The Digital World: Building on What You Already Know to Respond Critically

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FIGURE 1.1 Whether these students realize it or not, they are engaging in rhetoric by consuming and posting information on social media. (credit: "Together and Alone" by Garry Knight/flickr, CC-BY)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1.1 "Reading" to Understand and Respond
1.2 Social Media Trailblazer: Selena Gomez
1.3 Glance at Critical Response: Rhetoric and Critical Thinking
1.4 Annotated Student Sample: Social Media Post and Responses on Voter Suppression
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INTRODUCTION Your past experiences with computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices represent your conscious choice to connect with a global community. For example, you may post on social media sites where you receive instant feedback from around the world in the form of reposts or likes. Through these interactions, you are empowered to influence people more than at any other point in history. In fact, you may be on the road to becoming the next big social media influencer—a person with established credentials in a certain field with access to a large audience and who, because of popularity, can influence others' actions. With applications that instantly translate into many languages, even language has become less of a barrier to your potential audience and thus to your potential influence. However, even though the world may be more connected now than ever before and communication may be faster, easier, more powerful, and more widely accessible, the basics of communication have not changed.

The essential element of all communication, past and present, including your social media posts and related comments, is the **rhetorical situation**: the **conditions**, or circumstances, of the communication and the **agents**, or people involved, in that communication. Notice that the term comes from the word ***rhetoric***. Originally, *rhetoric* referred to the art of persuasive speaking or writing. Now it is used more inclusively to mean the "techniques and theories of communication." And notice, too, that like the people in Figure 1.1, you are already using rhetoric every day as you find yourself in different rhetorical situations on social media. In this chapter, you will learn more about the use of rhetoric within rhetorical situations as you begin the journey of constructing bridges among the communication taking place on social media, in the world of academia, and in the world at large.

1.1 "Reading" to Understand and Respond

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify genre elements and determine how conventions are shaped by audience, purpose, language, culture, and expectation.
- Articulate the importance of inquiry, learning, critical thinking, and communicating in varying rhetorical and cultural contexts.
- Identify relationships between ideas, patterns of organization, and interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements in a diverse range of texts.

To read and write well means to read and write critically. *What are you saying that's new, different, insightful, or edgy?* In fact, a major goal of most college curricula is to train students to be critical readers, writers, and thinkers so that they carry those habits into the real and virtual worlds beyond campus borders. *What, you may ask, does it mean to be critical? How does being a critical reader, writer, and thinker differ from being an ordinary reader, writer, and thinker?* Being critical in reading means knowing how to analyze distinctions, interpretations, and conclusions. Being critical in writing means making distinctions, developing interpretations, and drawing conclusions that stand up to thoughtful scrutiny by others. Becoming a critical thinker, then, means learning to exercise reason and judgment whenever you encounter the language of others or generate language yourself. Beginning with social media and then moving into the world of academia, this chapter explores strategies for helping you become a more accomplished critical reader and emphasizes the close thinking relationship between critical reading and critical writing.

Rhetoric and the Rhetorical Situation

To begin to read, write, and think critically, it is helpful to look at something familiar such as social media and the way it is used. Interactions on social media, as in all types of conversation, present rhetorical situations that form the basis of communication. In the most basic terms, a rhetorical situation has two elements: agents and conditions. Agents are the originators (initiators) and the audience of the communication. The originator may have a real audience or an anticipated audience. A real audience is made up of people the originator may know personally or know of. For example, if you are the originator, your real audience could be a group of your peers to whom you present your ideas in class. Or it could be a person to whom you send a text message. You know the members of the class and know something about them. Similarly, you know the person to whom you send the text. An anticipated audience is one you hope to reach or one you expect will engage with your communication. When you post on social media platforms, for instance, your audience is probably anticipated. While you might have followers, you may not know them personally, but you anticipate who they are and how they might react.

The conditions of a rhetorical situation refer to the genre, purpose, stance, context, and culture. The **genre**, or medium, is the mode in which you communicate. You may speak persuasively in class, or you may send a text message; both are genres. The **purpose** is your reason or reasons for the communication. For example, if you are presenting to your class, your purpose might be to do well and get a good grade, but it also might be to

inform or to persuade your classmates. Likewise, you might want to gain attention by posting something on social media that connects to other people's thoughts and feelings. The third condition is the **stance**, which is your take, or viewpoint, as presented in the communication. Your stance may be that college loans should be forgiven, or it may be that college loans should be repaid in full. The **context** is the setting of the rhetorical situation. Some examples might be a communication taking place during a global pandemic or during a Black Lives Matter protest. The context affects the ways in which a particular social, political, or economic situation influences the process of communication. The final element is **culture**, which refers to groups of people who share commonalities. When communicating, you make assumptions about the cultural traits of your audience, perhaps expecting that they will agree with you regarding certain values or beliefs. For example, if you are communicating with an American audience, you may assume a positive value for democracy or a dislike of foreign interference. Conversely, you also may communicate with people whose cultural views are at odds or in conflict with your own: for example, a man who publicly advocates outdated gender views might have trouble communicating culturally with a younger female audience. The ways in which you choose to communicate to those within and those outside of your culture are likely to differ as you craft a stance within a given context for a particular purpose and audience.

As you work through a deeper understanding of rhetoric within a rhetorical situation, remember a few key points. When you read, write, and think critically or rhetorically, you try to figure out why a message is being communicated in a certain way. Reading language rhetorically means figuring out *why* and *how* it works or fails to work in achieving its communicative purpose. Writing rhetorically means being conscious of the ways in which you construct a message within a clearly defined rhetorical situation. Thinking rhetorically means considering the possibilities of meaning as conveyed through language and image. By putting these concepts together, you will come to understand how these elements work in concert with each other and affect your interactions with the world.

Social Media Savvy



Social media is an important part of modern life, and many people maintain multiple social media accounts. These applications can educate and help you connect to others. However, every post you make on any social media platform leaves a digital footprint—the sum of your online behavior. These footprints might reflect on you positively or negatively. On one hand, if you repost a baby goat jumping around a barnyard, you and others may laugh and no harm is done. On the other hand, if you are upset or angry and post something nasty about someone, the target can be harmed through cyberbullying and your online reputation tarnished. It is important to understand that the footprint you leave may never go away and may cause trouble for you down the road.

Negative footprints could hurt your credibility regarding future admissions to programs or future employment. Comedian Kevin Hart (b. 1979), for example, lost a job hosting the Academy Awards when some of his negative posts resurfaced, even after he rescinded them and acknowledged the problem. Right or wrong, social media leaves a trail for others to find. *In other words, what are you showing others about your talents and skills through your social media presence?* The point is that with its wonder and power, social media should be treated responsibly and with an awareness of its longevity. One way to better judge what you might post would be to consider the rhetorical situation so that you can anticipate an audience reaction based on genre, purpose, stance, context, and cultural awareness.

1.2 Trailblazer

Social Media Trailblazer: Selena Gomez

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Read for inquiry, learning, critical thinking, and communicating in various rhetorical contexts.
- Identify the elements of successful social media use.



FIGURE 1.2 Selena Gomez (credit: "Selena Gomez" by jenniferlinneaphotogaphy/flickr, CC BY 2.0))

"Our actions and words have an impact on others—whether on social media or in real life."

Authenticity as Rhetoric

By any standard, singer, actor, and philanthropist Selena Gomez (b. 1992) is an influencer. By 2021, Gomez had amassed around 65 million Twitter (https://openstax.org/r/selenagomeztwitter) followers and over 260 million Instagram (https://openstax.org/r/selenagomezinsta) followers, placing her among celebrities with top follower counts. Gomez was born in Grand Prairie, Texas, but raised outside of Dallas. She is named after the popular Tejano singer Selena Quintanilla-Perez (1971–1995), who was murdered by her fan club president but still maintains an avid following. Gomez entered show business as a child, inspired by the single mother, an amateur actress, who raised her. After roles on *Barney and Friends (https://openstax.org/r/barneyandfriends)* (from 2002–2004) and *Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over* (2003), Gomez auditioned for the world of Disney. Appearing first on *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* (2005–2008), Gomez landed a lead role as Alex Russo on Disney's *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007–2012), for which she also sang the theme song (https://openstax.org/r/themesong). By 2012, Gomez was ready to depart from such family-friendly roles, taking parts in films such as *Spring Breakers* (2012), *The Dead Don't Die* (2019), and *A Rainy Day in New York* (2019). Gomez's music career paralleled that of her acting career; she began as a member of the band Selena Gomez and the Scene (2009) and launched her solo career in 2012. Gomez has released the solo albums *Stars Dance* (2013), *Revival* (2015),

and *Rare (https://openstax.org/r/rare)* (2020).

Despite Gomez's success as a public figure, her relationship with social media has been rocky. Gomez describes her social media strategy as "intentional . . . I don't take a lot of pointless pictures." Gomez recognizes the power of her social media platform, and she has used it to champion the causes that she cares about. As a person diagnosed with both lupus (2015) and bipolar disorder (2018), Gomez has used social media to advocate for mental and physical health causes. (Lupus is an inflammatory disease caused by the immune system attacking its own tissue; bipolar disorder is characterized by extreme mood swings.) Gomez says, "Everything that I'm attached to has a charity aspect." She continues, "If something good isn't coming out of it, I'm not going to do it." This "intentional," open approach to her personal difficulties and her emphasis on building positivity out of struggle generates an intimacy with fans that has served to increase her following.

However, the most radical action that Gomez may have committed with regard to social media was her decision to quit it. Suffering from publicity overload, cyberbullying, and a negatively changing sense of self, Gomez handed over her Instagram account to her assistant in 2017. She has also handed her Instagram account over to people such as Georgia voting rights advocate Stacey Abrams (https://openstax.org/r/staceyabrams) (b. 1973) as part of the #ShareTheMicNow (https://openstax.org/r/sharethemicnow) campaign, which amplifies the voices of Black women. Gomez deleted social media apps from her smartphone and gave up knowledge of her passwords. She claims that the move has been liberating: "I suddenly had to learn how to be with myself." She reflects that there were 150 million people on her phone, and "I just put it down. . . . That was such a relief."

Despite the shift in approach, Gomez's relationship with social media remains strong. She actively cultivates a "deliberate . . . vulnerability" through her unwillingness to shy away from tough or important issues. Regardless of which of Gomez's assistants hits the "post" button, Gomez's focus on giving of herself to improve society resonates with her fans.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you heard of Selena Gomez? What did you know about her before reading this feature?
2. If you consider her background, what skills do you think have helped Gomez establish her savvy rhetorical presence on social media? Which skills do you relate to, and how might you use them?
3. In what ways has Gomez used her struggles with mental and physical health to amplify her platform? How might this context affect the rhetorical situation?
4. Explain how authenticity helps Gomez communicate. What influence does one's experience have on the rhetorical situation?
5. In what ways does Gomez rely on emotional appeals to her audience? In what ways does she incorporate ethics, logic, or timeliness?

1.3 Glance at Critical Response: Rhetoric and Critical Thinking

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Use words, images, and specific rhetorical terminology to understand, discuss, and analyze a variety of texts.
- Determine how genre conventions are shaped by audience, purpose, language, culture, and expectation.
- Distinguish among different types of rhetorical situations and communicate effectively within them.

Every day you find yourself in rhetorical situations and use rhetoric to communicate with and to persuade others, even though you might not realize you are doing it. For example, when you voice your opinion or respond to another's opinion, you are thinking rhetorically. Your purpose is often to convince others that you

have a valid opinion, and maybe even issue a call to action. Obviously, you use words to communicate and present your position. But you may communicate effectively through images as well.

Words and Images

Both words and images convey information, but each does so in significantly different ways. In English, words are written sequentially, from left to right. A look at a daily newspaper or web page reveals textual information further augmented by headlines, titles, subtitles, boldface, italics, white space, and images. By the time readers get to college, they have internalized predictive strategies to help them critically understand a variety of written texts and the images that accompany them. For example, you might be able to predict the words in a sentence as you are reading it. You also know the purpose of headers and other markers that guide you through the reading.

To be a critical reader, though, you need to be more than a good predictor. In addition to following the thread of communication, you need to evaluate its logic. To do that, you need to ask questions such as these as you consider the argument: *Is it fair (i.e., unbiased)? Does it provide credible evidence? Does it make sense, or is it reasonably plausible?* Then, based on what you have decided, you can accept or reject its conclusions. You may also consider alternative possibilities so that you can learn more. In this way, you read actively, searching for information and ideas that you understand and can use to further your own thinking, writing, and speaking. To move from understanding to critical awareness, plan to read a text more than once and in more than one way. One good strategy is to ask questions of a text rather than to accept the author's ideas as fact. Another strategy is to take notes about your understanding of the passage. And another is to make connections between concepts in different parts of a reading. Maybe an idea on page 4 is reiterated on page 18. To be an active, engaged reader, you will need to build bridges that illustrate how concepts become part of a larger argument. Part of being a good reader is the act of building information bridges within a text and across all the related information you encounter, including your experiences.

With this goal in mind, beware of passive reading. If you ever have been reading and completed a page or paragraph and realized you have little idea of what you've just read, you have been reading passively or just moving your eyes across the page. Although you might be able to claim you "read" the material, you have not engaged with the text to learn from it, which is the point of reading. You haven't built bridges that connect to other material. Remember, words help you make sense of the world, communicate in the world, and create a record to reflect on so that you can build bridges across the information you encounter.

Images, however, present a different set of problems for critical readers. Sometimes having little or no accompanying text, images require a different skill set. For example, in looking at a photograph or drawing, you find different information presented simultaneously. This presentation allows you to scan or stop anywhere in the image—at least theoretically. Because visual information is presented simultaneously, its general meaning may be apparent at a glance, while more nuanced or complicated meanings may take a long time to figure out. And even then, odds are these meanings will vary from one viewer to another.



FIGURE 1.3 Young woman looking away from the viewer or old woman in profile? (credit: "My wife and my mother-in-law" by W. E. (William Ely) Hill/Public Domain)

In the well-known image shown in Figure 1.3, *do you see an old woman or a young woman?* Although the image remains static, your interpretation of it may change depending on any number of factors, including your experience, culture, and education. Once you become aware of the two perspectives of this image, you can see the "other" easily. But if you are not told about the two ways to "see" it, you might defend a perspective without realizing that you are missing another one. Most visuals, however, are not optical illusions; less noticeable perspectives may require more analysis and may be more influenced by your cultural identity and the ways in which you are accustomed to interpreting. In any case, this image is a reminder to have an open mind and be willing to challenge your perspectives against your interpretations. As such, like written communication, images require analysis before they can be understood thoroughly and evaluation before they can be judged on a wider scale.

If you have experience with social media, you may be familiar with the way users respond to images or words by introducing another image: the **meme**. A meme is a photograph containing text that presents one viewer's response. The term *meme* originates from the Greek root *mim*, meaning "mime" or "mimic," and the English suffix *-eme*. In the 1970s, British evolutionary biologist and author Richard Dawkins (b. 1941) created the term for use as "a unit of cultural transmission," and he understood it to be "the cultural equivalent of a gene." Today, according to the dictionary definition, memes are "amusing or interesting items that spread widely through the Internet." For example, maybe you have seen a meme of an upset cat or of a friend turning around to look at something else while another friend is relating something important. The text that accompanies these pictures provides some expression on the part of the originator that the audience usually finds humorous, relatable, or capable of arousing any range of emotion or thought. For example, in the photograph shown in Figure 1.4 of a critter standing at attention, the author of the text conveys anxiousness. The use of the word *like* has been popularized in the meme genre to mean "to give an example."



FIGURE 1.4 Example of a meme (credit: "Waiting for you like . . ." by Marco Verch/flickr/CC BY 2.0)

While these playful aspects of images are important, you also should recognize how images fit into the rhetorical situation. Consider the same elements, such as context and genre, when viewing images. You may find multiple perspectives to consider. In addition, *where* images show up in a text or for an audience might be important. These are all aspects of understanding the situation and thinking critically. Engaged readers try to connect and build bridges to information across text and images.

As you consider your reading and viewing experiences on social media and elsewhere, note that your responses involve some basic critical thinking strategies. Some of these include summary, paraphrase, analysis, and evaluation, which are defined in the next section. The remaining parts of this chapter will focus on written communication. While this chapter touches only briefly on visual discourse, Image Analysis: What You See presents an extensive discussion on visual communication.

Relation to Academics

As with all disciplines, rhetoric has its own vocabulary. What follows are key terms, definitions, and elements of rhetoric. Become familiar with them as you discuss and write responses to the various texts and images you will encounter.

- **Analysis:** detailed breakdown or other explanation of some aspect or aspects of a text. Analysis helps readers understand the meaning of a text.
- **Authority:** credibility; background that reflects experience, knowledge, or understanding of a situation. An authoritative voice is clear, direct, factual, and specific, leaving an impression of confidence.
- **Context:** setting—time and place—of the rhetorical situation. The context affects the ways in which a particular social, political, or economic situation influences the process of communication. Depending on context, you may need to adapt your text to audience background and knowledge by supplying (or omitting) information, clarifying terminology, or using language that best reaches your readers.
- **Culture:** group of people who share common beliefs and lived experiences. Each person belongs to various cultures, such as a workplace, school, sports team fan, or community.
- **Evaluation:** systematic assessment and judgment based on specific and articulated criteria, with a goal to improve understanding.
- **Evidence:** support or proof for a fact, opinion, or statement. Evidence can be presented as statistics, examples, expert opinions, analogies, case studies, text quotations, research in the field, videos, interviews, and other sources of credible information.
- **Media literacy:** ability to create, understand, and evaluate various types of media; more specifically, the ability to apply critical thinking skills to them.
- **Meme:** image (usually) with accompanying text that calls for a response or elicits a reaction.

- **Paraphrase:** rewording of original text to make it clearer for readers. When they are part of your text, paraphrases require a citation of the original source.
- **Rhetoric:** use of effective communication in written, visual, or other forms and understanding of its impact on audiences as well as of its organization and structure.
- **Rhetorical situation:** instance of communication; the conditions of a communication and the agents of that communication.
- **Social media:** all digital tools that allow individuals or groups to create, post, share, or otherwise express themselves in a public forum. Social media platforms publish instantly and can reach a wide audience.
- **Summary:** condensed account of a text or other form of communication, noting its main points. Summaries are written in one's own words and require appropriate attribution when used as part of a paper.
- **Tone:** an author's projected or perceived attitude toward the subject matter and audience. Word choice, vocal inflection, pacing, and other stylistic choices may make the author sound angry, sarcastic, apologetic, resigned, uncertain, authoritative, and so on.

As you read through these terms, you likely recognize most of them and realize you are adept in some rhetorical situations. For example, when you talk with friends about your trip to the local mall, you provide details they will understand. You might refer to previous trips or tell them what is on sale or that you expect to see someone from school there. In other words, you understand the components of the rhetorical situation. However, if you tell your grandparents about the same trip, the rhetorical situation will be different, and you will approach the interaction differently. Because the audience is different, you likely will explain the event with more detail to address the fact that they don't go to the mall often, or you will omit specific details that your grandparents will not understand or find interesting. For instance, instead of telling them about the video game store, you might tell them about the pretzel café.

As part of your understanding of the rhetorical situation, you might summarize specific elements, again depending on the intended audience. You might speak briefly about the pretzel café to your friends but spend more time detailing the various toppings for your grandparents. If, by chance, you have previously stopped to have a pretzel, you might provide your analysis and evaluation of the service and the food. Once again, you are engaged in rhetoric by showing an understanding of and the ability to develop a strategy for approaching a particular rhetorical situation. The point is to recognize that rhetorical situations differ, depending, in this case, on the audience. Awareness of the rhetorical situation applies to academic writing as well. You change your presentation, tone, style, and other elements to fit the conditions of the situation.

1.4 Annotated Student Sample: Social Media Post and Responses on Voter Suppression

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Determine how conventions are shaped by purpose, language, culture, and expectations.
- Read for inquiry, learning, critical thinking, and communicating in varying rhetorical and cultural contexts.
- Distinguish relationships between genre conventions, ideas, patterns of organization, and interplay between various elements and how they influence the rhetorical situation.

Introduction



FIGURE 1.5 In Ohio, legal voter Larry Harmon was purged from the voter rolls because he had not voted since 2008. (credit: "Kaptur stands up for Ohio voters at Supreme Court" by Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0)

In the social media thread that follows, Proud Immigrant Citizen @primmcit posts about immigration and voter suppression. Others add their comments regarding voter suppression. Consider the ways in which each person responds to this initial post.

LIVING BY THEIR OWN WORDS

Social Media Thread

> Proud Immigrant Citizen @primmcit
>
> POTUS and DOJ have created a section dedicated to denaturalization. Strips citizenship and disenfranchises immigrant citizens, mainly persons of color, on trumped-up charges. Not-so-subtle way to control who can and cannot vote! This is a nightmare!

This opening post sets up a rhetorical situation. The genre is social media in which the platform limits the number of characters. The author's purpose is to inform others about a policy. It may also be to collect "likes" or reposts to spread the information, regardless of its accuracy. The audience is a collection of social media users—some known, some unknown. The author's stance is against the denaturalization policy. The context is a POTUS/DOJ action against immigrants. The culture shows a conflict between immigrants and the current administration (and its supporters).

> History Buff @historyfuture
>
> This is not new. Immigration Act of 1924 limited number of new immigrants to 2% of current U.S. citizens of that nationality. Largest groups (e.g., White people from northwest Europe) kept getting bigger. Effective way to concentrate political power.

This response provides further information about the rhetorical situation by offering historical context, which, again, may or may not be accurate.

> Proud Immigrant Citizen @primmcit
>
> It may not be new, but it's still wrong!

The original poster reiterates their stance.

> American and Proud @IPledge
>
> Are you for real saying that the government shouldn't control immigration? I don't want all these criminals voting, and I've had it up to here with everyone's stupid complaining!

This response provides an inaccurate summary of the original post. The tone shows anger and unwillingness to engage in meaningful discussion or to learn more about the issue. This person's mind is made up, so it would be hard to convince them to take a new or refined position.

> Peter @BetweenTheLines
>
> No, Proud Immigrant is saying that denaturalization is being used as a means of voter suppression.

This response corrects the previous responder with an accurate paraphrase of the original poster's stance and hints at the factual nature of the original post.

> Karen @ConservativeGirl
>
> What are the trumped-up charges? Can you direct me to some evidence? Sounds like a lot of liberal garbage.

This responder, although clearly against the original poster's stance, properly asks for evidence—something that may be provided through a link to keep the character count within the confines of the genre. Based on the handle and the end of the post, this person may or may not be open to a new perspective or factual information about the issue.

> Miguel @BothSides
>
> Liberal or conservative, voter suppression is one of the most dangerous threats to our democracy.

This responder offers an evaluation, regardless of stance. The tone indicates a reasonable attitude. However, by stating "liberal or conservative," this post may limit the audience since other cultures, such as moderate or progressive, may be following the thread.

> Sarah @IWatch
>
> When the news talks about low voter turnout in an election, it's hard to know why people didn't show up.

This responder begins an analysis of the original post by providing a questioning tone. However, this post does not seem to further the discussion; it makes a statement and does not follow up with new information or ideas.

> Mario @MyVote
>
> Exactly, did they stay home by choice, or were they "encouraged" to stay home by government red tape?

This responder clarifies the analytical question and tries to reengage previous responders. The question also opens up the potential for new evidence from others.

> Maria @HomeGirl
>
> It's not just immigrants. After Obama was elected, more than 20 states passed measures to limit voting in Black and Brown neighborhoods.

This responder offers possible evidence to support the ongoing problem of voter suppression. While unverified, it provides a strong starting point for further inquiry and discussion so that evidence can be brought into the discussion.

> Malik @BlackPanther
>
> This kind of racism isn't new. History Buff @historyfuture is right. Closing polling locations in Black and Brown neighborhoods is the new poll tax or literacy test.

This responder makes a connection between the past and present—an element of analysis.

Cho @HistoryRepeats	Yes, the party seeking power wants their voters to turn out, not all voters.

This responder makes an inference based on the accumulation of evidence. While the conclusion may be sound, it remains unclear.

Megan @FightThePower	It's easier to suppress the votes of non-supporters than to try to win them over.

This responder makes another inference based on the accumulation of evidence and alludes to previous instances of voter suppression along with potential rationale.

Marco @DontMessWithMe	That's why we need to #StayInLine

This responder presents a potential call to action—something people can do to fight voter suppression. This call to action assumes the audience within the given culture understands or can find out what #StayInLine means and how to become involved.

Conclusion

You are likely familiar with this type of social media thread—users from different cultures and with differing views coming together to comment on a post. What you may not have realized is that these users and others like them are engaging in rhetoric by responding to a text through summary, paraphrase, analysis, evaluation, calls for evidence, or proposals of action. Again, they demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation and how to navigate within it.

Discussion Questions

1. How might you have responded to the initial post, and why?
2. How do the usernames or handles affect your reading of the posts?
3. What might you have posted to begin a discussion about the voter suppression? How might each of these responders have interacted with your post?
4. What did you learn from the posts, and how might you confirm (or deny) the information provided? What specific items should you research to better engage with and further the discussion?
5. What conventions of social media do you notice (or do you recognize as missing)?

1.5 Writing Process: Thinking Critically About a "Text"

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Develop and implement flexible strategies for reading and rereading.
- Articulate how organizational features function for different audiences, creating cultural awareness within rhetorical situations.
- Determine how genre conventions for structure, paragraphs, tone, and mechanics vary.
- Identify common formats and design features for different kinds of text.
- Read and write critically within social media platforms.

Thinking critically is crucial to success both in and after school. Indeed, this skill may be the foundation of all education. Most of *Writing Guide with Handbook* explores strategies for helping you become an accomplished critical writer, but as you have already learned, a close relationship exists between critical writing and critical reading. Reading and writing, like producing and consuming, are two sides of the same coin. When you study one, you inevitably learn more about the other at the same time. The more you attend to the language of published writers, the more you will learn about your own language. The more you attend to your own written

language, the more you will learn about the texts you read.

Summary of Assignment: Critical Response

Select a short "text" for response. The "text" may be written, visual, or a combination of both. Keeping in mind the example of Selena Gomez or other social media activists (such as Swedish environmentalist Greta Thunberg [b. 2003] or conservative speaker and entrepreneur Wayne Dupree [b. 1968]), focus on a text, perhaps a meme or social media post, that addresses an aspect of social activism. First, read it completely for understanding. Summarize or paraphrase the main ideas of the text to check for comprehension. Second, read it critically to determine its purpose, to analyze its use of language (or another element), and to evaluate it. Finally, write a short (1–2 pages) critical response to the text, perhaps recommending or not recommending it to other readers, explaining its significance in a particular area of life or field of study, or even commenting on the diction or style of the communication and its potential impact on readers.

Another Lens. When you consider another perspective, you often learn information you have not considered before. Look at Figure 1.6:

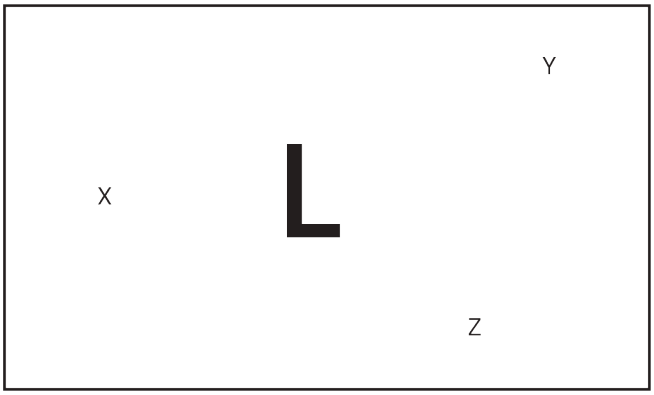


FIGURE 1.6 What X, Y, and Z see (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY NC-SA 4.0 license)

If you have the perspective of the X, all you see is the "back" of the L. You might not even know it's an L. You might think it is an I, but it also could be the side of an M, or an N, or even a P. From the perspective of X, you have only limited information about the structure, letter, or whatever is in front of you. If you take the perspective of Y, you have a different information, which contrasts with what you learned from X. Furthermore, neither X nor Y has the perspective of Z. As you can see, combining the perspectives gives you a more comprehensive picture. Although it is unlikely you will ever get a complete and accurate picture of any given situation, by considering other perspectives, you begin to think critically to understand an issue, problem, or condition.

As a class or in small groups, agree on a short text to read and respond to, as described. Share your responses in small groups, paying particular attention to the evaluation, analysis, and evidence that each person presents. Revise your initial response based on these new, shared perspectives from your classmates about the same text. The goal is to learn from others' perspectives. In so doing, consider how your classmates' perspectives enhance your comprehension and broaden your ability to understand the interpretations of the text. As you revise, incorporate this new knowledge, and consider how the various cultures and interpretations based on culture can lead to understanding and even misunderstanding. Finally, pay attention to how you might consider these multiple perspectives to clarify the text's purpose or meaning for an audience.

Quick Launch: Mapping the Rhetorical Situation

When you first sit down to write, you can use any of several methods to get going. The blank page can be intimidating, and facing a blank page is one of the reasons writing can be challenging at first. Figure out which "launch" methods work best for you and your style(s) of thinking and writing. Sometimes this stage is called

prewriting or **planning**. Taking the time to prewrite helps you decide how to proceed to the actual writing and builds your confidence in the process. Some people make concept maps, others make checklists, and still others create formal outlines. Some do research on a topic before they start, whereas others just sit down and write whatever comes to mind, a process called **freewrite**. There is no perfect or correct way to begin writing. The important thing is to discover which strategies work for you for a particular writing task, and then to use them.

For this writing task, create a concept map with six radiating circles (or use six index cards that you can physically move around on a tabletop). Label the map as noted in Figure 1.7. In each radiating circle, fill in the information regarding the rhetorical situation (that is, the agents and the five conditions: genre, purpose, stance, context, and culture) in relation to your chosen text. As you assess the rhetorical situation, you will further your understanding of the text, and you may begin to find areas for analysis or evaluation.

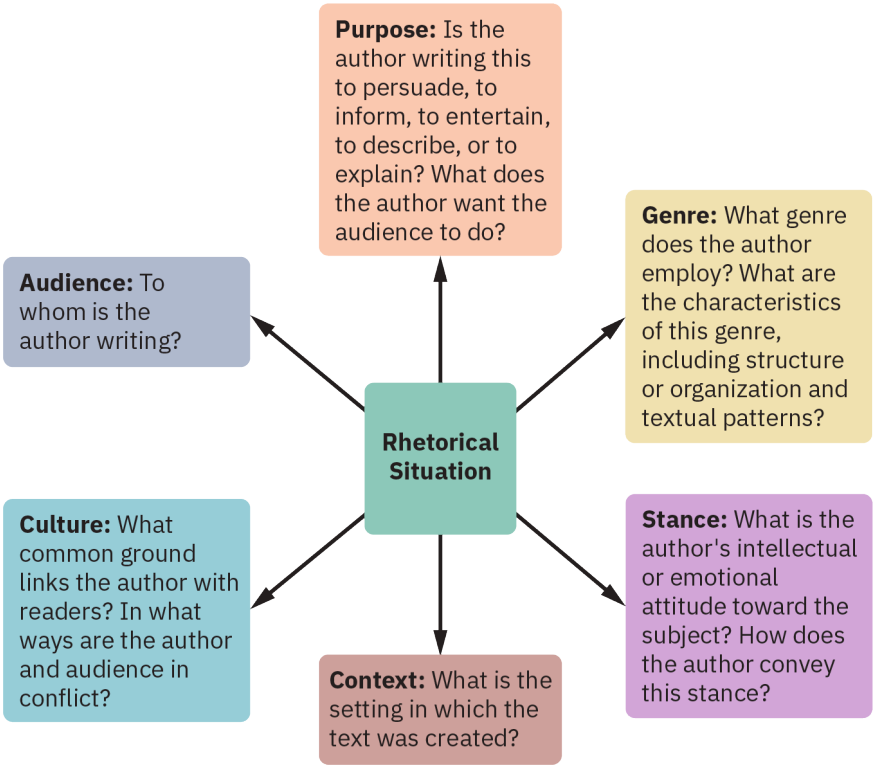


FIGURE 1.7 Concept map (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY NC-SA 4.0 license)

Drafting: Restating, Analyzing, and Evaluating

To restate and then respond to a text, you need to both reread and "resee" it, reconsidering its rhetorical situation and your reaction to it. Be sure that you grasp the main ideas within the text but move beyond that to a critical understanding of the text as a cultural artifact. In responding, you start a conversation with the text so that you enter into the framework and context of the communication. In general, when responding to a text, you have to

- understand what it means within its rhetorical situation;
- analyze its meaning;
- evaluate its significance; and
- determine how to incorporate it into your own thinking and writing.

Responding to Understand: Summary

A summary is a condensed version of a longer text that reviews its main ideas. Shorter than the original text, a summary is written in your own words. To prepare a summary, you may outline or annotate the text to

highlight relationships between ideas or conclusions. Reread sections of the text such as abstracts, first and last paragraphs, and sections titled "Summary," "Observations," or "Conclusion(s)." Also consider headings, subheadings, and visuals, all of which often name main ideas. Remember, you want to provide a summary in your own words of the source's work, not your interpretation or opinion of it. Review this video on summarizing (https://openstax.org/r/summarizing) for more information.

Responding to Clarify: Paraphrase

A paraphrase is a restatement of a text or part of a text, written in your own words, to clarify its meaning for your readers. A paraphrase is usually about the same length as the original text, although it can be either longer or shorter. Your goal in paraphrasing is to provide readers with clarity about a complex idea while still maintaining the perspective of the source. Paraphrasing can be difficult and requires practice, so be sure to review (https://openstax.org/r/review).

Responding to Analyze

Responding to analyze means moving beyond a basic understanding and appreciation of what the text *says* and examining it to see how it was put together in order to deepen your comprehension. From thorough analysis, you can arrive at your own theory regarding what the text *means.* Thus, analysis leads to interpretation and to evaluation, or judgment of its merits.

In responding to analyze, consider the following questions: *How has the author constructed this text? What is the author's subject, tone, and message or theme? For what reason or purpose has the author constructed this text in this way at this time?* An analysis provides an understanding of the ways in which the parts of the text form a whole within a rhetorical situation. Any such response points to important ideas and makes connections to provide textual evidence to support the analysis.

To read a text analytically, mark it for

- points of agreement and disagreement with claims or assertions;
- convincing examples that support claims or assertions;
- implications or consequences of believing the author;
- personal associations with text material;
- connections to other "texts" you have read;
- recurring images, symbols, diction, phrases, ideas, and so on; and
- conclusions.

Consider developing a coding system for cross-referencing to show that one annotation, passage, or idea is related to another. Some students write comments on different features of the text in different colors, such as green for nature imagery, blue for key terms, red for interesting anecdotes, and so on. Other students use numbers, such as 1 for plot, 2 for character, and so on.

Visit Walden University (https://openstax.org/r/WaldenUniversity) for more detail on including analysis in your writing. You can also refer to Rhetorical Analysis: Interpreting the Art of Rhetoric for more on rhetorical analysis and Print or Textual Analysis: What You Read for more on print or textual analysis.

Responding to Evaluate

Responding to evaluate means deciding whether you think the text accomplishes its purposes effectively. *In other words, does the text do what it claims to do?* You can also determine the significance of the text and its implications. Of course, different genres of texts should be judged using different criteria. To evaluate a text, you need to understand and analyze it in order to support your judgments.

In an **argument**, a writer (or speaker) advances claims and supports them with logical reasoning and evidence. A **claim** is a statement that something is true (or valid) or that some action should be taken. Every claim in an argument should be supported by logical **reasoning** (e.g., cause and effect, comparison and

contrast, or problem and solution) and by reliable and sufficient **evidence** (e.g., facts, statistics, anecdotes, examples, or quotations). When responding to an argument, ask the following questions: *Is the claim based on presented facts—information that can be verified? Is the claim based on credible inferences—connections between textual evidence and personal knowledge or experience? Is the claim based on unsubstantiated opinions—personal belief?* All three elements—facts, inferences, and opinions—have their places in argumentative texts. However, the strongest arguments are those based on verifiable facts and reasonably drawn inferences. Look out for opinions masquerading as facts and for inferences stemming from insufficient facts. Refer to the social media exchange in the Annotated Student Sample and recognize how those posts present information to help you see these connections.

An **informational text** presents facts and draws conclusions based on those facts. When responding to an informational text, ensure that the facts are accurate, that the inferences rely on facts, and that opinions presented as evidence are based on expertise, not emotion. Decide whether the author presents enough reliable facts to justify the conclusions. In addition, consider whether the author is reliable and reasonable. Also, ask questions, such as *Is the tone objective? Has all the relevant information been presented? Is the author an expert in the field? What necessary or useful information seems missing? Are other perspectives missing?*

To understand an informational text, you need some context for the new ideas you encounter, some knowledge of the terms and ideas, and knowledge of the rules that govern the genre. If would be difficult to read the Emancipation Proclamation with no knowledge of the Civil War (1861–1865) or the practice of enslavement. It would also be difficult to read a biology textbook chapter about photosynthesis but know nothing of plants, cell structure, or chemical reactions. The more you know, the more you learn; the more you learn, the more critical your reading, writing, and thinking will be. As you gain knowledge, you will naturally ask more questions and make more connections or bridges between information sources, thereby enhancing your reading, writing, and critical thinking skills.

Many college instructors will ask you to read about subjects that are new to you. First, of course, it's important to understand what you read. Comprehension means being proactive as a reader: looking up words you do not know, taking meaningful notes, asking questions, understanding the rhetorical situation of the text, and so on. Second, you want to improve your skills to analyze or evaluate texts critically and write about this understanding. *However, how do you develop context, learn background, and find the rules to help you read unfamiliar texts on unfamiliar subjects? What strategies or shortcuts can speed up the learning process?*

As an experiment, read the following statement issued by President Harry S. Truman (1884–1972), take notes, and practice being a proactive reader who focuses on comprehension, the rhetorical situation, and critical analysis of the passage:



FIGURE 1.8 Harry S. Truman (credit: "Portrait of President Harry S. Truman" by National Archives and Records Administration/Public Domain)

> Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, and destroyed its usefulness to the enemy. That bomb had more power than 20,000 tons of T.N.T. It had more than two thousand times the blast power of the British Grand Slam, which is the largest bomb ever yet used in the history of warfare.

How did you do? Did your reasoning go something like this?

- Noting the setting—Hiroshima, Japan. Prior historical knowledge suggests that Hiroshima is one of the cities on which the United States dropped an atomic bomb near the end of World War II (1939–1945).
- Staying with the first sentence, Truman focuses on Hiroshima as something useful to the enemy that has been destroyed. There is no mention of human casualties.
- The second sentence focuses on the destructive power of the bomb, suggesting the force of the United States's arsenal.
- Out of curiosity, you might have looked up the British Grand Slam to learn it was a powerful bomb type developed by engineer and inventor Sir Barnes Wallis (1887–1979) and used during World War II. Here, too, Truman suggests that the United States is even more powerful than its ally Great Britain.
- The tone of the text is prideful, as if using the largest bomb in the history of warfare is a grand accomplishment.

Whether reading new texts, learning new information, or witnessing unfamiliar events, you usually draw meaning by following a process something like this one—trying to identify what you see, hear, or read; questioning what you do not understand; making and testing predictions; and consulting authorities for confirmation or credible information. In this way, comprehension leads to critical analysis, understanding, and evaluation.

You will encounter different text types, too. Authors of **literary texts** such as short stories, poems, and plays may strive to make their work believable, enjoyable, and effective in conveying their themes. To locate a **theme**, look for recurring language, ideas, or images. Consider how the characters change between the beginning and the end of the story. Then, consider whether the author's choices effectively convey the theme.

The strongest responses to literature or other art forms are based on textual evidence, as in most academic writing. Visit Colorado State University (https://openstax.org/r/Colorado_State_University) for more insight into evaluation.

You also can refer to Evaluation or Review: Would You Recommend It? for more on evaluation or review and Print or Textual Analysis: What You Read for more direction in approaching narrative texts.

Responding to Write

Once you understand a text, examine it more slowly to analyze and evaluate its cultural assumptions, its arguments, its evidence, its logic, and its conclusions. The best way to do this is to respond, or "talk back," to the text in writing. Again, pay attention to the rhetorical situation: the agents and conditions. Talking back can take various forms, from actually saying words to yourself or aloud, to making margin notes, to composing a critical response. Respond to passages that cause you to pause for a moment to reflect, to question, to read again, or to say "Ah!" or "Aha!" Your reactions may suggest something important, maybe a revelation or an insight. Whichever it may be, take note of it because you may not have that reaction on another reading.

If the text is informational, try to capture the statements that are repeated or that pull together or summarize ideas. These are often critical elements to understand and possibly evaluate later. If the text is argumentative, examine the claim, reasoning, and each piece of supporting evidence. You can always go back to examine evidence or look up sources the author used when you want to gain a better understanding of the text's purpose and position in a larger conversation. If the text is literary, pay extra attention to language features, such as images, metaphors, and crisp dialogue. Often, authors use these elements to help create a character, such as a character that always says "ya know" after every sentence, thus making a character more individual and realistic.

Basically, you want to note what's happening to you as you read. Ask about the text's effect on you. *How are you reacting? What are you thinking or feeling? What do you like? What do you dislike? What do you trust or distrust? Why?* These responses are useful especially if the information is new or unexpected. By noting them, you will be able to build your understanding and convey that to readers. Part of the goal as a writer is to take the connections and bridges you have made and provide them for *your* readers to help them follow the logic of those connections.

Responding to a text in writing also means locating specific evidence to quote, paraphrase, or summarize in support of your analysis or evaluation. When you quote, you use the exact language of the text; when you summarize, you reduce the text to a brief statement of its main ideas in your own words; when you paraphrase, you restate the text in your own words. In all these cases—quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you will need to cite or reference the original source. Proper and consistent citation is important for several reasons. It helps establish your authority, thus building your credibility with readers. It also allows readers to go to your sources for more details or specifics so that they, too, can take part in the conversation. And it shows you are crediting your sources, thus avoiding plagiarism. To learn more about source citation, consult MLA Documentation and Format or APA Documentation and Format.

Use this media interactive to practice identifying the different ways in which readers respond to texts. Then, examine the annotated professional critical response model below.

Access multimedia content (http://openstax.org/books/writing-guide/pages/1-5-writing-process-thinking-critically-about-a-text)

Critical Response: An Annotated Model

The Case of Jean Gianini

In 1914, in the village of Poland, New York, sixteen-year-old Jean Gianini murdered his former teacher Lydia Beecher. During the commission of this brutal murder, Gianini provided evidence that tied him to the murder through a lost a button at the crime scene. Upon arrest, Gianini confessed to the crime. At the trial, Gianni's

defense lawyers claimed that Gianini was legally insane during the commission of his crime. Psychologist Dr. Henry Herbert Goddard was called to testify as an expert witness.

Here, as the author, Henry Herbert Goddard *(1866–1957)*, analyzes *"The Case of Jean Gianini" (1915).* The selection that follows demonstrates a framework and an example of a critical response to a text. It has been excerpted for clarity and space.

Introduction

In the introduction to his critical response, Goddard includes the title of the work and a summary of the rhetorical situation. He ends the introduction with a statement of evaluation.

> "We find the defendant in this case not guilty as charged . . ."

> Such was the verdict by the jury of the Supreme Court of Herkimer County, New York, on May 28th, 1914, in the case of the people *vs.* Jean Gianini, indicted for the murder of Lida Beecher, his former teacher.

Here, the author cites the title of the text—a court case—and provides some early context.

> The prosecution and, at first at least, the majority of the citizens of the community held that this had been a carefully planned, premeditated, cold-blooded murder of the most atrocious character, committed with a fiendishness seldom seen among human beings. It was, on the other hand, claimed by the defense that the boy . . . had only the intelligence of a ten-year-old child, that he did not know the nature and quality of his act, and that he did not have any true realization of the enormity of his crime. For some reason unaccountable to a great many people, the jury accepted the view of the defense.

Here, the author provides elements of the rhetorical situation: culture, context, and stance. Shared cultural assumptions are that the guilty will be punished. Contextual details of the trial include a summary of the defense and the jury's reaction. The phrase "unaccountable to a great many people" may suggest that the author does not agree with the jury's "not guilty" verdict.

> Not infrequently have verdicts in murder trials been unacceptable to the populace. In that respect this verdict is not an exceptional one, but from other standpoints it is remarkable. Probably no verdict in modern times has marked so great a step forward in society's treatment of the wrongdoer. For the first time in history psychological tests of intelligence have been admitted into court and the mentality of the accused established on the basis of these facts.

> The value of this verdict cannot be overestimated. It establishes a new standard in criminal procedure.

Here, the author offers commentary about the larger meaning of this case, historically. In addition, the author concludes with a statement of evaluation—the importance of the verdict to the administration of justice.

Body

The next several body paragraphs provide Goddard with the opportunity to offer the reasons behind his evaluation. Each paragraph should have a topic sentence to maintain focus and organization. For each reason offered, explanation of its importance and supporting evidence from the text through quotations, summaries, or paraphrases should follow. See MLA Documentation and Format or APA Documentation and Format for guidance on citation.

> One of the unique features, so far as court procedure is concerned, was the introduction into the case, of examinations by means of the Binet-Simon Measuring Scale of Intelligence.

In this passage, the author gives one reason to support both his and the jury's assessment of Jean's intelligence—an intelligence test. Moreover, it is presented as a new scientific tool, which it was in 1915, to help establish the case.

> The writer's examination of Jean consisted largely of the use of these tests, and as a result he estimated his mentality at approximately ten years of age. It was somewhat difficult to estimate his mentality with the usual exactness since others had already used the tests, and it was impossible to say how much Jean had learned from his previous examinations. As a matter of fact, in some cases at least, he had not profited by the experiences which should have helped him greatly [. . .] For example, one of the tests is to draw from memory a diagram which he has been allowed to study for ten seconds. It is clear that if one were given this test two or three times, at the last trial he should have a pretty good idea of it and be able to draw it correctly. Although the writer's use of this test was in the last of the series of those who tested him, yet he did not succeed in drawing it. This is usually drawn by a child of ten years. When asked to repeat a certain sentence, he replied, "Oh, I have been asked that a hundred times." But in spite of the fact that he had heard it several times he failed to remember it, and yet this sentence is generally remembered by a child of twelve.

Here, the author introduces evidence from the test through summary. Yet, he employs some faulty cause-and-effect reasoning. Based on Jean's response to repeating a sentence, is it possible that he refuses to participate in the tests rather than that he is unable to produce the desired responses? By not considering alternative conclusions (or perspectives), the author shows a bias against Jean and favoritism toward the test and the conclusion he draws from it.

Conclusion

To conclude, Goddard shares with readers his final thoughts about the text and leaves the readers with something to think about.

> Our general studies have not yet gone far enough, and certainly our study of this particular family is far from sufficient, to enable us to decide whether this is a matter of heredity or whether we shall say that Jean's condition as well as that of the first child is traceable directly to the mother's insanity or to her alcoholism.

> For the present purpose, of course, it does not matter. We see in these facts, whether we regard them as causes or merely as symptoms of a deeper lying cause, sufficient reason for Jean's [intellectual condition. [. . .] The next important question that arises is a legal one of whether [. . .] he knew the nature and quality of his act and that it was wrong.

Finally, the author introduces subsequent (and maybe distracting) information. Additionally, the author concedes to the popular assessment of Jean's mental condition, but he raises a legal question that prompts readers to continue thinking: Does one's intellectual capacity excuse one from criminal culpability?

Now, it is your turn to put this knowledge to work. Use a graphic organizer like Table 1.1 to get started drafting your ideas in response to your chosen text.

Structure of Response	Content of Response	Your Response
Introduction	Author Title of Work Summary of rhetorical situation Statement of analysis or evaluation	
Body 1	Point 1 of analysis or evaluation Evidence from text in form of quotation, summary, or paraphrase	

TABLE 1.1 Drafting frame

Structure of Response	Content of Response	Your Response
Body 2	Point 2 of analysis or evaluation Evidence from text in form of quotation, summary, or paraphrase	
Body 3	Point 3 of analysis or evaluation Evidence from text in form of quotation, summary, or paraphrase	
Body 4 (if needed)	Point 4 of analysis or evaluation Evidence from text in form of quotation, summary, or paraphrase	
Body 5 (if needed)	Point 5 of analysis or evaluation Evidence from text in form of quotation, summary, or paraphrase	
Conclusion	Final conclusions regarding analysis or evaluation Leave readers thinking or suggest action	

TABLE 1.1 Drafting frame

In addition, use these sentence starters as needed during drafting:

Summary:

[Name of author] explains _____.

After discussing _____, the author claims _____.

[Author's name]'s main point is _____.

Paraphrase:

In other words, the author is saying that _____.

To paraphrase, the author claims that _____.

To simplify this idea, think about it in this way: _____.

Analysis:

[Name of author] develops _____ to show _____.

The author's use of _____ supports _____.

The author employs _____ to create _____.

Evaluation:

The most important aspect of this text is _____ because _____.

[Name of author] fails to address _____ and _____, which makes me think about the impact on _____.

I think [name of author] is wrong [or correct] because _____.

Evidence:

As an example, the author says, "_____." *(Be sure to provide accurate citation!)*

The sentence "_____" suggests that _____.

The use of the word "_____" creates the impression that _____.

As often as possible, use the author's name rather than a pronoun. The first time you mention it, write the full name as it is listed on the source you are using. Then, use the last name only, and be certain to cite properly. Finally, edit and revise your work to catch any oversights.

1.6 Evaluation: Intention vs. Execution

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Distinguish variations in genre conventions.
- Differentiate between intention and execution with regard to intended meaning.
- Articulate how rubrics provide insight into the final outcomes of an assignment.

When you write, you try to convert what is in your mind into words on paper or on a screen. Because you are writing for others, your thoughts must be understandable to them. Have you ever said, "I know what I *mean*; I just don't know how to say it"? Your **intention** is what you mean, and your **execution** is how you say it. Sometimes, however, intention and execution don't convey the same thing. When this gap occurs, your intention needs some focus so that you can execute.

Rubrics help you direct your prewriting and drafting to fulfill the criteria of an assignment. In basic terms, a rubric provides a guide for drafting and evaluating a paper (or other project). More important, it helps you understand your intention and process it into execution. At times, having an idea of how a work will be evaluated is useful so that you can address the elements of the rubric as you draft and revise. Nevertheless, you should understand that any rubric will not cover every aspect of a given assignment. You also will need to consider other factors while drafting. In addition, rubrics may be based on conventions already discussed in class or a previous reading. For example, part of the following rubric is "analyzing and evaluating the text." If you do not know what these terms mean or how to analyze or evaluate the text, having such criteria is useless. In other words, to be able to analyze and evaluate a text, you need to know *how to analyze and evaluate a text*. This observation brings you back to the rhetorical situation and the other important elements of this chapter. So be sure to review, take meaningful notes, and understand what you will need to do. Once you are ready, use this rubric to evaluate the chapter's assigned writing task.

Rubric

Score	Critical Language Awareness	Clarity and Coherence	Rhetorical Choices
5 **Skillful**	The text always adheres to the task as discussed in Section 1.5: summarizing, paraphrasing, explaining, analyzing, and evaluating a reading selection. The text also shows ample evidence of the writer's intent to consciously meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The written work consistently features clear and coherent language that allows readers to move seamlessly from section to section with clearly linked concepts and transitions. The writing is consistently focused on the topic.	Each aspect of the rhetorical situation is clearly identifiable, presented clearly, and understood. The language is perfectly suited to the writer's purpose and audience.
4 **Accomplished**	The text usually adheres to the task as discussed in Section 1.5: summarizing, paraphrasing, explaining, analyzing, and evaluating a reading selection. The text also shows some evidence of the writer's intent to consciously meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The writing usually provides clear and coherent language that allows readers to move easily from section to section with linked concepts and transitions. The writing is mostly focused on the topic.	Most aspects of the rhetorical situation are identifiable, presented clearly, and understood. Language is generally suited to the writer's purpose and audience.
3 **Capable**	The text generally adheres to the task as discussed in Section 1.5: summarizing, paraphrasing, explaining, analyzing, and evaluating a reading selection. The text also shows limited evidence of the writer's intent to consciously meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The writing provides general awareness of clear and coherent language and sometimes allows readers to move from section to section with basic linking of concepts and meaningful transitions. The writing may show a lack of focus on the topic.	Some aspects of the rhetorical situation are identifiable, presented, and partly understood. Language is sometimes unsuited to the writer's purpose and audience.

TABLE 1.2

Score	Critical Language Awareness	Clarity and Coherence	Rhetorical Choices
2 **Developing**	The text occasionally adheres to the task as discussed in Section 1.5: summarizing, paraphrasing, explaining, analyzing, and evaluating a reading selection. The text also shows emerging evidence of the writer's intent to consciously meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The writing provides minimal attention to clear and coherent language and does not adequately allow readers to move from section to section through the use of linked concepts or transitions. The writing is often unfocused.	One aspect of the rhetorical situation is identifiable and presented and is partially or minimally understood. Language is mostly unsuited to the writer's purpose and audience.
1 **Beginning**	The text does not adhere to the task as discussed in Section 1.5: summarizing, paraphrasing, explaining, analyzing, and evaluating a reading selection. The text also shows little to no evidence of the writer's intent to consciously meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The writing reflects minimal or no attention to clear and coherent language and may hinder readers in moving from section to section. Transitions are either missing or incorrect. The writing is unfocused.	No aspect of the rhetorical situation is identifiable, presented, or understood. Language is unsuited to the writer's purpose and audience.

TABLE 1.2

1.7 Spotlight on … Academia

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Determine how various mediums address, affect, and interact with a range of audiences.
- Examine the importance of your college experience and larger impact on society.
- Write and post texts in different environments and in varying rhetorical situations.

The Role of the Classroom in This Brave New World

The term ***academia*** refers to "the life, community, or environment of teachers, schools, and education." With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the world of academia was challenged. There were logistical challenges, of course: *How would students and teachers attend classes and remain safe? In what ways could digital learning replace classroom learning effectively?* But there were deeper philosophical challenges: *What is the real value of a traditional college education in a world that is seemingly on the brink of one crisis after another? Would the classroom become something of value, leading the way in this brave new world, or would it become obsolete?* While some students chose not to return to their classrooms in the fall of 2020, others either returned or logged on virtually. Whichever way students decided to engage, the larger purpose of college was challenged.

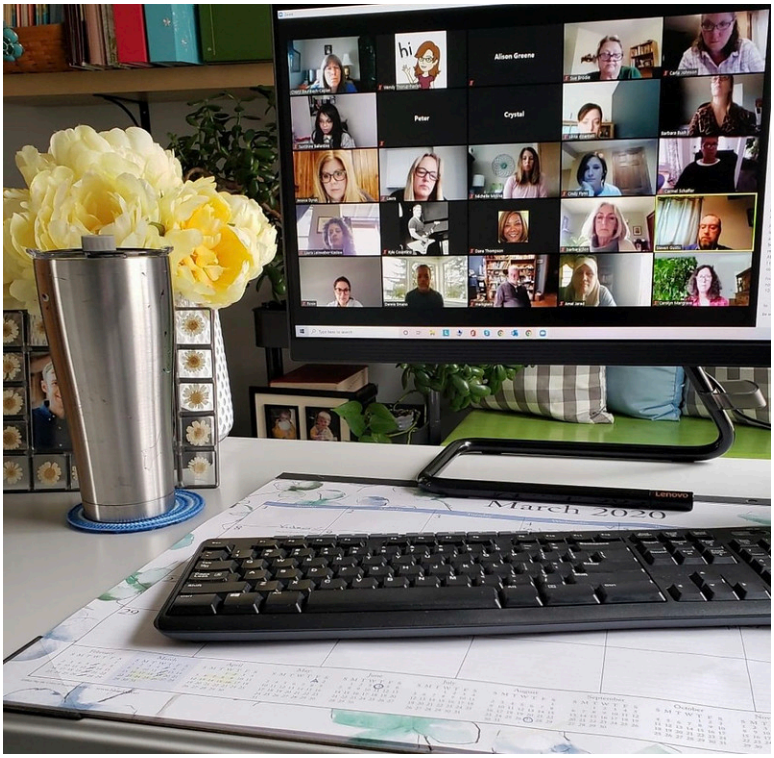


FIGURE 1.9 Students in a virtual classroom during the 2020 pandemic (credit: "Chaps Work From Home 31" by COD Newsroom/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

At its best, the college experience is one of personal transformation. The student embarks on a journey of empowerment, learning to understand the world around them, then to participate in it, and finally to influence it. It is a journey from understanding to analysis and from evaluation to problem-solving. The final awarding of a degree calls a student to action. *What will you do with the newly gained knowledge and practiced skill sets? How will you make an impact the world in positive ways? Will you develop the vaccine for the next health threat? Will you address centuries of racial injustice in ways never before attempted? What unique contribution can only you make at this time and in this place?* The question is not really whether the college classroom has a role to play in this world, but whether it will rise above outdated traditions to the level of impactful engagement. One thing is certain, however; the answer starts with you and the publication of your ideas.

Authentic Publication

To practice your knowledge and use some of the tools in your growing skill set, do this short activity. If you have a social media account, use it to bridge social media and academia by publishing a version of your critical response that meets the characteristics of the platform, likely by reducing the character count or posting a video. First, summarize or paraphrase your main points. Research a link you might include to provide readers with background information and a larger context of your rhetorical situation. Next, create a post that asks an honest, analytical, or evaluative question about the topic. In determining your phrasing, assess the rhetorical situation. If you can, tag a few of your followers to encourage them to respond. You might even mention that this is part of a school project or add a hashtag—a word or phrase preceded by # that categorizes the accompanying text. If you are on multiple platforms, try different versions or approaches to see which one generates the most attention and discussion.

As a result, you might learn something compelling or find your interest piqued by engaging with others. Maybe you can even incorporate what you learn into your portfolio reflection, which is covered at the end of this chapter. Remember, part of the goal of writing is learning. Writing helps you solidify what you are thinking, what it might mean, why it matters, how to say it, and how to communicate it to others. Using various media to

convey information will continue to be an essential element of your education and your life, so be sure to practice it.

1.8 Portfolio: Tracing Writing Development

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Reflect on the development of composing processes.
- Reflect on how those composing processes affect your work.



FIGURE 1.10 (credit: "Carbon fiber keyboard" by H. Sterling Cross/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0)

The Portfolio: And So It Begins . . .

In simplest terms, a writing portfolio is a collection of your writing contained within a single binder or folder. This writing may have been done over a number of weeks, months, or even years. It may be organized chronologically, thematically, or according to quality. A private writing portfolio may contain writing that you wish to keep only for yourself. In this case, you decide what is in it and what it looks like. However, a writing portfolio assigned for a class will contain writing to be shared with an audience to demonstrate the growth of your writing and reasoning abilities. One kind of writing portfolio, accumulated during a college course, presents a record of your work over a semester, and your instructor may be use it to assign a grade. Another type of portfolio presents a condensed, edited story of your semester's progress in a more narrative form.

The most common type of portfolio assigned in a writing course combines the cumulative work collected over the semester, plus a cover letter in which you explain the nature and value of these papers. Sometimes you will be asked to assign yourself a grade on the basis of your own assessment. The following suggestions may help you prepare a course portfolio:

- **Make your portfolio speak for you.** If your course portfolio is clean, complete, and carefully organized, that is how it will be judged. If it is unique, colorful, creative, and imaginative, that, too, is how it will be judged. Similarly, your folder will be judged more critically if it is messy, incomplete, and haphazardly put together. Before giving your portfolio to somebody else for evaluation, consider whether it reflects how you want to be presented.
- **Include exactly what is asked for.** If an instructor wants three finished papers and a dozen sample journal entries, that is the minimum your course portfolio should contain. Sometimes you can include more than what is asked for, but never include less.
- **Add supplemental material judiciously.** Course portfolios are among the most flexible means of presenting yourself. If you believe that supplemental writing will show you in a better light, include that

too, but only after the required material. If you include extra material, attach a memo to explain why it is there and what you think it adds to your portfolio. Supplemental writing might include journals, letters, sketches, or diagrams that suggest other useful dimensions of your thinking.

- **Include *perfect* final drafts.** At least make them as close to perfect as you can. Show that your own standard for finished work is high. Check spelling, grammar, citation, formatting, and font sizes and types. You should go over your work carefully and be able to find the smallest errors. In addition, if you are asked for a hard copy of your portfolio, final drafts should be double-spaced and printed on only one side of high-quality paper, unless another format is requested. And, of course, your work should be carefully proofread and should follow the language and genre conventions appropriate to the task.
- **Demonstrate growth.** This is a tall order, but course portfolios, unlike most other assessment instruments, can show positive change. The primary value of portfolios in writing classes is that they allow you to demonstrate how a finished paper came into being. Consequently, instructors frequently ask for early drafts to be attached to final drafts of each paper, the most recent on top, so they can see how you followed revision suggestions, how much effort you invested, how many drafts you wrote, and how often you took risks and tried to improve. To build such a record of your work, make sure the date of every draft is clearly marked on each one, and keep it in a safe place (and backed up electronically).
- **Demonstrate work in progress.** Course portfolios allow writers to present partially finished work that suggests future directions and intentions. Both instructors and potential employers may find such preliminary drafts or outlines as valuable as some of your finished work. When you include a tentative draft, be sure to attach a memo or note explaining why you still believe it has merit and in which direction you plan to take your next revisions.
- **Attach a table of contents.** For portfolios containing more than three papers, attach a separate table of contents. For those containing only a few papers, embed your table of contents in the cover letter.
- **Organize your work using clear logic.** Three methods of organization are particularly appealing:
  - **Chronological order:** Writing is arranged in order, beginning with the first week of class and ending with the last week, with all drafts, papers, journal entries, letters, and such fitting in place according to the date written. Only the cover letter is out of chronological order, appearing at the beginning and serving as an introduction to what follows. This method allows you to show the evolution of growth most clearly, with your latest writing (presumably the best) presented at the end.
  - **Reverse chronological order:** The most recent writing is up front, and the earliest writing at the back. In this instance, the most recent written document—the cover letter—is in place at the beginning of the portfolio. This method features your latest (presumably the best) work up front and allows readers to trace the history of how it got there.
  - **Best-first order:** You place your strongest writing up front and your weakest in back. Organizing a portfolio this way suggests that the work *you* consider strongest should count most heavily in evaluating the semester's work.

With each completed chapter in this textbook, you will add to this portfolio. As you work through the chapters and complete the assignments, save each one on your computer or in the cloud, unless your instructor asks you to print your work and arrange it in a binder. Each assignment becomes an artifact that will form a piece of your portfolio. Depending on your preference or your instructor's approach, you may write a little about each assignment as you add to the portfolio. As you compile your portfolio, take some time to read the assignments—drafts and finished products—carefully. Undoubtedly, you will see improvement in your writing over a short amount of time. Be sure to make note of this improvement because it will prove useful moving forward.

Reflective Task: The Freedom of Freewriting



As you begin your portfolio with the addition of your critical response, compose an accompanying freewrite, sometimes called a quick write. In this case, you will be responding to your own text—a powerful tool in your intellectual development. To begin, write quickly and without stopping about the process of composing your

critical response and the finished product. See where your thoughts go, a process that often helps you clarify your own thoughts about the subject—your own text and its creation. When you freewrite, write to yourself in your own natural style, without worrying about sentence structure, grammar, spelling, or punctuation. The purpose is to help you tie together the ideas from your writing process, your assignment, and other thoughts and experiences in your mind. One future value of freewriting is that the process tends to generate questions at random, capture them, and leave the answering for a later task or assignment. Another bonus of freewriting is that you will build confidence with writing and become more disciplined when you have to write. In other words, the more you write, the more confidence you will have in your voice and your writing.

By now you may have realized that writing, whether on social media platforms or in the classroom, is a conversation. The conversation may take place with yourself (freewriting), with your instructor and classmates (assignment), or with the world (social media). You have learned how people like Selena Gomez and others use simple and effective strategies, such as vulnerability, understanding, analysis, and evaluation, to engage in such conversations. Now adopt these same processes—try them on for size, practice them, and learn to master them. As you move through the remainder of this course and text, compose with intention by keeping in mind the limits and freedoms of a particular defined rhetorical situation.

Further Reading

It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with texts of evaluation and analysis. Below, you will find a few titles with which to start.

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