

## Lesson Plan

### Beyond the Checklist: Using Rhetorical Analysis to Evaluate Sources as Social Acts

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#### Objective:

Rhetoric is the study of how people use language to influence the behavior of others. This lesson is intended to help students use the concepts of Rhetorical Analysis to understand the social nature of a source and evaluate its credibility.

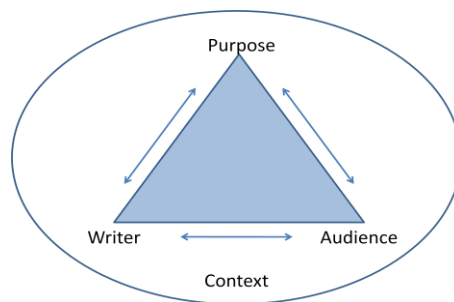
#### Outcomes:

1. Students will be able to identify and define the four parts of the Rhetorical Situation.
2. Students will be able to identify credibility cues that signal authority, accuracy, and bias.
3. Students will be able to apply the concepts of Rhetorical Analysis to determine if these cues achieve the desired effect within the Situation.

#### Procedures:

**1) Warm-up Prompt:** You have just failed my class. You, however, disagree with my decision. Compose an email asking me to reconsider. For it to be effective, what specific choices do you need to make? Think about issues relating to me, language, tone, and format. Be able to defend each of your decisions.

In a class discussion, ask for suggestions. As you receive answers, introduce and define each element of the Rhetorical Situation:



Discuss how the interactions of these elements dictate the choices available for constructing effective messages. Spend some time on the influence of Context—external elements (e.g. time, geography, ideology, culture) that impose constraints (e.g. behaviors, styles, values, etc.).

Describe Credibility Cues—features or actions that signal Authority, Accuracy, and Bias. These cues can be used to build a case for or against a source's credibility. Discuss how different situations require different choices; thus, cues may not signify the same thing in every circumstance.

Draw the Rhetorical Situation on the board as a point of reference. Ask if students have any questions about its make-up and function.

**2) Rhetorical Analysis:** We must understand how individual elements interact to create a desired effect. Go to the website for the Institute for Historical Review (<http://www.ihr.org>). Ask students to rhetorically analyze the organization's message.

- Who is behind it?
- What is their intended Purpose?
- Who is their intended Audience?
- Within what context(s) does this site operate?
- What cues do they use to signal their Authority, Accuracy, and Bias?

With specific examples from the source, have students develop an evaluation of the site. Does the source's handling of these elements create an effective message? Does it create a credible message? Why or why not?

**3) Assessment:** In discussion, have students share their analysis. Explore each element individually. Then discuss how they interact to create a desired effect. Record all comments on the board.

**4) Closure:** Every text is an argument attempting to persuade you. Some of these texts are effective; some of them are not. Rhetorical analysis can be helpful for understanding all types of information.

\*A bibliography of the research behind this lesson will appear in the LOEX Proceedings.