

Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum
Southwestern Community College

Volume V
Number 2

In-Class Workshops Available for Your Students

You can schedule an in-class workshop now through the WAC Coordinator, Jennifer Hippensteel, to encourage student success on your writing assignments. Workshops can be tailored to your classes and specific assignments.

Contact information:
jb_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu

The Unlikely Rhetorician

There I was, sitting at a stop light, listening to the idle of my car and debating with myself about which way to turn. I could feel the seconds ticking away as I was keeping my friends waiting at a restaurant that I had no idea how to locate. As the light changed, I pulled away in a direction that just felt wrong. I managed to pull over into an empty parking space along the street and pull out my phone. I rapidly sent off a text, “Help! I’m sitting on Broadway in front of The Orange Peel...where do I need to go now?”

While it isn’t immediately evident, what just happened was a *rhetorical situation*—a moment in time that required communication, in this case writing (the text message). I clearly had purpose (to get directions), an audience (my friend), and a need to write (I was lost). Of course, I didn’t think consciously about these rhetorical elements of my text message at the time. However, by looking at all writing in this way, it becomes clear that there are many decisions we make in our writing that we are never consciously aware of. Becoming conscious of them is what rhetoric is all about.

A Rhetoric Primer—It’s All About Decisions

It is likely that most of us would not consider ourselves to be professional “rhetoricians.” In fact, the term “rhetoric” receives quite a bit of negative publicity in media, particularly during political campaigns where men and women are accused of using “empty” or “mere” rhetoric. Candidates often exhort one another to go “beyond” the rhetoric. It’s unfortunate that the word has been bandied about in this way. Digging deeper into what rhetoric truly is (and it is all around us) may be

beneficial to us and our students.

While we might not be able to name them, we all know that there are important elements that make up any piece of writing. Whether it is an email, business letter, essay, research paper, or text message, all types of writing have specific parts that make them “good.” Taking the time to ask ourselves how we define “good” in a certain piece of writing will help how we describe and support that assignment.

Good Decision-Making

Looking at the rhetorical elements of any writing shows us that any time we are faced with a writing situation, we must make certain decisions long before we ever put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. These decisions are mostly subconscious, but once aware of them, we become better thinkers and better writers.

Making these crucial decision-making moments explicit to our students will also help them become better writers as well.

Exigence—In rhetoric, exigence is defined as the need to write or a situation that calls for writing. For our students, our assignments often create the exigence, but any writing or any communication is done out of a felt need to get a message out there and across to someone else.

Audience—The audience is that “someone else” to whom we are communicating. Good questions to ask about

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Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than being able to decide.
—Napoleon Bonaparte

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Rhetoric Primer (cont'd)

audience include, “Who will be reading my writing?” and “What expectations does my audience hold?” These expectations may pertain to the subject matter, word choice, sources used, and formatting.

Purpose—Purpose in writing is the point I’m hoping to get across to my audience. If I’ve decided to write about puppy mills, I need to clarify my purpose. Am I simply defining what a puppy mill is? Am I

arguing against them on ethical terms?

Subject/Focus/Thesis— In writing, a subject is a broad area that then should be narrowed down to a more specific area of focus, typically expressed in a thesis statement early in the writing.

Strategy/Organization— An important decision that is often overlooked by students concerns the strategy chosen or the organization scheme. Some subjects/topics work better

with certain strategies than others. Common strategies in academic writing include comparison/contrast, persuasion/argument, definition, and analysis. This decision depends greatly upon purpose. Organization asks students to think about the logical flow of ideas, the use of transitions, and how the writing leads the reader from one thought to another.

Style—Writing style is made up of word choice, tone, and the use of evidence or source material to help

prove a point or make an argument. Again, style may change from assignment to assignment depending on audience and purpose. Know what kind of style you’re expecting, and communicate that to your students.

We all know good writing when we see it. Being able to define for our students what specific qualities make up good writing will help them be successful on the assignments we give in our classes.



Announcing the Fifth Annual WAC Essay Awards



Who: Currently enrolled students at SCC

What: Submit any essay written for a class at SCC during this past academic year (Summer 2012, Fall 2012, Spring 2013)

Categories: Research Essays and Non-Research Essays

Deadline for submissions: Wednesday, April 3, 2013, at 4 PM

CASH PRIZES in each category: 1st-\$200 2nd-\$100 3rd-\$50

Full rules and submission forms available at Oaks 101B and at www.southwesterncc.edu/wac