**Rhetorical Analysis: Key Terms & Concepts**

**Rhetoric**: “the art and craft of effective communication” / “a study of what is said and how it is being said”

* “Rhetoric” is, simply, what a speaker or author is *doing* when they try to communicate, and how they attempt to communicate their ideas
* A used car salesman, a politician, and a stand-up comedian may all use rhetoric to accomplish their goals (selling cars, getting elected, and making people laugh, respectively)
* Various Rhetorical Appeals (modes of communication – I’ll prepare some notes on this in a few days) and Rhetorical Techniques (methods/strategies of argument – we’ll look at these in more depth during unit 2) might be used by speakers to accomplish their goals

**Argument**: “the point” of a piece of rhetoric / what a speaker is trying to communicate

* Not necessarily combative (as in, the argument you have with your roommate about doing the dishes)
* Myriad forms of argument/argument is *constant* in rhetoric: the car salesman may argue that the lemon is a “good deal”; the politician may argue that they can serve the public best; the comedian may argue that airports really *are* bizarre places
* Rhetorical Analysis helps us to not only identify the essential points of an Argument, it may also help us determine *why* a writer or speaker is making their argument
* In turn, a strong rhetorical analysis of a situation or text (and the incumbent arguments) can help shape our response (think of it as approaching a situation with a “clear head,” so to speak)

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**Subject**: the topic, theme, or point of an argument or rhetorical situation

* Being able to identify the Subject of an argument is crucial – though sometimes this might be elusive
  + clever rhetors – that is, arguers or speakers – might try to couch the “real” subject of their argument in another; think of Mark Antony’s (Marlon Brando) speech to the crowd in [*Julius Caesar*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X9C55TkUP8)…Antony argues, Loudly, that the people should “bury” Caesar (i.e., “forget him”) and that “Brutus is an honorable man” – but the tone and arrangement of Antony’s rhetoric conveys the *opposite* arguments – that Caesar’s memory can hold the republic together and that Brutus is a liar (Being crafty analysts of rhetoric, we know, of course, that *Antony* is lying…

**Writer** (or Author, Speaker, Arguant… – I’ll use them interchangeably): the person(s) responsible for the argument

* identifying the writer is one thing, but *using* that information is another… if one knows a little bit about who is making an argument (either by personal knowledge or research), one can get a sense of the perspective(s) a writer/author/speaker “brings to the table”
* think about credentials (degrees or special training a speaker might have)
* think about Subject Position (i.e., is the writer “coming from” a particular identity or demographic? and does this affect how Audiences might respond to a particular argument?)
* “research” and “background knowledge” about a writer might also give one insight into *other* arguments they’ve made… are their current arguments resonant with old ones? (for example: think about politicians who run a campaign in multiple cycles – people may base their electoral decisions on prior voting records – always the case for presidential elections)
* [Here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-yZNMWFqvM), King Henry V (Lawrence Olivier) makes a rousing speech to rally the troops… do you think his soldiers would be so inspired and loyal if they knew their leader had spent his teens and twenties as a [drunken bandit](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctSiq-J2-7A)? (his old man, King Henry IV, is chewing him out for being a jabroni in the latter video)

**Audience:** to whom the writer addresses or intends their argument

* When we “do” rhetorical analysis, ascertaining who the writer is trying to reach, influence, sway, or inspire is crucial…
* Although “we” (that is, *you*) might not always be the “intended” audience of a particular argument, one can still think critically (and productively) about how this relates to the writer’s message as a whole…
* For instance, do you think that [Romeo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3MiaSG1SMQ) [I apologize for not being able to find the name of this excellent actor] would wax so poetic (i.e., employ such heavy *pathos*) if he were talking about Juliet with his friends at a bar instead of talking to himself? (He does, after all, downplay his affection for Rosalind – his lesser boo – in front of Benvolio and Friar Laurence…)

**Message:** what an audience “gets” from an argument or text

* Can be different from what the author is attempting to convey…
* One argument or text may have many, many, many messages (depending on audience, tone, etc.)
* In *The Merchant of Venice*, [Shylock's speech](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th7euZ30wDE) has two messages 1) He’s fed up with the anti-Semitism of the Christians in Venice and sees it as hypocritical – “If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh?” 2) He’s learned Vengeance and Hate and, basically, how to be a ‘Bad Guy’ from a life of being abused by Christians “The villainy you teach me, I will execute!”

**Purpose:** what an author hopes their audience “gets” from their argument or text

* Audiences may not “get it” if the speaker doesn’t arrange their rhetoric carefully…
* A well-articulated and arranged argument will have a very clear purpose
* In the clip from *Merchant*, above, Shylock’s “purpose” is to inform his audience that he is serious about collecting his bloody debt (a literal pound of flesh) from Antonio. The men who have confronted him realize the Purpose of the speech – that Shylock (Al Pacino) is deadly serious about getting what’s owed – and go to warn their friend that Shylock is out for blood: “Antonio is at his house. We should speak to him.” We know Shylock’s argument is “successful” here, because “the point” of his rant is clearly conveyed

**Genre:** the “type” of argument *or* medium which houses the argument/rhetoric

* Genre may deal with the “type” of argument being made, or how that argument is being delivered (ex: campaign speech, pep rally, university lecture) … When discussing “genre” in this sense, think about how the particular manifestation of the genre you’re looking at corresponds or departs from the genre-conventions you’re expecting… (i.e., What makes *this* campaign speech different from every other campaign speech you’ve heard? What is the speaker doing that is similar to other campaign speeches?)
* Genremay also deal with the “physical” or “objective” Form of a text **(**ex: novel, blog, poem, newspaper article). Thinking about genre in this sense helps us think about *context* (we might expect a book-length argument to go into great detail; a tweet might be able to make the same argument in less space, but we of course wouldn’t expect the same level of detail as a book…)
* Genre may *also* also pertain to style & content (ex: Sci-fi, romance, comedy, fantasy, noir, horror, *et cetera*)
* Genre is distinct from a “medium”(ex: books vs. websites vs. magazines) but what we know or anticipate about particular “mediums” may affect how we think about genre… This will lead us (in unit 2) to a discussion of “genre conventions,” and of “mediumicity” in unit 3…

**Tone:** the general “attitude” of the *speaker* toward the subject and the audience

* Different from “mood” (how the argument or text makes the audience feel)
* Word choice, syntax (the arrangement of words), and the details an author chooses to include (or exclude) convey a particular *tone*
* Arguments and texts can have multiple tones, but identifying the dominant tone is most important…
* Ex: Above, we might identify the tone of Shylock’s speech as “angry,” “conflicted,” “passionate,” or “proud” depending on what words and examples resonate with us. *I* might argue that the tone of the speech is all these things simultaneously, but I *also* think that most people would agree that the “dominant tone” is one of anger… (The “mood” of this scene might be something along the lines of “we know Shylock is serious about getting revenge” – and, indeed, his audience picks up on exactly this, as Shylock’s “message” is very straightforward and the *tone* of his argument is resonant with his intent).