

Self-Assessment

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Introduction

When I first saw this class on my required courses list I let out a big sigh. It's not that I particularly hated writing classes or anything, in fact I did admit that some could be fun, but at that point I had enough. I had taken writing classes for a majority of my life from elementary school to high school every, single, year and I even took one my first semester at college, so I was a bit sick of them. Now I won't say that this "Writing for Engineers" class was the most fun and exciting class I have taken because that would be a blatant lie, but I will admit that it was different. When I walked into the class I had certain expectations, I thought it would just be a bunch of repurposing my old argumentative essays and going over old topics like any other English class, but my assumptions were proven to be wrong. Since I had taken Freshman Composition in my first semester, things like the rhetorical situation were just repeated but what surprised me was the type of writing that was going to be done. After putting on my apron, ready to get the dust off my old essays, I realized that it was a waste of effort, and that I looked ridiculous. To my surprise writing for engineers wasn't just a fancy name so that the college could just add more required courses, it was actually a writing class with engineers in mind.

Over the span of this class I wrote many types papers that I had never encountered before, and I feel that for once this was a writing class that was worth taking. All of the papers had to do with engineering in some way or another and some of them were specific to my field. I wrote things that I might actually use in the future and in my professional life. I felt this writing helped me become a better engineer much more so than writing essays about random topics.

While the course did contain elements of previous writing courses, those elements were presented in a new light. When I took Freshman Composition I dealt with the rhetorical situation

throughout the course, but I never really felt like I interacted with it. During that course the writing felt, for a lack of a better term, stale, it was boring, plain and just a recycled version of previous years, but I felt that writing for engineers really made me think about and incorporate the elements of the rhetorical situation to better my papers. There was not much focus put on the course learning outcomes throughout the course but when I look back I realize that I had been interacting with and meeting them the whole time.

The Rhetorical Situation

The rhetorical situation consists of six elements: exigence, stance, purpose, audience, genre and media/design. Each element serves to better explain the circumstances and various aspects of the piece being written.

Exigence:

People write for many reasons, such as out of personal desire, or in response to certain events and that is exactly what exigence is, the reason the writer is writing in the first place. I wanted to talk about this element of the rhetorical situation first because I felt that this one was the most difficult. Up till now every time I wrote a paper it was because I was assigned to, but Professor Carr was having none of that so I was forced to widen my perspective and seriously consider why I was writing. Eventually throughout the course I felt that I was slowly able to understand the motivation behind my work. Every paper I wrote during the course had a different exigence because there were different reasons for their creation, and this helped develop my understanding of the element. My technical description for example was written because, “**The Pilot Corporation wanted to create a basic information guide for anyone who was interested in their pens.**” My reason for writing that paper was because a company needed it, but my exigence changed when I wrote my proposal, “**There was an inherent problem on campus and we had a possible solution, so we needed to act**” Due to the variety of different writing motivations I feel that I have sufficiently interacted with and addressed the rhetorical element of exigence.

Stance:

Unless you are a robot everyone has an opinion, whether that be a strong one or a weak one, it is always there. This opinion can influence the work of a writer and it is called the writers stance.

This rhetorical element was very difficult for me to grasp and to be completely honest I feel that it still is. Having opinions may be obvious and knowing your own opinion may be even more obvious but this was very difficult for me. Sometimes I found myself struggling because while I knew I had an opinion I didn't know what it was. This may sound strange but every time I considered stance I ended up questioning myself and my opinions. Throughout my papers my stance was vague such as in my technical description where I could only describe an ambiguous attitude towards my topic, "I decided to have a positive attitude toward the product." I feel that my expression of stance did improve with future papers such as in my lab report where I expressed an attitude toward technology, "Technology is rapidly entering our lives and we need to consider some things that it may replace and whether it has any negative impact", but I think I just got better at making something that sounded good and not truly understanding it. Stance is an element of the rhetorical situation that may need more time for me to fully grasp it.

Purpose:

The purpose of any piece of writing is what the writer wishes to accomplish with it. This element of the rhetorical situation is something that I am very familiar with and something that has been mentioned in every English class I have taken so far. I believe that there was not much room for improvement in this area, but I will say that if nothing else this class gave me an opportunity to interact with new purposes and made me think about underlying ones. For example, in my proposal I realized that I had not one but two purposes, "One of the purposes was to inform the readers about a problem in the community and propose a solution. However, we also realized that there was more to it and we had a deeper secondary purpose which was to persuade the audience that our solution made sense. We wanted to convince the audience that we would be

able to solve their problem and that they should put their trust in us.” My purpose may vary from paper to paper, but I feel that I have a good understanding of this rhetorical element.

Audience:

The audience of the paper is the person, or people that the paper is intended for and it is something that has grown for me over the span of this course. Initially my audience was only Professor Carr when I wrote my Professional Letter, but it slowly became larger. I believe that my understanding of audience has developed greatly and that is evident in my writing. In my first paper, which was the technical description I gave my audience a vague and thoughtless description as, “Anyone who wanted more information on the Pilot G2 07 pen”, but by the time I wrote my proposal I noticed a big difference. For my proposal I gave thought to the various audiences that would be interested in my work, “We started thinking small at first and considered the audience to be the board of directors for CCNY because they would ultimately be the ones deciding whether the proposal would be accepted or not, but we realized that we needed to widen our field of view. Who does this affect, and who would be interested to know more? We then expanded our audience to the CCNY community because we felt that they would be interested in the changes that would be happening on campus and they would probably want an explanation for the sudden increase in their tech fee. However, this scope was still too small and so we expanded our view even further. We came to the conclusion that not only would the CCNY community be interested in this project, but it may be of interest to other schools and colleges who may want to implement something similar. So, in the end we decided that our audience would include every school and college in America because this project may be of interest to them.” I realized that my audience was not limited, and I had to widen my perspective to understand my true audience. This element of the rhetorical situation was probably the one that

was most developed for me because it changed my way of thinking and expanded my point of view.

Genre:

The genre of a paper is the format of the writing such as a poem, or a song. This class gave me the opportunity to work with genres that I had never worked with before. For example, I had to write a proposal, something that was completely new to me. At first it seemed daunting and difficult, but I realized that it was a valuable form of writing in my field. I feel that I have really come to understand the importance of interacting with various genres because they can be used to accomplish different goals as I stated in my technical description, “**This was the right genre for the situation since it described the various aspects of the product which was my purpose.**”

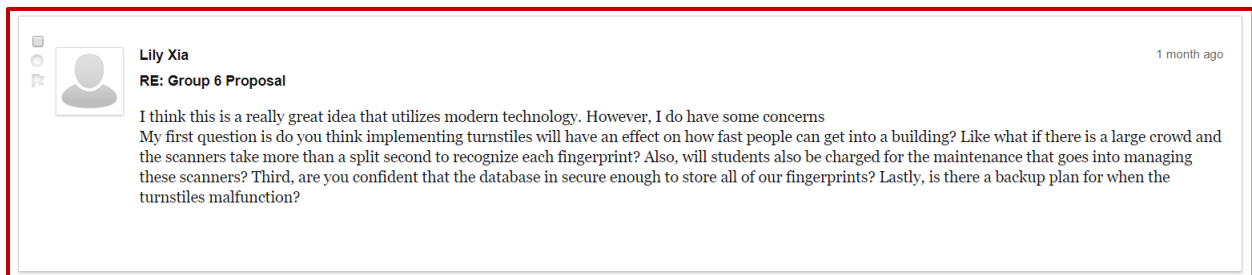
Media/Design:

The media/design of a work is how the work is presented. To be completely honest I felt that this element of the rhetorical situation was developed the least. What I mean is that while I did interact with this element a lot I feel that I did not learn much. I have already written papers in print and online many times so most of my papers did not teach me anything. The only possible paper that stood out was the proposal which had an oral component, but I have given a number of speeches, and presentations in the past so I did not learn much. If nothing else I have gained experience with this element of the rhetorical situation, so I will not say that I obtained nothing.

Course Learning Outcomes

Outcome 1: Acknowledge your and others' range of linguistic differences as resources and draw on those resources to develop rhetorical sensibility.

This course learning outcome never really made much sense to me. I took it to mean utilizing the different perspectives of your peers to improve your writing but that seemed to overlap the course learning outcome that dealt with the social aspects of writing, so I never really saw the reason to make this its own separate outcome. That being said, I still feel like I met this outcome because throughout the course I believe that the knowledge of my peers has given me more to think about and has helped me better my work. For example, when we had to post the topics of our proposals on blackboard a classmate asked my group questions that I had never bothered considering.

A screenshot of a Blackboard discussion post. The post is from Lily Xia, titled "RE: Group 6 Proposal", and is dated "1 month ago". The text of the post reads: "I think this is a really great idea that utilizes modern technology. However, I do have some concerns My first question is do you think implementing turnstiles will have an effect on how fast people can get into a building? Like what if there is a large crowd and the scanners take more than a split second to recognize each fingerprint? Also, will students also be charged for the maintenance that goes into managing these scanners? Third, are you confident that the database is secure enough to store all of our fingerprints? Lastly, is there a backup plan for when the turnstiles malfunction?"

Lily Xia
RE: Group 6 Proposal
1 month ago

I think this is a really great idea that utilizes modern technology. However, I do have some concerns
My first question is do you think implementing turnstiles will have an effect on how fast people can get into a building? Like what if there is a large crowd and the scanners take more than a split second to recognize each fingerprint? Also, will students also be charged for the maintenance that goes into managing these scanners? Third, are you confident that the database is secure enough to store all of our fingerprints? Lastly, is there a backup plan for when the turnstiles malfunction?

I feel these questions really helped improve the proposal overall and prepared me for any similar questions the audience may have had.

Outcome 2: Enhance strategies for reading, drafting, revising, editing, and self-assessment.

I don't think much has changed for me for this outcome. My drafting process is to make the first draft as perfect as possible so there is little to correct for the final and this generally leads to little revision other than spelling and grammar. If anything has changed at all it would be

my strategies for editing. I have looked at many works from my peers throughout this course and after editing them I feel that I have gained valuable experience in that category. Below is an example of when I critiqued the first draft of my peer's lab report.

Moving on to materials and methods, I found this section to be informative but at the same time very confusing. The main thing that confused me was the wording and how you explained some things and I believe that some pictures or diagrams would really help the reader understand what you are doing. I was also confused on why you did things the way you did, such as why you put the materials in for 6 hours or why you measured the temperature afterwards. Is there a reason for needing the temperature? I also wanted to know why there was only one set of tests run because what if there was an outlier. What if that one piece of wood was weaker than the standard? Multiple tests account for abnormal samples. As for the table it looks nice but its missing the caption, so you might want to fix that before the final.

Outcome 3: Negotiate your own writing goals and audience expectations regarding conventions of genre, medium, and rhetorical situation.

Before I even began writing any of my papers I was forced to consider the various elements of the rhetorical situation and think about what I wanted to accomplish and how I was going to do it. For example, I had to decide how the tone of my papers were going to change based on things like the audience and purpose such as in my technical description where I tried to maintain an objective and strictly business tone.

The Pilot G2 07 pen is mostly made up of dark plastic and is 5.6 inches in length when retracted (14.3 centimeters) with a 10.5-millimeter diameter (Jet Pens). The pen tip itself is, as stated in its name is 0.7 millimeters and the entire device weighs 9 grams (.30 oz) (Jet Pens).

Then when I did my professional letter the tone was more personal because my audience and purpose were different.

To be completely honest I am not a person with a lot of ambition and I only want a stable well-paying job to support myself and my family. So, if you asked me what kind of engineering challenges I would like to be a part of or how I would want to change the world with my degree I would say that I don't.

Outcome 4: Develop and engage in the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes.

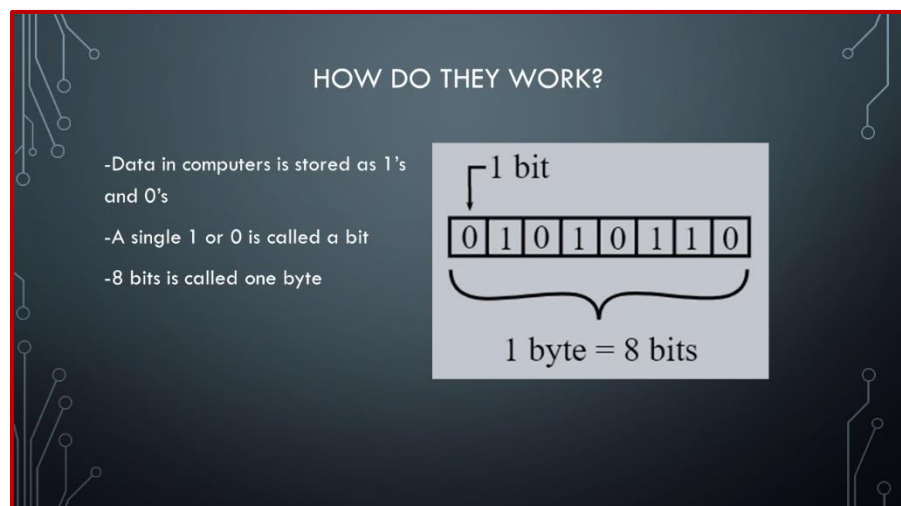
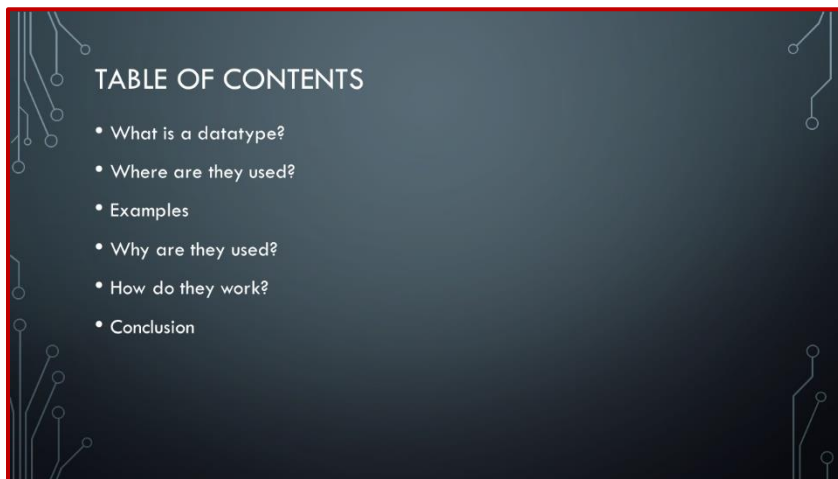
This was probably the most relevant course learning outcome for this class because a majority of it involved interacting with my peers. For the proposal we all worked in groups to create a solid plan. We also did a variety of peer review exercises for every paper so that we could use feedback from one another. We did one peer review in class and the rest of them were done online. Below is part of a peer review my group did for another groups proposal.

Three aspects of the proposal that call for revision:

There are a few things that need revision the first being the formatting. I don't know if this was just a conversion error but the spacing was all over the place, so this paper did not particularly look too good. Another aspect of this paper that could use revision would be an overall need for detail. This paper was very general in some sections and I felt that it did not do enough. A lot more detail could be added to various parts of the paper to make it much better such as explaining your methods. One final thing that I believe needs revision is the exclusion of some important information such as the budget. This paper did not contain a budget and to the reader this may be a very important part which may decide whether the proposal is accepted or not.

Outcome 5: Engage in genre analysis and multimodal composing to explore effective writing across disciplinary contexts and beyond.

I feel that this learning outcome was also very relevant for this course because we wrote in a variety of genres for the course. I also want to say that we spent a good amount time analyzing each genre before we wrote our papers by reading the textbooks and creating simplified versions of the genre. For the proposal I created a PowerPoint in a hybrid homework about datatypes to help solidify my understanding of the genre. Below are some slides from that PowerPoint.



We also did something similar for the technical description. Below is part of the technical description precursor that I did.

Product Description: The Pilot G-2 07 pen is a high-quality pen which consists of 5 major parts.

As listed here the Pilot G-2 07 can be broken into

1. The Head – Contains the spring and stabilizes the tip
2. The Ink Cartridge – Contains the ink
3. The Ink Holder – Holds the ink cartridge
4. The Clicker – The part that is pressed to expose the pen tip
5. The Clicker Holder – Holds the Clicker in place

These parts are listed in order of appearance from the tip to the other end.

Outcome 6: Formulate and articulate a stance through and in your writing.

This course learning outcome was very hazy for me and I don't think that I properly met it. As stated previously while I know that everyone has an opinion on a topic I was always unsure about how I felt about my own topic and so I had difficulty conveying my stance within my papers. I do however think that I have improved over the span of this course because I was able to express my feelings within my group proposal.

We have shifted our attention toward a more easily solved and apparent problem and that is security at the entrances of schools. Looking back on previous events we believe that some of the tragedies that occurred could have been prevented or at the least lessened in severity if the system to enter the school was much more secure.

Outcome 7: Practice using various library resources, online databases, and the Internet to locate sources appropriate to your writing projects.

This outcome played a vital role during the course because we had to spend a lot of time doing research. Our research became even more formal when the class visited the library to learn how to use the CCNY Database to locate credible, peer reviewed sources. I didn't utilize the database as much as I would have liked to, and I got my sources from various places scoured across the internet. Below is the bibliography of my lab report where I used one source from the database and two other online sources.

Reference

Herold, B. (2014). Screen Reading Poses Learning Challenges. (Cover story). *Education Week*, 33(30), 1-25. Retrieved from <http://ccny-proxy1.libr.ccny.cuny.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=95943884&site=ehost-live>

History Cooperative (2016, September 14). *A History of E Books*. Retrieved from <http://historycooperative.org/a-history-of-e-books/>

Salter, P. (n.d.). *Impact of reading from a screen versus from printed material*. Retrieved from <https://www.radford.act.edu.au/storage/reading-on-screens-v-paper.pdf>

Outcome 8: Strengthen your source use practices (including evaluating, integrating, quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, synthesizing, analyzing, and citing sources).

The last course learning outcomes deals with the usage of sources. This outcome was not particularly difficult to meet but it was different. All the papers I had written previously were in MLA, so the APA format was new but not particularly challenging. I utilized my sources mainly

by paraphrasing and summarizing because I was never really a fan of directly quoting sources.

Below is an example of my usage and citation of a source I used in my group proposal.

For our proposal, we have decided to use turnstiles provided by Controlled Access Inc. because they are an ISO certified company. Controlled Access Inc. has an ISO 9001:2008 certification which asserts that they have passed a quality assurance test and ensures the quality of their products and services (ISO, 2008). Specifically, we plan on using their HS427-S full-height turnstile. This turnstile is made of stainless steel, has 2.25 feet (.686 meters) of pedestrian clearance, and comes equipped with electronic locks (Controlled Access Inc, 2017).

Conclusion

Overall this class was not an easy one. We wrote many papers, most of which were over 10 pages long and I spent hours working on and agonizing over them. However, this class was definitely not just another English class full of recycled essays and topics. Instead it focused on a certain field and expected students to write papers that they may need to write in the future. Every major assignment in this class taught me something new, and I feel it has made me a better engineer, or at least enabled me to write like one. So, while it was responsible for plenty of my stress I feel that I will look back on it one day glad that I took it.