
What do engineering students need to know about writing?

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Resources: Center for Writing



Writing Initiatives
University of Alberta



Centre for Writers

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1/22/2009 11:53:11 AM

Welcome to the Centre for Writers

We offer **free** one-on-one writing coaching and support to all students, instructors and staff at the University of Alberta - in any faculty or at any level of study.

Our writing coaches are available to assist clients with higher order concerns in their writing, such as thesis formation, organization and idea development, as well as more specific details, like grammar and documentation style. Clients can bring in any writing project at any stage of development: essays, lab reports, creative pieces, scholarly articles, thesis drafts, application letters - and more. Our coaches will also help students read instructor comments on already-graded papers. ESL and EAL students are welcome!

Request a class room visit by a tutor.



No matter how many technical skills you have, you still need to deal with people at a level they can understand, so communication skills are just as important as technical skills. —Paula Anthony, Tech support team leader

Genres

As you move through your career at U of A you will need to learn new genres

- Engineering genres:

 - Genres in course electives:
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Audiences

You will need to learn to write for distinctly different audiences:

- Co-workers in co-op placements
 - Engineering professors
 - Professors in elective courses
 - Job search documents
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Factors affecting success

- Flexibility of your writing processes
 - Ability to get feedback on drafts
 - Familiarity with the genre, complexity of the genre
 - Complexity of the task: description is less complex than analysis/synthesis
 - Number of audiences/readers, diversity within these groups
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Academic writing for engineering students

- Technical engineering documents
 - Email to peers, professors, staff
 - Job application materials
 - Essays for non-engineering courses
 - Lab reports for science courses
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What is technical writing?

- Writing that focuses on instrumental discourse (discourse that aims to do something)
 - E.g. computer manuals (print and help screens)
 - Assembly instructions for toys, appliances, games
 - Research articles
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Other examples

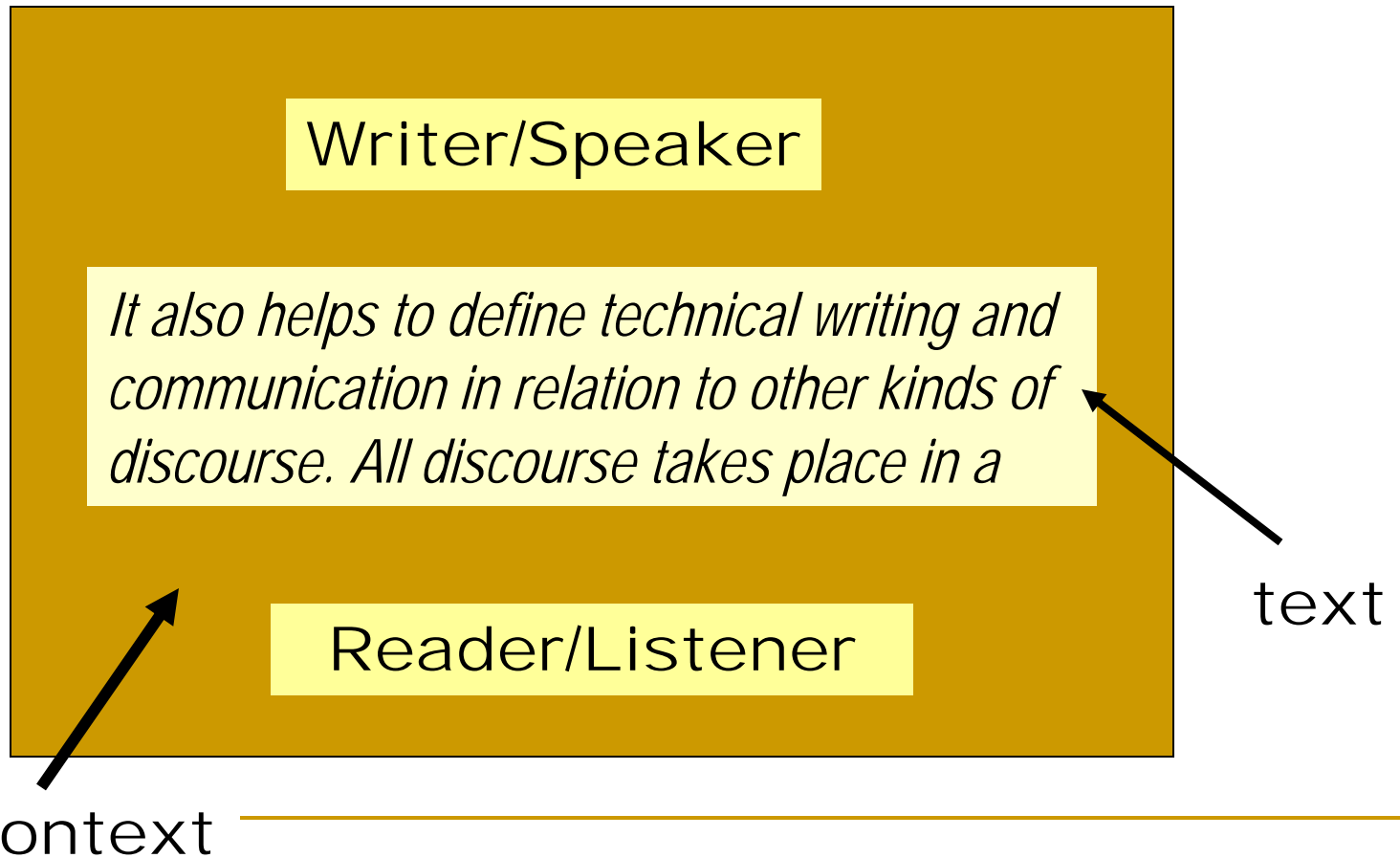
- ❑ Magazine articles that explain how to complete a process, such as making a dovetail joint or cooking a particular food dish
 - ❑ Instructions on how to enroll using Bear Tracks
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Purpose of all these documents:

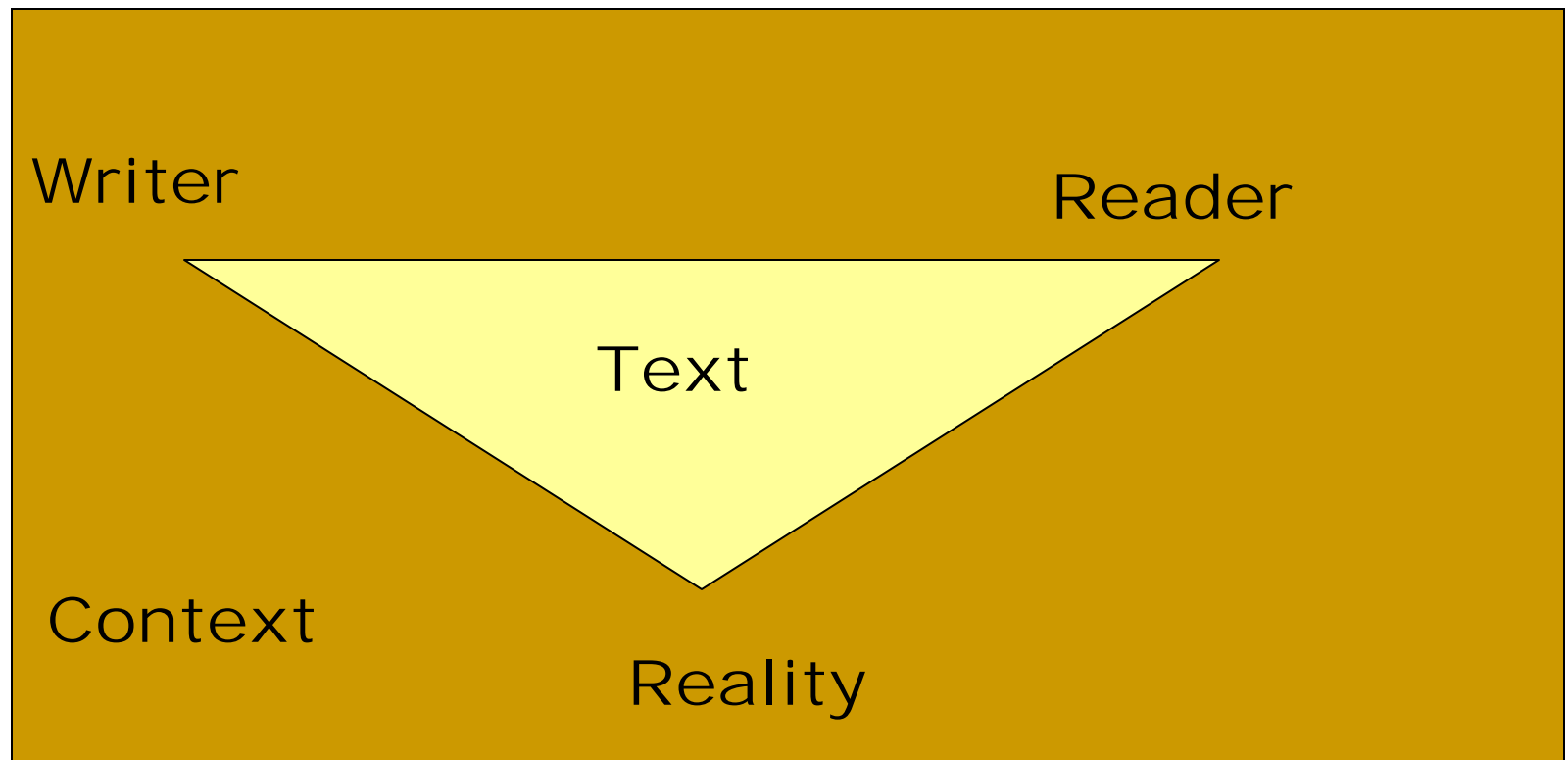
- To inform
- To be “instruments” or tools for people to use to get things done.

The documents you will write in this course all share this sense of purpose.

A model of communication



Communication Triangle



From James Kinneavy, *A Theory of Discourse*. (New York: Norton, 1971), 61.

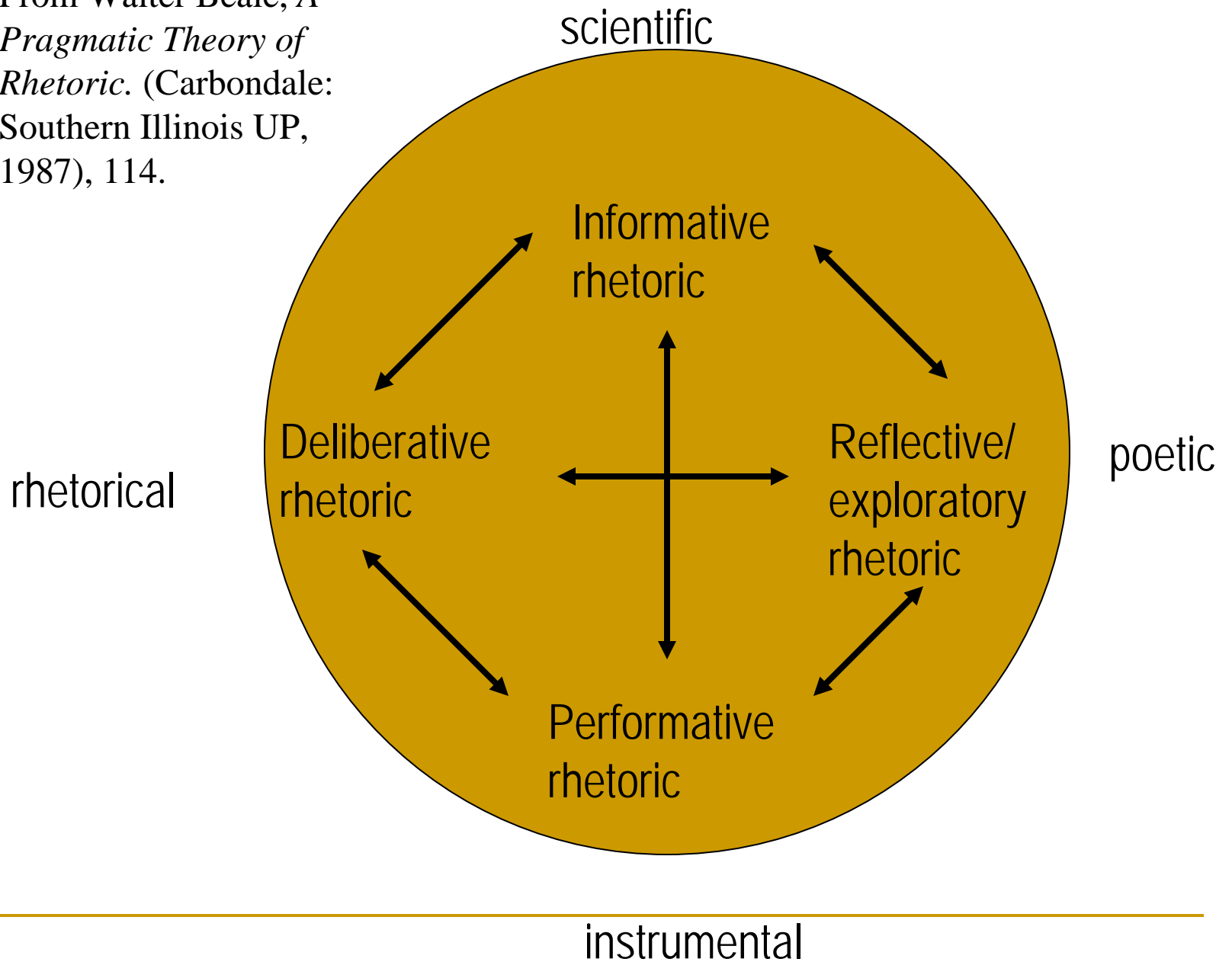
Different kinds of discourse

- Focus on writer/speaker: expressive
 - Journals, diaries, manifestoes
 - Focus on reader/listener: persuasive
 - Advertising, editorials in newspapers
 - Focus on reality: technical & scientific
 - Textbooks, reports, manuals
 - Focus on text: literary
 - Poetry, plays, fiction, non-fiction
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What's the problem with the communication triangle?

- Too easy to think of these four areas as separate, but they are not
- Rhetorical genres always overlap

From Walter Beale, *A Pragmatic Theory of Rhetoric*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987), 114.



The circular model

- Highlights the dual aims of discourse
 - A piece of writing can both persuade and inform (e.g. newspaper report on school lunches)
 - Any piece of writing has at least two aims
 - E.g Your resume
 - Informative and persuasive
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Audience and Purpose

- Understand your audience for a piece of writing
 - Understand your purpose for a piece of writing
 - The better you understand your audience and purpose, the better your document will accomplish your goals
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Looking ahead

- Use the C4W as a resource to get feedback before handing in final drafts
 - Work hard at developing broad writing skills to handle the challenges of writing at work and in academic settings
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