Elements of Rhetorical Situations

A Rhetorical Situation is the situation that must occur before Rhetorical Analysis can occur. Awareness of rhetorical situations can help in both composition and analysis. Once you know how to identify and analyze the elements of rhetorical situations, you will be better able to produce writing that meets your audience’s needs, fits the specific setting you write in, and conveys your intended message and purpose.

Each individual rhetorical situation shares five basic elements with all other rhetorical situations:

- **A text** (i.e., an actual instance or piece of communication)
- **An author**
- **An audience**
- **Purposes** (i.e., the varied reasons both authors and audiences communicate)
- **A setting** (i.e., the time, place, and environment surrounding a moment of communication)

**Rhetorical Appeals**
- Ethos, Logos, Pathos

In ancient Greece, these terms of Rhetorical Concepts (Appeals) corresponded with basic components that all rhetorical situations have.

- **Logos** – Aligns with Text
  Logic or reasoning and actual content of a speech and how it was organized, the structure and content of the text itself.

- **Ethos** – Aligns with Author
  Credibility or trustworthiness, referring to the elements of a speech that reflects on the particular character of the speaker or the speech’s author.

- **Pathos** – Aligns with Audience
  Emotional appeal, or the elements of a speech that appeal to any of an audience’s sensibilities. Today, many people may discuss the pathos qualities of a text to refer to how well an author appeals to an audience’s emotions.

- **Telos** – Aligns with Purpose
Telos is a term Aristotle used to explain the particular purpose or attitude of the communication

Kairos – Aligns with Setting

Kairos is a term that refers to the elements of a speech that acknowledge and draw support from the particular setting, time, and place that a speech occurs.

Understanding the factors that shape rhetorical situations make authors and audiences more aware of what goes into different acts of communication. Overall, understanding these factors helps people better understand the differing perspectives of others.

**Rhetorical Analysis**

When you are asked to do a “rhetorical analysis” of a text, you are being asked to apply your critical reading skills to break down the “whole” of the text into the sum of its “parts.” You try to determine what the writer is trying to achieve, and what writing strategies he/she is using to try to achieve it.

Rhetoric requires understanding a fundamental division between what is communicated through language and how this is communicated. To be effective, a text must be developed and organized with a clear context and purpose in mind.

How is the “text” organized/structured?

Example, definition, comparison-contrast, classification, process analysis, description, narrative, cause-and-effect. These are broad forms that the speaker or writer can take to shape the message. Writers decide to hang their message upon one or more of these forms. The first step toward rhetorical analysis is to identify the dominant forms that the writer has chosen.

Style, tone, voice: Gut reactions are useful here. Examine your own responses. What is it that makes you respond as you do? Are you the author’s intended audience? If not, who is? The attitude a writer takes towards a subject or character: serious, humorous, sarcastic, ironic, satirical, tongue-in-cheek, solemn, objective.

Satire: literary tone used to ridicule or make fun of human vice or weakness, often with the intent of correcting, or changing, the subject of the satiric attack. One of the most interesting features of satire is that it is almost universally believed to be a persuasive writing form.

Style
Style is to be found everywhere, but it has discrete elements: diction and syntax. Via diction (word choice) and syntax (sentence structure), the writer expresses tone, connotation, and figurative language.

Is the diction mostly formal or mostly informal? Mostly polysyllabic or mostly short words? Is the diction scientific, scholarly, or conversational? If it’s conversational, is it colloquial? Slang?

Are the sentences mostly long or mostly short? What kinds of punctuation do we see?

Is the tone mostly serious or mostly playful? What emotions do you sense from the writer?

Is the language mostly literal or mostly metaphorical? Do the metaphors bring to mind something positive or something negative?