TWO

Rhetorical Situations

AS PART OF A COLLEGE APPLICATION, a high school student writes a personal statement about what she plans to study, and why. A baseball fan posts a piece on a New York Yankees blog analyzing data to show why a beloved pitcher probably won't be elected to the Hall of Fame. Eighty-seven readers respond, some praising his analysis, others questioning his conclusions and offering their own analyses. The officers of a small company address the annual shareholders' meeting to report on how the firm is doing, using *PowerPoint* slides to call attention to their most important points. They take questions afterward, and two people raise their hands. Our baseball fan sees on *Twitter* that the Yankees have signed a star pitcher he thinks they don't really need and fires off a tweet saying so. The student in our first example takes a deep breath and logs on to the website of the college she wants to attend to see if she's been accepted. Good news: she's in. Come September she's at the library, working on an essay for her first-year composition course—and texting her friends as she works.

In each of these scenarios, an author is writing (or speaking) in a different set of specific circumstances—addressing certain audiences for a particular purpose, using certain technologies, and so on. So it is whenever we write. Whether we're texting a friend, outlining an oral presentation, or writing an essay, we do so within a specific rhetorical situation.

Three different rhetorical situations: a lone writer texting (*top left*); a student giving an oral presentation in class (*right*); and members of a community group collaborating on a project (*bottom left*).

We have a purpose, an audience, a stance, a genre, a medium, a design—all of which exist in some larger context. This chapter covers each of these elements and provides prompts to help you think about some of the choices you have as you negotiate your own rhetorical situations.

Every rhetorical situation presents its own unique constraints and opportunities, and as authors, we need to think strategically about our own situation. Adding to a class wiki presents a different challenge from writing an in-class essay exam, putting together a résumé and cover letter for a job, or working with fellow members of a campus choir to draft a grant proposal to the student government requesting funding to go on tour. A group of neighbors developing a proposal to present at a community meeting will need to attend to both the written text they will submit and the oral arguments they will make. They may also need to create slides or other visuals to support their proposal.

The workplace creates still other kinds of rhetorical situations with their own distinctive features. Reporters, for instance, must always consider their deadlines as well as their ethical obligations—to the public, to the persons or institutions they write about, and to the story they are reporting. A reporter working for six months to investigate corporate wrongdoing faces different challenges from one who covers local sports day to day. The medium—print, video, radio, podcast, blog, or some combination of these or other media—also influences how reporters write their stories.

Think about Your Own Rhetorical Situation

It is important to start thinking about your rhetorical situation early in your writing process. As a student, you'll often be given assignments with very specific guidelines—to follow the conventions of a particular genre, in a certain medium, by a specific date. Nevertheless, even the most fully developed assignment cannot specify every aspect of any particular rhetorical situation.

Effective writers—whether students, teachers, journalists, or your mom—know how to analyze their rhetorical situations. They may conduct this analysis unconsciously, drawing on the rhetorical common sense they have developed as writers, readers, speakers, and listeners. Particularly when you are writing in a new genre or discipline—a situation that you'll surely face in college—it can help to analyze your rhetorical situation more systematically.

THINK ABOUT YOUR GENRE

- *Have you been assigned a specific genre?* If not, do any words in the assignment imply a certain genre? *Evaluate* may signal a review, for example, and *explain why* could indicate a causal analysis.

- *If you get to choose your genre,* consider your PURPOSE. If you want to convince readers to recycle their trash, you would likely write an argument. If, however, you want to explain how to recycle food waste into compost, your purpose would call for a process analysis.

- *Does your genre require a certain organization?* A process analysis, for instance, is often organized CHRONOLOGICALLY, whereas a visual analysis may be organized SPATIALLY —and an annotated bibliography is almost always organized alphabetically.

- *How does your genre affect your TONE ?* A lab report, for example, generally calls for a more matter-of-fact tone than a film review.

- *Are certain DESIGN features expected in your genre?* You would likely need to include images in a review of an art show, for instance, or be required to use a standard font for a research paper.

THINK ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE

- *Who is your intended audience?* An instructor? A supervisor? Classmates? Members of a particular organization? Visitors to a website? Who else might see or hear what you say?

- *How are members of your audience like and unlike you?* Consider demographics such as age, gender, religion, income, education, occupation, or political attitudes.

- *What's your relationship with your audience?* An instructor or supervisor, for example, holds considerable authority over you. Other audiences may be friends, coworkers, or even strangers. What expectations about the text might they have because of your relationship? You'd need to be careful not to sound too informal to a committee considering you for a scholarship, or too bossy to a group of friends.

- *If you have a choice of MEDIUM,* which one(s) would best reach your intended audience?

- *What do you want your audience to think or do* as a result of what you say? Take your ideas seriously? Reflect on their beliefs? Respond to you? Take some kind of action? How will you signal to them what you want?

- *Can you assume your audience will be interested* in what you say, or will you need to get them interested? Are they likely to resist any of your ideas?

- *How much does your audience know about your topic?* How much background information do they need? Will they expect—or be put off by—the use of technical jargon? Will you need to define any terms?

- *Will your audience expect a particular GENRE ?* If you're writing about Mozart for a music class, you might analyze a piece he composed; if, however, you're commenting on a *YouTube* music video, you'd be more likely to write some kind of review.

To quote further from People's Exhibit A, your Twitter feed, "@holdupguy82 I'm in the getaway vehicle with the money and hostages. Where R U?"

• **What about audience members you don't or can't know?** It goes without saying that you won't always know who could potentially read your writing, especially if you're writing on a site that anyone can access. The ability to reach hundreds, even thousands of readers is part of the web's power, but you will want to take special care when your writing might reach unknown audiences. Remember as well that anything posted on the internet may easily be shared and read out of context, as the above cartoon shows!

THINK ABOUT YOUR PURPOSE

• **How would you describe your own motivation for writing?** To fulfill a course assignment? To meet a personal or professional commitment? To express your ideas to someone? For fun?

• **What is your primary goal?** To inform your audience about something? To persuade them to think a certain way? To call them to action? To entertain them? Something else? Do you have other goals as well?

• **How do your goals influence your choice of genre, medium, and design?** For example, if you want to persuade neighbors to recycle, you may choose to make colorful posters for display in public places. If you want to inform a corporation about what recycling programs accomplish, you may want to write a report using charts and data.

THINK ABOUT YOUR STANCE

• **What's your attitude toward your topic?** Objective? Strongly supportive? Mildly skeptical? Amused? Angry?

• **What's your relationship with your AUDIENCE?** Do they know you, and if so, how? Are you a student? a friend? a mentor? an interested community member? How do they see you, and how do you want to be seen?

• **How can you best convey your stance in your writing?** What TONE do you want it to have?

• **How will your stance and tone be received by your audience?** Will they be drawn in by it?

THINK ABOUT THE LARGER CONTEXT

• **What else has been said about your topic,** and how does that affect what you will say? What would be the most effective way for you to add your voice to the conversation?

• **Do you have any constraints?** When is this writing due and how much time and energy can you put into it? How many pages (or minutes) do you have to deliver your message?

• **How much independence do you have as a writer** in this situation? To what extent do you need to meet the expectations of others, such as an instructor or a supervisor? If this writing is an assignment, how can you approach it in a way that makes it matter to you?

THINK ABOUT YOUR MEDIUM AND DESIGN

- *If you get to choose your medium,* which one will work best for your audience and purpose? Print? Spoken? Digital? Some combination?

- *How will the medium determine what you can and cannot do?* For example, if you're submitting an essay online, you could include video, but if you were writing the same essay in print, you'd only be able to include a still shot from the video.

- *Does your medium favor certain conventions?* Paragraphs work well in print, but *PowerPoint* presentations usually rely on images or bulleted phrases instead. If you are writing online, you can include links to sources and background information.

- *What's the most appropriate look for your* RHETORICAL SITUATION? Plain and serious? Warm and inviting? Whimsical? What design elements will help you project that look?

- *Should you include visuals?* Would any part of your text benefit from them? Will your audience expect them? What kind would be appropriate—photographs? videos? maps? Is there any statistical data that would be easier to understand as a table, chart, or graph?

- *If you're writing a spoken or digital text,* should you include sound? still images? moving images?

REFLECT. Make a list of all the writing that you remember doing in the last week. Be sure to include everything from texts and status updates to more formal academic or work-related writing. Choose three examples that strike you as quite different from one another and analyze the rhetorical situation you faced for each one, drawing upon the guidelines in this chapter.

THREE

Reading Rhetorically
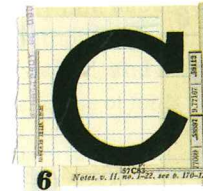
HANCES ARE, YOU READ MORE than you think you do. You read print texts, of course, but you are probably reading even more on a phone, a tablet, a computer, or other devices. Reading is now, as perhaps never before, a basic necessity. In fact, if you think that reading is something you learned once and for all in the first or second grade, think again.

Today, reading calls for strategic effort. As media critic Howard Rheingold sees it, literacy today involves at least five interlocking abilities: attention, participation, collaboration, network awareness, and critical consumption. Of these, attention is first and foremost. In short, you need to work at *paying attention* to what you read. In his book *The Economics of Attention*, rhetorician Richard Lanham explains: "We're drowning in information. What we lack is the human attention needed to make sense of it all."

When so many texts are vying for our attention, which ones do we choose? In order to decide what to read, what to pay attention to, we need to practice what Rheingold calls *infotention,* a word he came up with to describe a "mind-machine combination of brain-powered attention skills and computer-powered information filters." Rheingold is talking primarily about reading online, but we think that infotention is important for reading any kind of text, because it calls for synthesizing and

So many texts vying for our attention!

thinking rhetorically about the enormous amount of information available to us in both print and digital sources. And while some of us can multitask (fighter pilots are one example Rheingold gives of those whose jobs demand it), most of us are not good at it and must learn to focus our attention when we read.

In other words, we need to learn to read rhetorically. Reading rhetorically means attending carefully and intentionally to a text. It means being open-minded to that text. And it means being an active participant in understanding and thinking about and responding to what is in the text. As Nobel laureate Toni Morrison says, "The words on the page are only half the story. The rest is what you bring to the party."

So how do you learn to read rhetorically and to practice infotention? Some steps seem obvious: especially for high-stakes reading, like much of what you do for school, you need to find space and time in which you can really focus—and turn off social media and put down your phone. Beyond such obvious steps, though, you can improve your reading by approaching texts systematically. This chapter will guide you in doing so, beginning with tips for how to understand and engage effectively with what you read.

READING TO UNDERSTAND AND ENGAGE

Start by previewing the text. Efficient readers tell us that they most often begin not by plunging right into the text but by previewing it, finding out what they can about it and getting a sense of what it's about.

- *What do you know (and think) about the topic?* What do you want to learn about it?

- *Who are the authors or sponsors?* Where do you think they're coming from: might they have a particular agenda or purpose?

- *Who published the text,* and what does that tell you about its intended audience and purpose?

- *Skim the text* to get a sense of what it covers. Does the *title* give you any hint about what's to come? If there's a *subtitle*, does it indicate the author's argument or stance? Scan any *headings* or *menus* to see what's covered, and look at any text that's highlighted. Does the text's *design* and use of *fonts* tell you anything about its content or stance?

Annotate as you read. Author Anatole Broyard said that he used to be intimidated by the texts he read, seeing them as great authorities he should absorb but not respond to. But that changed. Later, he said, he learned when he opened a text to occupy it: "I stomp around in it. I underline passages, scribble in the margins, leave my mark." Broyard's point echoes what experts on reading today say: reading is a thoroughly social activity, bringing you into conversation with the writers, asking you to engage them and their ideas actively. And the digital texts you read today often allow for, even demand, your response. So as you begin to read, you should be ready to engage in that conversation, reading with pen or mouse in hand, ready to "stomp."

NOTE KEY POINTS IN THE ARGUMENT

- Highlight the most important points and any **THESIS** statement.
- Identify key terms (and look them up if necessary).
- Underline things that are unclear or confusing, and jot down your questions in the margins.
- Think about how the content meshes with what you already know about the subject. Is there anything surprising?

CONSIDER THE AUTHOR

- Mark any words that indicate the author's STANCE.
- Note places in the text where the author has demonstrated AUTHORITY to write on the topic.
- How would you describe the author's STYLE and TONE? Formal? Casual? Serious? Humorous? Mocking? Informative? Something else? Mark words or passages that establish that style and tone.

THINK ABOUT THE AUDIENCE

- Who do you think the author is addressing? Note any words in the text that make you think so. Are you included in that group?
- What do you know about that audience's values? Highlight words that suggest what the author thinks the audience cares about.

TAKE NOTE OF YOUR REACTIONS

- Make a note of your first impression of the text.
- Do you agree with the author? Disagree? Agree and disagree? Why?
- Note any phrases or passages or points you find surprising—and why.
- After you've read the text thoroughly, sum up your assessment of it. How well do you think it achieves its purpose?

PAY ATTENTION TO THE TEXT'S DESIGN

- How does the design affect the way you understand the text?
- Note any headings, sidebars, or other design features that label or highlight parts of the text.
- Pay attention to the font(s). What do they indicate about the text?
- If the text includes visuals, what do they contribute to the message?

TALK BACK TO THE TEXT

- Comment on any strengths and weaknesses.
- Note any points you want to remember or question.
- Jot down other possible views or COUNTERARGUMENTS.

A Sample Annotated Text

Here's the opening of "On Buying Local" by Katherine Spriggs (reprinted on pp. 150–58), along with the annotations one reader has added.

AMERICANS TODAY CAN eat pears in the spring in Minnesota, oranges in the summer in Montana, asparagus in the fall in Maine, and cranberries in the winter in Florida. In fact, we can eat pretty much any kind of produce anywhere at any time of the year. But what is the cost of this convenience? In this essay, I will explore some answers to this question and argue that we should give up a little bit of convenience in favor of buying local.

Thesis statement.

"Buying local" means that consumers choose to buy food that has been grown, raised, or produced as close to their homes as possible ("Buy Local"). Buying local is an important part of the response to many environmental issues we face today (fig. 1). It encourages the development of small farms, which are often more environmentally sustainable than large farms, and thus strengthens local markets and supports small rural economies. By demonstrating a commitment to buying local, Americans could set an example for global environmentalism.

I wonder what she means by "buying local."

This paragraph shows her stance: strongly in favor of sustainable farming and buying local.

In 2010, the international community is facing many environmental challenges, including global warming, pollution, and dwindling fossil fuel resources. Global warming is attributed to the release of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane, most commonly emitted in the burning of fossil fuels. It is such a pressing problem that scientists estimate that in the year 2030, there will be no glaciers left in Glacier National Park ("Global Warming Statistics"). The United States is especially guilty of contributing to the problem, producing about a quarter of all global greenhouse gas emissions, and playing a large part in pollution and shrinking world oil supplies as well ("Record Increase"). According to a CNN article published in 2000, the United States manufactures more than 1.5 billion pounds of chemical pesticides a year that can pollute our water, soil, and air (Baum). Agriculture is particularly interconnected with all of these issues. Almost three-fourths of the pesticides produced in the United States are used

Here comes some evidence. Looks like she's done her homework. So far, I'm with her.

I want to check out this source: I'm a little suspicious of what she says here.

Farmers' markets are expensive. Most of us can't afford to shop at them.

Fig. 1. Shopping at a farmers' market is one good way to support small farms and strengthen the local economy. Photograph from Alamy.

Overall, I'm impressed with the research she's done. She's serious about this issue and is making a strong case.

in agriculture (Baum). Most produce is shipped many miles before it is sold to consumers, and shipping our food long distances is costly in both the amount of fossil fuel it uses and the greenhouse gases it produces.

SUMMARIZE the main ideas. If you're reading attentively, you should be able to summarize the main ideas and the major support for those ideas.

- Keep your summary short and sweet, capturing the text's main ideas but leaving out less important information.
- Be careful to summarize the text fairly and accurately.
- Use your own words; if you have included any phrases from the original, enclose them in quotation marks.

Here is a summary of Katherine Spriggs' essay:

> In her essay "On Buying Local," college student Katherine Spriggs argues that consumers should purchase food grown locally whenever possible. After demonstrating the environmental and practical reasons for doing so, Spriggs shows that buying local can offer an alternative to destructive mass farming, help small farmers and their families, build sustainable agricultural models, reduce the cost of shipping food from far-away places, and avoid the exploitation of workers, especially in third-world countries. In spite of a few drawbacks (local food may be more expensive and seasonal variation may reduce the number of choices available), she concludes that "Buying local is an easy step that everyone can take toward 'greener' living."

ANALYZE the text to figure out what makes it tick. How does it achieve its goals and get its message across?

- What claim is the text making? How is the claim **QUALIFIED**, if at all?
- What **REASONS** and **EVIDENCE** support the claim? Examples? Precedents? Personal experience? How effective do you find this support?
- How does the author establish **AUTHORITY** to write on this topic? What does he or she do to gain the audience's confidence?
- What is the author's **STANCE** toward the topic—passionate? critical? neutral?—and what words reflect that stance?
- What **COUNTERARGUMENTS** or other perspectives does the author address—and how does he or she respond to them?
- What overall impression does the text make on you, and what passages create that impression?
- Are you persuaded by the argument? Why or why not?

Consider the larger CONTEXT. Close analysis may leave you looking at a text you're reading as a bunch of parts rather than as a whole. So it's important to put those parts back together again and look at the text within its larger context.

- What seems to have motivated the author to write? Is he or she responding to some other argument—and if so, what is it?
- How does the text fit into the larger conversation on the topic? Is the author's point corroborated by what others have said, or is he or she out on a limb, making a claim that hardly anyone else agrees with?
- Does the author incorporate or fairly acknowledge other perspectives?
- What might the context tell you about the author's stance toward the topic? Is he or she writing as an advocate? a reporter? a critic?
- How do you think others who have thought about the topic would respond to this text?

Say "yes," "no," or "maybe." Before you come to final conclusions about any text—whether it's a newspaper article, an advertisement, a website, a tweet, whatever—take time to read carefully in order to understand the author's point of view as clearly and fully as possible.

- Try "walking a mile" in the author's shoes to understand the way he or she sees the topic.
- Say "yes" first, reading as fairly and open-mindedly as you can.
- Once you have fully understood the author's viewpoint, say "maybe" to any passages that seem problematic, confusing, or poorly supported. Think about why you see these passages as meriting only a "maybe."
- Finally, look for passages, evidence, and anything else to which you feel obligated to say "no." You may find few or none of these, but as a critical reader, you need to look for them. For those you identify, think hard about why they seem unacceptable or just plain wrong.

Take time to reflect. Research shows that there's a strong connection between taking time to think carefully about what you are reading and what researchers call "deep learning," the kind that sticks with you. So when you read an especially important text, it's a good idea to take the time to reflect on what you have learned from it.

- What important information have you gleaned from the text? What are the big takeaways for you?
- What lessons has the text taught you? How might you apply those lessons in your own writing or thinking?
- What impact has the reading had on you—as a person, student, scholar, and researcher?
- What doubts or questions do you still have about the text? What additional information would you have liked to have?

Put your reflections in writing. The act of recording these thoughts will help you remember them.

Respond to what you read. Reading rhetorically calls on you to respond to what you read—to take your reactions to the next level and share your thoughts with others. In other words, it means adding your voice to the larger conversation. Your instructor may assign you to write a response of some kind, but you could also consider sending an email or a letter to the author. If you want to respond to something you read online, see if there's a space for comments.

READING ACROSS MEDIA

Once upon a time "reading" meant attending to words on paper. But today we often encounter texts that convey information in images and in sound as well—and they may be on- or off-screen. So when you approach such texts, be sure to think carefully about how the medium of delivery may affect your understanding, analysis, and response.

Reading Visual Texts

Visual texts present their own opportunities and challenges. As new technologies bring images into our phones and lives on a minute-by-minute basis, visual texts have become so familiar and pervasive that it may seem that "reading" them is just natural. But reading visual texts with a critical eye takes time and patience—and attention.

Take a look at the advertisement for a Shinola watch on the next page. You may know that Shinola is a Detroit-based watchmaker proud that its watches are "made in America"; if not, a quick look at *Shinola.com* will fill in this part of the ad's **CONTEXT**. But there's a lot more going on in terms of its particular rhetorical situation. The ad first ran in 2015, when it was clearly "talking back" to smart watches in general and to the launch of the Apple watch in particular, with its full panoply of futuristic bells and whistles. "Hey," the ad writers seem to be saying to the smart watch crowd, "our watch is just smart enough."

Thinking through the rhetorical situation tells you something about the ad's purpose and audience. Of course its major **PURPOSE** is to sell watches, but one other goal seems to be to poke a little fun at all the high-tech, super-smart watches on the market. And what about its **AUDIENCE**: who do you think the ad addresses most directly? Perhaps Americans who think of themselves as solid "no frills" folks?

Reading a visual begins, then, with studying the purpose, audience, message, and context. But there's a lot more you can do to understand a visual. You can look closely, for instance, at its **DESIGN**. In the Shinola ad, the stark, high-contrast, black-and-white image takes center stage, drawing our eyes to it and its accompanying captions. There are no other distracting elements, no other colors, no glitz. The simplicity gives the watch a retro look, which is emphasized by its sturdy straps, open face, and clear numerals, its old-fashioned wind-up button and second hand.

You'll also want to take a close look at any words. In this case, the Shinola ad includes a large headline centered above the image, three lines of all caps, sans serif type that match the simplicity and straightforwardness of the image itself. And it's hard to miss the mocking **TONE**: "A WATCH SO SMART THAT IT CAN TELL YOU THE TIME JUST BY LOOKING AT IT." The small caption below the image underscores this message: "THE RUNWELL. IT'S JUST SMART ENOUGH." Take that, Apple!

Reading Print Texts

Print texts may consist mostly of sentences and paragraphs that (should) follow logically from one to the next, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. For these texts, the familiar practice of reading left to right, top to bottom (at least in English) will carry you through the text, though you may

occasionally need to pause to look up the meaning of a word, to take notes, or just to reflect on what you're reading.

"Reading" Spoken Texts

Spoken texts need to be "read" in a different way, by listening to what the speaker is saying while viewing images he or she projects on a screen or has put in a handout. If the presentation is a really good one, these elements will complement each other, joining together to get their message across. Still, you may need to learn to split your attention, making sure you are not focusing so much on any slides or handouts that you're missing what the speaker is saying—or vice versa. Remember, too, that you'll be a better audience member if you look at the speaker and any visuals, rather than staring at your laptop or looking down at the desk.

Reading Digital Texts

Digital texts stretch readers even further, since they blend written words with audio, video, links, charts and graphs, and other elements that you can attend to in any order you choose. In reading such texts, you'll need to make decisions carefully. When exactly should you click on a link, for example? The first moment it comes up? Or should you make a note to check it out later since doing so now may break your concentration—and you might not be able to get back easily to what you were reading. Links are a good thing in that they lead to more information, but following them can interrupt your train of thought. In addition, scrolling seems to encourage skimming and to make us read more rapidly. In short, it can be harder to stay on task. So you may well need to make a special effort with digital texts—to read them attentively, and to pay close attention to what you're reading.

Reading On- and Off-Screen

It's clear by now that our ways of reading are changing in the digital age. If reading was once something we did alone, silently, not so today. Reading now is likely to take place on the run, on digital devices of all kinds. It has also become deeply social, as when we send messages via text or share what

we're reading and what we think of it on social media. Between texts, email, *Twitter,* and forums like *Reddit,* you are probably doing a lot of reading, and a lot of it on-screen.

Researchers have found that we often take shortcuts when we read online, searching and scanning and jumping around in a text or leaping from link to link. This kind of reading is very helpful for finding answers and information quickly, but it can blur our focus and make it difficult to attend to the text carefully and purposefully. So it's important to learn to make online reading effective for your academic work. Here are a few tips to help you when you're reading on-screen.

- Be clear about your purpose in reading. If you need to understand and remember the text, remind yourself to read carefully and avoid skimming or skipping around.
- Close *Facebook* and other pages that may distract you from reading.
- Learn how to take notes on PDF files and Word documents. Then you can make notes as you read on-screen, just as you would when reading a print text. Or take notes on paper.
- Reading PDFs and websites in full-screen mode will clear away clutter and make it easier to focus on the text.
- Look up terms on the internet as you read, making a note of definitions you may need later.
- For really high-stakes readings, consider printing out the text to read.

The pervasiveness of reading on-screen may suggest that many readers prefer to read that way. But current research suggests that most students still prefer to read print, especially if the reading is important and needs to be internalized and remembered. Print texts, it's worth remembering, are easy to navigate—you can tell at a glance how much you've read and how much you still have to go, and you can move back and forth in the text to find something important.

In addition, researchers have found that students reading on-screen are less likely to reflect on what they read or to make connections and synthesize in ways that bind learning to memory. It's important to note, however, that studies like these almost always end with a caveat: reading practices are changing and technology is making it easier to read on-screen.

We are clearly in a time of flux where reading is concerned, so the best advice is for you to think very carefully about why you are reading. If you need to find some information quickly, to follow a conversation on *Twitter*, or to look for online sources on a topic you're researching, reading on-screen is the way to go. But if you need to fully comprehend and retain the information in a text, you may want to stick with tried-and-true print.

READING ACROSS GENRES

Genres affect how we read—and can help guide our reading. Knowing the characteristic features of a genre, therefore, can help you read more attentively—and more purposefully. When you read a **REPORT**, for example, you expect information you can trust—and you look for signs that the author knows what he or she is writing about and has cited authoritative sources. When you read a **REVIEW**, you expect to find some judgment, along with reasons and evidence to support that judgment. And you know to question any **ARGUMENT** that fails to acknowledge likely counterarguments. This is all to say that what you know about common genres can help you as a reader. Knowing what features to expect will help you read with a critical eye, and just recognizing a genre can help you adjust your reading as need be (reading directions more slowly, for example).

READING ACROSS ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

It's especially important to read rhetorically when it comes to encountering texts in different academic fields. Take the word *analysis,* for instance. That little word has a wide range of definitions as it moves from one field to another. In *philosophy*, analysis has traditionally meant breaking down a topic into its constituent parts in order to understand them—and the whole—more completely. In the *sciences*, analysis often involves the scientific method of observing a phenomenon, formulating a hypothesis about it, and experimenting to see whether the hypothesis holds up. And in *business*, analysis usually refers to assessing needs and finding ways to meet them. In *literary studies*, on the other hand, analysis usually calls for close reading in order to interpret a passage of text. When you're assigned to carry out an analysis, then, it's important to know what the particular field of study expects you to do and to ask your instructors if you aren't sure.

Beyond attending to what particular words mean from field to field, you should note that what counts as effective **EVIDENCE** can differ across academic disciplines. In literature and other fields in the *humanities*, textual evidence is often the most important: your job as a reader is to focus on the text itself. For the *sciences*, you'll most often focus on evidence gathered through experimentation, on facts and figures. Some of the *social sciences* also favor the use of "hard" evidence or data, while others are more likely to use evidence drawn from interviews, oral histories, or even anecdotes. As a strong reader, you'll need to be aware of what counts as credible evidence in the fields you study.

Finally, pay attention to the way various disciplines present their information. You'll probably find that articles and books in *literature* and *history* present their information in paragraphs, sometimes with illustrations. *Physics* texts present much important information in equations, while those in *psychology* and *political science* rely more on charts and graphs and other visual representations of quantitative data. In *art history*, you can expect to see extensive use of images, while much of the work in *music* will rely on notation and sound.

So reading calls for some real effort. Whether you're reading words or images or bar graphs, literary analysis or musical notation, in a print book or on a screen, you need to read *rhetorically*—attentively and intentionally and with an open mind. And on top of all that, you need to be an active participant with what you read, just as Toni Morrison says: "The words on the page are only half the story. The rest is what you bring to the party."

REFLECT. The next time you're assigned to read a text online, pay attention to your process. Take some notes on just how you read: Do you go straight through, or do you stop often? Do you take notes? Do you take breaks while reading to attend to something else? What do you do if you don't understand a passage? How long can you read at a stretch and maintain full concentration? Then answer the same questions the next time you're assigned to read a print text. What differences do you notice in the way you read each text? What conclusions can you draw about how to be a more effective reader, both on- and off-screen?