Fifth Edition

The RHETORICAL ACT

THINKING, SPEAKING, AND WRITING CRITICALLY

KARLYN KOHRS CAMPBELL ■ SUSAN SCHULTZ HUXMAN ■ THOMAS R. BURKHOLDER

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The Rhetorical Act

Thinking, Speaking, and Writing Critically

Fifth Edition

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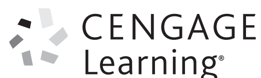

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To all those who have struggled
for the right to speak,
in the hope that what this book contains
will help to give them voice

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About the Authors

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell is Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*, 2 vols. (1989) and co-author of *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance* (1990), *Presidents Creating the Presidency* (2008), *The Interplay of Influence: News, Advertising, Politics, and the Mass Media* (6th ed., 2006), and editor of *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric* (1997, 2003), *Women Public Speakers in the United States, 1800–1925* (1993), and *Women Public Speakers in the United States, 1925–present* (1994). Awards include a fellowship at the Shorenstein Center of the Kennedy School at Harvard, the National Communication Association Distinguished Scholar Award, the Lauren Ecroyd outstanding teacher award, the Woolbert Award for scholarship of exceptional originality and influence, Golden Anniversary Monograph Award, and the University of Minnesota 2002 Distinguished Woman Scholar in the Humanities and Social Sciences. She has taught at Macalester College, The British College at Palermo, Italy, California State University at Los Angeles, SUNY at Brockport and at Binghamton, City University of C.U.N.Y., University of Kansas, and Dokkyo University, Tokyo, Japan.

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Thomas R. Burkholder (PhD, University of Kansas) is Associate Professor and former Chair of the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Nevada–Las Vegas. He is co-author, with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, of the second edition of *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric* (1997) and co-editor, with Martha S. Watson, of *Perfecting American Society: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth Century Reform* (2007). His work has also appeared in the *Western Journal of Communication*, *Southern Communication Journal*, *Communication Studies*, and various book chapters. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in rhetorical theory, rhetorical criticism, and U.S. public address.

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Preface

WHAT IS THE DISTINCTIVE PERSPECTIVE OF THIS BOOK?

The first edition of *The Rhetorical Act* appeared more than thirty years ago. It grew out of a course on rhetoric and social influence that I taught at the University of Kansas. Susan Huxman and Tom Burkholder were graduate students in the communication studies program, and both were teaching assistants in that class. Based on our shared experiences, we developed views of the relationship between rhetoric and criticism that inform all of the editions. Susan Huxman joined me as co-author on the third edition; fortunately for the two of us, Tom Burkholder was willing to bring his expertise to this edition. In my view, their contributions have made this edition the best so far.

The fifth edition retains the conceptual core of the earlier editions while extending the book's scope and relevance. Quite simply, this book aims to teach students how to craft and critique messages that influence. Moreover, we believe that teaching students to be effective critics is essential to teaching them to be effective communicators. This edition presents rhetorical criticism, media literacy, and strategic public speaking as an integrated skill-set, reflected in the subtitle: *Thinking, Speaking, and Writing Critically*.

This edition remains committed to the ancient idea of the interrelationship of art and practice, that you cannot improve skills such as speaking and writing without understanding the theory, concepts, and ideas on which they are based. Conversely, you cannot master the theory unless you use it and test it in practice. In our view, this ancient relationship demands that those who would learn about rhetoric must adopt the role of rhetor-critic. The rhetor initiates rhetorical action and seeks to make the choices that will make her or him the most effective moral agent. The critic describes, analyzes, and evaluates rhetorical acts to understand what they do and how and for whom they are effective. As rhetor-critics, students learn to critique their own rhetoric in order to improve it, and as critic-consumers, they learn to analyze the rhetoric of others in order to make decisions as intelligently as possible.

Consistent with the earlier editions, the fifth edition of *The Rhetorical Act* is different from traditional textbooks on criticism and public speaking in several ways. First, it treats rhetorical action as the joint creation of rhetor and audience, emphasizing the audience's active role as collaborators, as joint creators of messages, the classical concept of the enthymeme (Aristotle). Second, it approaches rhetoric in all its varieties as a "strategy to encompass a situation" (Kenneth Burke) and as "that art or talent by which discourse is adapted to its end" (George Campbell). Third, it treats all forms of rhetoric as points on a single continuum of influence; there is no separate

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treatment of speaking or writing to inform, entertain, or persuade. Finally, it does not rely on "schools of criticism"; rather, it concentrates on the descriptive, analytical, and evaluative tools that make up the critical process. It introduces students to a comprehensive critical "grammar" and "vocabulary."

Once again, we offer a Prologue and an Epilogue. The Prologue by Professor Huxman is addressed to a beginning student audience. The Epilogue is written for advanced students and instructor audiences by Professor Campbell. Both are designed to address larger audiences on college campuses when discussions about the centrality of speech to the liberal arts curriculum and to the general education curriculum arise.

Supplements: The book's supplements include the Instructor Companion Site where Cognero Computerized Testing and tutorial quiz and essay questions are available.

WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THE FIFTH EDITION?

In General: In each new edition we attempt to refine our analysis of the elements of the rhetorical process and to respond to the changing characteristics of the contemporary rhetorical environment. Teachers will find the basic structure familiar, but punctuated with new examples, changes in layout that make concepts clearer, and fresh illustrations. Consistent with the ways in which our communicative environment has grown and changed, we have increased our analysis of visual communication and incorporated exercises related to the new ways in which we use the tools of communication.

Major Revisions in Key Chapters

- **Chapter 5: "The Resources of Argument"** includes new material drawn from the research of classical scholars that enlarges our understanding of the enthymeme and which is illustrated by reference to the speech of Robert Kennedy referred to in the Prologue, President John Kennedy's speech in Berlin, and President Obama's speech after the shootings in Tucson, Arizona.
- **Chapter 12: "Understanding Visual Rhetoric"** incorporates analysis of the changes in technology that have made all of us visual rhetors.
- **Chapter 13: "Understanding the Medium of Transmission"** details the fundamentals of media literacy with examples and illustrates the media's high ethos appeal. It explores the implications of mediated exchanges in which who speaks is unknown, and notes the different form of "reading" that occurs on social media and the communicative paradoxes social media create. Finally, it explores the relationship between mass media and social reform and asks whether social movements can emerge out of socially mediated communication.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

We believe that one of the major strengths of *The Rhetorical Act,* through all of its prior editions, has been the high quality of the contemporary, up-to-date examples and materials for analysis—the texts of speeches, the editorials and op-ed pieces, the photos—that bring to life the rhetorical principles and theories that are introduced and explained

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throughout the book. In preparing this fifth edition, however, we discovered that the cost of obtaining permission to reprint those examples and materials for analysis has skyrocketed since publication of the fourth edition. Those high permission fees threatened to raise the production costs of this edition—costs that might ultimately be passed along to the students who purchase this book.

Thus, in this fifth edition we have, reluctantly, chosen not to reprint some of the examples and materials for analysis that we had hoped to include. Rather, in selected cases we have instead included the Internet addresses (the URLs) for those materials, and we strongly encourage students and teachers to follow those Web links and obtain those materials for their own use. We understand that this decision carries with it the risk that some of those online materials may at some point become unavailable. We also believe that the effort to hold down the production cost of this fifth edition is worth that risk.

WHY DID WE WRITE A TEXTBOOK ON RHETORIC?

We wrote this new edition of *The Rhetorical Act*, like the earlier editions, because we have a passion to educate students on how to become discerning consumers and articulate practitioners of all varieties of rhetorical acts. We are committed to the humanistic approach to rhetoric—that the understanding of who we are as symbol users will foster greater appreciation of, and heighten the moral sensibilities of our students toward, our rhetorical universe. It is our fervent hope that this edition of *The Rhetorical Act* expands the relevance and scope of the previous editions and that it will continue to stimulate the kind of critical discussion so essential to developing analytical thinking, speaking, and writing skills. In Ciceronian terms, we wish to develop "citizen-orators" for our times.

WHO HELPED US?

We thank all those whose comments and criticisms have improved this edition, including the following reviewers: Paul Achter, University of Richmond; Karen Kimball, University of North Texas; Bohn Lattin, University of Portland; Audra McMullen, Towson University; Susan Millsap, Otterbein University; and Kristina Sheeler, Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis.

We also thank the instructors who completed the satisfaction survey about the text. We want to offer special thanks to Susan Huxman for her intensive work on visual rhetoric and to Tom Burkholder who challenged both of us by asking the hard questions and who has improved this edition significantly because of his special interests in criticism and his extensive background in argumentation. We all owe great thanks to the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Nevada–Las Vegas, and the department chair, Dr. David Henry, for providing us space in which to work and underwriting our joint efforts as we made this revision.

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Prologue

WHY STUDY RHETORIC?

Welcome to the discipline of *Rhetoric*—the study of all the processes by which people influence each other through symbols (verbal, nonverbal, visual, aural). This book will help you craft and critique *rhetorical acts*—strategic symbolic attempts to overcome the challenges in a given situation to connect with a specific audience on a given issue to achieve a particular end. As a *rhetor* (a writer, speaker, or producer of a rhetorical act), you have the potential to make an enormous impact on the lives of those around you—affecting decisions large and small about what we buy, where we live, how we vote, to whom we donate money, and why we socialize with particular groups, configure our smartphones to display certain apps, and embrace certain spiritual traditions. As a *critic* (one who describes, analyzes, and evaluates rhetorical acts to understand how and for whom they work), you will learn to examine your own rhetoric in order to improve it and to analyze the rhetoric of others in order to make decisions as intelligently as possible. If you study all forms of influence, you will become aware of the available resources of persuasion and learn how people use and misuse them to advance their goals—a noble aim first advanced by the ancient Greeks and Romans who advocated that all citizens study rhetoric.

So, many moons ago Aristotle and company thought rhetoric was good for you. But why study it today? Because rhetoric often is defined as reason-given discourse, consider these three reasons why the study of rhetoric is important to you.

Intellectual Reasons

Instruction in rhetoric is central to understanding who we are as symbol-using animals. The study of rhetoric helps you appreciate the diverse ways in which discourse forms communities and sharpens your moral sensibilities regarding the power of language to affect societal values. The ability to speak or write clearly, eloquently, and effectively has been recognized as the hallmark of an educated person since the beginning of recorded history.[1] At the age of eighteen, Cicero said, "If truth were self-evident, eloquence would not be necessary." Isocrates said, "To become eloquent is to activate one's humanity, to apply the imagination and to solve the practical problems of human living."[2] The great Greek statesman Pericles said, "One who forms a judgment on any point but cannot explain it clearly, might as well never have thought at all on the subject."[3] Aristotle recommended the study of rhetoric for intellectual advancement

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because it prevents the triumph of fraud and injustice; instructs when scientific instruction is of no avail; makes us argue both sides of a case; and is a means of defense. One of the rhetorical acts you will read is a courageous speech by Angelina Grimké, (1838), one of the first advocates for abolitionism and woman's rights in the United States. Despite a heckling mob and the grand place where she spoke—Pennsylvania Hall—which burned to the ground after her "incendiary" message nearly thirty years before the Civil War, Grimké, the daughter of a wealthy South Carolina slave owner, argued passionately for the rights of slaves and women on intellectual grounds: "As a Southerner I feel that it is my duty to stand up here tonight and bear testimony against slavery. I have seen it—I have seen it. I know it has horrors that can never be described. I was brought up under its wing: I witnessed for many years its demoralizing influences, and its destructiveness to human happiness. . . . Man cannot enjoy [happiness] while his manhood is destroyed, and that part of the being blotted out." More contemporary rhetors in the book also use rhetoric to make sophisticated observations about the human condition: Robert Kennedy, speaking impromptu to an African American crowd on the news of Martin Luther King's assassination; Ronald Reagan comforting a nation after the loss of the *Challenger* astronauts; Steve Olson making a conservative case for gay rights; and Steve Jobs reminding us that we are indeed "homo narans"—in his compelling stories of the transforming power of education in a university commencement address. Studying their words enriches our lives and cultivates our own symbolic capacities.

Citizenship Reasons

Aristotle first argued that humans were the only animals to live in a *polis* (a city-state or political community). The root word of communication is *communis*—Latin for community. Do you remember the movie *Castaway* with Tom Hanks? What happens to him when he's stranded on the island? He almost goes crazy because he has no one to talk to. What does he do to create that communication bond to survive? He paints a face on a volleyball that has washed up onto the shore and calls it "Wilson." A similar story line, only this one with a man-eating tiger, prevails in a later movie, *The Life of Pi*.

The art of rhetoric is as much a survival skill as the mark of an educated person. I am fond of reminding students of what contemporary rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke said about the basic human need for rhetorical competence: it is "equipment for living."[4] Cicero in his call for "citizen-orators" cemented the relationship between civic-mindedness and speech competency. Preparation for life in the modern world requires rhetorical action with a cross section of diverse people who often have conflicting needs and values. Effective speech helps maintain a sense of community and craft consensus in an increasingly diverse and complex world.[5]

Leadership demands strong rhetorical competencies. Forging alliances, resolving conflict, negotiating change, initiating policy, handling the media, meting out justice, celebrating accomplishments, these are all rhetorical skills linked to strong citizenship. The relationship between rhetoric and citizenship has been codified in our constitution: freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom to dissent. Democracy and deliberation go hand in hand. A rhetoric course brings together students from across the institution and provides a town hall forum to disseminate and

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evaluate the "marketplace of ideas" of a diverse speech community.[6] In a rhetorical criticism, media literacy, composition, and/or strategic public speaking course like the one you are enrolled in, your professor aims to develop effective citizens and leaders for our times.

In these pages, you will be exposed to several rhetorical acts that prompt discussion about citizenship and national identity. Michael Bloomburg's speech at "ground zero" arguing for tolerance in our treatment of Muslims; Former U.S. Senator Dale Bumpers crafts a compelling history lesson persuading his colleagues to "consider the weight of history" in dealing with the grave punishment of impeachment; the great resistance to changing our national anthem whether in content, tune, or translation is examined in rhetorical pieces by Caldwell Titcomb, a music professor, Daniel Epstein, an essayist, and David Goldstein, a reporter; the demands of political power for African Americans is enunciated with passion by Malcolm X; war speeches to the nation, such as the Pearl Harbor address by Franklin D. Roosevelt, require that we understand how and why some democratic principles are suspended during wartime. Studying these rhetorical acts will help you see why proficiency in rhetoric is "equipment for living" in a "polis."

Workplace Reasons

Studies abound pointing to the centrality of speech competency in the job market. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that in a survey of 480 companies employers ranked communication skills (speaking, listening, and writing) as those most valued in any job. In a report on the fastest-growing careers, the U. S. Department of Labor stated that communication skills would be in demand across occupations well into the twenty-first century. When 1,000 faculty members from a cross section of disciplines were asked to identify basic competencies for every college graduate, skills in communicating topped the list.[7] It is little wonder then that a Carnegie report recommended not one but two courses in communication to anchor liberal arts education in our nation's colleges and universities.[8]

Rhetorical training is valuable to employers because communicating effectively is vital to success. Its omnipresence alone deserves study. Most of our waking day is spent listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Try to find a job in any field that pays a living wage, involves working with other people, and promises advancement potential that does not require a competent communicator. It's impossible in the new economy in which we live! Many rewarding careers demand special expertise in rhetoric. A four-star general and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President Eisenhower, General Maxwell D. Taylor had this to say when asked what training had been most helpful to him in preparation for his demanding role as Chief of Staff: "I never hesitated in replying," General Taylor began. "My most valuable preparation was membership in the Northeast High School Society of Debate in my pre-West Point days in Kansas City."[9] If you aspire to rise to the top of your field as an engineer, administrator, lawyer, legislator, teacher, health care professional, business leader, or performing artist, just to name a few, you must be good at *thinking, speaking, and writing critically*—the subtitle of this book.

To help you draw the connection between rhetorical acumen and workplace achievement, you will be exposed to rhetorical acts from some of these rhetorical careerists: provocative journalists Donna Britt, Peter Shawn Taylor, Larry Bradshaw

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and Lorrie Slonsky, Gary Smith, and Malcolm Gladwell; social movement leaders Frederick Douglass, Angelina Grimké, and Martin Luther King Jr.; scientist Bill McKibbin; attorney Ted Olson; advertising guru Tony Schwartz; and political leaders from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama. You will also learn how to write and speak critically by presenting articulate speeches, crafting analytical essays, and researching strategy reports. Your rhetorical acts, if assembled and executed strategically, will be preparation for successful career choices.

DOES RHETORIC MATTER?

Despite its important place in your college curriculum, your community, and your workplace, some of you may wonder how rhetoric stacks up against other skills that ostensibly require real action. In fact, you may wonder why this book uses the term rhetorical act or rhetorical action together. I mean there's talk and then there's action; those who talk the talk and those who walk the walk, right? One way to help you think about ways in which discourse doesn't take the place of deeds but is itself a vital act is through recounting a great rhetorical moment in U.S. history. Consider how rhetoric created the events that unfolded on this night.

One hour after Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Robert F. Kennedy, then a presidential contender campaigning in Indianapolis, received the grim news. Kennedy scuttled his scheduled campaign speech in the heart of the city of Indianapolis, resisted the advice from police and his own handlers to "get out of Dodge," walked into the ghetto of that city alone, called out for people to follow him, climbed into the back of a pickup, and in the cold night with a howling wind, delivered the following impromptu remarks to an audience of around 1,000 mostly black citizens who had no idea that King was dead. Joe Klein, political columnist for *Time* magazine and author of *Politics Lost* (2006), gives us a front row seat to the riveting audience reactions to RFK delivering the news of King's tragic death. His commentary is captured in brackets and italics.[10]

> Ladies and gentlemen, I'm only going to speak to you for one or two minutes tonight because I have sad news. I have sad news for you, for all of our fellow citizens and for people who love peace all over the world. And that is that Martin Luther King was shot and killed tonight in Memphis, Tennessee.
>
> *[At this point, there were screams, wailing—just the rawest, most visceral sounds of pain that human voices can summon. As the screams died, Kennedy resumed, slowly, pausing frequently, measuring his words (p. 5).]*
>
> Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings and he died in the cause of that effort.
>
> *[There was total silence now (p. 5).]*
>
> In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it is perhaps well to ask what black—considering the evidence, evidently there were white people who were responsible.
>
> *[A shudder went through the crowd at the powerful unadorned word: responsible (p. 5).]*

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You can be filled with bitterness, with hatred, and a desire for revenge. We can move in that direction as a country, in great polarization—black people amongst blacks, and white amongst whites, filled with hatred toward one another.

Or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand and comprehend, and to replace the stain of bloodshed that has spread across our land, with an effort to understand with compassion and love.

For those of you who are black, and are tempted to be filled with hatred and distrust of the injustice of such an act, against all white people, I can only say that I feel . . . I feel in my own heart the same kind of feeling. I had a member of my family killed, but he was killed by a white man.

[This is the first time that Robert Kennedy had ever spoken publicly of the death of his brother, John F. Kennedy (p. 6).]

We have to make an effort in the United States, we have to make an effort to understand, to get beyond these rather difficult times.

My favorite poem, favorite poet, was Aeschylus. He once wrote: "Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the human heart. Until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness but love and wisdom and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice for those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black.

So I ask you tonight to return home, to say a prayer for the family of Martin Luther King—yes, that's true—but more importantly, to say a prayer for our own country, which all of us love, a prayer for understanding and that compassion of which I spoke.

We can do well in this country. We will have difficult times; we've had difficult times in the past. And we will have difficult times in the future. It is not the end of violence; it is not the end of lawlessness; and it is not the end of disorder. But the vast majority of white people and the vast majority of black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of life, and want justice for all human beings who abide in our land.

[Someone shouted YAY! There were other shouts, which melted into a warm buttery round of applause (p. 7).]

Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world. Let us dedicate ourselves to that . . . and say a prayer for our country, and for our people.

[Over the next few days, there were riots in 76 American cities. Forty-six people died. 2,500 were injured, 28,000 jailed . . . Indianapolis remained quiet" (p. 7).]

Susan Schultz Huxman

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Chapter 1

A Rhetorical Perspective

Through its title, *The Rhetorical Act*, this book boldly announces that it is about rhetoric. Because media commentators often use *rhetoric* to mean "hot air" or "lies," you may well ask why you should study rhetoric in a class or read a book about rhetorical action. One way to answer this question is to encourage you to read the prologue and epilogue of this book. Another way is to define *rhetoric* properly and to show the possible value of a rhetorical perspective on human action.

For the moment, we will define *rhetoric* as "the planned use of symbols to achieve goals."[1] Although we will explain that definition in greater detail later in this chapter, you should note these key elements. Most examples of *rhetoric* are not spontaneous, spur-of-the-moment exclamations; rather, they are carefully thought-out messages. This definition is very broad in scope because the symbols that make up those carefully planned messages can be of many types—written and spoken language; nonverbal behaviors; fine arts such as paintings, drawings, and sculptures; music; visual images such as photographs, motion pictures, or television programs—in short, any form of symbol. And finally, the goal, aim, or purpose of such messages is to influence a particular group of people—an audience—in some way, usually to somehow change their thoughts or behaviors. From a rhetorical perspective, we view human communicative acts in that way.

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Any "perspective" is literally a way of looking through (*per* = through; *specere* = to look), an angle of vision, a way of seeing. All perspectives are partial and in that sense distorted or biased: each looks at this rather than that; each has its particular emphasis. Put a bit differently, from any perspective we can seem some things very well, other things less well, and still other things not at all. Because someone is always doing the looking and seeing from somewhere, it is impossible to avoid taking some point of view or perspective.

Sometimes perspectives are physical—actual places from which to view material things. For example, go to the top floor of the tallest building at your university and look out through a window. What do you see? Likely, you will see the tops of trees and other smaller buildings on campus, and perhaps even a geometrical pattern of walkways crisscrossing a central quad or plaza. Then, leave the building and as you do, stop on the front steps and take another look at the campus. It is the same campus, of course, but because your perspective has changed, what you see is likely very different. You see the same trees, buildings, and walkways, but from this view point you see the trunks of the trees and the facades of the buildings rather than their tops, and the geometrical pattern of the walkways may not be apparent. From these two different physical perspectives, then, you see some things well, other things less well, and still other things not at all.

Sometimes perspectives, like a *rhetorical* perspective, are mental or intellectual rather than physical. Rather than places from which to view material things, they are orientations or attitudes that frame the way we think. Just what is the mental or intellectual perspective that we call *rhetorical*? It might best be understood by comparing it to other mental or intellectual perspectives with which you might be more familiar, such as a philosophical or scientific perspective.

Whereas scientists would say the most important concern is the discovery and testing of certain kinds of truths, rhetoricians (who study rhetoric and take a rhetorical perspective) would say, "Truths cannot walk on their own legs. They must be carried by people to other people. They must be explained, defended, and spread through language, argument, and appeal." Philosophers and scientists respond rightly that, whenever possible, assumptions should be tested through logic and experiment. In fact, they would argue that you and I should pay more attention to how scientific or philosophical conclusions are reached and tested. Rhetoricians reply that unacknowledged and unaccepted truths are of no use at all. Thus the bias of a rhetorical perspective is its emphasis on and its concern with the resources available in language and in people to make ideas clear and cogent, to bring concepts to life, to make them salient for people. A rhetorical perspective is interested in what influences or persuades people: in other words, in the planned use of symbols to achieve goals.

Those strongly committed to a rhetorical perspective argue that some scientists and philosophers delude themselves, when they claim they are not persuaders and do not use rhetorical strategies in their writings. In a review of two books reporting research on Neanderthals, for example, Stephen Jay Gould, who taught biology, geology, and the history of science at Harvard, said that humans are storytelling creatures and commented on "the centrality of narrative style in any human discourse (though scientists like to deny the importance of such rhetorical devices—while using them all the time—and prefer to believe that persuasion depends upon fact and logic alone)."[2]

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When objectivity is highly valued, as it is in science and philosophy, some feel that any hint of the sort of subjectivity that usually characterizes rhetorical decision making must be denied. The folly of holding such a suspicious view of rhetoric is apparent in the evolution versus intelligent design controversy making the rounds in state school board policy debates on what should be taught about Darwin's theory of evolution in high school biology classes. In his documentary about the recent evolution debates, *A Flock of Dodos,* Randy Olson, a protégé of Professor Gould's and a twenty-year marine biologist turned filmmaker, pokes fun at his own colleagues for refusing to engage the creationists and intelligent design advocates in public forums. Scientists are their own worst enemy, Dr. Olson maintains, when they think biology and rhetoric don't mix—that explaining the importance of evolutionary theory to citizens is beneath them. He cautions half-jokingly, "If evolutionists don't learn to adapt to the new media environment, then their message could go the way of the dodo!"[3] Similarly, feminist challenges to traditional philosophy call attention to possible sources of bias in modes of philosophizing, pointing to rhetorical impulses in the works of great philosophers.[4] In other words, rhetoricians can identify persuasive elements in all discourse, including scientific and philosophical communication.

A rhetorical perspective, then, focuses on the sorts of issues on which informed and honest people can disagree. It focuses on how people arrive at social truths; that is, on the kinds of truths created and tested by people in groups and that influence social and political decisions. These truths represent what a group of people agrees to believe or accept; such truths become what the group takes to be "common sense."

Among the important social truths a rhetorical perspective might teach you to examine are the processes by which taxpayers, parents, congressional committees, school boards, and citizens respond to issues that cannot be resolved solely through objective means such as logical analysis and experimental testing. Should affirmative action programs, for example, be used to rectify past discrimination against minorities and women? Early acceptance of affirmative action as an appropriate remedy for past discrimination has shifted as doubts arise about "quotas" or "reverse discrimination." What constitutes discrimination? What remedies for past discrimination are fair to all those who compete for jobs and admission to educational programs? As another example, should air quality standards be set high enough that cars must be redesigned to use alternative energy sources, gasoline reformulated, and industries converted to use less polluting fuels? How can we balance our concern for healthy industries that create good jobs with the impact of pollution on the environment and on human health? Still another example: Will harsh penalties for convicted rapists provide better protection for women, or will such penalties increase the reluctance of juries to convict?

For social questions such as these, philosophers can point out contradictions in our thinking and spell out the implications of a given position. Social scientists can give us the best available data about the lack of women and minorities in categories of employment, about available pools of minority applicants for jobs, about causes and effects of pollution, and about the low conviction rates of accused rapists. When we have looked at the data and examined the logic of the conclusions drawn from them, we still must make decisions that go beyond the facts and make commitments that go beyond sheer logic.

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Why Has Rhetoric Become a Dirty Word?

Not so long ago, the predominant meaning [of rhetoric] was "the art of expressive speech" or "the science of persuasion"; now the much-abused word, with a root related to "oratory," is laden with artificiality: empty talk is "mere" rhetoric.

But rhetoric, in its positive sense, fills a linguistic need: "The technique of articulate argument" is too much of a mouthful. If we mean "empty talk," or wish to deride the fulsome fulminations of a blowhard, we already have a large selection of sneering synonyms available: from the euphemism "bushwa" to the acronym "bomfog." ([The word] "bomfog," an acronym for "brotherhood of man, fatherhood of God," is not written in caps—because it relies on its similarity to two small words.)

The most effective way to rehabilitate "rhetoric," I think, is to offer a colorful, yet suitably pedantic term to cover its pejorative meaning. The word I have in mind is *bloviation,* a noun back-formed from the verb *bloviate*. (A verb is useful, too—you can't say "rhetoricize," and "orate" does not have the specifically spurious connotation.)

Bloviation is most often associated with the statements of Warren Gamaliel Harding—"Gamalielese," H. L. Mencken called it—but the word has deep roots as an authentic Americanism. In *Dictionary of Slang, Jargon & Cant,* Albert Barrère and Charles Leland placed *bloviate*'s origin before 1850, and defined it as "verbosity, wandering from the subject, and idle or inflated oratory or blowing, but which word it was probably suggested, being partially influenced by 'deviate.'"

So, if you mean "bloviating," get off "rhetoric's" back: We need "rhetoric" to do a job that no other word does as well.

Source: William Safire, *Safire's New Political Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1993).

From its beginnings, this emphasis on social truths has been the distinctive quality of a rhetorical perspective. What fragmentary historical records exist seem to indicate that rhetoric was first studied and taught early in the fifth century BCE by sophists or wise men in Greek city-states around the Mediterranean. These city-states began to become more democratic, and as citizens met together to decide the laws under which they would live, as they brought suits and defended themselves against charges of wrongdoing, and as they celebrated the values that gave them a sense of identity, the need to speak cogently and clearly became increasingly important. Accordingly, men such as Gorgias of Leontini, Protagoras, Isocrates, and others began to teach male citizens (only males were allowed to speak and vote) how to present their ideas more effectively and to write about what made some speeches more persuasive and some speakers more appealing than others.

WHAT IS RHETORIC?

The oldest major treatise on the art of rhetoric that is still available to us is *On Rhetoric,* written by Aristotle in fourth-century BCE Athens. The Greek word for rhetoric comes from *rhêtorikê, -ikê* meaning "art or skill of," and *rhêtór*, meaning an experienced political/public speaker. Rhetoric, then, was for Aristotle the art or skill of speaking in the sorts of public forums common in ancient Athens—in the legislative assembly, in the courts, and on ceremonial occasions. The aim of such speaking was social influence, or persuasion. Thus, he defined rhetoric as "the ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (1355b).[5]

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In *Rhetoric* and in his other works, Aristotle distinguished among kinds of truth. He believed that there were certain immutable truths of nature, which he designated as the province of metaphysics or science (*theoria*). He also recognized a different sort of truth consisting of the wisdom or social knowledge (*phronêsis*) needed to make choices about matters affecting communities or a whole society. These truths, not discoverable through science or analytic logic, he described as contingent; that is, as dependent on cultural values, the situation or immediate context, and the nature of the issue. They were the special concerns of the area of study he called *rhetoric*, the means of making decisions on issues where "there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt" (1356a).[6]

The contingent qualities of social truths can best be illustrated by looking at what it means to say that something is "a problem." Put simply, a problem is the gap that exists between what you think ought to be (value) and what is; it is the discrepancy between the ideal and the real, between goals and achievements. Problems come to exist because people can perceive and define them as such in interaction—that is, through rhetoric. As you will realize, what is a problem for one person (or group) may not be a problem for another person (or group). Some U.S. citizens, for example, perceive a problem with current income tax laws that they believe give an advantage to individuals with very high incomes at the expense of workers who earn much less. The problem, as they see it, is a matter of fairness (a value), and they urge lawmakers to raise the income tax rate for those with high incomes. Other citizens, however, view individuals with high incomes as "job creators" who stimulate economic growth through their investments. As they see it, raising taxes on high-income individuals would stifle that investment and harm the economy overall—especially for those with lower incomes.

Quite obviously, then, defining problems depends on goals and values, and these can change. In this same sense social truths—and thus rhetoric—are "subjective" and "evaluative"; rhetoric addresses issues that arise because of people's values, and these will change through time in the face of altered conditions.

Rhetoric is, of course, also concerned with data that establish what exists and with logical processes for drawing conclusions from facts and implications from principles and assumptions. Indeed, Aristotle considered rhetoric an offshoot of logic, and a rhetorical perspective is characterized not only by an emphasis on social truths but also by an emphasis on reason-giving or justification in place of coercion or violence. This distinction can be subtle. In general, rhetorical efforts seek to affect the free choices of groups or individuals, whereas coercion creates situations in which only one choice seems possible—the costs of any other option are too high, the pressure too great, the threat too terrible. Violence coerces by threatening bodily harm or death if any choice but that desired is made. Reason-giving assumes that by presenting the implications of the available options, one can persuade an audience to choose from among them freely, based on the reasons and evidence offered. Rhetoric presumes that audiences have some real freedom of choice.[7]

Of course not all of the reasons used by rhetors (those who initiate symbolic acts seeking to influence others) will make sense to logicians or scientists. Some rhetorical reasons are grounded in facts and logic, but many others are grounded in religious beliefs, history, or cultural values; in associations and metaphors; in hunger or desire, resentments, or dreams. A rhetorical perspective is eclectic and inclusive in its search for what is influential and why. In fact, rhetoric's concern with justification grows out of its focus on social truths tested by people in their roles as voters, property owners,

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consumers, workers, parents, and the like. In other words, reasons are presented to the decision makers and evaluators to whom the rhetoric is addressed, the audience.

Obviously, in some situations you can say, "Do this and don't ask any questions—just trust me," but such situations are rare. Reasons can be omitted only when your relationship to those addressed is so close and strong that the relationship itself is the reason for action or belief.

In most cases, then, even those involving your nearest and dearest, you must give reasons, justify your views, explain your position. And you must do so in terms that will make sense to others. Rhetors must "socialize" or adapt their reasons to reflect shared values. It is more acceptable, for example, to explain that you run several miles every day to maintain your weight and protect your health than to say that you run for the joy of it, for the sheer physical pleasure it gives you. Socialized reasons are widely accepted, meaning they are agreed to by most people. U.S. culture is strongly pragmatic; therefore, "good" reasons tend to show that an act is useful and practical. U.S. culture is strongly capitalistic; therefore, good reasons tend to show that an act is profitable, or assume that an action should be judged by its impact on "the bottom line." Other societies and some U.S. subcultures place greater emphasis on the sensual and aesthetic; for them, good reasons affirm behavior that is pleasurable and expressive, such as precision ice skating, acrobatic skateboarding, skillful hang gliding, dancing the tango really well, losing oneself in musical sound, singing in close harmony, rapping, or savoring and preparing unusual foods, regardless of whether or not those behaviors are pragmatic of economically beneficial.

Because rhetoric is addressed to others, it is reason-giving; and because it is social and public, it uses as reasons the values accepted and affirmed by a subculture or culture. In this way, rhetoric is tied to social values, and rhetors' statements will reflect the social norms of particular groups, times, and places (see Figure 1–1).

Because it is addressed to others, providing justifications that they will understand and feel, rhetoric is a humanistic study, and as such it examines all kinds of human symbol use, even the bizarre and perverse. From the beginnings of rhetoric in classical antiquity, rhetoricians have understood that persuasion occurs through both argument and association, through the cold light of logic and the white heat of passion, through explicit values and subconscious needs and associations. Accordingly, the field of rhetoric has come to examine all of the available means by which we are influenced and by which we can influence others. Thus modern interpretations of rhetoric go far beyond Aristotle's emphasis on the art or skill of speaking in public. As we suggested earlier in

Figure 1–1
What Is Rhetoric?

- Rhetoric is the study of what is persuasive.
- Rhetoric is the purposive use of messages to invite assent.
- Rhetoric is the craft of producing reason-giving discourse that is grounded in social truths.

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this chapter, a contemporary rhetorical perspective seeks to understand the potential for social influence in all forms of symbol use—written and spoken language; nonverbal behaviors; fine arts such as paintings, drawings, and sculptures; music; visual images such as photographs, motion pictures, or television programs; and probably more.

In summary, rhetoric is the study of what is persuasive. The issues with which it is concerned are social truths, addressed to others, justified by reasons that reflect cultural values. Rhetoric is a humanistic study that examines all the symbolic means by which influence occurs.

There are seven defining characteristics of rhetoric, each beginning with the letter *p* (see Figure 1–2). First and foremost, rhetoric is *public*; that is, it is addressed to others. It is public because it deals with issues and problems that one person alone cannot answer or solve; the issues are communal; the solutions require cooperative effort. Because rhetoric is addressed to others, it is *propositional*; developed through complete thoughts. That's the case because one person's ideas must be made intelligible and salient for others whose cooperation is needed; that's also the case because much rhetoric is argumentative, making claims and offering reasons in their support. In that sense rhetoric is not random thoughts but some kind of coherent, structured statement about an issue or concern. As you will immediately recognize, rhetoric is *purposive*, aimed at achieving a particular goal, such as selling a product or influencing thought or action. Even the most apparently expressive discourse can have some kind of instrumental or purposive goal; for example, cheering for a team expresses the feelings of fans, but it raises the morale of players and may improve their performance, helping them to win. That's closely related to rhetoric's emphasis on *problem solving*. Most rhetorical discourse arises in situations in which we as audience and rhetors experience a felt need: a desire for closure (farewell address), a desire to mark beginnings and initiate a process (inaugural address), a desire to acknowledge death and to memorialize (eulogy). In some cases, of course, the problem is more concrete: how can a fair and accurate resolution be reached about eminent domain, high-tech surveillance, and access to medical records—all issues that pit privacy rights against government safeguards? Closely related to rhetoric's purposive, problem-solving qualities is an emphasis on the *pragmatic*. The Greek word *praxis* or action is the root for "practical," meaning that it can be put into effect or enacted. Pragmatic is a synonym of practical, but it also

Rhetoric is ...

- public
- propositional
- purposive
- problem solving
- pragmatic
- poetic
- powerful

Figure 1–2
The Seven Ps of Rhetoric

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stresses facts and actual occurrences, but with an emphasis on practical outcomes. In this sense rhetoric is material; it produces actions that affect us materially; it is active, not just contemplative.

In what may seem to be a contradiction, rhetoric is *poetic*; that is, rhetoric frequently displays ritualistic, aesthetic, dramatic, and emotive qualities. The rhetoric of the mass, of communion, and of other religious rituals reinforces belief; what is pleasing and appealing to our senses, such as metaphor and vivid description, invites our participation and assent. Dramatic narrative captures our attention and involves us with characters, dialogue, and conflict and excites us emotionally so that we care about what happens and identify with the people we encounter. Those rhetorical works we call eloquent are good examples of these qualities, illustrated here and in subsequent chapters by speeches by Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. and by essays that involve us in the lives of people whose stories teach us lessons.

Finally, because rhetoric is all of these—public, propositional, purposive, problem solving, pragmatic, and poetic—it is *powerful*, with the potential to prompt our participation, invite identification, alter our perceptions, and persuade us. Accordingly, it has the potential to help or harm us, elevate or debase ideas, and make or break careers, and thus has significant ethical dimensions.

RHETORICAL ACTS

As we have described it, a rhetorical perspective takes note of the rhetorical or persuasive dimension in all human symbol-using behavior. Although all human actions can be considered implicitly persuasive, we do not wish to define "the rhetorical act" so broadly. The lines separating rhetorical acts from other acts are difficult to draw, however, and in this book we shall treat the concept of rhetoric in both its broad and its narrow senses.

The broadest view of rhetoric is expressed in the statement, "You can never not communicate," meaning that whatever you do or say (or don't do or say) can be observed and interpreted. For example, an unsmiling expression can be interpreted as evidence of sadness (rather than thoughtfulness), a young African American man walking home from work is perceived by some as menacing, or a woman walking home late from work is sometimes assumed to be extending a sexual invitation. Any behavior can become rhetorical when someone interprets or misinterprets it and is influenced by that interpretation, whatever the actor's intentions may have been.

In a more narrow sense, of course, many acts are intentionally rhetorical—advertisements, music videos, editorials, book and movie reviews, and films, essays, sermons, and speeches that declare a position and seek to defend it or make it attractive to others. When we address you as speakers or writers, we are speaking of rhetorical acts as intentional, deliberate attempts to influence others. When we act as critics or analysts and address you as critics and analysts, however, we comment on all possible persuasive effects, both intentional and unintentional. To understand rhetoric, you must fathom all the processes of influence, and as a rhetor you must come to terms with unintended and accidental effects—especially because some of them may work against your purpose.

In other words, defined most broadly, *rhetoric* is the study of all the processes by which people influence each other through symbols, regardless of the intent of the source.

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A *rhetorical act*, however, is an intentional, created, polished attempt to overcome the challenges in a given situation with a specific audience on a given issue to achieve a particular end. A rhetorical act creates a message whose shape and form, beginning and end, are stamped on it by one or more human authors with goals for an audience. If you study all forms of influence, you will become aware of all the available resources for persuasion. Similarly, when you analyze your rhetoric and that of others, you must consider persuasive effects that may not have been fully under the control of or consciously intended by the source.

RHETORICAL PURPOSES

Because intention and impact are so important to a rhetorical perspective, we want to consider the range of meanings included in the words *persuasion* and *influence*. From the persuader's point of view, these meanings describe a range of purposes or intentions, not simply agreement or opposition. From the point of view of a reader, listener, or viewer, they reflect processes that constantly engage us as we experience the world, try to understand it, and decide what actions, if any, would be appropriate as responses. In other words, rhetorical purposes are conscious attempts to influence processes that are occurring in us all of the time as we come in contact with the world and the people in it.

Creating Virtual Experience

Through their use of symbols, rhetors call up ideas, pictures, and experiences in those they address. If a rhetor writes, "The burning sun beat down on the stubble in the oat field, and seen through a haze of sweat, the stalks suddenly seemed to be hair sprouting in a crew cut from the scalp of a red-haired giant," you can draw on past sensations and experiences to re-create your own mental picture. Although each reader's picture will be different, and each will reflect the reader's unique past, most will concern summer in a rural area.

Fundamentally, to act rhetorically is to communicate or to initiate an act—to express something in symbols—that someone else can translate into virtual experience. When something is virtual, it does not exist in fact; it is *as if* it existed. There is no sun, no stubble, no sweat, no scalp, no red hair, no giant on this page. But if a rhetor writes about them vividly enough, you can imagine them; it is as if you saw and heard and felt them here and now. That re-creation in your mind is virtual experience. In response to the rhetor's words, you imagine a scene, create a mental picture, and what you experience is virtual experience—experience called forth and shaped by your response to the symbols produced by someone else. Effective communication creates an image or idea in your mind that approximates the image or idea that the speaker or author wished to convey.

In other words, the fundamental rhetorical purpose, the most basic kind of influence—communicating—requires you to initiate a rhetorical act that can be translated into virtual experience by others. The most basic question in rhetoric is how to do that.

One kind of rhetorical action is intended primarily to produce virtual experience. Most works of literature, for example, are written to expand and shape our experience.

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