

## “The Divisions of Rhetoric” and “A General Introduction to Rhetorical Appeals”: An Introduction to the Study of Rhetoric

Different schools and different departments give our current course many different names, such as Freshman Composition, First-Year Writing, Basic Composition, or Introduction to Composition. Nonetheless, all of these courses tend to have the same ultimate aim—to prepare incoming students for the rigors of academic research and writing at the college level—and they all share a focus on the study of rhetoric whether that is specified or not. You often hear people use the term “**rhetoric**” to mean empty words or speech that is devoid of ethics or any real content; actually, this definition reflects the same definition that the philosopher Plato tried to give rhetoric thousands of years ago.

However, if you study works by his student Aristotle, the Roman philosopher Cicero, medieval authors such as Christine de Pizan and Dante, and books by contemporary critics such as Gerald Vizenor or Cheryl Glenn, another impression begins to emerge. All of these figures write about many different topics: Cicero discusses the ethics of Roman citizenship; Christine de Pizan defends women against misogyny; and Vizenor explains how Native American identity has survived in the face of genocide and oppression. Yet they all have something in common, rhetoric, both in theory and in practice.

Rhetoric can take on many different forms and works through diverse modes. It can be **verbal** as in a speech, **textual** as in a law or a book, **embodied** as in a dance performance or an act of protest, **visual** as in a painting about war, **auditory** as in a sad song, and **digital** as in a videogame or website. Furthermore, rhetoric is not just about surface impressions but also about *how a text is framed as fitting into a society and responding to that society*.

In the case of Picasso’s famous painting *Guernica*, the artist tries to express the devastating impact of the Spanish Civil War through a jumble of chaotic images that contrasts with the basic unity of his other works and that of other artists of the time. If you have ever read John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, you may be familiar with his portrait of a rebellious Satan and the construction of hell, followed by the story of the fall of Adam and Eve. But in order to fully understand Milton’s purpose in writing this epic poem, you also need to be familiar with the political turmoil of England’s Civil War and people’s general need to find order during turbulent times. In a more recent example, posters bear the image of the iconic moment when Olympic athlete and later educator John Carlos, shown here with Tommy Smith, raised his fist to give the Black Power salute after winning the bronze medal at the 1968 Summer Olympics to protest the injustices experienced by African-Americans. These examples are all forms of rhetoric, and they reveal that *communication and culture are fundamentally tied, since culture informs what kind of appeals will work best for members of our social groups and how we interpret the messages of others*.

Let’s start at the beginning with a brief overview. Most of the time rhetorical

communication involves three different elements: the **author** or **speaker**, the **audience**, and the **text** or message; you might add a fourth element, the **environment** or **cultural context** in which this triangle is located. It's important to remember this last element because, as the Toulmin model of argument reveals, **warrants** or **assumptions** based on *shared cultural ideals* bolster your arguments and make your audience more likely to support your ideas. [A cute cartoon image of a smiley roll of toilet paper bears the caption: "They see me rollin'. They hatin'."] I assume you get the joke because I assume you know that "rollin'" is slang for "being," as in "That's just how I roll," but there are other possible interpretations that may relate to money or controlled substances, depending on the use of the term you're most familiar with. But I'm assuming the first.

Assumptions support appeals to your audience, which can mean both arguments and how **pleasing** they are to your audience. Appealing to your audience is important because that is the main way by which we encourage **identification**, or a tendency to believe that you and others have something in common, which helps bring people so that they can work together towards a common goal. The opposite of identification is **disassociation**, or a distancing or breaking off. While dissociation can prove very useful, as when separating good ideas from bad or realizing that you have nothing in common with others after all, and identification can be misleading, as when those who do not have your best interest in mind try to convince you that they do, the important thing to remember is that you must learn to use both of these processes ethically and purposefully.

To figure out how best to do this, you need to know about the components or divisions of rhetoric. The ones discussed here and that you read about are taken as the most common, but they are not universal. Each culture stresses specific aspects of communication, and any outline it constructs will reflect that. So while we will be looking at a rhetorical structure informed by ancient Greek philosophers because it is expedient, please note that there are many other Western rhetorical traditions indigenous to the United States and the rest of the Americas.

First and foremost, we see that rhetoric is divided into three branches: deliberative, judicial, and epideictic. **Deliberative** is what senators use to persuade people to vote on certain issues in a certain way. **Judicial** is a formal kind of rhetoric intended to figure out possibilities and accuse or defend people, as in a court room. **Epideictic** or **panegyric** rhetoric tends to be reserved for more ceremonial situations, as in eulogies or dedication ceremonies. Aristotle distinguishes these three types based on the time, purpose, and argument when each of them takes place; however, you'll notice in practice these three types can easily overlap or become blurred, as when the current president honors a historical president's virtues to persuade people to support certain policies or when an attorney invokes particular laws and exhorts the jury to ignore these laws because the defendant proves a special case. So, you might want to think seriously about what your ultimate purpose is when we communicating. That will help you determine the type of rhetoric to use.

Now let's talk about the five parts or canons of rhetoric. Even if you have never heard of

these terms or used them as we do here, you are probably more familiar with them than you know. They are **invention**, **arrangement**, **style**, **memory**, and **delivery**. If you have ever had to make a speech in front of your class, you have had to consider all five; even writing a shopping list entails considerations of arrangement and memory!

**Invention** refers to all those activities that help you plan out your writing or your argument, where you decide what kind of proof you will give, whether you want to appeal to someone's reason or their emotions. Also, here you decide whether you will use deductive or inductive proof—that is, whether you will rely arguments that go from wide to narrow (top-down), or from the simple to the complex (bottom-up). Here you might also choose what commonplace ideas you want to use so that your audience knows you share a common culture, and make sure to avoid fallacies in thinking and argumentation. We will discuss commonplaces and fallacies more later on in the semester.

**Arrangement** has to do quite plainly with where different parts of a speech, arguments, or report should go to make it more easily accessible to your audience. You'll note that the six parts on page 171 of the reading seem to be the same basic parts that you were taught when learning to write most papers, from the attention-grabbing opening through to the conclusion that sums everything up.

Every different culture decides what constitutes simple or complex, plain or ornate, and oftentimes even people within the same social group might disagree. But overall, **style** tends to be dictated by the purpose and context of a message. So when speaking with friends in a private conversation, you probably do not want to speak in the grand style of Shakespearean verse but might opt instead for the plain style; when trying to explain how to use a very difficult mathematical equation to someone bad at math, you might choose the medium style which says you are an expert but is easy enough to understand; and, when describing all the many wonderful qualities of your significant other, you might prefer to use romantic metaphors that compare the person's eyes to the nighttime sky rather than simply stating that they have big eyes—that's the grand style.

**Memory** involves techniques that help you remember what you want to say and how you want to say it for maximum effect. It might include the use of images to help you and your audience remember what was said. But it also includes how you may want to tap into a shared collective memory in order to engage your audience, as when someone talks about the "good old days" without really specifying what time period they are talking about and even if the past wasn't really better than now. We will talk more about this later on in the semester.

Finally, **delivery** proves highly important, especially now in the digital age. While the reading discusses stances and gestures as needing to be appropriate to what you were saying, we know that the mode of delivery says as much about your message as the content does. You've heard the saying "**The medium is the message?**" That was said by Marshall McLuhan, a well-known scholar of rhetoric and New Media, and what he meant by that is that the decisions that you make regarding how you will communicate

with your audience—via a video? via a poem? via a sculpture?—says a lot about who you envision your audience to be and how you expect them to interpret what you have to say. In everyday life you can see the results of paying attention to delivery and also of failing to think about it. A clothing store that offers a wider range of sizes can expect a wider range of customers, while a clothing store that specializes in smaller sizes might be seen to say that they want to distance themselves from larger individuals. What might that tell a potential customer about the store's overall attitude regarding body image? What if that customer now links that store with increased cases of eating disorders? Does it? Planning your delivery is crucial because the claims that your choices make or insinuate to others sometimes work on a more subconscious level, and they can determine whether your audience will listen to what you have to say (or not) even if the audience itself is unsure why they are partial to your work or not.

By the end of the semester you will be asked to design collaborative projects with this in mind since you will need to decide what modes of delivery prove most effective to your own purposes. In today's world, our experiences of others are often mediated by digital media, and it's up to you to make ethical and informed choice about delivery because this media is your stand-in in your absence. What is the message of your media?