WRITING SITUATIONS

Sidney I. Dobrin

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WRITING SITUATIONS

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Preface

College students are frequently in situations that require writing in new and unfamiliar ways. Although new to the college setting, students need to respond to academic writing projects and conventions. Students taking first-year writing classes, for example, have told me about being required to write in genres new to them or to use research in ways they previously had not. "I've never written a research paper," many have said. Students complete writing assignments for courses in other disciplines, often with little or no instruction about how to write for those assignments or fields. I recently spoke with a student taking a course in visual anthropology in which the majority of the grade was based on five essays. Yet, as the student related, expectations for those essays were not clearly defined.

Equally as often, students write outside college in contexts that require adapting what they have learned in classes, whether through direct or indirect instruction, to other situations that affect their lives. Most teachers have heard stories from students about application letters for employment or professional school, blogs on personal and important issues, articles and editorials written to express themselves about an issue, and so on. Students write about things that matter to them; they write about things they have little or no choice in writing. They write to communicate with friends, family, and professional contacts. They text, blog, post status updates, comment, respond, write wikis, make videos. They write with digital technologies and with analog technologies. They write with words and with images.

Writing Situations teaches students how to analyze, navigate, and respond in many writing situations. Students learn to move fluidly among various contemporary writing situations like shifting from writing an essay in response to an assigned reading to writing a music review for a personal blog. Central to this agenda, *Writing Situations* focuses on helping students in becoming successful writers in their college settings and maneuvering into other writing situations.

Grounded in understanding writing situations as rhetorical (based in choices writers and readers make), political (based in the exchange and power of each situation), and ecological (based in the relationships and connections of each situation), *Writing Situations* aims to help students understand and effectively participate in academic, personal, and professional writing situations. *Writing Situations* expands the possibilities of students' experiences by providing rigorous instruction made accessible through visual pedagogy that illustrates the process of thinking through ideas. Questions for writers to ask themselves about their writing situation foster invention and transform guidance into practical action steps. Provocative readings create opportunities for analysis, discussion, and writing. Challenging and detailed writing assignments encourage print-based writing, visual analysis, researched writing, digital composition, and radical revision. Contextualized and integrated next generation instructor support include videos, PowerPoints, and print tools such as customizable rubrics and heuristics that support each project chapter.

Writing Situations is part of a complex network: the project works best when considered part of an ecosystem that includes the student writer, classmates, the instructor, the college's writing program, library resources, *Writing Situations'* digital and media resources, and many other available resources. Taken together, all parts of the *Writing Situations'* ecosystem contribute to students' ability to learn to write effectively for situations they encounter throughout college and beyond.

Organizational Overview

Part One Writing Processes teaches students how to write for any situation by introducing the rhetorical situation, placing purpose and audience at the center, encouraging deliberate discovery, showing how drafting and organizing are inseparable, and emphasizing revision as an integrated activity that saturates all phases of writing.

Part Two Thinking, Reading, and Viewing focuses on strategies for questioning and analyzing writing situations, understanding academic standards and traits, and problem solving. Different methods for decision-making as well as for active, independent, and networked thinking encourage students to look for factors that define and influence situations.

Part Three Writing Projects offers detailed instruction in writing for different purposes, including to Narrate, Describe, Inform, Respond, Analyze, Evaluate, Argue, and Propose. Writers determine which approach will be most effective in achieving their goals by considering all aspects of their writing situation, including their purpose but also their audience, context, medium, stakeholders, distribution method, and circulation networks.

Each chapter includes three readings, a diagram that illustrates how an author arrived at her thesis, a chart comparing the rhetorical situation of each reading, two invention diagrams, five writing projects, writing process guidelines, and end-of-chapter activities.

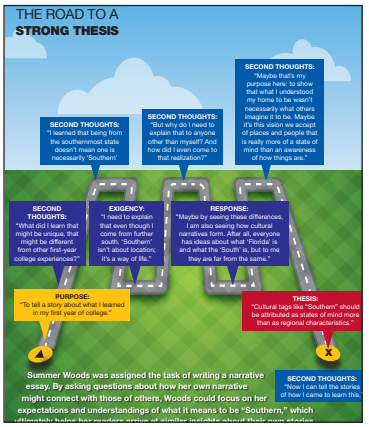
Part Four Writing Visuals helps students develop awareness that as text-based writing increasingly blends with visual communication, their own writing must adapt in ways appropriate to academic writing situations. A toolkit of strategies includes how to read visual information; how to use visuals effectively to convey information; practical guidelines for finding, adapting, and making visuals; and guidelines for designing documents.

Part Five Writing Research frames research as a form of investigation vital to how we learn, participate, and express ourselves. We research not only to answer questions but also to uncover further questions, allowing writers to better position themselves within a situation. Instruction includes developing research plans, finding and evaluating pertinent source material, writing research papers, and writing essay exams.

Part Six Readings organizes readings thematically (unique among purposes-organized writing guides) to facilitate synthesis assignments, but alternate tables of contents cluster readings by rhetorical purpose, rhetorical strategy, and genre. Readings invite challenging and thought-provoking conversations about Technology, Image/Culture, Sustainability, Education, Food, and Millennials. Conscientious apparatus fosters analysis, collaboration, discussion, and writing.

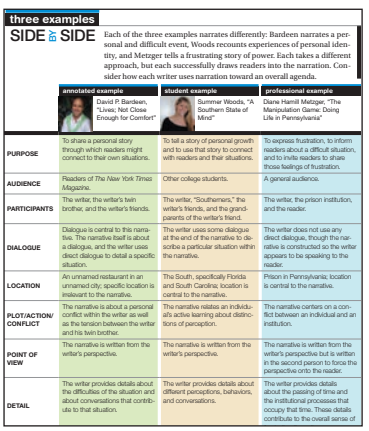
Part Seven Editing Writing provides strategies for editing; addresses the connection among correctness, style, and authority (ethos); and includes extensive and relevant examples of sentence level grammar, mechanics, and punctuation.

Key Features



Road to a Strong Thesis fosters analytic thinking by making visible a writer's interior monologue about purpose, audience, and rhetorical situation when developing a strong thesis.

Next Generation Instructor Support is contextualized and integrated. Videos, screencasts, PowerPoints, and print tools support each project chapter—and are organized by chapter to create a one-stop-shop for course preparation.


three examples

SIDE & SIDE Each of the three examples narrates differently: Bardeen narrates a personal and difficult event, Woods recounts experiences of personal identity, and Metzger tells a frustrating story of power. Each takes a different approach, but each successfully draws readers into the narration. Consider how each writer uses narration toward an overall agenda.

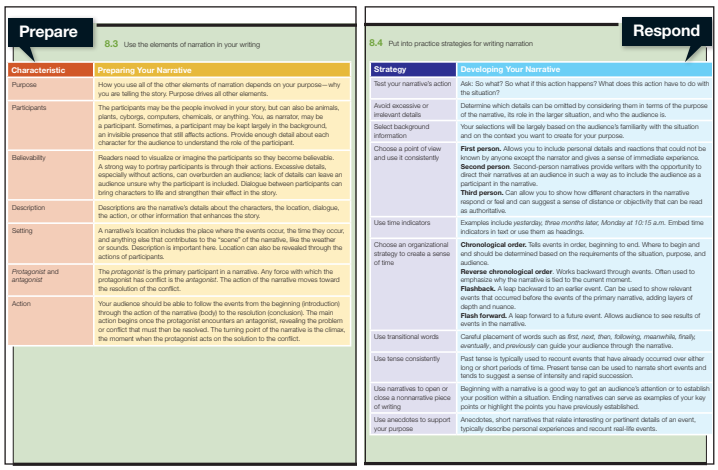
	annotated example David P. Bardeen, "Lives; Not Close Enough for Comfort"	student example Summer Woods, "A Southern State of Mind"	professional example Diane Hamill Metzger, "The Manipulation Game: Doing Life in Pennsylvania"
PURPOSE	To share a personal story through which readers might connect to their own situations.	To tell a story of personal growth and to use that story to connect with readers and their situations.	To express frustration, to inform readers about a difficult situation, and to invite readers to share those feelings of frustration.
AUDIENCE	Readers of *The New York Times Magazine*.	Other college students.	A general audience.
PARTICIPANTS	The writer, the writer's twin brother, and the writer's friends.	The writer, "Southerners," the writer's friends, and the grandparents of the writer's friend.	The writer, the prison institution, and the reader.
DIALOGUE	Dialogue is central to this narrative. The narrative itself is about a dialogue, and the writer uses direct dialogue to detail a specific situation.	The writer uses some dialogue at the end of the narrative to describe a particular situation within the narrative.	The writer does not use any direct dialogue, though the narrative is constructed so the writer appears to be speaking to the reader.
LOCATION	An unnamed restaurant in an unnamed city; specific location is irrelevant to the narrative.	The South, specifically Florida and South Carolina; location is central to the narrative.	Prison in Pennsylvania; location is central to the narrative.
PLOT/ACTION/ CONFLICT	The narrative is about a personal conflict within the writer as well as the tension between the writer and his twin brother.	The narrative relates an individual's active learning about distinctions of perception.	The narrative centers on a conflict between an individual and an institution.
POINT OF VIEW	The narrative is written from the writer's perspective.	The narrative is written from the writer's perspective.	The narrative is written from the writer's perspective but is written in the second person to force the perspective onto the reader.
DETAIL	The writer provides details about the difficulties of the situation and about conversations that contribute to that situation.	The writer provides details about different perceptions, behaviors, and conversations.	The writer provides details about the passing of time and the institutional processes that occupy that time. These details contribute to the overall sense of

Side by Side develops analytic reading skills by comparing three student and professional readings in each project chapter and spotlighting decisions each writer made when solving rhetorical problems in distinct but related situations.

Contemporary readings anthologized thematically rather than by genre better facilitate synthesis assignments. Engaging and relevant topics include technology, image and culture, sustainability, education, food, and the millennial generation.

Mapping Your Situation helps students navigate any writing situation by suggesting questions to ask ranging from purpose, audience, medium, and context to networks, providing a starting point for planning and invention.

Prepare and Respond identifies characteristics of different kinds of writing and walks writers through steps for developing content of their own.



Prepare

8.3 Use the elements of narration in your writing

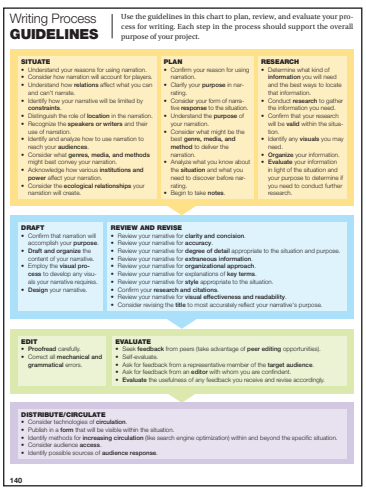
Characteristic	Preparing Your Narrative
Purpose	How you use all of the other elements of narration depends on your purpose—why you are telling the story. Purpose drives all other elements.
Participants	The participants may be the people involved in your story, but can also be animals, plants, cyborgs, computers, chemicals, or anything. You, as narrator, may be a participant. Sometimes, a participant may be kept largely in the background, an invisible presence that still affects actions. Provide enough detail about each character for the audience to understand the role of the participant.
Believability	Readers need to visualize or imagine the participants so they become believable. A strong way to portray participants is through their actions. Excessive details, especially without actions, can overburden an audience; lack of details can leave an audience unsure why the participant is included. Dialogue between participants can bring characters to life and strengthen their effect in the story.
Description	Descriptions are the narrative's details about the characters, the location, dialogue, the action, or other information that enhances the story.
Setting	A narrative's location includes the place where the events occur, the time they occur, and anything else that contributes to the "scene" of the narrative, like the weather or sounds. Description is important here. Location can also be revealed through the actions of participants.
Protagonist and *antagonist*	The *protagonist* is the primary participant in a narrative. Any force with which the protagonist has conflict is the *antagonist*. The action of the narrative moves toward the resolution of the conflict.
Action	Your audience should be able to follow the events from the beginning (introduction) through the action of the narrative (body) to the resolution (conclusion). The main action begins once the protagonist encounters an antagonist, revealing the problem or conflict that must then be resolved. The turning point of the narrative is the climax, the moment when the protagonist acts on the solution to the conflict.

Respond

8.4 Put into practice strategies for writing narration

Strategy	Developing Your Narrative
Test your narrative's action	Ask: So what? So what if this action happens? What does this action have to do with the situation?
Avoid excessive or irrelevant details	Determine which details can be omitted by considering them in terms of the purpose of the narrative, its role in the larger situation, and who the audience is.
Select background information	Your selections will be largely based on the audience's familiarity with the situation and on the context you want to create for your purpose.
Choose a point of view and use it consistently	**First person.** Allows you to include personal details and reactions that could not be known by anyone except the narrator and gives a sense of immediate experience. **Second person.** Second-person narratives provide writers with the opportunity to direct their narratives at an audience in such a way as to include the audience as a participant in the narrative. **Third person.** Can allow you to show how different characters in the narrative respond or feel and can suggest a sense of distance or objectivity that can be read as authoritative.
Use time indicators	Examples include *yesterday, three months later, Monday at 10:15 a.m.* Embed time indicators in text or use them as headings.
Choose an organizational strategy to create a sense of time	**Chronological order.** Tells events in order, beginning to end. Where to begin and end should be determined based on the requirements of the situation, purpose, and audience. **Reverse chronological order**. Works backward through events. Often used to emphasize why the narrative is tied to the current moment. **Flashback.** A leap backward to an earlier event. Can be used to show relevant events that occurred before the events of this primary narrative, adding layers of depth and nuance. **Flash forward.** A leap forward to a future event. Allows audience to see results of events in the narrative.
Use transitional words	Careful placement of words such as *first, next, then, following, meanwhile, finally, eventually*, and *previously* can guide your audience through the narrative.
Use tense consistently	Past tense is typically used to recount events that have already occurred over either long or short periods of time. Present tense can be used to narrate short events and tends to suggest a sense of intensity and rapid succession.
Use narratives to open or close a nonnarrative piece of writing	Beginning with a narrative is a good way to get an audience's attention or to establish your position within a situation. Ending narratives can serve as examples of your key points or highlight the points you have previously established.
Use anecdotes to support your purpose	Anecdotes, short narratives that relate interesting or pertinent details of an event, typically describe personal experiences and recount real-life events.

Writing Process Guidelines ensures students respond effectively to their writing situation: concrete action steps guide writers through their writing process from invention and research to drafting, revision, evaluation, and distribution.



Writing Process **GUIDELINES**

Use the guidelines in this chart to plan, review, and evaluate your process for writing. Each step in the process should support the overall purpose of your project.

SITUATE
- Understand your reasons for using narration.
- Consider how narration will account for players.
- Understand how **relations** affect what you can and can't narrate.
- Identify how your narrative will be limited by **constraints**.
- Distinguish the role of **location** in the narration.
- Recognize the **speakers or writers** and their use of narration.
- Identify and analyze how to use narration to reach your **audiences**.
- Consider what **genres, media, and methods** might best convey your narration.
- Acknowledge how various **institutions and power** affect your narration.
- Consider the **ecological relationships** your narration will create.

PLAN
- Confirm your reason for using narration.
- Clarify your **purpose** in narrating.
- Consider your form of narrative **response** to the situation.
- Understand the **purpose** of your narration.
- Consider what might be the best **genre, media, and method** to deliver the narration.
- Analyze what you know about the **situation** and what you need to discover before narrating.
- Begin to take **notes**.

RESEARCH
- Determine what kind of **information** you will need and the best ways to locate that information.
- Conduct **research** to gather the information you need.
- Confirm that your research will be **valid** within the situation.
- Identify any **visuals** you may need.
- **Organize** your information.
- **Evaluate** your information in light of the situation and your purpose to determine if you need to conduct further research.

DRAFT
- Confirm that narration will accomplish your **purpose**.
- **Draft and organize** the content of your narrative.
- Employ the **visual process** to develop any visuals your narrative requires.
- **Design** your narrative.

REVIEW AND REVISE
- Review your narrative for **clarity and concision**.
- Review your narrative for **accuracy**.
- Review your narrative for **degree of detail** appropriate to the situation and purpose.
- Review your narrative for **extraneous information**.
- Review your narrative for **organizational approach**.
- Review your narrative for explanations of **key terms**.
- Review your narrative for **style** appropriate to the situation.
- Confirm your **research and citations**.
- Review your narrative for **visual effectiveness and readability**.
- Consider revising the **title** to most accurately reflect your narrative's purpose.

EDIT
- **Proofread** carefully.
- Correct all **mechanical and grammatical** errors.

EVALUATE
- Seek **feedback** from peers (take advantage of **peer editing** opportunities).
- Self-evaluate.
- Ask for feedback from a representative member of the **target audience**.
- Ask for feedback from an **editor** with whom you are confident.
- **Evaluate** the usefulness of any feedback you receive and revise accordingly.

DISTRIBUTE/CIRCULATE
- Consider technologies of **circulation**.
- Publish in a **form** that will be visible within the situation.
- Identify methods for **increasing circulation** (like search engine optimization) within and beyond the specific situation.
- Consider audience **access**.
- Identify possible sources of **audience response**.

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Formal assignments in each project chapter facilitate flexible and ranging teaching approaches by including a traditional academic essay, a project focused on using visuals, an online or digital variation, a research-based option, and a "radical revision/translation" project to turn a print-based essay into a multimodal project.

Writing Projects

Essay

Using the information provided in this chapter, select one of the topic questions listed below, make a focused claim in response to that question, and write an argumentative essay about that topic. Be sure to establish a strong, specific claim within the topic, conduct research to learn more about the topic beyond what you may already know, provide substantial reasons for your claim, and supply reliable evidence in support of that claim.

- Should sustainability be an integral part of all college curricula?
- How important are visuals in contemporary culture?
- How important is or isn't the consumption of meat to good nutrition?
- How has information technology "improved" your life?
- Is it acceptable to use animals in scientific research?
- Is a college degree really valuable in the current economic climate?
- Should colleges begin using electronic textbooks rather than print textbooks?
- Should college students be required to demonstrate proficiency in a second language?
- Should animals be kept in zoos?

Visual Argumentation

Each of the flags shown here makes an argument. Select one, make a claim about what argument it presents, and support that claim with good reasons and evidence.

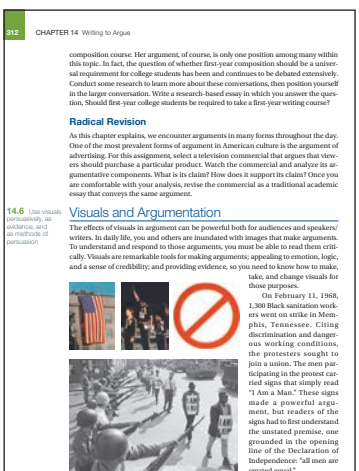
Digital

The flags in the preceding assignment are fairly well known and used widely; thus, their argument is likely to be familiar or more easily understood. But flags are often used to make less-familiar arguments or to argue against the argument of another flag.

For this assignment, design a flag that conveys an argument—political, academic, cultural, civic, campus-based, or whatever. Using image software available to you on your campus or on your own computer, create a new flag. As a class, display your flags, either on screen or in print, and discuss the arguments made in each before each creator explains his or her intended arguments.

Research

Lauren Brooke Hom's "The First-Year Dilemma: To Write or Not to Write?" makes a specific argument about whether first-year students should be required to take a first-year



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composition course. Her argument, of course, is only one position among many within this topic. In fact, the question of whether first-year composition should be a universal requirement for college students has been and continues to be debated extensively. Conduct some research to learn more about these conversations, then position yourself in the larger conversation. Write a research-based essay in which you answer the question, Should first-year college students be required to take a first-year writing course?

Radical Revision

As this chapter explains, we encounter arguments in many forms throughout the day. One of the most prevalent forms of argument in American culture is the argument of advertising. For this assignment, select a television commercial that argues that viewers should purchase a particular product. Watch the commercial and analyze its argumentative components. What is its claim? How does it support its claim? Once you are comfortable with your analysis, revise the commercial as a traditional academic essay that conveys the same argument.

14.6 Use visuals persuasively, as evidence, and as methods of persuasion

Visuals and Argumentation

The effects of visuals in argument can be powerful both for audiences and speakers/writers. In daily life, you and others are inundated with images that make arguments. To understand and respond to those arguments, you must be able to read them critically. Visuals are remarkable tools for making arguments; appealing to emotion, logic, and a sense of credibility; and providing evidence, so you need to know how to make, take, and change visuals for those purposes.

On February 11, 1968, 1,300 Black sanitation workers went on strike in Memphis, Tennessee. Citing discrimination and dangerous working conditions, the protesters sought to join a union. The men participating in the protest carried signs that simply read "I Am a Man." These signs made a powerful argument, but readers of the signs had to first understand the unstated premise, one grounded in the opening line of the Declaration of Independence: "all men are created equal."

Supplements

MyWritingLab Now Available for Composition

Integrated solutions for writing. MyWritingLab is an online homework, tutorial, and assessment program that provides engaging experiences for today's instructors and students. New features designed specifically for composition instructors and their course needs include a new writing space for students, customizable rubrics for assessing and grading student writing, multimedia instruction on all aspects of composition, and advanced reporting to improve the ability to analyze class performance. New for students and their course needs is an idea generator: the **Map Your Situation tool within MyWritingLab** allows students to work through a key chapter resource by answering questions about a paper's audience, context, purpose, medium, stakeholders, and networks. This "prewriting" about their specific writing situation is captured in an invention document and can serve as a starting point for drafting and organizing ideas.

Adaptive learning. For students who enter the course underprepared, MyWritingLab offers pre-assessments and personalized remediation so they see improved results and instructors spend less time in class reviewing the basics.

Visit www.mywritinglab.com for more information.

eTextbooks

Pearson eText

An online version of *Writing Situations* brings together the many resources of MyWritingLab with the instructional content of this successful book to create an enhanced learning experience for students.

CourseSmart eTextbook

Students can subscribe to *Writing Situations* at CourseSmart.com. The format of the eText allows students to search the text, bookmark passages, save their own notes, and print reading assignments that incorporate lecture notes.

Android and iPad eTextbooks

Android and iPad versions of the eText provide the complete text and the electronic resources described above.

Next Generation Instructor Support

Traditionally, instructor support materials for a course text are housed under separate covers—one booklet for an instructor's manual, another for a test bank, with a presentation solution available elsewhere—and instructors preparing lesson plans are left to their own devices to make these resources work together. By contrast, instructor support and professional development material for *Writing Situations* is contextualized and integrated.

Videos, screencasts, PowerPoints, and print tools support each project chapter. Videos suggest ideas for teaching the assignment and criteria to look for when responding to student work. Tools referenced in the videos (such as grading rubrics or heuristics), along with classroom-ready, customizable PowerPoints and handouts, are available as downloads and can be modified to suit your teaching style and the needs of your course. Time-stamped transcripts accompany each video and make it easy to follow along, skip ahead, or reference quickly and as needed. Resources are organized by chapter to create a one-stop-shop and facilitate course preparation.

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As you can see from the expansive list of acknowledgments on these pages, this book came to fruition through the efforts, influence, and collaboration of many people. While I cannot express the depth of my gratitude to each in these pages, I do wish to acknowledge and thank those who have offered support and guidance throughout the process of writing and producing this book.

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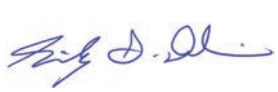

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PART 1

Writing Processes

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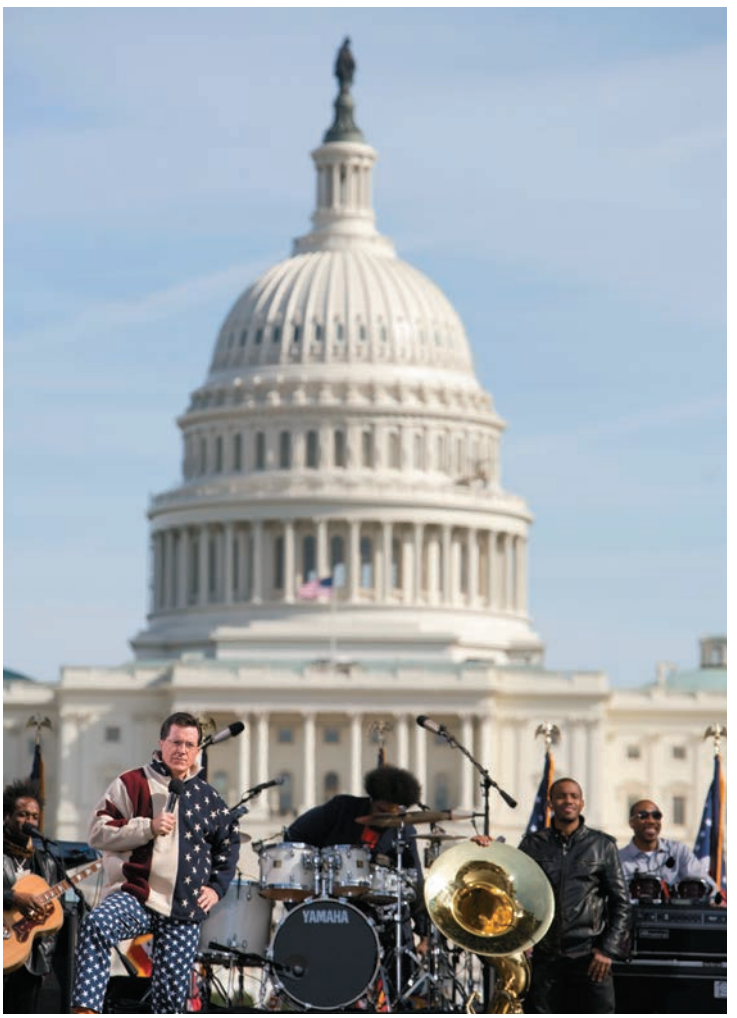
3 Generating Ideas 31
4 Drafting and Organizing 45
5 Revising 60

CHAPTER

1 Understanding Rhetorical Situations



Learning Objectives

1.1 Describe three primary reasons for writing in college

1.2 Describe the ten key elements in rhetorical situations

1.3 Recognize writing situations as part of an ecology of multiple situations

1.4 Identify the four categories of possible responses available to you in any given rhetorical situation

Before you read this chapter

Why do we write in college? What makes writing in college different from other kinds of writing? In your journal or blog, write about what distinguishes "college writing" from other writing, how you anticipate learning about college writing, and how writing might contribute to your college learning.

1.1 Describe three primary reasons for writing in college

One of the most rewarding and satisfying parts of your college experience will be the writing you do. The writing you will produce will challenge you, it will affect how and what you learn, and it will affect how you engage the world around you. Ultimately, we write in college for three reasons:

- *Learning*— We learn *how* to write in new and different situations and we *learn* from our writing.
- *Participating* —We write to participate in the world and in situations that affect our lives, both in college and beyond.
- *Expressing* —We write to make our voices heard, and to say what we have to say.

None of these reasons for writing in college can happen without the others, and they all require thinking.

Learning

Writing is an indispensable part of learning. Learning to write in college is important not only because it strengthens your ability to produce successful writing in your courses but also because the very act of writing enhances your learning. Writing is used in college as a method to get you to show what you know, but in the process, writing also helps you to figure out what you know.

Writing can stimulate your learning by helping you generate ideas, work through problems, develop solutions, formulate approaches, synthesize information, grasp difficult concepts, analyze complex ideas, and understand complicated material. The process of writing also helps you to remember details about a subject and, when combined with thinking and learning, encourages memory.

Writing to learn also provides a way for you to make connections with the material you study, with places, and especially with other people—one of your greatest resources for learning. Writing, that is, enhances the situations in which you find yourself.

Participating

Part of the goal of learning is being able to engage your world, being able to better participate. The idea of participating is to be an active contributor in your life. It is a form of citizenship—being a part of a community and having some say in how that community functions. A big part of participation centers on making decisions as well as considering the situations in which those decisions are made and how decisions affect you and others. Participation is about taking responsibility for your role in a situation.

College is an invitation to participate in academic conversations. When you study a particular subject—like accounting or medicine or literature—you decide to engage the situations of that community. And participating as a citizen means that you take an active role in larger communities, societies, and cultures. This kind of participation is crucial to the world in which we live.

Expressing

We write to express, to articulate our ideas and thoughts. Expression is a form of making meaning, of participating, and of contributing. When you express yourself, you stake a place in a situation as an individual who has something to say. Think about writing to express as a way of proclaiming identity—who we are in a given situation and where we stand. In addition, we want our audiences to remember what we wrote. We want what we express to strike a chord with our audience, to connect with them, to be memorable, to encourage others to remember.

Thinking

Each of the reasons you write in college—to learn, to participate, and to express—requires thinking. Through writing, you learn to think more clearly about situations and to better understand the situations you encounter. Both the degree and substance of your participation depend on your thoughts about where you want to be in the situation. You can also learn to think about your expression in a situation, that is, what you say and how you say it. Writing promotes thinking, and good writing requires thinking.

You are probably familiar with the term *critical thinking*, a kind of thinking used for analyzing and understanding. Critical thinking strategies are important for how you approach the kinds of writing assignments this class and other college classes ask of you.

Critical thinking enables you to better understand situations, create new ideas, and accept or question old ideas. It can lead to action and change by helping you to judge a situation and to adjust your own positions based on those informed judgments. Critical thinking is a process to assess authenticity, value, and accuracy. Consequently, it helps you clarify ambiguity and is the root of problem solving.

1.2 Describe the ten key elements in rhetorical situations

Rhetorical Situations

Rhetoric, quite simply, is how we use language to communicate—to persuade, to inform, to narrate, to remember, or to do any number of the things we use language to do. As writers and speakers, we make decisions, what we call *rhetorical choices,* about how to use language every day. *Writing Situations* is designed to help you learn to make effective rhetorical choices. The first thing you should understand about any rhetorical choice is that it is made in a particular context, a situation, and that the rhetorical choice you make in one situation may or may not work in another. Thus, understanding how rhetorical situations function helps you understand how to make good rhetorical choices in any situation.

In your lifetime, you will need to understand how to move into and between many writing situations, or rhetorical situations. Rhetorical situations can be thought of as the circumstances in which you write or speak. Traditionally, rhetorical situations have been characterized as occurring when four fundamental elements converge:

- *the writer or speaker*
- *the audience*
- *the purpose* of what is being written or spoken
- *the topic* of what is being written or spoken

All of these parts of a rhetorical situation take place in a given context. Likewise, all of these parameters operate within a cultural paradigm, which influences how writers write and how audiences respond. In addition, all of these elements influence a writer's choices about what genres (types or kinds of writing) are efficient or even acceptable in the situation.

You can get a clearer picture of how rhetorical situations work by examining ten of their key elements. These ten elements are part of rhetorician Lloyd Bitzer's definition of the rhetorical situation. They are introduced here in a convenient order for the sake of explanation, but that should not suggest an order of importance. All of these elements are critical to any writing situation, and depending on the given situation, any one may be of greater importance than the others. Each will be addressed in detail throughout *Writing Situations*.

Ten Elements of Rhetorical Situations

Element	Comments
Exigency	Exigency is the reason for writing—the incentive, the investment, and the motivation a writer has for writing. Exigency might be considered a situational need: why a writer needs to write. Exigency suggests change; it suggests that something should, and can, be done. Exigency influences purpose; the reason you respond to a situation is reflected in the purpose of your response to the situation.
Players	The players are all the people involved in the situation, including a speaker, a writer, someone implicated or named in the situation, or an audience. Keep in mind that players can also include people who may be affected by the situation but who are not part of the intended audience. For instance, a legislator may write a proposed trade law that affects a group of people outside his or her legislative jurisdiction by imposing import regulations on products that group of people produces. The legislator's writing is not intended for those people to read, yet they will be affected by the situation and the document, even if unknowingly.
Relations	Relations can refer to any relation of the situation, including relations between individuals, between speakers and audience, between writers and readers, between players and policies, between players and power, between degrees of power of different players, between writers and places, and even between power and external elements like culture, industry, or government. Understanding the dynamics of the situation's relations is crucial to understanding the situation, how to position oneself in the situation, and how to effectively respond to it.
Constraints	Constraints restrict what decisions can be made and what actions can be taken. Constraints may include beliefs, traditions, interests, motives, ideas, attitudes, and facts about either the situation or the kind of situation. For example, your instructor may impose constraints regarding what topics you can and cannot write about for class assignments, and the culture of college may impose constraints regarding what is and isn't appropriate to write about. Constraints may also be material, like the space in which you can respond. Twitter, for instance, limits tweets (posts) to 140 characters. Understanding under what constraints one must write—philosophically, ethically, politically, or even materially—will help you better understand the situation in which you participate and the options you have for participating.

(*Continued*)

Element	Comments
Location	Writing in a situation requires that the writing be available in some location: a web page, a newspaper, a book, a syllabus, etc. To participate in or respond to a situation, writers need to know not only where they are located but also where all other facets of the situation are located. Location is deeply connected to access. For instance, by posting your writing on the Web, you provide access to that writing for those who can access the Internet. But that location also denies access to some. That location, then, makes an assumption about what audience can reach your writing in that situation.
Speakers/Writers	Most often, you write because someone else has said, written, or done something that compels you to write—because a situation has arisen. Your position as a participant, a writer, is developed in relation to the positions of other participants, speakers, or writers. One of the most important parts of navigating writing situations is being able to figure out where you fit as a speaker.
Audience	Once you know who the writers/speakers in a situation are, you need to understand who *their* audiences are; that is, you must first understand who in the given situation is being spoken to, written to—and why. Once you understand the audience of the situation, you can then begin to analyze and understand who your audience is going to be and how that audience is attached to the situation.
Genre, Medium, and Method	Genre is the kind or type of writing, for example, short stories, novels, essays, poems, reports, e-mails, blogs, letters, manuals, and so on. Medium can be thought of as the material presentation of the writing, for example, a web page, a print document, a speech, a blog, a text message. The method is how the writer uses language to accomplish the task at hand: argumentative, assertive, cunning, elusive, subtle, and so on.
Institution/Power	All of the elements of any rhetorical situation are bound by conditions of the situation beyond just the constraints. These conditions are the politics of the situation—what can and can't be said or done—and power mechanisms such as race, class, culture, gender, or religion. Although you may not always be able to see or understand all of the institutional or power mechanisms that affect a situation, it is important to consider as many of them as possible. If the point of entering a writing situation is to bring about some form of change, then the writer must always recognize that doing so is an act of power. Convincing someone of something, explaining something, describing something, or any other possible response to a situation—including not participating in the situation—is an act of power.
Timing/*Kairos*	Every rhetorical situation is affected by timing. The point when something is said and written affects the situation and is affected by when other things have been said and written. Rhetoricians refer to the timing of a rhetorical situation as *kairos*, which literally means "the opportune occasion for speech." Chances are you have made a comment in a conversation that ends up confusing others because they had stopped talking about that subject much earlier. That's bad timing. Knowing when to enter a conversation so your writing or comments have the most impact is important.

Even though these ten elements are presented here as separate parts of rhetorical situations, it is more accurate to think of them as interactive and inseparable than as independent. Each part influences and affects all other parts. In addition, a rhetorical situation is already in place before you enter into it and will continue when you leave

it. It might be most accurate to understand your participation in a rhetorical situation as playing a role in that situation's continual evolution rather than as making an isolated entry into a pre-established, fixed situation. Situations are never stagnant. For example, a situation's audience is likely to change as the situation evolves; thus, understanding audience requires that a writer/speaker be flexible and adaptable to changes in the situation and not wed to one concept of who the audience is. The dynamic nature of these ten elements within rhetorical situations creates a "rhetorical ecology."

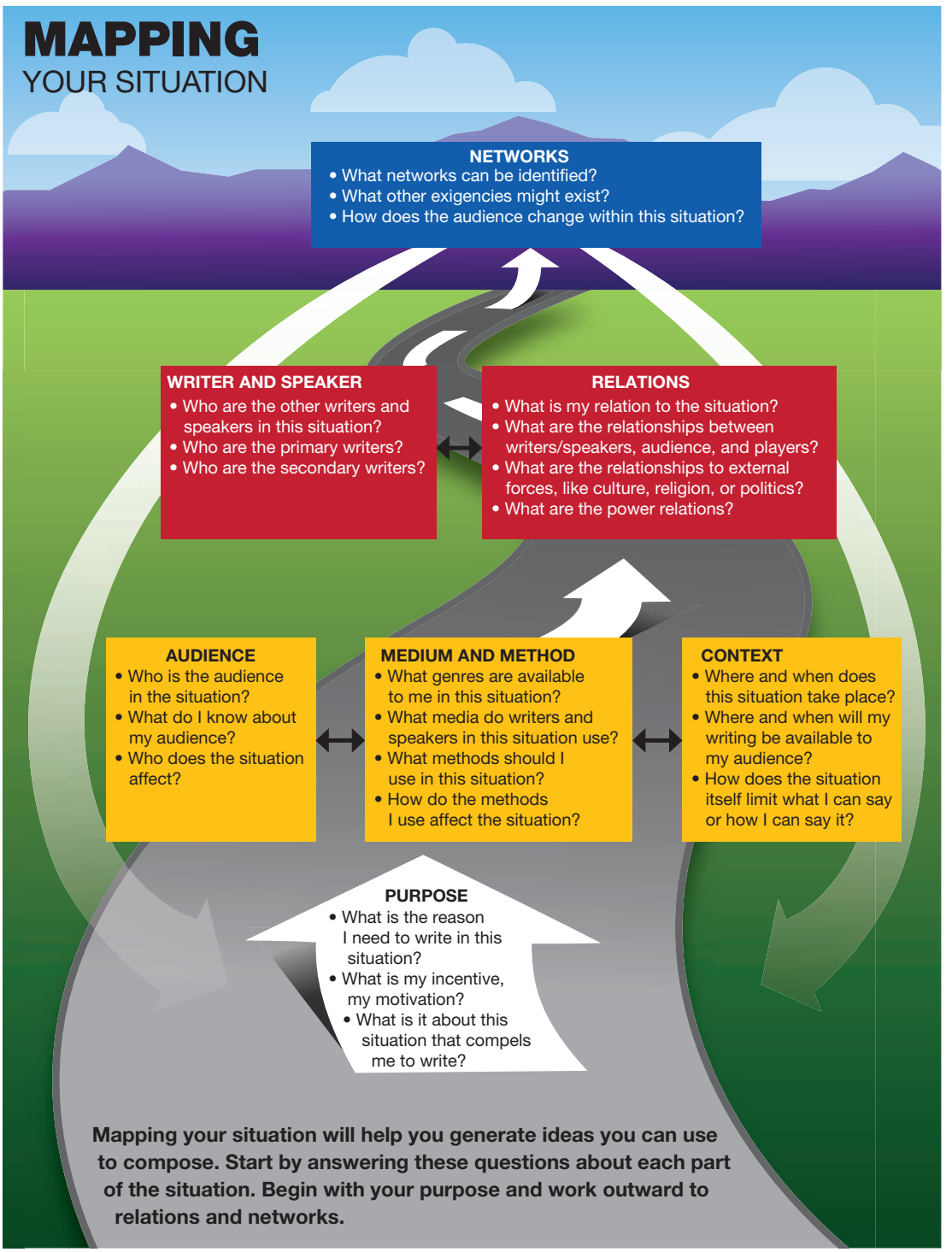
Rhetorical Ecology

1.3 Recognize writing situations as part of an ecology of multiple situations

The term *rhetorical ecology* suggests a complex sense of connection, an intricate and evolving network that not only connects a speaker or writer and a situation but also connects that situation to a host of other factors, including its place and its historical context. In this way, then, a writer or speaker enters into a situation already connected with countless other situations that then affect how that writer engages the new situation. Writers engage those networks through a series of "encounters"; these encounters are becoming more complex as the current state of digital technologies encourages rapid, mass distribution and circulation of writing.

One way to understand how rhetorical ecologies work is to think about the kinds of connections various digital networks and documents make. For example, you might post an entry to your blog in which you embed a video from YouTube or another video sharing site. When you post your blog and video, your Twitter account can automatically send a message to people who follow your tweets that the blog has been posted and provide a link to the blog page. Likewise, your MySpace and Facebook venues may announce the same update and link. You may also decide to post the link to aggregate sites like Digg, Buzzflash, or Fark, all of which categorize and make available links to millions of readers. Within the blog post, you may include links to other blogs, articles, web pages, videos, applications, and so on that contribute to the rhetorical situation. And your blog page may now appear in search engine results when someone searches the Web for terms you have identified as key terms. Of course, your blog also encourages your readers to respond either in comment sections or in their own documents. Comment sections in blogs, newspapers, zines, and other digital media are one of the most common forms of writing and sustained interaction available today. And, unlike newspapers, books, or other print materials, this interaction allows readers to affect your document by altering the context in which others read it; by making suggestions for revisions, which you can make immediately; and by correcting inconsistencies and inaccuracies in your writing. Thus, your original blog post becomes part of an ecology of texts, not necessarily an autonomous artifact.

Mapping Your Situation is a visual that shows this dynamic relationship. Embedded in the graphic are questions that a writer should be asking during the writing process to map connections among key elements. Later chapters will present similar questions tailored to particular writing projects.


MAPPING
YOUR SITUATION
NETWORKS
• What networks can be identified?
• What other exigencies might exist?
• How does the audience change within this situation?
WRITER AND SPEAKER
• Who are the other writers and speakers in this situation?
• Who are the primary writers?
• Who are the secondary writers?
RELATIONS
• What is my relation to the situation?
• What are the relationships between writers/speakers, audience, and players?
• What are the relationships to external forces, like culture, religion, or politics?
• What are the power relations?
AUDIENCE
• Who is the audience in the situation?
• What do I know about my audience?
• Who does the situation affect?
MEDIUM AND METHOD
• What genres are available to me in this situation?
• What media do writers and speakers in this situation use?
• What methods should I use in this situation?
• How do the methods I use affect the situation?
CONTEXT
• Where and when does this situation take place?
• Where and when will my writing be available to my audience?
• How does the situation itself limit what I can say or how I can say it?
PURPOSE
• What is the reason I need to write in this situation?
• What is my incentive, my motivation?
• What is it about this situation that compels me to write?
Mapping your situation will help you generate ideas you can use to compose. Start by answering these questions about each part of the situation. Begin with your purpose and work outward to relations and networks.

Responding to Situations

1.4 Identify the four categories of possible responses available to you in any given rhetorical situation

Once you have analyzed the situation and positioned yourself in relation to it, you will want to determine how to respond to and participate in that situation. Every situation presents limited ways in which you can respond. Some of those responses may be determined by the institution and power of the situation; some may be constrained or expanded by the medium and methods available. Some responses may be inhibited by the audience, by the other speakers, by the location of the situation. Some of those responses may be conventional; some may be unconventional. Some responses may resist the situation or the conventions of the situation. And some may be abnormal or even inappropriate to the situation. No matter how you—or any writer—chooses to respond, those choices are initiated and bound by the situation and boil down to four broad categories: direct response, indirect response, resistant response, and no response.

Direct Response

You may respond directly to a situation by speaking or writing to the initial speakers and/or audience, participating firsthand in the situation that sparked the exigency. Within a direct response, options for the content of your response may be numerous, but options for your approach will be limited to the following:

- Argue in support of the speaker/writer's message.
- Argue against the way the speaker/writer is handling or resolving the situation (different from arguing against the *situation*—discussed under "Resistant Response").
- Correct or provide a different perspective.
- Engage in dialogue.
- Persuade the audience/speaker.

Indirect Response

Indirect responses do not engage the situation exactly. Instead, indirect responses might be thought of as responses *about* the situation rather than *within* the situation. Some of the ways to respond indirectly include the following:

- Expand the situation with additional information.
- In a fashion parallel to the situation, tell a similar story to a similar audience or situation.
- Use the situation as an example in another situation.
- Compare/contrast the situation with other situations.
- Argue for or against the issue of the situation.
- Explain the causes/effects of the situation.
- Describe the situation.