

Argumentation and Communication: Understanding the Rhetorical Situation

UBCO Master of Data Science – DATA 552



Class Outline

Introductions

DATA 552 – What can you expect?

Writing diagnostic

The rhetorical situation: What is it and why is it the key to effective communication?

Writing assignments #2 and #4

Writing assignment #1

Homework

Objectives

TA Information: Maya Pilin

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Office Hours: TBD by appointment

Education and Work Experience

- BA in Psychology from University of Ottawa
- Experience as a Writing Consultant at the UBCO Writing and Research Center
- Ph.D. Candidate in Psychological Science studying the role of emotions in alcohol and cannabis use

DATA 552: What to expect

DATA 552 is a lecture- and lab-based course with **emphasis writing and presentations**. Students are expected to engage in lecture discussions and to participate in all in-class activities, exercises, and workshops.

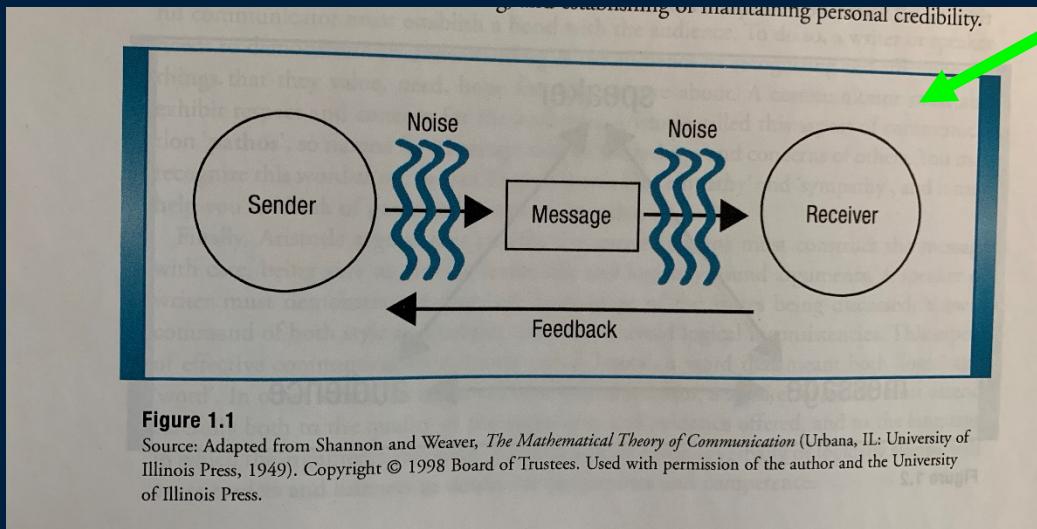
My goal is to provide you with the skills and tools necessary to **effectively interpret and respond to different writing and communications situations** (and challenges) you will encounter as data analysts

Title

Text

The Rhetorical Situation

Most textbooks on communication include some form of the following figure in their introductory chapter:



This box is
(essentially) the
rhetorical situation

Fig.1. Adapted from *Writing in the Technical Fields and Effective Communication for the Technical Professions* (2009) by Jennifer MacLennan

The Rhetorical Situation

To "cut through" the noise, one must have a strong grasp of the rhetorical situation:

The topic

The angle

The purpose

The audience

The context

The communicator's
role

Purpose

The purpose is the reason for a piece of communication: it's why you are writing, saying, or presenting. More specifically, the purpose is what you are trying to achieve by engaging in communication.

Examples:

- To get the job → to show why your company is the best fit for the job
- To inform your client that work will not be completed on schedule
- To convince your boss to let you do the project you would like to do
- To set up a meeting to discuss a new project
- To communicate a series of trends so that the audience can make an educated decision about what to do next
- To illustrate a series of trends to show why proceeding with the current course of action is not viable

Purpose: To Persuade or Inform

Usually, we think of communication as either persuasive or informative.

To persuade is to **convince** someone to take a particular action.

To inform is to **describe** a concept/scenario or to outline information



Purpose: Remember that You are Always Persuading

I would argue, however, that ALL COMMUNICATION is PERSUASIVE:

- Even if we are ‘simply’ describing a situation or outlining a scenario, we still want to persuade the audience to trust our information and to read it all.



Purpose: Questions to Ask Yourself

When beginning an email, a formal business document (*i.e.*, a report or proposal), a blog post, a tweet, or a presentation you **always** want to ask yourself:

- What do I want to achieve/accomplish?
- Why do I want to accomplish this?
- What action(s) do I want the audience to take?
- When do I want them to take these actions?
- How does taking this action benefit my audience?

Try it and Share

Question 1: Can you think about a time when you either created a message or received a message that didn't have a clear purpose?

- a) Why was the purpose unclear?
- b) What could the writer have done to clarify the purpose?

Audience: Who are They and What's Important to Them

While it's important to have a clear purpose, your message won't make it through the 'noise' if you do not communicate it in a way your audience understands.

This requires you, the communicator, to **understand your audience – their quirks, their values and beliefs, and most importantly, their goals.**



Audience: Ask Yourself

What did they ask for? Did they ask for anything at all?

What's important to them? What are they trying to achieve?

What do they need to know?

Why do they need to know this?

How do they like to get their information?

How will they feel about the information?

Do they have any weird quirks? (i.e., you know they hate it when people verb nouns)



Audience: Ask Yourself

What socio-economic, historic, or cultural events, values, or beliefs do they have and how will this change their reaction?

What else might be impacting their understanding of the situation and impacting their attention?

Will more than one person be reading/listening to this? If so, are all of their needs the same?

Try it and Share

Question 2: You've prepared a report that illustrates and explains shopping trends at the Kelowna Super Store. The report was requested by the marketing and advertising department, but you know that the store manager has also requested a copy.

- a) How would you describe the marketing and advertising team's needs?
- b) How would you describe the store manager's needs?

Context

The **context** refers to where, when, and how your audience will read or hear your information.

- On the bus
- In the car
- In their office
- On their phone when they are picking their kids up from school
- Via email
- When they are running low on project funds and you know that they will not be happy if the bridge is not completed in time

Context

The **context** can also refer to the **genre** you will use to communicate.

Common genres include

- Emails / Memo
- Proposals: solicited/unsolicited, formal/semi-formal/not formal
- Reports / Strategies /Procedures
- Blogs
- Presentations
- Resumes and Cover Letters
- Social Media
- Instant Messages

Like audience, the context limits and frames how you communicate your ideas.

Questions?



Do I have to answer ALL those questions every time I communicate with someone? That seems like a lot.

Writing Assignment #2 and #4

The second and fourth assignments are a proposal and report.

The proposal assignment requires you write a 2-page semi-formal proposal requesting approval to conduct data analysis and prepare a report on a problem you've observed.

The report, which you will complete as your fourth (4th) writing assignment will outline patterns behind the observed problem and propose a possible solution to the problem.

Writing Assignment #2 and #4

I've drafted two hypothetical situations that you can use as your "problem" and provided suggests for where you can find the associated data.

Option 1

You work for Kelowna General Hospital, and you've noticed that emergency room wait times have been increasing. You've also noticed more public conversations about emergency room and surgical wait times. You believe that your data science knowledge may be able to help the hospital understand the problem and develop strategies to mitigate it. You would like to prepare an unsolicited proposal offering to do an analysis of the reasons why patients come to the emergency room, for how long they stay, and when they tend to come most frequently.

Writing Assignment #2 and #4

Option 2

You work for a company that purchases homes and then re-sells them for a profit. You're also aware that real estate sales in Kelowna and the surrounding region are in decline. You believe that your data science skills could help the company decide if purchasing a home in Kelowna (or the surrounding area) is a smart investment. You have decided to propose conducting a data analysis and preparing report outlining Kelowna's current real-estate market and potential investment opportunities.

Or, you may choose to use to draft a proposal around a dataset that you've prepared or used in a previous class.

Writing Assignment #1

- This **group assignment** requires you to read four (4) different communications pieces and identify the type (genre) of communication, the topic, the intended audience (and any supplementary audiences), the purpose, and the context of each.
- I would also like you to think about the type of information and level of detail included in each document. Consider also the word choice, sentence structure, organization, and presentation of each text. How would you describe each of the different texts?
- Your conclusions should be summarized in an email memo and added to your GitHub repo (formatted as an email in a .md file).

Writing Assignment #1

This assignment should be completed in pairs and requires a 15-minute consultation with Maya Pilin, the course TA: @Maya Pilin (on Slack).

Instructions

Please read the four (4) communication pieces below carefully and identify the type of communication, the topic, the intended audience (and any supplementary audiences), the purpose, and the context.

- Harris fumbles on health insurance by Chris Stirewalt (Jan. 29 2019):
<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/harris-fumbles-on-health-insurance>
- Making an interactive UMAP visualization of the MNIST data set by Grant (Jan. 29 2019):
<https://blog.fastforwardlabs.com/2019/01/29/making-an-interactive-umap-visualization-of-the-mnist-data-set.html>
- Population & Housing in Kelowna (2018):
https://www.kelowna.ca/sites/files/1/docs/related/ff-population_and_housing.pdf
- Dear Ms. Fratelli email (available as PDF in github under lab 1).|

Homework

1. Select pairs and get started on Writing Assignment #1
2. Review Writing Assignment #2 and decide if you would like to use a dataset from a previous class or one of the hypothetical examples.

Objectives

- Students will be able to identify the six (6) parts of the rhetorical situation: topic, angle, context, purpose, audience, and the communicator's role.
- Students will begin thinking about all communication as persuasive and will actively consider the audience, purpose, and context of every communication piece.
- Students will approach all forms of communication with the readers' (audience's) needs in mind.



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