

Exercise walk-through

1.1

Components of the rhetorical situation

AP English Language and Composition

The Rhetorical Situation

AP English Language is not a literature course. It is a course in **how texts do work on readers**, and Unit 1 installs the two ideas everything else is built on: the **rhetorical situation** and the **claim-plus-evidence** paragraph.

- The **exigence** is the part of the situation that **inspires, stimulates, provokes, or prompts a writer to create a text**. It is the reason this text exists *now*.
- The **purpose** is what the writer hopes to accomplish. A text may have **more than one purpose**.
- The **audience** has **shared as well as individual** beliefs, values, needs, and backgrounds – so “the audience” is never a single uniform thing.
- The **context** includes the **time, place, and occasion** in which the text was created.
- The **message** is what the text actually says and does.

The six parts of the rhetorical situation

exigence

the problem or occasion that **prompts** the writing

purpose

what the writer wants the audience to think, feel or do

audience

who is addressed – and their values, knowledge and likely objections

writer

the speaker's position, credibility and stake in the matter

context

the circumstances surrounding the text – historical, cultural, immediate

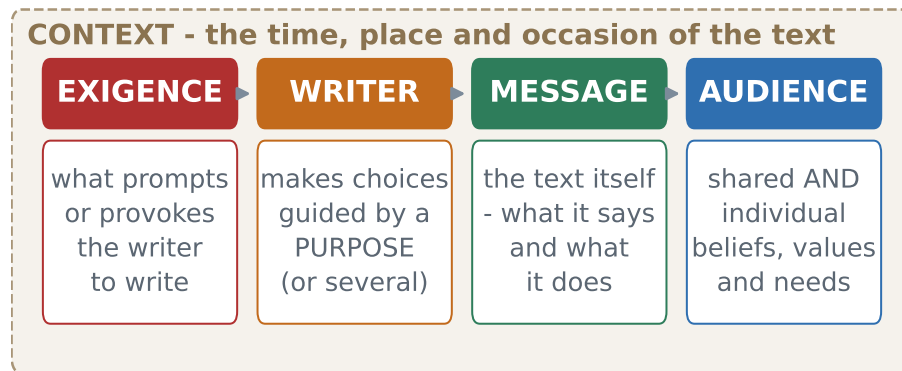
message

the argument itself, shaped by the other five

The CED names all six. A rhetorical analysis that discusses only the text and not **who it was for and why now** is missing most of the situation.

Exigence prompts the writer; context surrounds

The rhetorical situation - and the order runs left to right



*The sentence every rhetorical-analysis answer needs:
this writer, prompted by this exigence, made this choice to move this audience toward this purpose.*

Exigence prompts the writer; context surrounds everything - and every question about “choices” is answered from here

The Rhetorical Situation, continued

The most common weak answer in this course names a device and stops.

The rhetorical situation is what turns a device into an argument: *this writer, prompted by this exigence, made this choice to move this audience toward this purpose.*

Exercises 2.1·2.2

2.1 Name four components of the rhetorical situation. [2]

2.2 Explain the difference between exigence and purpose. [2]

Exercises 2.1·2.2

2.1 Name four components of the rhetorical situation. [2]

2.1

- any four of: exigence, audience, purpose, writer, context, message
-

2.2 Explain the difference between exigence and purpose. [2]

2.2

- exigence is the situation that makes writing necessary now; purpose is what the writer wants to happen as a result

Exercise 2.3 (a)

2.3 A letter is written by a hospital director to local residents after a service closure is announced.

(a) State the exigence.

[1]

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(a)

- the announced closure of the service

Exercise 2.3 (b)

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(b) State one way the audience shapes the likely evidence.

[1]

Exercise 2.3 (b)

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(b) State one way the audience shapes the likely evidence. [1]

(b)

- residents need consequences for their own care explained, so the evidence will be local and concrete rather than statistical

Exercises 3.1-3.2

3.1 A headnote reading “published in a national newspaper the week after a factory fire” supplies mainly [1]

- ☐ **A** the writer’s syntax
B exigence and context
C the thesis
D the line of reasoning

3.2 A device analysis earns credit only when it is linked to [1]

- ☐ **A** the length of the sentence
B the writer’s purpose and audience
C the number of examples
D the date of publication

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3.1 B

- it supplies the occasion and the surrounding circumstances

3.2 A device analysis earns credit only when it is linked to [1]

- ☐ **A** the length of the sentence
B the writer’s purpose and audience
C the number of examples
D the date of publication

3.2 B

- an unlinked device is description, not analysis

Exercise 3.3 (a)

3.3 A speech is rewritten for a specialist conference instead of a public meeting.

(a) State one change you would expect in the evidence.

[1]

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[1]

(a)

- more technical data and citation, less analogy

Exercise 3.3 (b)

3.3 A speech is rewritten for a specialist conference instead of a public meeting.

(b) Explain why the change follows from the rhetorical situation.

[2]

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3.3 A speech is rewritten for a specialist conference instead of a public meeting.

(b) Explain why the change follows from the rhetorical situation. [2]

(b)

- specialists share the background knowledge, so evidence that would need translating for a general audience can be stated directly

Exercise 3.4

3.4 Full free-response task. In 1963, the mayor of a mid-sized city wrote an open letter to residents defending a proposal to close two neighbourhood libraries and open one larger central library. The letter appeared on the front page of the local newspaper and opened: *“I know what these buildings mean to you. I grew up in one of them.”*

Read the situation carefully. Then write an essay that analyses the rhetorical choices the mayor makes to advance the argument.

Marked on the AP 6-point rubric: **Row A – Thesis (1), Row B – Evidence and Commentary (4), Row C – Sophistication (1).**

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[6]

3.4

- *Row A – Thesis (1).* One point for a defensible thesis that states an interpretation of the rhetorical situation, not a restatement of it. **Earns the point:** “By opening with his own childhood in the buildings he plans to close, the mayor positions himself as a

Full solution 3.4 (1/2)

3.4

- *Row A – Thesis (1)*. One point for a defensible thesis that states an interpretation of the rhetorical situation, not a restatement of it. **Earns the point:** “By opening with his own childhood in the buildings he plans to close, the mayor positions himself as a member of the audience he is about to disappoint, so that the closure reads as a shared loss rather than a decision imposed on them.” **Does not:** “The mayor uses ethos, pathos and logos to persuade the readers” – a list of devices is not an interpretation. *Row B – Evidence and Commentary (0–4)*. 4 points requires specific evidence for **each** claim and commentary that consistently explains **how** the choice functions. A strong response works the whole situation, not one device: the **exigence** (a decision already taken, announced to people it disadvantages); the **audience** (residents who use those two buildings, addressed as neighbours, not ratepayers); the **purpose** (to convert

Full solution 3.4 (2/2)

grief into acceptance, not to inform); the **message** (loss is acknowledged first, benefit second); and the **medium** – a front-page open letter, which reaches the affected residents and the wider city at once, so the mayor is simultaneously consoling one group and justifying himself to another. 3 points: adequate evidence but commentary that explains what the choice *is* rather than what it *does*. 2: evidence that summarises the letter. 1: mostly generalised claims. *Row C – Sophistication (1)*. Awarded for a genuinely complex reading sustained throughout – for example, recognising that the confession of personal attachment is also a **pre-emption**: by naming the strongest objection first and in his own voice, the mayor leaves his opponents nothing to say that he has not already said more sympathetically. A single perceptive sentence dropped into an otherwise ordinary essay does not earn the point