

Teaching Rhetorical Principles

The Generative Principles of Rhetoric

The generative principles of rhetoric give form, substance, and relevance to effective writing, perceptive reading, and insightful observation. These principles will likely be familiar to many: *audience, context, kairos, purpose, ethos, pathos, logos, invention, arrangement, style, memory, delivery, symbol, process, argument, dialogue, analysis, genre*, and many others. These principles should be presented not as *rules* or *recipes*, but as *concepts*, ideas to think *with*, not simply *about*. The concepts of rhetoric are interrelated principles, matrices that in seeing, reading, and writing act in concert, simultaneously, with the whole greater than the sum of the parts. Put the generative principles of rhetoric into play in contexts that will make them recognizable, interesting, and useful for students. These principles will endure for students because they are transferable across disciplinary contexts and conventions.

Rhetoric as the Elaboration and Exploitation of Ambiguity

At the start, it is helpful to think of rhetoric in two senses: 1) As an art of invention or elaboration; and 2) as a method of exploiting or reducing alternatives in the interest of identification. Rhetoric has value as a productive art. Since people first conceived of it as such, rhetoric has been used to open up a subject by revealing the basis of our disagreements and our shared values. Rhetoric has also been designed to elaborate ambiguity in any given subject in an interpretive process of invention. Rhetoric can also be an act of reduction involving exploitation and emphasis. When we act, we choose from among numerous possible acts. When we communicate with others, we choose to say some things and not others, in the interest of cultivating their good will, of entertaining them, or of achieving some other purpose. This selection from among alternatives is deliberate exploitation, a “singling out” for the attention of others, a highlighting of interest and meaning with which we aim to show that we have interests and contexts in common. It is also a reduction, for the same reason that any word or image reduces the limitless domain of contexts and situations of which it is a part. In making decisions about content, form, and style, we must make choices, and students will learn to make intelligent choices in any given context once they learn to exercise discretion (i.e., make rhetorical decisions) and act on them in situations that matter to them.

Examples: Where did *THAT* come from?

People are always pulling advice from secret and dark places! Here are some examples: