4.1 Components of the rhetorical situation

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 17 marks**

KEY WORDS occasion • context • kairos • expectation • repetition • universal

Objective

Build the skills to explain how a writer's **context** and **occasion** shape the way a speech or essay opens and what it asks of its audience.

You must be able to:

- explain how historical context shapes a writer's choices
- explain how an occasion sets audience expectations
- analyze how a writer uses the moment to persuade

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

Context and occasion

term	meaning	example: Roosevelt, January 1941
occasion	the event where the text is given	the annual State of the Union address to Congress
context	the wider situation	war in Europe and Asia; the US not yet fighting
expectations	what the audience expects	a report on the nation; policy proposals
kairos	the right moment for an argument	a moment when Americans must decide whether to help Britain

How context shapes choices

A writer chooses examples, tone and claims that fit the moment. In 1941 many Americans wanted to stay out of the war, so Roosevelt described the aims as universal freedoms, not as a war plan.

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Worked example

Task: explain how context shapes Roosevelt's phrase "everywhere in the world".

Answer: Many Americans saw the war as a foreign problem (context). By repeating "everywhere in the world" after each freedom (choice), Roosevelt makes American values seem to depend on what happens abroad, preparing listeners to support aid to Britain (effect).

2 Practice

2.1 Identify two parts of the context of a speech given during a war. [2]



2.2 Explain the difference between the occasion and the context of a text. [3]



2.3 A student gives a speech at a school assembly the week after a storm damaged the sports hall. Explain how this context should shape the speech's opening. [3]



3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Read the passage.

> "In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression–everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way–everywhere in the world."

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, State of the Union address, 6 January 1941

(a) Identify the occasion of this speech. [1]

1 In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world.

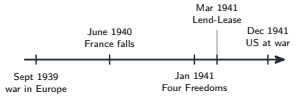
Roosevelt, 1941

(b) Identify the phrase Roosevelt repeats. [1]

(c) Explain why the phrase "which we seek to make secure" suits the context of January 1941. [1]

3.2 Use the Roosevelt passage in Question 3.1. In January 1941 the US was not at war, and many Americans wanted to stay out of the fighting in Europe.

Write one paragraph that analyzes how Roosevelt's choices respond to the context of January 1941. Begin with a thesis sentence. [6]



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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

any two, for example: the state of the war; public opinion about the war; recent events such as a defeat or victory; the speaker's role; the occasion of the speech

2.2

the occasion is the specific event where the text is given, such as a graduation or a funeral; the context is the wider historical and social situation; so a graduation speech in 2020 had the same occasion as any other, but the pandemic context changed what the audience needed to hear

2.3

the audience is likely worried or upset about the damage; the speech should open by acknowledging the storm and those affected; so the audience feels understood and is ready to listen, while ignoring it would seem careless

3.1

(a) the annual State of the Union address to Congress

(b) "everywhere in the world"

(c) war had spread across Europe and Asia, so the future was not safe; the phrase suggests the US must act to protect it

3.2

thesis: a defensible thesis about how Roosevelt responds to the context, for example by making the war a question of universal freedoms

evidence: quotes or describes the repetition "everywhere in the world"; quotes or describes "four essential human freedoms" or "which we seek to make secure"

commentary: explains how the repetition widens Americans' concern beyond their own borders; explains how naming shared freedoms rather than military aims makes involvement acceptable to a cautious public

sophistication: explains the context with insight, for example that he is preparing for aid to Britain (Lend-Lease, March 1941) without asking for war

model: "Roosevelt answers a nation that wants to stay home by making its own freedoms depend on the world. He lists 'four essential human freedoms' that most Americans already value, such as 'freedom of speech and expression.' Then each freedom ends with the same words, 'everywhere in the world,' which pull the listener's attention across the ocean. A citizen who loves free speech at home is asked to want it abroad too. Because he speaks of freedoms rather than battles, Roosevelt can prepare a cautious public to help Britain without asking it, yet, to go to war."

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