

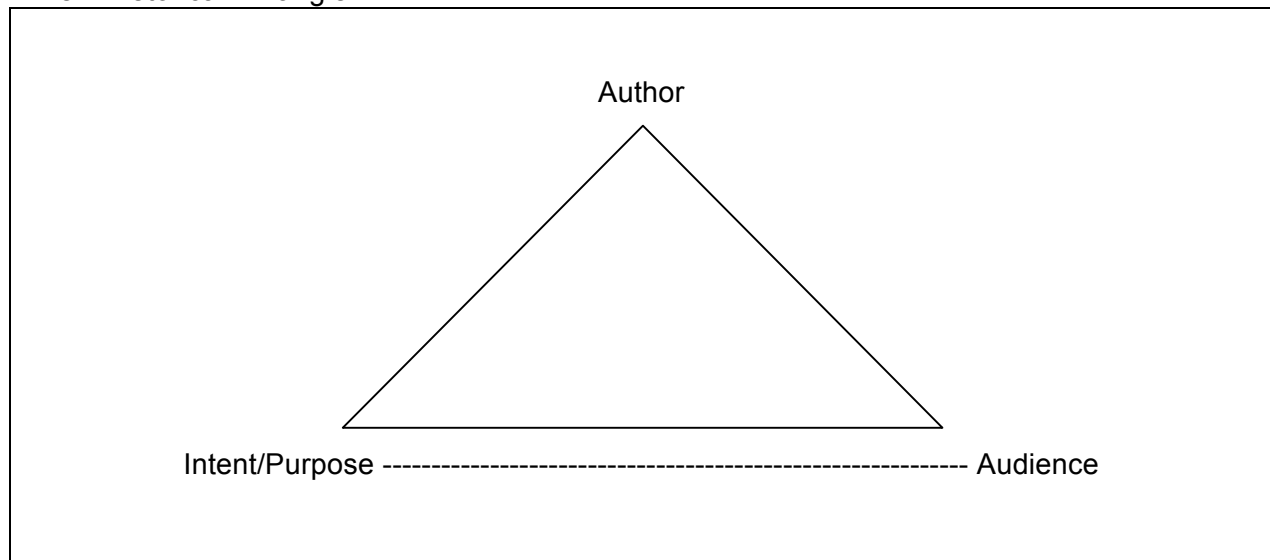
## CONTEXTUALIZATION (THE TRIANGULATION METHOD)

The concept of contextualization refers to understanding the intent/purpose, the author, and audience of a text. Moreover, it refers to understanding the context (or situation) involved in writing or reading a text.

### Triangulating Contexts

The relationship of the author, his/her intent or purpose, and the audience who receives the text form a bit of a triangle (not unlike like a scandalous love affair). We call this the “Rhetorical Triangle,” since most academics agree that understanding at least two of the three components of the relationship means understanding the relationship. In a sense, in one corner, you have the author. In another, you have the intent/purpose of the author. Then, you have the intended audience.

### The “Rhetorical” Triangle



In order to understand a text, you must understand its context. For example, a terrorist write a manifesto. If we understand his/her audience and purpose, these facets of the relationship might point back to an understanding of the author (even the identity of the author).

If terrorism is not your thing, try out this example: If the author is a major corporation and the audience is teenage girls, then the intent/purpose must be to sell products or services to teenage girls. Moreover, the “rhetorical triangle” helps us to understand the motives and agendas of the author, as well as his or her intent/purpose.

### Audience

Understanding an audience is one of the key components to writing a good essay or even understanding the overall purpose and even the author (when reading). Therefore, it is essential to write explicitly or directly with the audience in mind.

For example, when you write an essay in a classroom setting, you are essentially writing to that particular instructor. However, if the instructor tells you to write specifically to an audience, then

you must consider the needs, assumptions, beliefs, and values of that audience. You must adapt your writing to service the needs of that particular audience.

If writing for a six-year old male, you would probably choose to write more simply, using very basic wording. Also, you might consider his interests in choosing a topic, such as cars/trucks, army men, or dinosaurs.

If writing for a teenage female, you would probably choose to write a bit more complexly, considering using much more complex sentences and ideas. Consequentially, you might also consider writing about things which are interesting to teenage females. Think about what other texts catering to this age and gender write about... cosmetics, clothing, relationships, etc.

### Beyond Triangulation

Aside from author, audience, and purpose, there are other properties of a document, which a reader should consider: its medium, the space in which a message is shared, and the time in which the message is shared.

Genre- Consider the genre. Genre refers to the type of media the document belongs to. For example, is it an article from a magazine? A film? A college essay for a class?

Medium – Consider the material and physical limitations of the media. And, ask the question: What is the medium? What are the benefits of using a particular kind of media over another? Why does the author choose this media (for example, does it have to do with his or her familiarity with the media?)?

Space – Where is the message composed? The space where the composition was created may reveal many things about the document.

Time – When is the message composed? The time that the composition was created may reveal many things about the document as well.

## EXERCISE

Try to figure out the author, audience, and intent/purpose for the following passages. When you have finished, compare notes with a peer then with the instructor.

1) Equities plummeted today as the S&P 500 fell sharply landing at an all-time low. President Richard Samuelson of the CTI Fund commented on the situation, "We've seen some historic lows before, but we see this motion as an opportunity to encourage investors to develop their portfolios in terms of quantity."

2) Harry the Lion moved slowly to the woods. He saw the other lions did not move. He began to think that he made the wrong choice. So, Harry turned around and headed back to the pride. His mom and dad were very happy.

3) John is a 24-year old intern from San Diego, California. He likes Surfing, long walks, and eating Japanese food. He says that he likes when girls know how to cook and know how to dance, and he loves to sit by the ocean soaking up the sun. His worst date was a time when a former girlfriend's father chased him down the street after he caught his daughter kissing John.

4) Expect showers across the northern part of the state. Tomorrow, we should clear this low-pressure system and move towards some sunny weather. The Eastern part of the state will notice a slight rise in humidity as well, while the Southern part of the state will remain comfortably dry throughout the week.

5) Heidi remarked to Connor, "Why does she do this to you?" He nodded. "Why can't she leave you alone," she said in a soft voice. Quickly, he glanced around to see if anyone was coming, then he at his bag. "I have a way to deal with this," he said as he motioned to his bag. "What is it?" she asked. "Just the thing to enact some revenge..." he said.