Teaching Rhetorical Analysis
David Jolliffe, Former Chief Reader

"I. What is rhetoric? "The faculty of finding the available means of persuasion in a given case" (Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica*). "The art of featuring content" (William Covino and David Jolliffe, *Rhetoric: Concepts, Definitions, Boundaries*).

II. What is rhetorical analysis? Examination of written texts, literary or "ordinary," to determine how the author has shaped the content in order to achieve an identifiable purpose for a given audience. Rhetorical analysis commits the intentional fallacy and the affective fallacy with impunity.

III. Traditional divisions of the art of rhetoric: Invention, arrangement, style, memory, delivery.

IV. Key terms in rhetorical analysis:

   A. Exigence: a gap, a need, a lack, something that needs doing. What's sticking in the author's craw.

   B. Audience: A reader or group of readers capable of acting on this exigence. Important distinctions: Primary and secondary audiences, immediate and mediated audiences.

   C. Purpose: What the author intends for the reader(s) to do while and after they read the text.

   D. appeals: Closely related ways the author aims to get the readers to take up the purposeful action:
     1. Ethos: Appeals to the character of the writer or the persona.

     2. Pathos: Appeals to the emotions or interests of the readers.

     3. Logos: Appeals to the structure of the argument. Three perspectives:
       a. Enthymemes: Syllogisms in which the major premise is suppressed and unstated for several reasons: The audience believes it *a priori**, it is common knowledge, it is controvertible presumption, not an incontrovertible proposition.
       b. Toulmin's informal structure …………
       c. A paradeigma: A repeated series of examples that form a pattern.

E. Figures of speech: Schemes and tropes and their function.

F. Imagery, syntax, diction and their functions.

*[Latin "before the fact"]   David A. Jolliffe, Professor, Brown Chair of English Literacy

A Rhetorical Framework for Analyzing Nonfiction, Fiction, Poetry, and Drama
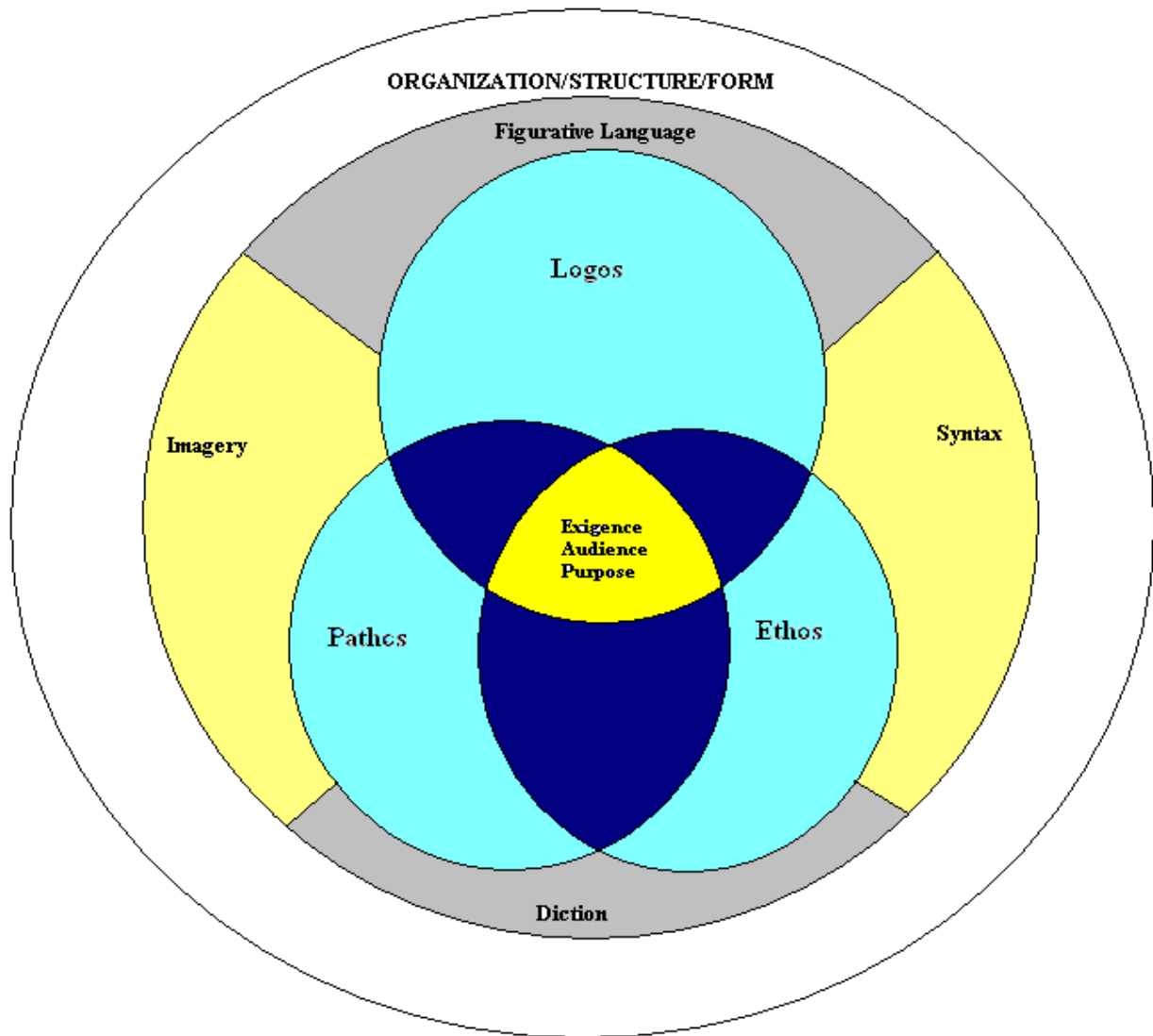
Adapted from David A. Jolliffe, Professor, Brown Chair of English Literacy, University of Arkansas, former Chief Reader AP English Language and Composition.

Rhetorical Situation: Context and Purpose

As former Chief Reader Hepzibah Roskelly says: "The first thing that [you] need to know about rhetoric, then, is that it's all around us in conversation, in movies, in advertisements and books, in body language, and in art. We employ rhetoric whether we're conscious of it or not, but becoming conscious of how rhetoric works can transform speaking, reading, and writing, making us more successful and able communicators and more discerning audiences. The very ordinariness of rhetoric is the single most important tool…to use to help students understand its dynamics and practice them."[1]

Lloyd F. Bitzer described the concept of the rhetorical situation in his essay of the same name.[2] The concept relies on understanding a moment called "exigence," in which something happens, or fails to happen, that compels one to speak out. For example, if the local school board fires a popular principal, a sympathetic parent might then be compelled to take the microphone at the meeting and/or write a letter to the editor. Bitzer defined the rhetorical situation as the "complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence."

Some elements of the rhetorical situation include:

1. **Exigence:** What happens or fails to happen? Why is one compelled to speak out?
2. **Persons:** Who is involved in the exigence and what roles do they play?
3. **Relations:** What are the relationships, especially the differences in power, between the persons involved?
4. **Location:** Where is the site of discourse? e.g. a podium, newspaper, web page, etc.
5. **Speaker:** Who is compelled to speak or write?
6. **Audience:** Who does the speaker address and why?
7. **Method:** How does the speaker choose to address the audience?
8. **Institutions:** What are the rules of the game surrounding/constraining numbers 1 through 7.

Analyzing the rhetorical situation (which, at its most fundamental, means identifying the elements above) can tell much about speakers, their situations, and their persuasive intentions.

The ancient Greeks gave special attention to timing--the "when" of the rhetorical situation. They called this *kairos*, and it identifies the combination of the "right" moment to speak and the "right" way (or proportion) to speak. Let's get back to the school board example. After voting to fire the popular principal, the sympathetic parent might grab the microphone and scream invectives at the board. This would be bad *kairos*. Perhaps a better choice would be to recognize that a mild rebuke fits the situation followed by a well-timed letter to the editor or column in the school newsletter.

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[1] Roskelly. Hepzibah. "Special Focus in English Language and Composition." The College Board®

[2] Bitzer, Lloyd F. 1968. "The Rhetorical Situation." Rhetoric: Concepts, Definitions, Boundaries. William A. Covino ed

   Boston: Allyn and Bacon: 1995.

Rhetorical Triangle
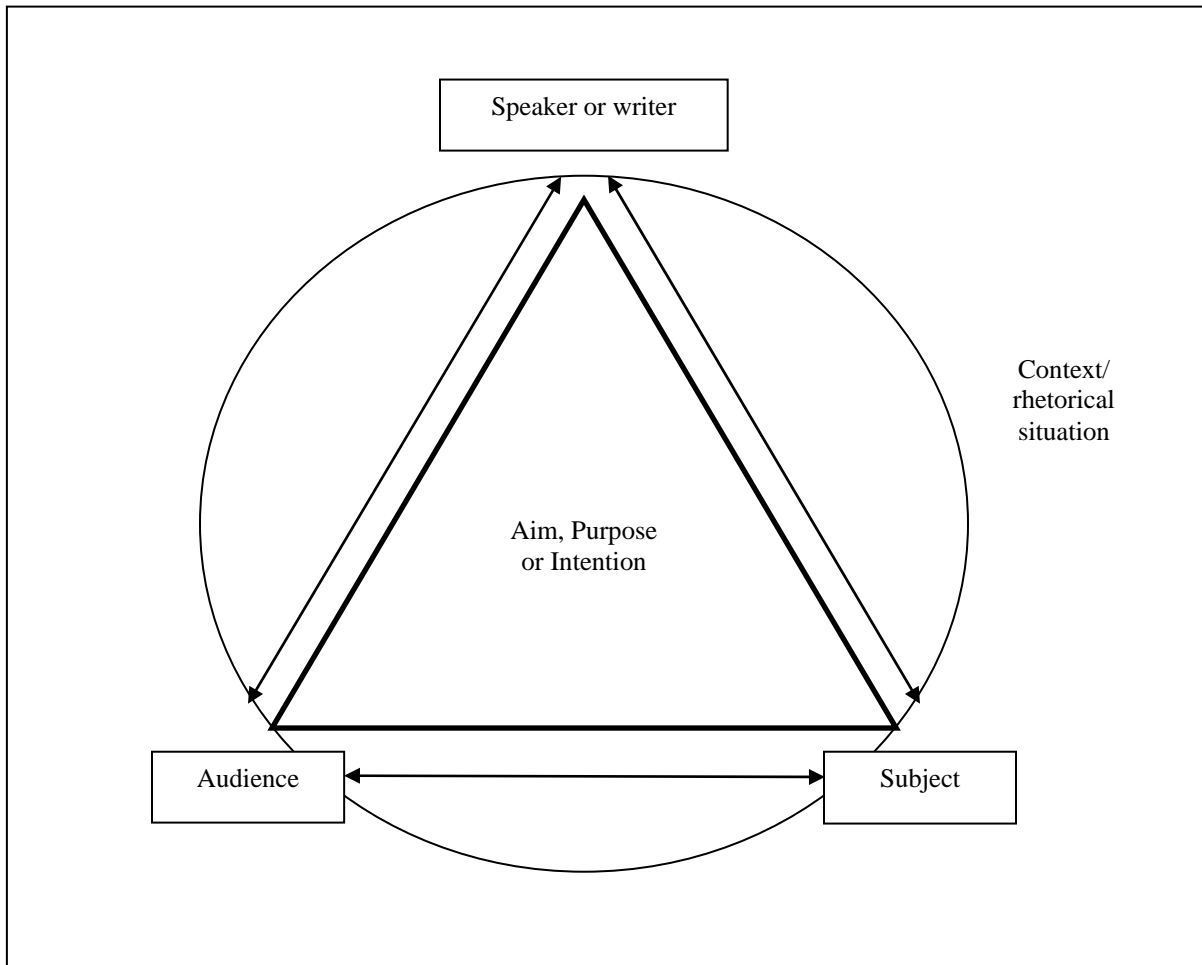
While the basic rhetorical triangle sets out the three initial keys to developing skill with rhetoric, the triangle needs to be modified so that it reflects three vital facts. First, rhetorical translations always take place in a **context**-a convergence of time, place, people, events and motivating forces- that influences how the rhetor understands, analyzes, and generates the persona, the appeals, and the subject matter material. **Context is the situation where the writing and reading occur.** Identifying the context leads to understanding what brings about the writers' choices. Second, every rhetorical transaction is designed to achieve an **aim,** a **purpose,** or an **intention.** Third, when rhetors consider what aim they hope to accomplish in a particular context, they select an appropriate type of text, or **genre,** to achieve that purpose. These three divisions lead to three additional keys to developing skill with rhetoric: invention, organization, and style.

Roskell, Hephzibah, and David Jolliffe. *Everyday Use: Rhetoric at Work in Reading and Writing*. New York: Longman, 2009.

Principles for Analyzing Rhetoric

The first step in analyzing rhetoric must always be a *descriptive analysis of the strategies present in the rhetoric.* All analysis begins with a description of the strategies found in a piece of discourse.

The *goal of analysis* is to see clearly: *What is being said (and)*
How the rhetor is saying it

The five canons (principles) of rhetoric are

      A. INVENTION
      B. ORGANIZATION
      C. STYLE
      D. MEMORY   (since contemporary rhetors no longer give extended speeches from memory, critics no longer attend to that canon.)
      E. DELIVERY (The canon of delivery refers to the verbal and non-verbal performance of speech.)
                  (Although delivery is the key in the presentation of traditional rhetorical discourse, critics cannot analyze it unless they have access to actual event or to a videotape.)

IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES

Most frameworks for describing rhetorical strategies continue to be rooted in the work of classical theorists who laid them out as a five part system for the development of a speech. These are known as the five canons of rhetoric --- <u>invention</u>, <u>organization</u>, <u>style</u>, <u>memory</u> and <u>delivery</u>.

We will discuss three of them since critics no longer give extended speeches from <u>Memory</u>; and, although <u>Delivery</u> is the key in presentation of traditional rhetorical discourse, critics cannot analyze delivery which refers to the verbal and non-verbal performance of speech, since critics cannot analyze it (delivery) unless they have access to the actual event or a videotape.

<u>Invention</u>
        The creation and development (expansion, growth) of ideas

<u>Organization</u>
        The ordering of ideas

<u>Style</u>
        The use of language