

RHETORICAL SITUATION HANDOUT

TOPIC, PURPOSE, AUDIENCE, TONE

The Topic, Purpose, Audience, and Tone of an essay make-up what is called the Rhetorical Situation of the writing process. The parts of the Rhetorical Situation help writers to remember what, why, who, and how they are writing about a particular Topic.

Topic:

This is “what” you are writing about.

Remember that assignments vary; be prepared to write about a variety of topics.

Purpose:

This is the “why” you are writing...to persuade, to explain, or to narrate.

Remember that purposes can vary and overlap in every assignment.

Audience:

The “who” you are writing for...your audience could be peers, professors, layman or professionals.

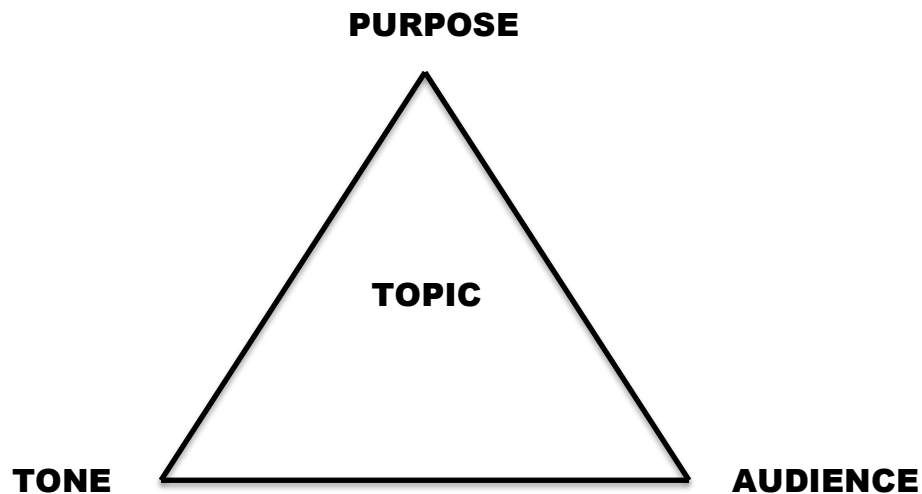
Remember that audiences can vary and overlap in every assignment.

Tone:

This is the way that you sound in your paper...you could be playful, serious, casual, or formal.

Remember that tone is important because it designates the mood and effect of a work.

The diagram below represents the relationship between the ideas of the Rhetorical Situation.



TOPIC HANDOUT

The Topic of an essay is the “what” an author writes. In a majority of writing courses, the Topic for an essay will be assigned, however, there will be times when a Topic is not given directly. This handout is designed to help you find, create, and evaluate a Topic.

How to Find a Topic:

The first step in finding a Topic is to read the assignment prompt, if the prompt doesn’t give a specific Topic for your essay, ask the instructor if there is a specific Topic they would like you to focus on. However there are times when the Topic is left up to you, in this case you can chose a Topic by writing about something you are interested in, something you know a lot about, or something you want to learn about.

How to Create a Topic:

There are multiple techniques for generating a Topic. It is crucial that the topic is something the writer is passionate about and cares to spend time researching, developing, writing, and editing. Remember: The best essays have a Topic that is limited and focused.

How to Evaluate a Topic:

Evaluating a Topic involves thinking about the Rhetorical Situation you are writing in. This means that authors think about the way that their Topic relates to their Audience, Purpose, and Tone.

Practice:

Below is a sample paragraph, try determining the Rhetorical Situation in the space provided.

Situation 1

Molly is graduating in the spring and has applied to multiple universities. As part of her application process, she has to write letters of interest to each school she has applied to. The letters help the schools determine the reason Molly wants to attend their university.

Topic: _____

Audience: _____

Purpose: _____

Tone: _____

TOPIC GUIDE HANDOUT

LOVE	THE MOON	BAD ROOMATES
FLASHCARDS	ANTS	HIPSTERS
GREEN THINGS	MILKSHAKES	OCEANIC PLATES
STRANGE CUSTOMS	GIRAFFES	BOWLING SHOES
ICE CREAM	EARTHWORMS	HALLOWEEN
LAMPSHADES	SWING SETS	SCUBA DIVING
STARFISH	BILLBOARDS	ROLLER COASTERS
TIME TRAVEL	BEARDS	MOTORCYCLES
POLICE OFFICERS	SUSHI	BACON
DOCTORS	CRAYONS	PIRATES
MERMAIDS	THE ZOO	WALKIE TALKIES
VAMPIRES	APPLES	COPYRIGHT
MALL	POLAR BEARS	ALIENS
ELEVATORS	NINJAS	TROLLS
AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS	BALLROOM DANCE	CELL PHONES
KOSHER MEATS	MUSICALS	STICKY NOTES
ENERGY DRINKS	JUNGLES	PLATYPUS
PROM	CHILDHOOD	CARTOONS
COUNTRY MUSIC	WATER FIGHTS	FROZEN YOGURT
MOTIVATIONAL POSTERS	TEACHERS	MINI VANS
PAPER CUTS	POTATOES	BROTHERS
BLACK PLAGUE	FIREFLIES	SISTERS
HICCUPS	WATER BOTTLES	SUMMER VACATION
DOUGHNUTS	COLLEGE	MOUNTAINS
ARTIFICIAL PLANTS	ZOMBIES	PAWN SHOPS
THREE RING BINDER	PETS	CAR WASH

PURPOSE HANDOUT

The Purpose of an essay is “why” an author is writing. Essays can have multiple purposes and the purpose of an essay is usually determined by what the author wants to accomplish by communicating with their audience. An author may be writing to convince a city council to enforce city cleaning codes or an author may be writing a description for something they are selling online.

Determining the Purpose of an Essay:

Choosing the purpose of an essay is an author’s choice; however as readers, we often need to determine what that purpose is. When we want determine the purpose of an essay, book, video, or movie we can ask ourselves the following questions:

How do I feel?

What am I being asked to understand?

What am I being asked to do?

Answering these question can help readers understand if the author’s purpose is to describe or persuade or any number of other purposes. Try determining the purpose of the sample situation below. Ask the three questions (How do I feel? / What am I being asked to understand? / What am I being asked to do?) first. Then try naming the purpose; for help with possible purposes, see the handout **Purpose Guide Handout**.

Situation 1

Place corned beef and water in Crock Pot Cooker. Cover. Set on high. When steaming vigorously, set to medium and continue cooking 2 1/2 hours. Remove meat from cooker. Put potatoes, turnips, carrots and cabbage in Cooker. Place meat on top of vegetables. Cover and when mixture is steaming briskly, set to medium. Cook for 45 minutes.

How do I feel?

What am I being asked to understand?

What am I being asked to do?

Purpose

PURPOSE GUIDE HANDOUT

INFORM	PERSUADE
DESCRIBE	CONVINCE
DEFINE	INFLUENCE
REVIEW	ARGUE
NOTIFY	RECOMMEND
INSTRUCT	CHANGE
ADVISE	ADVOCATE
ANNOUNCE	URGE
EXPLAIN	DEFEND
DEMONSTRATE	JUSTIFY
ILLUSTRATE	SUPPORT

NOTES:

AUDIENCE HANDOUT

Audience refers to “who” you are writing to in an essay. There are many different audiences that a writer could write to and it is likely that in any assignment you could be writing to multiple audiences. The topics below will help you identify, appeal to, and trouble shoot the audience of an essay.

Questions to Identify Your Audience:

Does your assignment itself give any clues about your audience?

If the writer determines the audience, who would best benefit from the essay?

Do you have more than one audience? If so, list them.

Ways to Appeal to Your Audience:

What does the audience value?

What does the audience care least about?

What kind of organization would best help the audience follow the essay?

How does the audience feel about the topic?

How does the audience feel about the writer?

Trouble Shooting Your Audience Choices:

(Have someone you trust read the essay and use the guidelines below to trouble shoot)

If the reader is....

Asking tons of questions

Confused

Bored or knows excessive Detail

Do this....

(Use more detail / elaboration)

(Clarify your examples / detail)

(De-clutter your examples / detail)

NOTES:

TONE HANDOUT

Tone is usually communicated an author's word choice and examples and reflects the way an author feels toward their topic and audience. The tone of an essay can range from formal to informal, playful to serious or many variations in-between. Tone is important because it designates the mood and effect of a work as well as the attitude an author wants to convey.

Questions to Determine the Appropriate Tone:

Choosing the purpose of an essay is an author's choice; however as readers, we often need to determine what that purpose is. When we want determine the purpose of an essay, book, video, or movie we can ask ourselves the following questions:

What is the author's attitude toward the topic?

What is the author's relationship with their audience?

How does the author sound to their audience?

Answering these questions can help readers understand the author's tone. Try determining the tone of the sample situation below. Ask the three questions (What is the author's attitude toward the topic? / What is the author's relationship with their audience? / How does the author sound to their audience?) first. Then try naming the tone; for help with possible tones, see the handout **Tone Guide Handout**.

Situation 1

Lately the weather has been cold and rainy, which wouldn't bother me, but I haven't seen my cat, June, in three days. She is the best cat ever, and I really miss her. My dad forgot to let her back in our house from her nightly walk and she hasn't been back since.

What is the author's attitude toward the topic?

What is the author's relationship with their audience?

How does the author sound to their audience?

Tone

TONE GUIDE HANDOUT

OUTRAGED

MOURNFUL

CRAZY

OVERWHELMED

SAD

LOVING

CONTEMPLATIVE

DEFIANT

THOUGHTFUL

BITTER

DEPRESSED

MOCKING

HUMOROUS

ECSTATIC

FORMAL

SILLY

FURIOUS

WHIMSICAL

REFLECTIVE

CHILDISH

SARCASTIC

HYSTERICAL

INFORMAL

INDIFFERENT

NOTES:
