PART 1

Rhetoric as a Meeting of Minds

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A Meeting of Minds as a Rhetorical Act

Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don’t just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn’t just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards.

Theodore Zeldin, Conversation: How Talk Can Change Our Lives

WHAT IS RHETORIC?

In this chapter we will be talking about rhetoric. Rhetoric is a word you have probably heard often. News reporters sometimes refer to a politician’s rhetoric or say that the words a public figure used were “all rhetoric.” You probably have some sense of what these comments imply, but you may not be able to say precisely what the word means. Does it describe the way the politician is speaking, the way the public figure manipulates his or her listeners, or does it mean that the words are, to borrow a phrase from Shakespeare, “all sound and fury signifying nothing”? Or does rhetoric represent effective argument? Before talking about where these attitudes come from and what we mean by the term, let’s consider a hypothetical situation where a person’s understanding of rhetoric will influence her interaction with a friend.

Katie was a first year student at a large state college. Her roommate, Jen, had been her best friend since elementary school. Unlike Katie and their other friends, Jen always had to struggle to get decent grades, but because she worked hard and earned the necessary grade point average, she was admitted to college. Halfway through their first term, Jen told Katie that she was considering dropping out of school because she had decided that she wasn’t smart enough to graduate. She said she felt stupid when she was in class, was terrified that the instructor might call on her, and knew that she could never pass her final exams. Besides, she had just received a failing grade on her first major assignment in a core class. She
thought that the grade proved her assessment of herself as not smart enough to earn a college degree.

Because Katie had known Jen for so long, she knew that her friend often felt insecure, but she also knew that in the past Jen had worked hard enough to do well. She wanted to find a way to convince her to stay in school. She thought she had three options:

- Give Jen a list of the values of a college education.
- Tell Jen how much she would miss her if she left.
- Answer Jen’s own assertions about why she was leaving by explaining why staying in college might help her develop the confidence she seemed to lack.

Which choice do you think would have the best chance of changing Jen’s mind? If you are like us, you would choose the third. An understanding of what rhetoric is and what elements it includes can help us see why. So, how are we defining rhetoric? According to one of the earliest teachers of rhetoric, the Greek philosopher Aristotle, rhetoric is the art of finding all the available means of persuasion. Our definition is similar but with a significant difference. We are defining rhetoric as the art of testing ideas with people who share our questions.

**Key Concept**

**A Definition of Rhetoric**

Rhetoric is the art of testing ideas with people who share our questions. It involves not merely the language we use but all the decisions we make about how to communicate effectively with others.

**THE RHETORICAL SITUATION**

As our definition implies, rhetoric occurs in a situation that includes a speaker or writer, a reader or listener, and a subject under discussion. In addition to these three central elements, we may add two more: the speaker’s purpose and the context in which the communication occurs. Understanding these elements of the rhetorical situation can help Katie make decisions about how to communicate. Giving her friend a list of the values of a college education might let Jen know quite a bit about the problem she was trying to solve but might not make her feel much better. Telling Jen that she would miss her says a great deal about the relationship between Katie and Jen but not much about the problem. Answering Jen’s own assertions about her decision, though, addresses Jen’s problems, demonstrates that Katie has listened to her friend and takes her words seriously, and shows her concern for Jen’s feelings. In
Key Concept

The Elements of a Rhetorical Situation

A rhetorical situation includes all of the elements a writer or speaker needs to consider for communicating about a particular issue, and the way those elements determine all the decisions the writer or speaker makes. The elements in any rhetorical situation include:

- **Subject**: What is the writing about?
- **Writer**: Who is writing?
- **Reader**: Who is the intended audience?
- **Purpose**: Why is the writer communicating with the reader?
- **Context**: What is the occasion for the writing? What social, historical, institutional, or cultural forces might influence the ways the writer communicates with the reader? What conventions of form and style are appropriate and expected for this subject and audience?

Other words, the third option balances the three central elements of the rhetorical situation—the subject, the speaker, and the person addressed. Whenever you communicate with another person, you will need to consider all three of these elements.

The Rhetorical Triangle

The diagram in Figure 1.1 illustrates the major components of any rhetorical situation. The subject angle of the triangle represents the ideas you intend to present. The writer angle represents your particular way of seeing the issue and the particular way you choose to express it. The reader angle represents what your audience will need from you in order to hear, understand, and respond to your ideas. Your purpose is the way you meet your reader in the center, where you share common ground, where you attempt to see the issue in the same way. Your purpose guides your writing, so that your written text is the result of all of your rhetorical choices. Understanding your rhetorical situation is the key to making choices that will help your reader understand and evaluate your answer to the question you share.

The circle around the entire diagram represents another essential component of the situation that we will return to later in the book: context. The context is the occasion for the communication, and it includes all of the influences on how readers and writers make and interpret meanings. When writers communicate, they and their readers are influenced by their cultural and social backgrounds and ideas about what is appropriate and inappropriate.
Writers need to know how these cultural and social situations will determine the effectiveness of their rhetorical decisions. They need to determine such things as what kinds of form they should use for the situation—a business letter, a memorandum, an academic argument? What kind of language—informal or formal? What kinds of examples—concrete or abstract? How many examples?

Our intuitive sense of rhetorical situations allows us to interact in everyday conversations with others. Even though you may think of yourself as having a certain personality or style, you make adjustments all the time to fit your social situation. You adjust your language choices to increase the likelihood that your messages will be heard and appreciated. You probably know some good jokes, but you may not tell the same joke the same way to your friends at a party as you do to your great aunt Doris at a family reunion. Making these kinds of distinctions shows that you have an intuitive understanding of the idea of the rhetorical situation because you are able to adjust language choices to meet the expectations and needs of particular audiences and subjects.

Most high school writing assignments help you develop your repertoire of language choices but rarely focus on developing your ability to choose from among your strategies those that will be most likely to address the needs of your rhetorical situation. There are reasons for that: most people are not ready until they are in college to figure out the complicated needs of other readers. In addition, the ideas and situations students confront often become more complicated in college. Your college writing classes should teach you ways to respond to a range of rhetorical situations using a variety of strategies, because as edu-
How to Analyze a Rhetorical Situation

To analyze a writing situation, you will need to consider each element of the diagram in Figure 1.1: subject, writer, reader, purpose, and context. The following questions will help you do so:

1. **Subject**: Why is this subject important to talk about? Do you have enough information about it? If you need more, where would you find it? If you are answering a question, how many answers can you think of, and how is your answer the best of those available? What are your key ideas? What evidence do you have to support them? What doubts do you have, and how can you inquire about them?

2. **Writer**: Why are you writing? What is your stance in relation to your subject and reader: are you a friend, a mentor, a critic, a learner, a confidant, an expert?

3. **Reader**: Who is your intended audience? How does your subject relate to their needs, interests, or expectations? Why might they need to know? What would you like to tell them? Are they receptive or resistant? If they are disinterested or resistant, how can you encourage interest and engagement?

4. **Purpose**: What would you like your reader to know, think, feel, or do about your subject? Is your intention to explain, explore, challenge, entertain, comfort, or persuade? Do you want to change your own understanding or behavior? Do you want to change the understanding or behavior of others?

5. **Context**: What social, historical, institutional, or cultural forces might influence your stance, your way of engaging an audience, or your way of presenting the subject? How does your understanding of the components of the rhetorical situation affect the form and content of your writing? In other words, what conventions of form and style are appropriate and expected for this subject and audience?

cated adults, you must address complicated issues while considering the needs of different audiences.

One of the most important advantages of a college education is that, through in-class and out-of-class experiences, you can broaden your understanding of contexts of all kinds. Interacting with people who are different from you helps you understand the ways others make decisions. Thus you not only develop your ability to work with others, but your own reasoning processes become more sophisticated as your repertoire of rhetorical strategies grows.

Understanding the elements of rhetoric will help you make good decisions as you write in real rhetorical situations. For example, what if you wanted to
write a letter to the Director of the Writing Program at your college asking that you be excused from the first-year English requirement. You are doing so because you think that it doesn’t make sense to require you to take a composition class when you took English all through high school and got decent grades. If you were to begin planning your letter by using the strategy questions listed in the “How to Analyze a Rhetorical Situation” strategy box, you might make the following notes:

Subject: Why is the college composition course necessary? Need current course rationale, any justification for course in college catalog. Conversations with other students or teachers might help. Compare with high school course materials.

Writer: I question the purposes of the course as stated in the syllabus because they look a lot like the ones for my high school class. I need to be informed about the materials of the class. Need to revise the letter for grammar and style and check conventions of a formal letter.

Reader: Director of Writing, who evidently sees the necessity of the class and so might be resistant to the discussion. Knowledgeable about style, grammar, and writing conventions.

Context: Current course rationale, Writing Director who will judge the quality of the writing against college-level standards, student as consumer, past experiences with writing classes, precedents for waiving the requirement.

This analysis would help you determine how to write the letter: what tone to use, what kinds of language might be appropriate, how formal to be, what information and supporting evidence to include, and so forth. We will be exploring all these decisions in the chapters that follow.

Application

Analyzing Your Rhetorical Situation

Use the five elements of the Rhetorical Triangle—subject, writer, reader, purpose, and context—to determine what information the writer might need to explore the question below. Using the strategy questions in the “How to Analyze a Rhetorical Situation” box, list the questions that the writer should answer before writing the paper.

“Why would we kill whales? It just doesn’t make sense. Anything we get from whales we can get from other sources cheaper and more efficiently. So why go ahead and kill beautiful, intelligent animals?”
RHETORIC AND DIALOGUE

How do we test ideas with people who share our questions? If we are really interested in finding the best possible answers, we recognize the need to explore answers together, and that means we must exchange our ideas. We must engage in dialogue.

Seeing rhetoric as dialogue is quite different from the ways you might usually define the term. As we said earlier, people typically use the word *rhetoric* in one of two ways—either as the form of language or as logic. When people call someone's words “mere rhetoric,” they mean that the message may sound impressive but lacks substance. Certainly, a speaker can convince a listener by using impressive language. You might remember times when you heard a speech or lecture that inspired or moved you by the words the speaker used. Politicians count on this kind of response when they use phrases that will be impressive and memorable. The other major way people talk about rhetoric is as the use of logic. When people talk about rhetoric this way, they imply that the way to change others’ minds is by convincing them that only one answer makes sense. Sometimes debaters and attorneys in television shows imply this when they insist that their answers are the only logical conclusions to the facts presented.

Exploring ideas through dialogue means more than simply trying to change people’s minds; it means trying to find good solutions to problems. A person using this kind of rhetoric is not trying to trick another person into accepting an answer to the question but rather to convince the other person to consider the
strength of a position. This is the kind of conversation in which both participants seek to understand a mutual problem by identifying their question, analyzing their rhetorical situation, and considering the possible choices of language and the reasons they might use in proposing possible answers.

When people engage in this kind of dialogue about mutual questions, they must consider issues of identification, shared concerns, and responsibility. They must determine what questions they share, what assumptions they bring to the discussion, why their assumptions might differ, what information they need to solve their mutual question, how they interpret the information they will share, and how they might find points of agreement. The effectiveness of their dialogue depends on a level of integrity and responsibility beyond the concerns of simply changing another’s mind; it requires the speaker or writer to be willing to change his or her mind as well.

Dialogue as a Meeting of Minds
An understanding of rhetoric, then, provides a way to address conflicts, to respect those whose positions you challenge, and to think in deeper and richer ways through dialogue. We call this a meeting of minds because when we test the strength of competing positions, we do so by putting our minds together. This dialogue occurs either in direct face-to-face interaction with others or by imagining the ways others concerned about the issue would respond.

Meeting other minds requires the speaker or writer to be in a two-way interaction with the listener. In dialogue, both participants are listening to and evaluating the other’s positions. Rather than simply trying to change the other’s mind, they are willing to change their own minds. People who define rhetoric as impressive and persuasive language or as convincing argument suggest that rhetorical choices are ones a writer makes to move readers to the writer’s position, and thus only the listener’s mind might change. For example, a candidate

**Key Concept**

The Elements of Dialogue

Good dialogue includes the following characteristics:

- A shared question.
- Respectful listening.
- Presentation of good ideas and reasons.
- Consideration of the differences and similarities of competing answers.
- Language choices that increase the likelihood that others will care enough to listen.
for congress in a midwestern farm state might argue that a law outlawing the sale of genetically engineered produce would unnecessarily deny farmers more efficient ways to increase their profits. As this congressional candidate makes the argument, she might talk about why she, unlike her opponent, is suspicious of “intrusive big government.” In her choice of argument and language, the candidate would be asking her constituents to take on a particular attitude, to vote for her even if they might originally have considered voting for her opponent.

The irony of this kind of arguing is that it restricts both the speaker and the listener. When the congressional candidate defines the discussion in terms of a single concern of her listeners, she closes down her own exploration of the complexity of the issue. As a result, she not only makes her constituents see the election in simple terms, but she also limits her own perspective on the question.

This way of making rhetorical choices contradicts what we consider an essential part of dialogue. When you are in real dialogue with another person and genuinely care about the issue you are discussing and, perhaps most importantly, respect the other person in the dialogue, we doubt that you are making choices to manipulate or trick your listener into accepting your position. Instead, while you try to convince the person to understand and consider the position you are taking, you also attempt to understand and consider the other person’s beliefs and assumptions. Making rhetorical choices in dialogue means that both the writer and person addressed participate in a mutual exploration of the issue and sometimes change their minds.

Identifying Through Dialogue

When we are in real dialogue with a person whose ideas we respect and take seriously, we say things like “I hear what you’re saying” or “I’m not sure what you mean by that” or “I guess I can understand why you would see it that way.” We suggest our own positions with statements like “But I’ve always thought” or “But if you look at it this way” or “But what if you considered.” We use these phrases because we are trying to find where we agree and disagree and also because we are attempting to see the issue from someone else’s perspective. As writers listen to different positions, attitudes, and reasons, they shape their own positions as a real response to others who share their questions.

When we realize that the person we are addressing does not see things in the same way we do, we need to step back and find the knowledge, ideas, beliefs, assumptions, and conventions we share. Finding what we have in common allows us to identify with another person. But to find what we hold in common often requires us to identify our differences. Sometimes our differences may have to do with nothing more than not speaking the same language. However, even when we speak the same language, we misunderstand each other because of our different national and regional differences. For example, in the United States we know that a large vehicle that has its own engine, travels on the highway, and carries goods is called a truck, but if we were in London it would be called a lorry. We know that football players score touchdowns and earn 6
points for doing so, unless we are in London, where football is a different sport and players score goals worth one point. Similar language differences exist even within the United States. In the northeast, people say they stand on line; most of the people in the rest of the country stand in line. While such differences seem small, recognizing them and understanding the underlying meaning can allow us to communicate more effectively.

More important than these differences in language are our political and cultural differences. Some Americans believe that education should be paid for by tax money, and others think a lottery is a more effective source of funding; some believe children should speak only when spoken to, and others want them to voice their opinions openly. In America we believe that each person has the right to vote in democratically held elections, that all citizens have the right to the pursuit of happiness, that women and men deserve equal pay for equal work. Not all cultures agree.

Knowing that belief systems are common only to those people who already share assumptions is important to you for two reasons. First, it means that if you are to communicate effectively with anyone whose background, experiences, or values are different from your own, you must be able to identify your own assumptions about what is reasonable or appropriate or right so that you can discuss them with others whose assumptions are different. Second, if you care about persuading your listeners or readers that your perspective is warranted, then you must be able to identify the assumptions you share. If you and another person disagree about how education should be funded, you can at least agree that it needs funding. Finding this point of agreement may allow you to consider the strengths and weaknesses of various competing proposals for providing the most effective means of funding.

**Academic Dialogue**

So far we have talked only about how rhetoric applies to dialogue in personal conversations, letters, or professional speeches or essays. You might wonder what possible connection this has to your college education. We think that the kind of rhetoric we have been describing is the heart of your studies because all disciplines rely on what is called shared critical inquiry, which is another term for this way of talking about rhetoric. Whatever your course of study, you will be asked at times to study a problem, take a position, and give good reasons for your opinion. When you do this, you will be writing like your instructors do when they publish their research. The articles and books they write may not look like they are engaging in dialogue, but they always write with the expectation that other scholars who are interested in the same questions will write responses to their inquiry. This is the way dialogue works in academic fields.

As you study the material in your classes, you will engage in inquiry in many different ways. You will need to summarize the positions and reasons of the instructor and the readings of the class, and to assess the strength of the arguments presented in a lecture or in the books and essays you read. When
you have developed an understanding of the issues involved, you will conduct your own research about a question at issue in your class, then justify the conclusions you draw at the end of your study. Each of these situations will demand that you rely on your rhetorical skills.

As you do so, you will need to think about the rhetorical situation you are in. You may be able to see the danger of attempting to persuade your instructor of the strength of your position through impressive language, particularly if your argument lacks substance or if the language detracts from the strength of your argument. It may seem less obvious why you need to think about more than logic as you write your essay, but you should remember that real questions have more than one good answer. Your answer will be only one of many, and so you will need to consider what kinds of examples and information your instructor will consider convincing, to what extent you and your instructor agree, what questions, assumptions, and concerns you share, and whether your essay presents your position in a compelling way.

Conscious, guided practice in careful and attentive reading and writing strengthens your ability to explore questions. As you read, you see how writers are shaping their ideas into words to share with readers. As you write, you shape notions into words to share with others. In addition to sharing your ideas with others, you are also testing them against your own understanding, to clarify them for yourself, and to shape them the best way you can to reflect what it is you know and want to say. This interaction allows you to explore your initial ideas about the problem and to shape positions discovered through the initial inquiry.

Strategy

How to Open Up a Dialogue

To meet other minds in shared understanding, you will need to do the following:

1. You must be able to identify the questions that people attempt to answer when they discuss ideas.
2. You must be able to listen carefully to what others are saying, keeping your mind open to good ideas and reasons.
3. You must give good reasons for the answers you propose.
4. You must consider how your answers differ from or parallel the answers others propose.
5. You must identify the assumptions and beliefs you hold in common with those you wish to address.
6. You must make language choices that will increase the likelihood that someone else will care enough to hear what you have to say.
PART 1: RHETORIC AS A MEETING OF MINDS

APPLICATION

Opening Up a Dialogue
In small groups or with your whole class, brainstorm a list of questions on issues that interest the group. Choose one, then write a paragraph summarizing what you believe about the issue and how your position differs from what other people in the class believe.

RHETORICAL COMMUNITIES

What Is a Rhetorical Community?
One way to talk about the kind of dialogue we have been exploring is as conversations that take place within communities. They are conversations because they involve discussing various answers to a shared question. Being joined by their common interests and concerns, people who discuss common questions form what we call rhetorical communities.

Rhetorical communities may be groups of real people sitting down face to face as they try to solve immediate problems they share or people who do not know each other but enter Internet chatrooms to discuss their common concerns. What makes such communities rhetorical is their interest in the same question. Examples of communities engaging in this kind of dialogue might include a group of neighbors who meet to discuss whether their community organization should ask the city to reconsider building a half-way house in their district, a non-profit organization that explores ways to raise money for a new facility, a teachers’ union that considers whether to demand a higher wage for beginning instructors, a student government subcommittee that is writing a policy statement on plagiarism, or even a group of poets in an artists’ colony who exchange experimental poetry. These groups become rhetorical communities when they begin to explore a question the members have in common.

Key Concept

Characteristics of a Rhetorical Community
Rhetorical communities have the following characteristics:

Its members share common questions.
Its members engage in dialogue to find answers to their common questions.
Its members have knowledge and experience that they bring to the discussion.
Kinds of Rhetorical Communities

Local Communities
Most geographical areas have many kinds of rhetorical communities that address the problems they share. Such organizations may be political units or simply neighbors who live on the same block, business owners in the district, homeowner associations in condominium units, religious groups, or parent-teacher organizations. Whatever joins them, the members share questions and problems. The issues they deal with may be as narrow and specific as how to organize an annual block party or what to do about noise complaints or as broad and general as how to address a region’s problem of homelessness or how to improve the local schools. They become communities out of a need to engage in dialogue about their shared concerns.

Sharing concerns, however, does not mean that all members of the community are necessarily of one mind. Often such groups have members who are very different in gender, age, ethnic identity, religion, or socio-economic background. This means that the effectiveness of their dialogue depends on finding ways to identify common ground. They may do so by explaining their differences, then working together to identify what they might agree on as mutual goals. As they do so, they will be balancing their recognition and understanding of the differences in background, beliefs, and perhaps language with their expectation that they are a group of reasonable people willing to listen to each other.

The Academic Community
Like neighborhood and local organizations, college communities have shared issues. Because the members of a college community share a place of work and specific goals, their problems are not unlike those found in neighborhood groups. They often discuss questions related to parking on and around campus, living arrangements, relationships between faculty and students, community involvement, general education requirements, noise, and so forth. While the particular issues are specific to the individual school, these are questions that colleges all over the country address.

Because members of college communities also belong to the larger academic community, they share questions that have to do with how our society funds higher education, how that funding ought to be distributed, what admissions standards ought to be, whether there are shared views of general education requirements, or whether writing courses should be required. As members of the academic community address each other about the issues they explore, they use language characteristics that all members recognize as appropriate to academic discourse. When they engage in dialogue, they speak somewhat more formally than they might in conversations with friends. Rather than appealing primarily to the emotions of their audiences, they appeal to the reasoning of other members of the community. They also choose a genre appropriate for their message. Academic genres include the memorandum, public address, departmental or committee report, and academic
essays, to mention a few. Whatever genre they choose, they do so according to the expectations of their audiences.

You may not think that you are a part of these discussions, but as members of your college community, you should have a voice in the dialogue about the issues of your school and higher education. Your experience and perspective should be represented. Throughout this book, we will be showing you ways to recognize and use academic discourse.

Specific Academic Communities: Disciplines and Classes
In addition to participating in the general academic conversation, you will be joining conversations in various academic communities. Every time you take a class, you are entering a particular rhetorical community. Whether the questions you are addressing have to do with mathematics, sciences, art, literature, or politics, the classroom is where students of that subject, or discipline, join to explore the questions they share. The questions will differ and depend on the material you will study, but each class will address very specific questions that your instructor should make clear on the course syllabus.

In addition to the rhetorical community of the entire class, smaller rhetorical communities may take shape within the classroom. Some instructors will assign issues to small discussion groups or teams, but students may also build their own communities such as writing groups to help each other revise their essays, or study groups to discuss research with other students who are studying related issues. In each of these situations, the group would benefit from practice in using the rhetorical triangle as the participants explore and try to find answers to their questions.

Just as the larger academic community shares language conventions, each discipline within the larger academic community has language characteristics particular to that discipline. A lab report requires you to use a form and language that is quite different from the kind of essay you might write in a political science class. When you first begin to study a subject, you begin by learning a new language and a new set of discourse conventions. Although this book will not teach you the language of every discipline, we hope that our discussions of discourse analysis will help you in learning those languages.

Forming a Rhetorical Community
What makes any group a rhetorical community is the questions they have in common and the activity of communicating about the questions. We will be discussing rhetorical communities in the classroom further in the following chapters, but for now, we will look at an example of the way a local issue caused a community to begin a discussion.

Every day, newspapers report on observed events and issues, and people respond to those reports in diverse ways through letters to the editor. Newspaper editorial pages are full of comments from people trying to understand the news. When we read these pages, we can witness communities attempting to
meet other minds in response to questions they share. When these writers all address the same issue, they form a rhetorical community. Readers’ responses often differ because they are influenced by the backgrounds and the experiences they bring to their reading. In the newspaper article that follows, a reporter begins a conversation when he reports on a seemingly minor event in a suburban community: a high school student shoots a bear out of a backyard tree. Just to the east of the location of the shooting is a mid-sized city. Just to the west of the location, beyond thousands of acres of orchard land, the Cascade Mountain wilderness area begins. The large Yakama Indian Reservation lies to the south. To the north, the Yakima River flows between ridges covered with sagebrush. In this location, the shooting triggers a community debate about values and priorities.

### Taste for Pears Was Bruin’s Undoin’

West Valley teen bags bear that wandered onto his grandfather’s land near 84th and Summitview.

1. An unwanted guest in West Valley went from orchard marauder to bedroom rug Thursday afternoon.
2. Dubbed the “Pear Bear,” a 3-year-old male black bear was shot in a backyard near the intersection of 84th and Summitview avenues after eluding authorities for more than a day.
3. “He was dead after the first shot,” said Dustin Trammel, a West Valley High School sophomore who bagged the treed bear.
4. Wildlife biologist Lee Stream tried to shoot the bear Wednesday with a tranquilizer dart as it roamed through Congdon Orchards near 64th Avenue and Nob Hill Boulevard. Authorities were unable to track the bear.
5. “Pear Bear was in the orchard doing what bears do at this time of year, eating as much food—in this case, apples and pears—as possible in order to survive a long winter hibernation,” said Stream, with the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.
6. “It has been a tough year for bears,” said Scott McCorquedale, wildlife biologist with the Yakama Nation. He captured and tagged Pear Bear on the reservation a year ago as part of a research project.
7. Record mountain snows lingering well into summer have hampered the growth of normal bear food, mainly berries. Many bears have wandered to lower elevations in search of food, he said.
8. Pear Bear, who weighed 100 pounds at 2 years old, previously was not a problem, McCorquedale said.
9. But the bear wandered closer to civilization than any bear in recent years. After eluding Stream and Yakima County sheriff’s deputies Wednesday, the bear did not return to the wild as some had hoped. Instead, he blundered farther into suburbia.
“I drove up and saw the bear back by my cattle,” said Don Trammel, a retired West Valley resident and hunter. “When I got out of my truck it climbed a tree.”

Trammel immediately called the sheriff’s office and the state Wildlife Department. The treed bear posed a safety risk for authorities.

“He didn’t appear to be aggressive,” Stream said Thursday. “But under the right circumstances, he could have been.”

If the bear was shot with a tranquilizer-laden dart, it would likely run for five minutes until the drugs kicked in, authorities said.

“Bears run quickly,” said sheriff’s Lt. Dave Thompson, noting that Apple Valley Elementary School was only four blocks away.

“We were ready to lock down the school,” said Sharon Allen, Apple Valley’s principal.

“It is open season for bears, and hunting seemed to be the best option,” Thompson said.

Don Trammel’s grandson had a state permit to hunt bears. Thompson and Trammel went to the school and pulled 15-year-old Dustin from his fourth period class.

“He thought I was joking,” the elder Trammel said.

The youth armed himself with a .30-caliber rifle and went to the back yard, where the bear remained in the tree.

A single 60-foot shot ended Pear Bear’s life.

“It’s going to be a rug,” the obviously proud teenager said, while standing over the dead bear, which was unceremoniously loaded into the bed of his pickup.

“It’s going in my bedroom.”
After reading the article, you might wonder what the writer assumed about his readers, how he thought his story might affect the way they saw the incident, and whether he thought his story would start a discussion. Nearly forty letters were published in the Yakima Herald-Republic responding to this story. The following are representative of the very different responses elicited by the newspaper article.

Letters to the Editor of the Yakima Herald-Republic

To the editor:
1 Finally: a reasoned response to a fairly common occurrence.
2 To those who are critical of the measure taken to resolve this situation, remember, wild animals are nearly all hard-pressed to exist and all will take advantage of an easy meal. The resolution of this dilemma should be the simplest action that can be safely taken.
3 The recent killing of the bear west of Yakima was not cruel or uncalled for since the animal would revisit another easy meal whenever it could be found. And where can an animal be relocated where there are not “people”? Thank you Don Trammel for your solution.

Perry Boogard, Yakima

To the editor:
1 Are you joking? Dusty Trammel shoots a hungry, lost, scared bear out of a tree. He’s quite the accomplished hunter. I’m sure he enjoyed the thrill of waking up and smelling the morning air, the challenge of finding an animal in his territory and stalking him, then enjoying the “fruits of his labor” by utilizing the animal to feed and sustain his family.
2 I’m sure he used the meat for food and the skin and pelt for this upcoming winter’s harsh conditions. After all, is this not why people hunt? What a great policy the West Valley School District must have in allowing young boys to enjoy the thrill of the kill. Well done. What an educational experience.
3 A true “hunter” actually hunts. For the wildlife authorities to state that they were scared the bear could run after being shot with a tranquilizer dart, my better judgment tells me that the bear would have hung onto that tree in pure fear until it fell out.
4 Local officials deflect public attitude by coaxing a holder of a bear tag to be their scapegoat. They knew that shooting the bear would have led to a publicity nightmare for the county.
5 A boo and a hiss to all agencies and individuals who showed very poor judgment and character in their actions in this situation.

Tim Madden, Yakima
To the editor:

I would like to defend young Mr. Trammell before all the animal lovers and ban-the-guns people crucify him. I would also like to commend the boy’s grandfather.

Dustin Trammell had the correct permits, issued by the state of Washington, to shoot the bear. Don Trammell went to the person he knew who had said permits were needed.

Regardless of the circumstances, the bear, a potential danger to the children of Apple Valley School, was tagged and bagged legally.

James Rogers, Wapato

To the editor:

There is nothing proud about gunning down a defenseless animal, and to think so is just as ridiculous as the grandfather who pulled a boy out of school to do a job that the so-called authorities couldn’t handle.

If we as a society support decisions like that, we are truly in a state of peril. When we bore further and further into the mountains and natural forests with our condos, strip malls, and gas stations, where do we expect the animals to go?

This is nature, as it has evolved because of the human race. We exploit and exhaust everything we are given. We cannot expect to take over nature and not take care of it. What amuses me is the incompetence of the authorities involved. What kind of a biologist is eluded by a 200 pound bear? Also, if the bear was so hard to shoot with a tranquilizer gun, how was it so easy for a 15-year-old boy to shoot it?

Why couldn’t it be trapped, taken to a refuge (there are plenty out there) and rehabilitated? Because Yakimans are so bored they would die without melodrama.

In closing I would just like to say, stop the insanity!

Jolene Calahan, Yakima

To the editor:

The great dominant culture’s mentality and behavior strikes again with disrespect for life.

Bear is the medicine of healers within some of our cultures. Upon hearing of this magnificent creature’s journey I thought to myself how sad it is that many people are blind to this medicine sign. When some part of the natural world captures our attention, it is to be noticed, honored, heeded.

Miserably, once again a group of individuals took part in killing a beautiful creature of medicine. From the rationalization that “Well, it could have become aggressive” (although no such behavior was observed) to the disrespectful manner in which the event was written about, the bear has been dishonored.

Some of us will burn candles and smudge sweetgrass in honor of our murdered brother. His violation? Searching for the fruit of life. For that he has become a bragged-about trophy rug.

My prayer is that each time someone walks upon bear’s back they will hear great bear’s whisper, “Mitakuye Oyasin” (we are related).

Sara Earthdove, Selah
To the editor:

Population growth is the single largest problem in the world. The Earth has doubled its own population since 1960. There’s not much wilderness for wild animals to go to. There’s not much wilderness for humans to go to. The carrying capacity of the wild land is at maximum for several species.

Would you, if you lived in the area where the bear had come to, have willingly given up your cat or dog to the bear? Would you have given up your child?

The shot was right and righteous. It’s a hard world. The wind and water eat the rock. In the scope of things, there’s little difference between a mustard seed and a bear, or between a bear and a human. This time the hunter got the bear. Sometimes it’s the other way around.

Dan Donaldson, Prosser

To the editor:

There is a lesson to be learned here, and it is not about bear hunting. The Herald-Republic had a choice as to how they presented this article, and they chose to make it inflammatory. Choosing to call the bear “Pear Bear” had to be a deliberate attempt to subliminally relate to the warm and fuzzy “Care Bears.”

Again we are hit with the old truth that “The pen is mightier than the sword.” All you folks who are riled up by the Herald-Republic’s treatment of this subject ought to sit back and consider how you have been manipulated. I think they call it “spin.”

Judy Verbrugge, Wapato

These letters show that although members of a rhetorical community share an interest in an issue, their attitudes about the subject often differ radically. These writers have very different assumptions about what is good and evil, lawful and unlawful, acceptable and unacceptable. We’re often told that newspaper reporting is generally assumed to be an objective account of events, but in this case something in the writer’s account of the story invited these responses.

What was the rhetorical situation of the reporter who wrote the original article? His job was to report the facts, but as the writer of a human-interest story, the reporter also knew to take into account the needs and possible reactions of his readers. In his account of his subject, the reporter recognized that some of his readers would support the shooting because it took care of a problem. He knew that others might regret the shooting, maybe because the problem it solved was the fault of humans, not bears. In any case, his language choices recognized and predicted the split opinions of his audience. The bear was “just doing what bears do,” especially in a “tough year.” It didn’t threaten civilization as much as it “blundered” into the neighborhood. The bear was “unceremoniously” loaded into the back of a truck, implying that some ceremony was in order. And we have to note that it’s disturbing that a “guest,” even an unwanted one, could wind up as a “bedroom rug.”

We might say that the writer’s purpose is simply to inform us about a community interest event. But the reporter’s language also tweaks us, a
The letter writers join the conversation as they consider the question the reporter raised. They offer varied reasons for their position, based on different assumptions: Yes, because the bear was a safety risk. No, because the bear was just trying to survive a harsh winter. The barrage of letters on this issue might have been written no matter what the original article said, but it’s possible that the reporter’s description of the event helped inspire the controversy.

If effective dialogue depends on shared understanding, then obviously, the group of letter writers who responded to the shooting of “Pear Bear” are not ready to solve their problem. They do not yet share a common understanding of what happened to the bear in the pear tree. But this “conversation” that occurred in the paper is exactly the way we communicate every day. The letter writers have different perspectives, and each one brings something unique to the conversation about the meaning of the bear and the bear’s relationship to the community. If you know how to listen carefully to those different perspectives, and if you are able to analyze how your perspective is like and unlike those of others, you will be more likely to achieve better, stronger understandings of issues—for yourself, and when you want to, to share with others through a meeting of minds.

Is it really possible to put together opinions as different as those in the letters and come up with a meeting of minds? Yes—if readers and writers really listen to each other respectfully. Yes—because a meeting of minds does not have to end in complete agreement; the goal is that all parties understand each other better. Listening to all points of view with an open mind and trying to understand the reasoning of people whose ideas differ will increase the quality and breadth of knowledge of everyone in the conversation.

One way to begin the dialogue with other people is to ask questions that test the strength of the positions they present. The questions in the strategy box “How to Examine a Writer’s Position” will help you begin such testing, a skill we will be developing further throughout this book.

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**Strategy**

**How to Examine a Writer’s Position**

When you seek to understand a piece of writing that expresses a position on an issue that interests you, try asking the following questions:

1. Does the writer know his or her subject, not only the facts but also the issues raised?
2. How does the writer pay respect to the ideas of others?
3. How does the writer attempt to convince us that he or she is equipped to answer the question? Why should we listen to him or her?
4. To what extent does the writing persuade you to agree with the writer? Why do you agree with the writer, or why not?
In the following article, a freelance writer for the newspaper enters the conversation. His understanding of the issue depends in many ways not only on the original news story but also on the discussion that took place in the community as a response to the original story.

**JIM PEARSON**

**The Death of Pear Bear: Shooting Proved to Be Only Answer**

1. By now you’ve heard about “Pear Bear.” That’s the one that 15-year-old Dustin Trammell shot last Thursday out on 84th Avenue in West Valley. Some people were outraged over the incident, and Don Trammell, Dustin’s grandfather, has been getting phone calls, both pro and con.

2. Don came home last Thursday and saw a bear scooting up a tree on his property. He called the state Department of Fish and Wildlife office, and biologist Jeff Bernatowicz came out to have a look.

3. At that point, they had three possible courses of action:
   1. Walk away and leave the bear alone.
   2. Tranquilize the bear and move him away from humanity.

4. The first option was not a good one. The bear had moved in among people and was eating pretty well. He was in an area with lots of people, pets and livestock. The bear probably wasn’t going away of his own accord because he had found food and evidently was not all that afraid of people.

5. The No. 2 option, tranquilizing and moving the bear to another area, also had its problems. In order to put the right amount of muscle relaxer/anesthetic into the syringe, the biologist has to guess the weight of the animal and how much fat is on the body. If the dart hits a vein, the drugs act quickly and the bear could fall from the tree, injuring itself. On the other hand, darted correctly in a muscle, the drug can take as long as 10 minutes to work. In the Spokane area, a number of bears have been darted, only to come out of the trees and take off running.

6. Either way, if he fell out of the tree and injured himself or if he came down the tree after being darted, they might be faced with having to shoot the critter. That’s a problem in a crowded area, where the shot would be nearly horizontal.

7. Even if everything had worked out perfectly, it would have taken two men all day to haul the bear up to the mountains to be released. That costs money. After he’s released, if he’s in another bear’s territory, he’s going to get chased out. Even if he doesn’t get chased out, he may come right back to the area where the pears are plentiful. Bears have a powerful homing instinct. You’ve no doubt read stories of bears that were trapped and moved repeatedly, only to return time and time again.
Option 3 looked better and better. Bear season was open, there are plenty of them, the bear was outside the city limits where discharge of a firearm was legal, no one else’s property would have to be entered (hunting on private property is by permission only), the shot would be fired nearly straight up so as not to endanger anyone, and Don’s grandson had a bear tag. In fact, he had already spent several days hunting for a bear.

The rest is history. Dustin is going to get a bear rug, the meat will be donated to Sportsmen Against Hunger, a program begun by Safari Club International that provides game meat to the needy, and the people in that area no longer have to worry about a bear.

But nuisance bears in the area west of town aren’t a new thing. Pear Bear wasn’t the first. In 1995, Tieton resident Bill Haney killed a huge black bear at the end of Tieton Drive, where the orchards end and the sagebrush begins. I reported that story in the Washington-Oregon Game and Fish Magazine. The bear was supposed to have weighed more than 600 pounds, but I wasn’t able to confirm that. I did, however, show Dee Ruggles the picture of the bear. Dee, along with his partner, Bill Copeland, both Tieton residents, used to run bears with hounds on predator control.

Bill took one look at the photo and said, “I don’t have any trouble believing that bear weighed 600 pounds.” He pointed to a bear rug hanging on his wall. “That rug measures exactly six feet from nose to tail. It came off the biggest bear I ever saw and he weighed 450 pounds. The bear in this photo (the one Haney killed) is a lot bigger. It’s turned diagonally across a 6-foot pick-up bed and the head is hanging over the tailgate. He’s quite a bit longer than 6 feet.”

I called Steve Pozzanghera, carnivore biologist for the Department of Fish and Wildlife to check out the story. He told me black bears could get that big, but they were usually “agricultural” bears. They can make terrific weight gains feeding on apples and other fruits, Pozzanghera said.

Bingo! Haney said the bear had about 40 pounds of Golden Delicious apples in his belly. Evidently, he had been making a nuisance of himself for some time because he had an old shotgun wound that was healed over and a newer rifle wound that was partially healed.

Let’s face it, urban bears are a nuisance. Frankly, I think Dustin and his grandfather are owed a “thanks.” They solved a problem in the only logical way available.

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**Application**

**Examining a Writer’s Position**

Using the questions in the strategy box “How to Examine a Writer’s Position,” examine Jim Pearson’s opinion piece about the Pear Bear incident. Write a short paragraph summarizing your answers.
READING AND WRITING: A MEETING OF MINDS

In this chapter, we have introduced assumptions and concepts that relate to all of the practices included in this book. First, when you engage with others in conversations that seek good answers to shared questions, you will need to find what assumptions and ideas you share. This is important because if you are to help your readers understand you, then you must try to understand them. Second, understanding your rhetorical situation helps you share your ideas with others. Each new writing situation permits you to extend your knowledge by allowing you to learn new strategies or combine those you already know in a new way. Third, people respond to problems in different ways because their experiences and backgrounds differ. If you listen respectfully to others whose ideas are different from your own, you will not only understand your own positions more completely, but you will also increase the probability that others will understand you. Sometimes, with good reasons, you may even change your mind! This art, the art of rhetoric, is one of the most important and valuable arts you can employ both in and out of college.

A meeting of minds does not necessarily mean that you agree with others or that they agree with you; it only means that you understand each other and respect the fact that there are alternate perspectives on any issue that help define the issue as a whole. This kind of mutual respect is not just a matter of civility or tolerance, though it certainly relies on those qualities. Your knowledge will be increased and enriched through your ability to be open to new ideas and perspectives and to relate them to your old knowledge.

In this book, we will share with you the results of writers’ attempts to understand experiences, situations, ideas, and issues through dialogue. We will introduce strategies for engaging in such dialogue that have been used successfully by writers—students and professionals—for ages. As you practice the strategies, you will discover how to choose the ones best suited for your reading and writing purposes.

Sometimes, you may be satisfied to have an opinion and not examine, explore, or question it, but for that, you don’t need this book. This book begins with the assumption that questioning and exploring answers to questions will result in better, stronger understandings that can be shared with others and tested in that interaction.

Reading and writing are wonderful and powerful tools for helping you make sense of your experiences. As a capable reader, you enrich your experience and knowledge through meeting other minds. As a capable writer, you can find language to express complexities in comprehensible, coherent ways, and to express your conclusions in respectful, informed ways.

1. Select an issue that you find puzzling or questionable, perhaps one of the issues you identified in the application box “Opening Up a Dialogue.” Then,
write several paragraphs that describe how you would go about exploring this subject or issue.

2. Part 4 of this text includes three casebooks of writings on various topics. Guided by your instructor or exploring on your own, select an article that challenges your thinking. Read it carefully, and then using questions from the strategy box “How to Examine a Writer’s Position,” explore possible reactions to the article in writing by imagining at least three different perspectives and writing letters to the author from those perspectives. Try as hard as you can to make each imaginary writer’s perspective reasonable and believable.

3. Bring your local newspaper to class and, in groups, select an article that raises an issue for the group. Using the questions from the strategy box “How to Analyze a Rhetorical Situation,” describe the rhetorical situation in which you think the author is writing. Individually, write letters responding to the article. You may go on to share your letters with your group.

DEVELOPING A WRITING PROJECT

Identify a question you might like to explore for an extended essay. Using the questions from the strategy box “How to Analyze a Rhetorical Situation,” describe the elements of the rhetorical situation that would guide your exploration of the issue. Write a letter to your instructor in which you explain the issue and describe the rhetorical situation.