

The Basic Rhetorical Situation

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By working through this chapter, you will be able to...

- Identify the elements of the rhetorical triangle.
- Understand how communicators create ethos.
- Identify how messages change according to their audience.
- Understand the importance of audience to communication.
- Analyze the needs and concerns of potential audiences.
- Understand how emotional appeals (pathos) can be used to affect audiences.
- Apply these basic rhetorical elements to analyzing your own rhetorical identity.

For many years, rhetoric and writing teachers have identified the elements common to all communication in a graphic called the rhetorical triangle, which aims to help students think both about *analyzing* rhetoric and *composing* it. While Chapter 2 complicates and enriches the traditional rhetorical triangle, it's important to think about the three elements that make it up: a communicator, a message, and an audience for that message (Figure 1.1).

1a Communicators: How Do They Convince Us of Their Relevance?

The communicator can be defined most basically as the person or entity responsible for the act of communication.

Keynote A communicator might be a single person (like you, when you email a company to complain about a defective product); it could be a group of people, such as a committee (like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change, which presents reports on the state of climate change science to the international community); and it could be an organization or institution (like the World Wildlife Fund, which produces a number of ads, video spots, and other materials to advocate for environmental issues).

In analyzing communication, we always need to think about why someone might have chosen this moment, this topic, and this way to communicate. When you are analyzing a message, the first step is to identify and describe the communicator(s):

- What are the communicator's demographics? Do these provide any clues about the communicator's relation to the subject?
- What does the communicator have to gain or lose as a result of this particular communication?
- What are the communicator's investments in the issue, and how might these affect what the communicator thinks and says about the subject?

Conversely, when *you* are acting as a communicator, you need to consider how your audience will perceive you and your message, something explored in more detail in the section on ethos.

Appealing to Audiences through Character: How Communicators Build Ethos

Not only do we need to think about the communicator's relation to the topic, we also need to consider how the communicator creates *ethos*. Ethos is one of what Aristotle defined as the "rhetorical appeals," along with *logos* and *pathos* (discussed later in this chapter). Ethos refers to how messages persuade (or "appeal" to an audience) as a result of the communicator's character. Aristotle claimed that ethos was the most important appeal, since if the source of a message isn't trustworthy, then no matter how well-produced the message, it will probably fail to persuade an audience. Ethos, Aristotle claimed, requires that the communicator display three factors:

1. Practical intelligence
2. A virtuous character
3. Good will

When these three qualities seem to be in evidence, Aristotle argued, the audience will be more inclined to accept the communicator's message. The twentieth-century rhetorician Kenneth Burke amplified this idea in his concept of "identification." According to Burke, persuasion isn't so much a matter of changing someone's mind with a given message as getting him or her on your side. If someone identifies with you and your beliefs and ways of being, he or she is much more likely to buy into what you're saying.

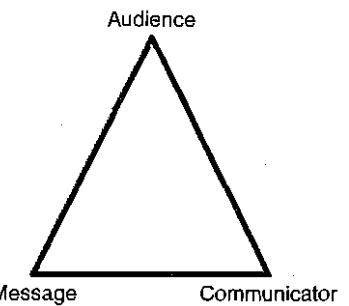


FIGURE 1.1 Traditional Rhetorical Triangle

How does an author build ethos? Ethos in rhetorical acts comes from two places: from sources external to the message, and from the message itself.

Ethos from sources external to the message

The external sources of ethos are everything that an audience may already know about a communicator, the topic, and the means by which the audience received the message.

EXAMPLE Through her credentials, the director of a research center on autism will probably gain automatic credibility in an opinion piece about the best ways to educate autistic children.

But just because you're well known doesn't mean that you'll automatically have credibility in the eyes of an audience. When the author is a well-known person, it's important to take into account *how* they're known and how that affects how the audience might perceive them.

EXAMPLE Bono, the lead singer of the band U2, has written a number of op-ed pieces for *The New York Times* about various social problems. While his celebrity arguably helps in that it draws attention to the causes he discusses, it also serves as a point of derision for some. ("What does a rock singer know about hunger in Africa?")

When you don't know very much about a communicator, as a good analyst you need to look for clues that provide an indication of whether you can trust the source.

EXAMPLE You may have never heard of Andrew Jensen, the author of a *New York Times* op-ed piece arguing for a ban on semi-automatic assault weapons. However, you do know that he was published in *The New York Times*, a highly respected national newspaper. The brief note at the end of the piece states that he was an Army infantry officer for five years. So even if you're opposed to gun control, you may be more inclined to read what he has to say, knowing that because of his job he at least has had significant experience with guns (and is not some liberal pansy). The note helps lend Jensen ethos, in other words.

Other external sources of ethos might include the communicator's gestures, dress, facial expressions, and tone of voice.

EXAMPLE Ronald Reagan's warm, reassuring voice, steady gaze, and carefully modulated gestures notoriously made him seem both stately and grandfatherly. If you watch a video of his speech to the nation after the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*, for instance, you'll be able to see why he was known as "The Great Communicator." (See Figure 1.2.)

Ethos from the message itself

Ethos also has to do with the content of the message itself: How does the content of the message convince you that it's trustworthy? This could include things like the tone and style of the message, as well as the points

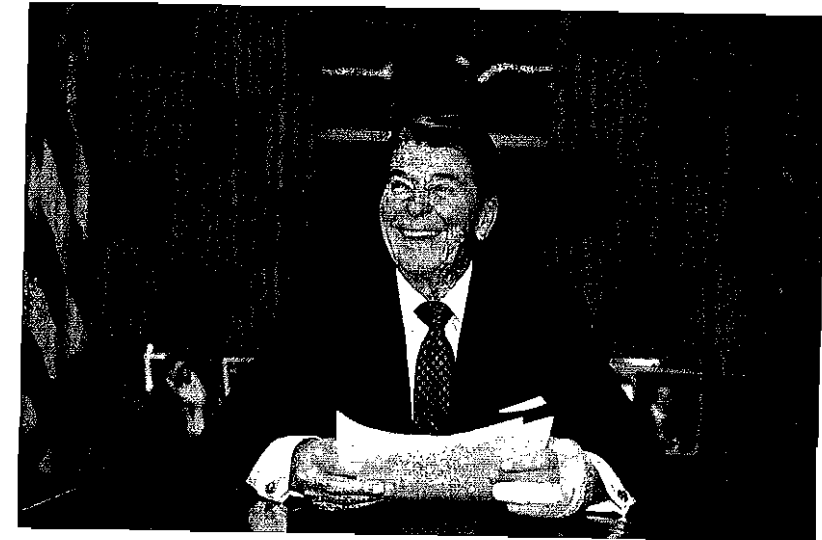


FIGURE 1.2 Ronald Reagan

that it makes and the evidence it uses to support those points. As with the external sources of ethos, this is always context-dependent: In some cases (as with, say, communications from universities and other organizations) you would expect the message to be formal and informative, and would find it suspicious if it were otherwise; in other cases you would find something scruffier and a little more homegrown to be more trustworthy.

EXAMPLE You may find a grainy cell-phone video of police beating a motorist distributed on a YouTube video that someone posted on Facebook more believable than the official police department press statement about the event, for instance.

EXAMPLE After it was alleged that Russia had interfered in the 2016 U.S. election by using paid trolls, scammers, and false news stories, schools across the United States began educating students on how to recognize "fake news." Some of the things experts recommend to watch out for include the means of delivery (they advise ignoring viral news stories and those that arrive as chain mails in email inboxes). Punctuation can also serve as a warning flag, like stories that use multiple exclamation points. And fake news stories often have extremely provocative headlines ("Obama Signs Executive Order Banning Pledge of Allegiance in Schools") but have either outright satirical content or cite bogus sources as "evidence." The writers of these stories bank on readers who pass stories along based on a provocative headline without actually reading the stories.

It's important to note, though, that neither form of ethos is stagnant, an eternally present quality in the message. It changes over time and according to who is listening to the message.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. To think about how a communicator creates ethos, locate a recent video of a politician at a campaign rally or giving a political speech. Analyze the various ways that the politician attempts to build ethos for his or her audience; consider the content of the speech, as well as gesture, tone, and any props that she or he might use.
2. Find and bring to class some communications that include no writing, or not only writing (for example, you might look at videos, flyers, posters, ads, infographics, podcasts, etc.). What is the difference between the role played by the communicator of the written piece and the communicator of these not-just-written pieces?
3. Read the following editorial and respond to the questions that follow.

College Rankings Should Account for Binge Drinking

BY ELLIOTT MILLENSON

"Right now, private rankings like *U.S. News & World Report* puts out each year . . . it encourages a lot of colleges to focus on ways to—how do we game the numbers?"

This comment from President Obama, its contorted grammar aside, hints at a critical and hidden reality. Many college policies, procedures and practices are designed solely to influence *U.S. News* rankings, not to improve education. Meanwhile, the *U.S. News* rankings fail to take many things into account that profoundly affect education and the overall college experience.

According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, "college presidents agree that binge drinking is the most serious problem on campus." NIH data underscore the fallout, noting "about 25 percent of college students report academic consequences of their drinking including missing classes, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers and receiving lower grades overall."

Almost 2,000 college students die each year from alcohol-related injuries, nearly 700,000 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking, and more than 97,000 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.

At many schools, binge drinking—having five or more drinks for a male and four or more for a female within two hours—is becoming the norm. A Harvard survey at 120 campuses revealed 44 percent of students engaged in binge drinking (known in certain contexts as "pre-gaming") in the previous two weeks. At Princeton, the top *U.S. News* ranked college, university policy "prohibits the consumption and serving of alcoholic beverages by and to persons under 21." Enforcement is another matter,

based on a Princeton 2011 survey that revealed 73 percent of students had recently pre-gamed, up from 67 percent in 2008.

A few colleges are actually doing something about this. Following alleged recent sexual misconduct at two fraternities, Brown banned alcoholic events in residential areas, and Dartmouth recently banned liquor with more than 15 percent alcohol from its campus. But the status quo prevails at most universities—albeit with hand-wringing and solemn expressions of serious concern tempered by statements on the difficulty of doing anything meaningful.

But imagine if *U.S. News* changed its criteria to include a metric on alcohol abuse, as well as efforts to reduce its incidence. Is there any doubt universities would address the problem with greater urgency?

For perspective, a September 2014 *Boston Magazine* article described how Northeastern University president Richard Freeland set out to move up in the rankings after realizing "schools ranked highly received increased visibility and prestige, stronger applicants, more alumni giving, and, most important, greater revenue potential . . . This single list, Freeland determined, had the power to make or break a school." He embarked on a path to "recalibrate the school to climb up the ranks . . ."

U.S. News Editor and Chief Content Officer Brian Kelly has stated, "It's not up to us to solve problems. We're just putting data out there."

Yet the data *U.S. News* chooses to incorporate are never far from a college president's mind. By not including campus drinking data, *U.S. News* may contribute to the problem. Perhaps mindful of the emphasis the magazine places on retaining students (22.5 percent of total rank), administrators don't wish to risk alienating their charges by curbing drinking.

There is no greater influence on college behavior than *U.S. News*. Yet the influence of drinking on education is ignored. The magazine needs some prodding—from government, public interest groups, parents and even educators to change its criteria. With a gentle nudge from *U.S. News* there is no doubt universities, which are home to some of the greatest minds in America, could develop sound approaches to reducing campus pre-gaming. That's a game that should begin with all deliberate speed.

- a. Describe the writer (you might even try Googling him). Who is he, and what's his relation to the topic of the op-ed piece? What kind of persona does he present in the piece through the style, tone, and content? Do you find him believable?
- b. In what other ways does the piece create ethos (think about external as well as internal sources of ethos)?



FIGURE 1.3 “Crying Jordan Afghan Girl” Meme Source: Know Your Meme.

1b Message: What Is the Communication About?

The **message** of an act of communication refers to its content or gist: What is the audience supposed to take away from the communicative act?

Messages can be relatively simple and straightforward: Your supervisor sends an email informing all employees that they need to start doing things a different way, for instance. But messages can also be quite complex.

EXAMPLE Consider the Internet meme “Crying Jordan” in Figure 1.3. To understand the message of this meme, readers would first have to be familiar with the tenacious image of Michael Jordan, emotional upon being inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2009. You would have to know that the image of Jordan has been Photoshopped hundreds of times to indicate or poke fun at someone who is struggling. You would also have to recognize the

clothes of the famous green-eyed “Afghan girl” from the 1985 *National Geographic* cover, widely used as an image that shows the horrors of the Soviet war in Afghanistan. So knowing both of these things, we might conclude that the message is something like “We should poke fun of how the media use and recirculate images to elicit feelings in viewers.”

Appealing to an Audience through the Strength of a Message: Logos

Another of Aristotle’s rhetorical appeals, logos refers to how the *logic* or content of the message appeals to an audience. It’s important to note that “logic” here doesn’t necessarily equate to formal philosophical logic, or even good logic.

EXAMPLE As many recent public debates have demonstrated (vaccinations, climate change, and evolution), as well as the “fake news” debacle mentioned earlier, facts, even those widely accepted by experts, aren’t always enough to persuade many of the truth of something.

It might be most effective, then, to think of logos as how the internal consistency of a message (including the claim, reasons, and unstated assumptions) appeals to an audience. See Chapter 7 for a much more extensive discussion of a message’s logos.

FOR DISCUSSION

To identify how a message changes according to its audience, study the following three communicative acts (all having to do with weight loss) and respond to the following questions.

- What is the message?
- Where do you locate the message?
- How do the messages in each piece differ according to communicator, purpose, and audience?
- Why would (or wouldn’t) the message of the piece persuade its audience?

Healthy Weight Loss

BY THE AMERICAN DIABETES ASSOCIATION

Does this sound familiar? You got tired of hearing your doctor and family bug you about losing weight to prevent or manage type 2 diabetes. So, you got a two-week diet plan from a friend. You started gung-ho. The first few days were great. Then you found there were nights you didn’t have time to fix your food and the family dinner. By the weekend your family wanted to have pizza. And the diet went out the door when you left for your favorite pizza place.

Many people try to lose weight, but fewer people lose weight and keep it off. This happens for several reasons. Sometimes people try to lose too much weight too fast. Or they try to follow a food plan that isn’t how they can eat long term. Reality is that losing weight in a healthy way and learning how to keep it off is not easy. It takes a new way of thinking. Are you ready?

SET YOUR GOALS

Set a realistic weight loss goal. Think about losing 5, 10, or 15 pounds. One of your goals should be to lose a few pounds and be able to keep it off for a long time. Here are some tips to help you make goals.

- Choose a time to start when you think life will be as calm and in control as possible.
- Do a self-check on what and when you eat. Keep honest food records for about a week. Write down everything you eat or drink. Use these records to set a few food goals. These food

goals should be small changes you can easily make to your existing food habits.

- Don't look for a magic bullet diet. They don't exist. You'll do best if you base eating habits on what you found out in your self check food records. Do you snack a lot? Instead of chips or a candy bar, could you snack on a piece of fruit, pretzels, or some nuts? Are your portions too large? Do you eat too many sweets?
- Be ready to change your food habits (and perhaps your family's food habits) for good. Say good bye to some of your unhealthy habits and food choices.
- Do a physical activity self-check. How much exercise do you get? How can you work more of it into your day? The tip sheet *Be Active, But How* can help.

Miranda Parks Visualized Her Way to a Better Body

BY CASSANDRA KULIK, *FIT MAGAZINE*

Weight before: 183 lbs.

Weight now: 125 lbs.

Age: 28

Height: 5'4"

Location: Fayetteville, AK

Occupation: Paralegal

Tip for newbies: "Just fix your mind on the long haul and go for it!"

Miranda lost almost 60 pounds in two years, and picturing what she'd look like was a big factor in her success. "If I felt like I literally couldn't take another step when I was running intervals, I'd picture Olympic coach Ethan Barletti saying 'Ain't nothing but gliding on a cloud!', and then I'd imagine myself floating through the air," she laughs. "And then I'd go on and finish the interval."

When she wasn't imagining heads of broccoli at the ends of her barbells, she visualized the muscles that were forming underneath her extra weight, and how beautiful they'd look when it melted away. "I'd see a woman with long, lean leg muscles or really nice shoulders, and I'd think 'that's what mine will look like,'" Miranda



Luri Racekoy/Shutterstock



Luri Racekoy/Shutterstock

said. "It helped inspire me to keep pushing, even when I didn't feel like it."

Knowing that she could set small goals and achieve them gave her confidence. She says that if she can visualize it, she can achieve it.

YOU CAN GET FIT LIKE MIRANDA

Miranda works out six days a week. She begins every routine with twenty minutes of cardio (alternating between the elliptical machine and intervals on the treadmill). She then does one of six strength routines:

Monday: Chest, triceps, and abs

Tuesday: Legs and glutes

Wednesday: Back and chest

Thursday: Legs

Friday: Biceps and shoulders

Saturday: Legs and glutes

Sunday: Rest

LOSE WEIGHT USING OUR MEDICALLY-APPROVED, EASY-TO-FOLLOW SYSTEM.

AS SEEN ON OPRAH!

Lose a dress size—or three—with our medically supervised weight loss program! Our low-calorie diet triggers your amygdala to help you burn excess fat while it decreases cravings and hunger. On our program, you won't even need to exercise to see results!

At Port Washington Nutrition Center, we follow Dr. Turpington's diet prescription protocol for a weight loss program designed to help you rapidly lose weight. Your own personal medical supervisor will monitor and respond to the physiological changes that happen in your body as you burn the fat, to help you lose weight in a way that's healthy and safe for you. And our friendly and knowledgeable nutrition staff will educate you on making healthy food choices for your body type, and will motivate you to maintain your weight loss so that you'll keep the pounds off for good.

Our program is designed to help you identify and address the underlying



physical reasons for why it's hard for you to lose weight. We monitor each patient's weight loss very carefully to make sure that patients are getting the best results from the program. Our patients typically lose 3.5 to 5 pounds per week!

We know that losing weight and keeping it off is very difficult, and we hope that our medically trained staff

will give you the knowledge and confidence you need to achieve your weight loss goals and to maintain those results for the long term.

We will be joined in April by the newest member of Port Washington Nutrition Center's community, Dr. Joseph Slickerzy! Dr. Slickerzy has been helping patients lose weight with Dr. Turpington's protocol for

over 15 years, and we feel very lucky to have him.

Call 1-800-999-1212 today for your free, private consultation with our weight loss staff!

We look forward to helping you start your journey to a lighter, leaner, healthier life.

Call us 1-800-999-1212 or visit us at: pwnc.com

Nina Malyna/Shutterstock

1c Audience: Who Is the Communication For?

Audience is a complex concept, but generally speaking, we'll use the term here to refer to the *intended recipient(s) of an act of communication*. Composition scholars identify two different types of audiences for a given message: *addressed audiences* and *invoked audiences*.

- **Addressed audiences** are the people who actually receive a text and interact with it.

EXAMPLE The addressed audiences in the Port Washington Nutrition Center weight loss ad would likely include anyone who walked into its office and anyone who visited its website; depending on how Port Washington Nutrition Center chose to advertise, the ad

might also pop up on *Facebook* feeds of people living in the area who searched on "weight loss."

- **Invoked audiences** are those imagined by the author. The text itself creates roles and invites the audience to occupy those roles, so it plays a part in creating its own audience. With analysis, it is generally easier to gauge who the communicator imagined as the audience than it is to know who actually received the message because you can study the text for clues.

EXAMPLE In the Port Washington Nutrition Center weight loss ad, we can glean from studying the image and the text of the ad that the center imagines its audience as someone, most likely a woman, who wants to lose weight without a lot of effort and who wants noticeable results fairly quickly.

Good communicators pay attention to the needs of their audience and shape their communication accordingly. Likewise, you can study any type of communication in terms of how it might appeal to a specific audience, and this will help you better understand its rhetorical effects. The following five questions can help you think about the audience's role in communication.

1. **As far as you can guess, what does the intended audience know, think, feel, value, or believe to be true about the topic of this communication?** Audiences range from hostile to supportive, depending on the topic. Accordingly, effective communicators must make decisions that take the audience into account. Canny communicators will think hard about what their target audience believes and values, and thus what sorts of things might cause them to be more receptive to the message of a particular communication.

EXAMPLE A letter to the university newspaper protesting cuts to the campus facilities budget might do well to appeal to the readers' (i.e., other members of the university) sense of collective pride by detailing the specific ways that the cuts would detrimentally affect the appearance of the campus. This tactic would probably work better than, say, going on a tirade about incompetent and short-sighted university administrators and state legislators. At best, such an attack would create a feeling of sourness in readers, and at worst it might cause readers to take the side of the people being attacked and hence potentially cause them to resist the message.

2. **What is the audience's purpose in reading (or listening to, or watching, or interacting with) your piece of communication?** Just as a communicator has a purpose for communicating, the audience has a purpose for engaging with particular forms of communication. Sometimes these purposes match up (in which case the communication is arguably successful), and sometimes they don't.

MindTap

View How to Video 1: Analyzing an Audience



Analyzing an Audience

EXAMPLE | Someone reading a placard at a historical monument might genuinely want to find out about the events that happened at that place, or they may simply be killing time as they wait for their friend to come back from buying a souvenir.

3. **What does the audience think of the communicator(s)?** The communicator's position vis-à-vis the audience is very important to how the audience receives the communication. An audience will dismiss or discount communicators whom it suspects of not having the right credentials to communicate about a subject. Of course, a communicator's credibility matters differently to different acts of communication. (Note that this is a different way of talking about ethos; see Section 1a.)

EXAMPLE | As a college student, you may not be qualified to make an authoritative claim about matters of astrophysics to astrophysicists, but you may be able to speak credibly about matters of education or any number of other things you're involved in or feel strongly about. Conversely, sometimes people can successfully transfer credibility or expertise from one realm to another realm where they have less expertise. Hollywood actors and other celebrities are infamous for making this kind of "credibility transfer," as when Madonna got involved with (and then botched) a charity orphanage project in Malawi, and Jenny McCarthy argued loudly and persistently about the ostensible dangers of getting children vaccinated (dangers later proven to be false).

4. **What is at stake for the audience in the topic of this communication? What specifically do they stand to gain or lose as a result of the communication?** Having a clear understanding of the importance or significance placed on a particular topic or argument can significantly affect how you talk about it, or whether you talk about it. It's critical to recognize an audience's investments and design your communication accordingly.

EXAMPLE | In using a set of instructions, what's at stake for the audience is their time and their sanity. Good writers of instructions would not, say, put as a reminder at the end of the instructions something that was critical to know midway through, forcing the reader to have to undo the previous twenty steps and start over. (Not that I'm speaking from bitter personal experience or anything.)

5. **In what circumstances will the audience encounter or use this communication, and how did that influence its format?** A communicator needs to consider not only the most appropriate medium and means of distribution for the message but also how and where the target audience may be encountering it.

EXAMPLE | In the case of the bad instructions referenced previously, a good technical communicator would have known to include the "attention" note in the instructions *before* the steps that it affected, since

typically when people attempt to complete a task, they don't sit down and read all the instructions first. Similarly, good websites are designed with the knowledge of how people actually use the Internet, and thus a set of principles for designing good, usable Web pages has gradually developed. For instance, people can't scroll for more than three screens without feeling lost and disoriented, so Web designers recommend limiting the amount of scrolling that users have to do to no more than three screens.

Appealing to an Audience's Emotions: Pathos

Pathos, the third of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals, refers to how messages persuade by arousing the emotions of the audience. "Arousing the emotions" has varying degrees of subtlety. It can mean using the rhetorical equivalent of an emotional sledgehammer: loaded terms and arguments that make the audience very angry (a favorite tactic of certain radio and television talk show hosts); or shameless ploys to arouse an audience's sense of pity and guilt: advertisements for animal shelters that show lingering close-ups of abused, sad-eyed dogs and cats while stirring music plays in the background, for instance. But remember that there are a lot of other, more subtle emotions: humor, fear, grief, uneasiness, disapproval, bemusement, passion, discouragement, pride, pity, indignation, expectation, insecurity, enchantment, tranquility, and many more.

How can we identify pathos, or appeals to emotion, in a given message? The emotions created by a text come on multiple levels. One level is the *overall* emotion that a particular text is meant to arouse in an audience, something deeply connected to the text's overall purpose. But different emotions may be aroused at various points in the text, through specific words, stories, or passages. These might be connected to the emotions of the overall text, or they might simply serve to get the reader more involved with the text. It's important for you as a rhetorical analyst to keep one eye on the main thing that the text is trying to get its audience to feel, while also paying attention to the particulars of emotional stories, words, and passages.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. To think more about audience, study the *Twitter* post with the following political cartoon. Then answer the following questions.
 - a. As far as you can guess, what does the intended audience know, think, feel, value, or believe to be true about the topic of this communication?
 - b. What is the audience's purpose in reading (or listening to, or watching, or interacting with) this piece of communication?
 - c. What does the audience think of the communicator(s)?
 - d. What is at stake for the audience in the topic of this communication? What specifically do they stand to gain or lose as a result of the communication?

Quick Pick @afbranco #HillarysHealth
 #HillaryLiesMatter #Crooked Hillary
 #DontGetFooledAgain #VoteGOP
 legalinsurrection.com/2016/10/branco...



- e. In what circumstances will the audience encounter or use this communication, and how does that influence its format?
2. Identify and bring in for discussion "communication fails," or examples of communication that do not respond well to audience. Where, specifically, do they fail? What could they have done better?
3. Find an example of an op-ed piece, a print/visual PSA (public service advertisement; you can find these online), a radio PSA, and a video PSA all on the same topic. First identify the overall emotional effect each of these aims to create. Then identify the specific tactics each medium uses to arouse this emotion. Did you find the form of pathos in one medium more emotionally gripping than the others?

ASSIGNMENT

Uncover Your Rhetorical Self

Being social animals, people are deeply rhetorical. That is, all of us work to craft a persona for ourselves that helps us to appeal to specific groups and gain social standing. We may not consciously think "I'm sharing this photo on Tumblr so that I can appeal to a certain audience in order to achieve X purpose," but in the background of all of our actions is an awareness



that others are responding to us (our *audience*) and that we want them to respond in certain ways (our *purpose*). This applies to even our most basic sorts of self-presentation: our personal style, the way we dress, the music we like, the way we inhabit our living space, and so forth.

It's also important to acknowledge that we position ourselves differently in different social groups: how we act in relation to our friends is probably different from how we act with our families or with employers. In other words, our choices may differ according to the effect that we hope to have on varying groups.

This assignment asks you to critically analyze the rhetorical effects of at least one of the following modes of self-presentation:

- Your appearance choices (including clothing, hair, body art, makeup, accessories, etc.)
- The choices you make regarding your living space (decor, furniture, linens, tidiness/cleanliness, wall hangings, etc.)

- Your social media activity ("about" information, photos, posting and sharing activity, commenting activity, etc.)
- Where you shop and the products you buy
- Your behavior in different social groups (including family, close friends, new acquaintances, classmates, professors, people older or younger than you)

INVENTION WORK FOR THE ASSIGNMENT

- Start by doing some freewriting about how you define yourself and how you hope to be seen by the various social groups in which you are involved. (For more on freewriting, see Chapter 13, "Creating Written Compositions.") Which social group is the most important to you at this moment in time?
- Choose one of the modes of self-presentation listed above, and do your best to objectively catalogue and describe your choices and actions.
- Then do a freewrite about what effect the choices and actions related to this mode have on your own rhetorical identity. You can use one or both of the following questions as a guide:
 - How do my choices and actions help to further my own sense of how I want to define myself?
 - How does my self-presentation help me to position myself socially?
- You might ask some people from several of the different social groups listed above to describe you, and see how their perceptions match your own self-perception.

FORMAT OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Depending on your instructor's preferences, you can do this assignment in the form of an essay (with photos), a personal profile or dossier, or a short video blog. But whatever format you use to present your rhetorical self-analysis, it should contain the following components:

1. An *introduction* that gives an overview of your rhetorical self: It should explain how you define yourself and how you hope to be seen by the various public groups with which you are affiliated.
2. A *description and analysis* of at least two of the modes of self-presentation above and how these contribute to your rhetorical identity.
3. *Evidence* in the form of photos, screenshots, and so forth.
4. A *conclusion* that discusses what you think are the rhetorical effects of the choices and actions associated with this mode of self-presentation.

FOR REFLECTION

Transferable Skills and Concepts

This chapter focuses mainly on successful instances of communication. However, there are obviously plenty of cases of communication gone awry, and it may not always be because the communicators didn't consider their audience. Think of an instance where you experienced miscommunication with somebody or where you witnessed an instance of miscommunication (even better if you can actually find an online or email conversation).

In a journal entry, first describe the gist of this miscommunication, and then try to pinpoint exactly what went wrong. Could you apply the principles of audience, message, and communicator described in this chapter to the miscommunication, or was it something beyond that? If it was, what does that tell you about the limitations of the basic elements of rhetoric?