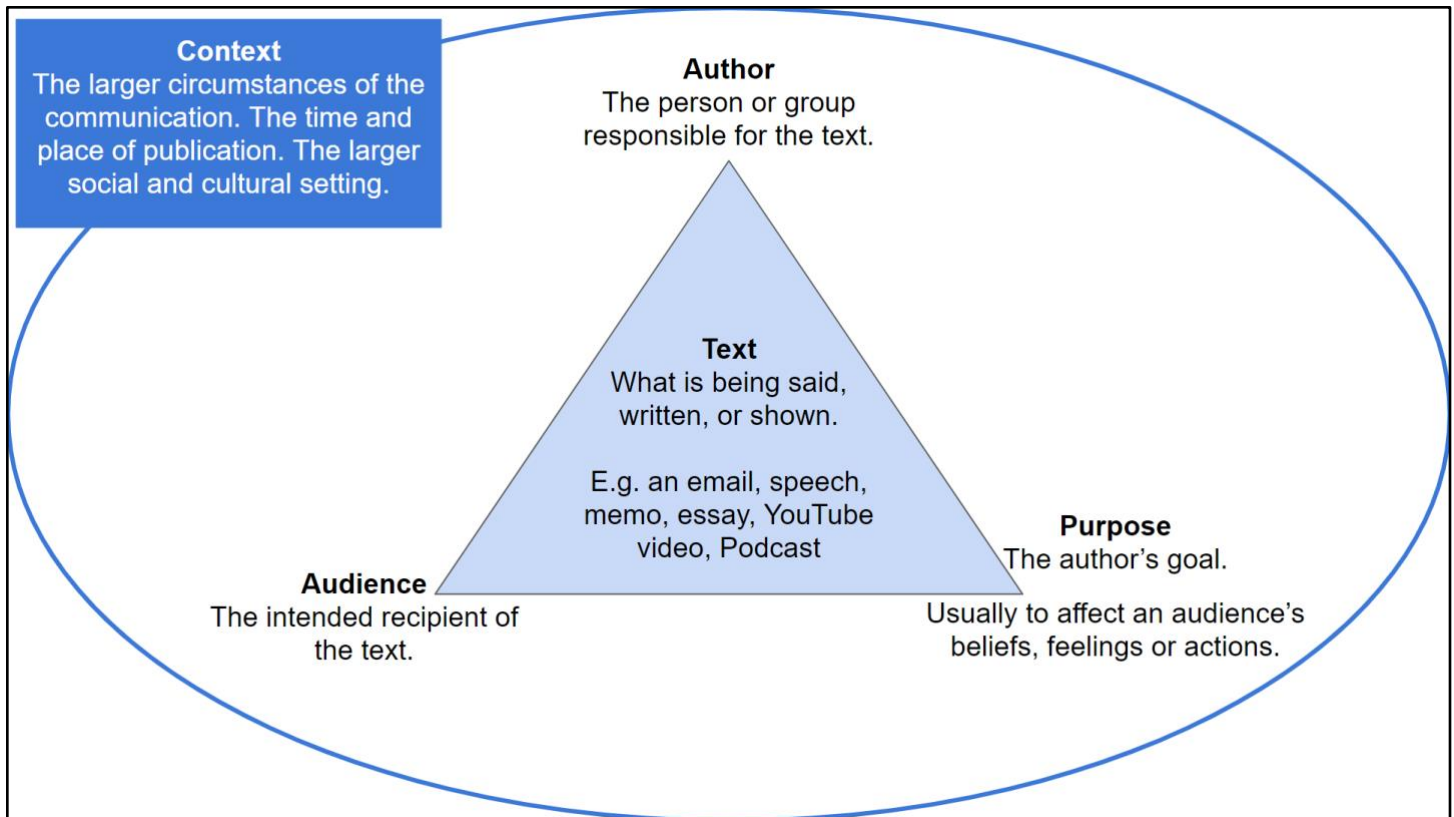


The Rhetorical Situation: Descriptions and Questions for Close Reading

The Rhetorical Situation (Rhetorical Context)



Purpose (Also Called Motivation or Exigence)

Purpose refers to the exigence or impulse behind the action. When you look at purpose, consider the reason why the author composed the piece and what the text responds to. Think of what the author is trying to *do* with the text, often it's more than just "inform."

Ask yourself: *Why did the author chose to write this piece? What argument, idea, or situation was the piece written to address? What behavior is the author trying to encourage the audience to engage in? What does the author want the audience to think or feel?*

Audience

Audience refers to the intended reader of the document. When you look at audience, look for clues about the intended audience and how audience considerations changed the piece. Texts often have secondary, unintended, audiences; don't assume all viewers of a text are intended audiences.

Ask yourself: *For whom was this document written? What expectations might that audience have? How did those expectations shape the text? What kind of audience do you think the author was envisioning when they composed the text?*

The Author

The author refers to the individual, group, or organization that produced the document. When you look at the author, look for the person who wrote the piece, the organization or group being represented, and the stance

that the author takes in the piece.

Ask yourself: Whose views are represented? What values does that person or group bring to the text? What incentives does this author have to take a particular position or make a particular argument?

The Text

The text refers to the language and structural choices made by the author. When you look at the text, look at the author's choices about tense, voice, structure, evidence, and style. When looking at a visual text, think about what images have been selected and how they have been arranged.

Ask yourself: What choices did the author make when composing this text? How do these choices reflect the author's stance, position, or argument? How do the author's choices influence readers?

Context

The context refers to the larger social, cultural, economic or political situation in which communication takes place. Context can be big (e.g. large scale social changes in the country) or small (e.g. the shared background of a group of people studying the same major). Thinking about context means thinking about where and when communication takes place.

Ask yourself: What was happening at the time when the author created their text? What social, cultural, or political trends might the author have been trying to use to make their communication more effective? What larger contextual elements might they have failed to account for?