



The Rhetorical Situation

The rhetorical situation refers to independent variables in a text, like audience, purpose, topic, as well as the relationship among those elements. By changing one variable, the entire rhetorical situation is altered (read more about the rhetorical situation at the [Writing Commons](#)).



The following questions can help you gain a sense of a text's rhetorical situation:

- Who is the writer?
- What is the writer's context? (i.e., What conditions are the writer operating within?)
- Who is the writer's target (primary) audience(s)? (i.e., the main reader wants to reach)
- What are the writer's goals in relation to the target audience(s)?
- Who are the secondary audiences? (i.e., What conditions are the audiences operating within?)
- What are the writer's goals in relation to secondary audiences?
- What is the audiences' context? (i.e., What conditions are the audiences operating within?)
- What is the subject? (i.e., the topic, the main point)
- Why did the writer choose to write about this subject at this time? (i.e., What is the exigence?)
- What is the text's genre? (i.e., what would you call this type of writing?)
- What is the genre context? (i.e., what are the constraints of this particular genre? What other genres does this genre interact with?)
- How would you characterize the wider culture that the text, reader, and subject operate within?
- How does the rhetorical situation impact choices made by the writer?

