

21W.794: IAP GRADUATE TECHNICAL WRITING WORKSHOP



Writing,
Rhetoric,
And
Professional
Communication

When we write, we need to integrate multiple knowledge domains

Content

What is the text about?

Rhetorical Situation

Who is the audience?
What is my purpose in writing for them?
How do I persuade them?

Process

How do I go about writing this?

Genre

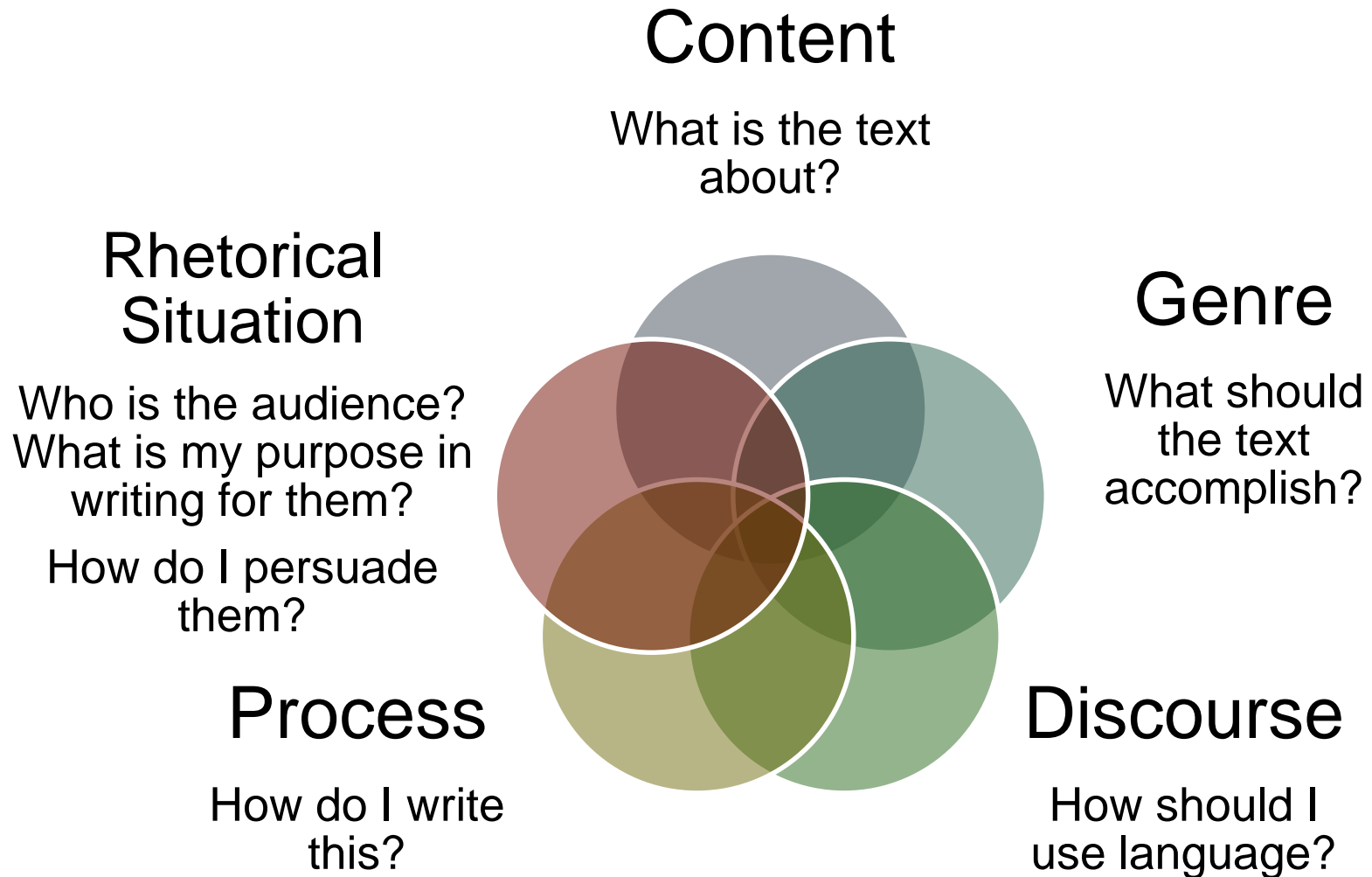
What should the text accomplish?

Discourse

How should I use language?



Where do your challenges in academic writing lie?



This course will teach:

Genre—how to understand genre functions, to identify and produce patterns of rhetorical moves and generic language features

Rhetorical situation—how to anticipate the needs of an audience, identify shared knowledge and open questions, structure information persuasively

Writing process—how to read complex texts effectively, manage information, develop and arrange ideas, draft, revise, and edit

Discourse—how to align meaning and syntax, achieve clarity, coherence, and concision, use metadiscourse to shape the audience's relationship with the content

Today's session

Two ways of reading scholarly literature rhetorically:

As a writer, reading for genre

As a critical scholar, reading for open questions and argument

GENRE

How texts work and how we can make them work more effectively

Much language use is patterned and
“disciplined” over time for specific purposes

Genres are socially-constructed “typified responses to recurring rhetorical situations”—Carolyn Miller

What “typified responses” emerged in our introductions?

Genres can be described as sets of more or less common speech acts, which we call “rhetorical moves,” which link specific content with generic language

Look for the relationship between specific content and generic language:

“Hello, Jessie! Let me introduce you to Rodger. Rodger has just joined our department as a new lecturer; he comes from Penn, where he worked with communication classes in Chemistry and also with the MyReviewers project. Jessie, he’ll be working with you in 6.UAR; I know his experience is really going to be helpful there, since we’re incorporating MyReviewers for the first time. Rodger, Jessie has lots of experience here; she was an MIT undergrad as well as a lecturer, so she can help you sort out the landscape as you get started. She also shares your interest in rhetorical theory. You’ll probably want to arrange a time to meet soon.”

What “rhetorical moves” might occur if you were introducing two colleagues?

Genres are socially-constructed “typified responses to recurring rhetorical situations”—Carolyn Miller

Name the parties

Explain social relationships

Highlight points of common interest

May launch further social interaction

How do we think about Genre?

Both *generic* and *generative*

Mediate between the individual statement and the shared social discourse conventions

“stabilized for now” but dynamic

-Catherine Schryer

Participate in activity systems to perform important functions

e.g. CFPs define research agendas; proposals unlock resources; progress reports elicit feedback and course corrections

Analyzing Genres

Rhetorical situation:

What's the *exigence* for this genre? What social work does it need to do?

Discourse community:

Who are the speakers and audience for this genre?
What are their language norms?

Rhetorical and Linguistic features:

What *moves* does it perform, and in what order?

Identify the 'generic' language that links the specific content

Theory and modelling predict that hurricane intensity should increase with increasing global mean temperatures, but work on the detection of trends in hurricane activity has focused mostly on their frequency and shows no trend. Here I define an index of the potential destructiveness of hurricanes based on the total dissipation of power, integrated over the lifetime of the cyclone, and show that this index has increased markedly since the mid-1970s. This trend is due to both longer storm lifetimes and greater storm intensities. I find that the record of net hurricane power dissipation is highly correlated with tropical sea surface temperature, reflecting well-documented climate signals, including multi-decadal oscillations in the North Atlantic and North Pacific, and global warming. My results suggest that future warming may lead to an upward trend in tropical cyclone destructive potential, and—taking into account an increasing coastal population—a substantial increase in hurricane-related losses in the twenty-first century.

What does an Abstract do?

Carves a research space—shows a concern, debate, or gap in knowledge

Explains the purpose of the research

Describes the specific approach

Highlights the results/findings

Argues for the significance of the results and might make recommendations

Features of the 'generic' language can be discipline-specific

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Why do we write or read abstracts? What work do they do for engineers?

1. As stand-alone mini-texts, they give readers a short summary of a study's topic, methodology and main findings;
2. As screening devices, they help readers decide whether they wish to read the whole article;
3. As previews for readers intending to read the whole article, they provide a road-map for understanding the details;
4. As guides to central terms and concepts, they provide indexing help for professional abstract writers and editors

STASIS THEORY

What does this abstract assume the audience knows?
Doesn't know? Needs to be convinced of?

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What questions do scholars explore?

Fact—what is it?

Definition—how should we categorize it?

Causation—what causes it? What effect does it have?

Value—what significance does it have? Is it good or bad?

Policy—what should we do about it? How should we implement it or respond to it?

Adapted from "The Stases in Literary and Scientific Argument," by Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor in *Written Communication*, 1988.

Let's analyze the stases in Emanuel 2005

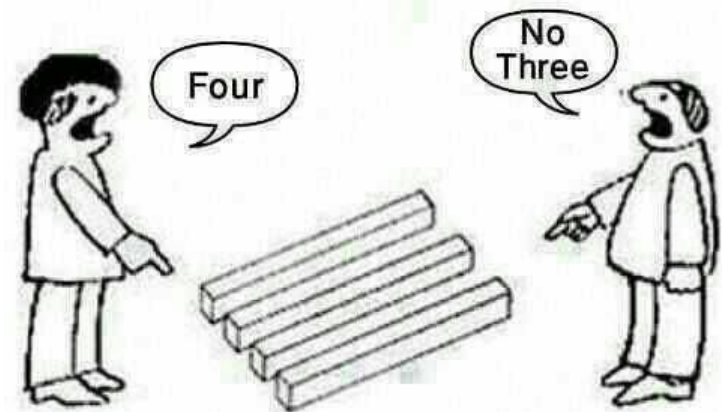
Arguments of fact: Does a thing exist, how many are there, and how do we know?

How many Americans are unemployed?

Are we experiencing statistically more hurricanes recently than in the past?

How many people attended the inauguration?

It is really confusing!!!



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Is or is not?

Claims of fact can be true or false if they can be measured absolutely and verified.

If they are measured by proxy or estimated, they are in the realm of the probable, and thus we can argue about the existence or amount.

Arguments of definition: How are facts linked to concepts?

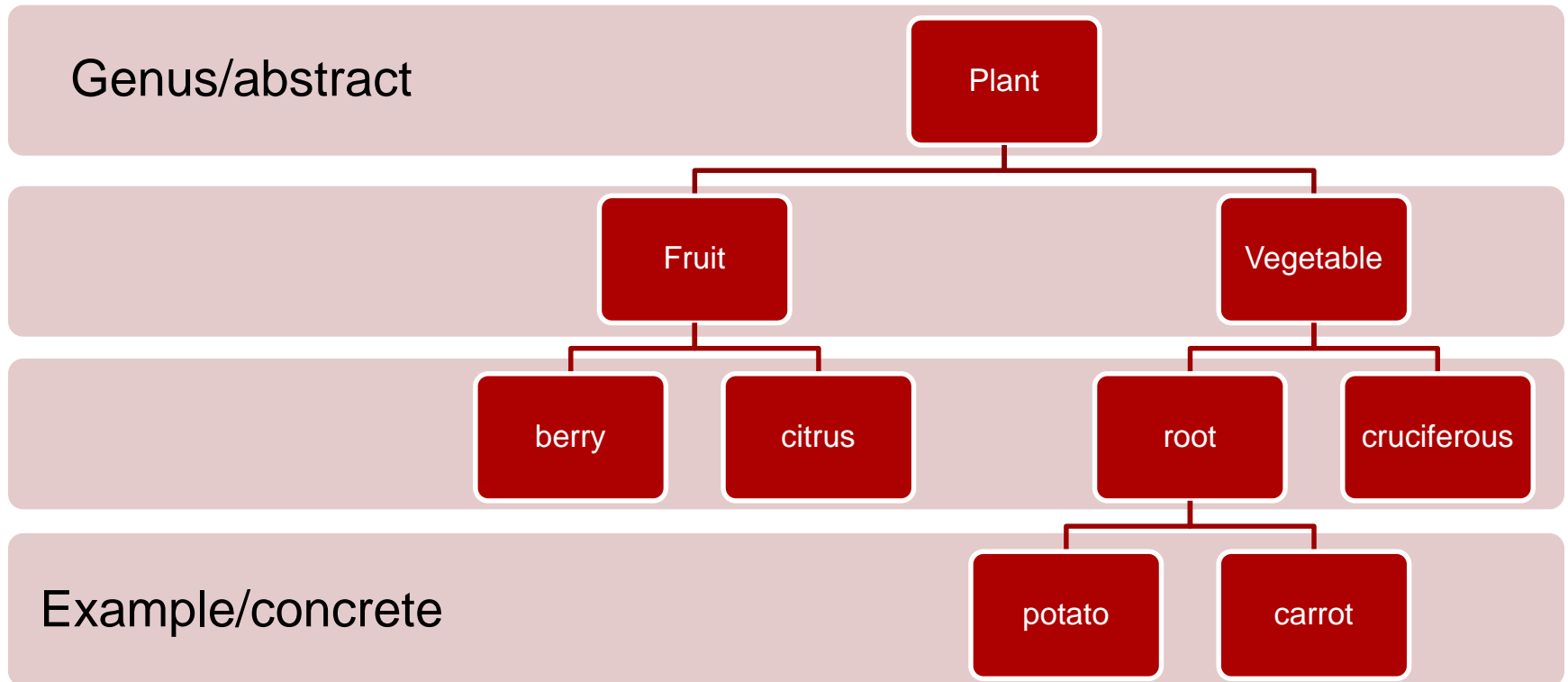
What is “marriage” and to whom can it apply?

How should we define “unemployment rate”?

Should we use the term “global warming” or “climate change”?

What is “entropy”?

The stasis of definition lets us navigate the ladder of abstraction and reason by analogy



And categorize, include and exclude, reason by example, and generalize

Categories: Class, kind, family, type, group cluster, camp, genre, genus

Inclusion: Is, counts as, meets the qualifications, can be considered, belongs in, typifies, is defined as

Exclusion: is not, is distinct from, unlike, differs from, is a separate case

Cases: Instance, case, member, item, candidate, representative

Typicality: classic, (un)common, (a)typical, central, (un)representative, borderline

Arguments of causation:

How do facts/events influence each other?

What effect did Hurricane Sandy have on the 2012 election?

What will be the consequences of increased sea surface temperatures?

Why are sea surface temperatures rising?

Elements of causation need to work together

Correlation (correlation implies but is not causation)

Sequence (post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy)

Agent and mechanism

Arguments of evaluation:

Why do these facts, concepts, and links matter?

How significant will the effects of climate change be?

Is the frequency of cyclones a good way to measure the effects of climate change?

Types of values claims

Comparisons

Ratings on a scale; hierarchies

Trade offs between values

Arguments of policy:

What should we do in response to the facts, concepts, consequences, and significance?

What should we do to limit the effects of climate change?

Should we switch to measuring and researching cyclone intensity rather than frequency?

Stases can be “open” or “closed”

Discourse and hedging phrases help us identify whether a text assumes the stasis is closed (we're all in agreement, or the question is settled), or open (we don't yet know, or the writer is trying to convince us)

Closed: demonstrates that, proves, is certain, obviously, etc.

Open: may, suggests, appears to, could indicate, etc.

“Lower” stases must be closed before agreement can be found in “higher” stases

e.g.— “Climate change is just a theory; there’s no scientific consensus” argues that the fact and causation stases are still open, and thus no policy debate can occur

Except . . .

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