



Taking a Stance: Elements of the Rhetorical Framework

Directions: The following questions may help you focus on the purpose of your writing.

1. **PURPOSE:** Identifying the purpose of your writing means that you are able to say what you are trying to do to an audience through your writing. What effect do you want your writing to have on the reader?

Here are some questions you can use to figure out of your purpose:

- *What are you trying to accomplish in this essay?*
- *What do you want your readers to experience when they read your essay?*
- *What do you want this audience to understand as a result of reading your writing?*

Here is some important information to remember about purpose:

- Sometimes purpose isn't clear until after you have done some writing.
- Purpose is always related to your sense of audience.
- Sometimes analyzing audience in detail helps you figure out purpose.
- Sometimes writing about purpose before you draft your response can help you find a thesis, or a structure, or a plan.
- Your sense of purpose can change as you move toward your final draft and understand more about what you are writing.

2. **AUDIENCE:** Identifying and analyzing audience help you develop a clearer understanding of your purpose. Your knowledge about your audience functions as an important guide for you when you are trying to decide what to put in your essay and how you are going to sequence your information.

Here are some questions to ask about audience:

- *What do they know about your topic?*
- *What do you want them to know about your topic and your message?*
- *What interests do they have in your topic?*
- *Why do they need to read your writing?*
- *What does your audience believe about this topic?*
- *What makes your audience a group or a community?*

Here is some important information to remember about audience analysis:

- Be specific as you take inventory of their interests, their knowledge, their sources, their agenda, and their worldview.
- Try to summarize their argument or the ideas they contribute to the conversation about your topic.
- Be aware of the language and knowledge the audience favors: what kind of facts they like, what sort of values they insist upon, what their expectations are?
- Remember that your writing moves out from a kind of internal focus (where you are writing more to yourself) to a specific focus on audience (where you are focused on how your writing affects the reader). How is your writing supporting a shared understanding of what you want to communicate?

3. **SITUATION:** Understanding the situation in which you are producing writing helps you understand the kind of rules you need to follow or the genre conventions that are most important to your writing. We always write in a specific context; understanding how the writing takes place in a particular context helps you understand what you need to show through your writing. For example, you may write to simply summarize a reading for yourself, or you may write to prove to the teacher that you have read something well; these two scenarios constitute two different writing situations and call for different processes and different products. Thus, the context, or situation, of the writing will include the way you perform the writing.

Here are some questions that will help you analyze the writing situation:

- *What does this writing have to do with your current situation as a writer/student?*
- *How does your writing relate to what others have written?*
- *How does our writing relate to the curriculum in your class?*
- *How does your writing relate to other work in the class?*
- *For whom are you writing?*
- *Are you supposed to demonstrate anything through this writing?*
- *What in this situation has prompted you to choose your topic?*

Here is some important information to remember about the value of analyzing situation:

- Understanding situation helps you develop a clearer sense of purpose.
- Knowing the context for your writing help you develop better ideas for the writing, allowing you to write in relation to some other ideas; it helps with topic selection, research, composing, and revision. You need information about the writing situation to be able to make key decisions about both the content and the sequence of information you choose.
- Analyzing audience helps you understand the influence situation has on your writing choices.

4. **PERSONA/ETHOS:** This simply refers to the way you are representing yourself in the writing. As people who write, we have lots of ways of presenting ourselves: as experts on family, as experts on law, as someone searching for truth. There is an infinite number of ways we present our identity through writing. Ethos refers to the way you build credibility through your writing. It is the way you represent yourself in the writing to gain trust from the reader.

Here are some questions to ask about ethos:

- *What impression do you want to make on the reader?*
- *What tone of voice do you want to use?*
- *Who are you speaking for when you write?*
- *Are you part of a larger community when you write?*
- *How can you let the reader experience your competence?*

Here is some important information to remember about ethos:

- Readers will pay attention to the language you use in making a judgment about your credibility.
- Readers will notice the kind of examples you use as those examples say something about your level of engagement with the topic, about your expertise, or about the amount of research you have done.
- Readers will notice how well you explain things. Your ideas find their clearest expression in your explanations. The more developed your explanations about the truth-value of your claims, the more credibility you have with the reader.
- Readers will detect inaccuracy or lack of engagement with a topic.

5. **MESSAGE:** In its most elemental form, message consists of what you want to say about a particular topic, event, or idea. It is the controlling idea of the essay. Message is the product of your thinking about purpose and audience; it is what you want to say to the reader or the point you want to get across. It is your most dominant claim.

Here are some questions to ask about message:

- *Can you summarize the main point of your essay in a short paragraph?*
- *Does your message support the purpose of your writing?*
- *Do all the evidence and explanations you use in your writing relate to your message?*
- *Does the audience need to hear your message?*
- *Is your message meaningful?*
- *Is your message self-evident?*
- *What happens when you apply the "So what?" question to your writing?*

Here is some important information to remember about message:

- Remember to ask the age-old question about your writing: So what?
- Message is often not discovered until after you have done quite a bit of writing.
- Another way to think of message is as the largest claim of the writing.
- Remember that we pass along a lot of messages in our writing, but in academic writing, one message seems to prevail as the most important.

Final Reflection: Now that you have considered the "rhetorical framework" for your writing, develop a set of instructions for yourself about how you will use this information in your first draft.

1. PURPOSE	
2. AUDIENCE	
3. SITUATION	
4. PERSONA/ETHOS	
5. MESSAGE	