

# 3

## GUIDED READINGS: RHETORICAL SITUATIONS & GENRES TOGETHER

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# What Do Rhetorical Situations Have to Do with Genres?

Now that you have an understanding of what constitutes a rhetorical situation and a beginning concept of genres, it's time to examine how they work together. When composing, a writer is always working within a rhetorical situation. That means the writer considers the purpose of her piece, whom she wants to reach, how best to appeal to her reader, and what sources and evidence to use, along with other considerations mentioned in Chapter 1. The next step for the writer is to choose how to best respond to her rhetorical situation. Which genre or genres are the best social response to her situation?

## Genres Respond to Rhetorical Situations

If we examine a particular event, we can see that there are numerous ways someone might choose to respond. After the Orlando shooting in the Pulse nightclub on June 12, 2016, people chose to respond in a variety of ways. Former President Barack Obama responded by releasing a press statement that included, "Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and loved ones of the victims." Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tweeted, "We grieve with our friends in the US & stand in solidarity with the LGBTQ2 community after today's terror attack." Samantha Bee, a comedic television talk show host, used her show *Full Frontal* to issue her response:

After a massacre, the standard operating procedure is you stand on stage and deliver some well-meaning words about how we will get through this together, how love wins, how love conquers hate. That is great, that is beautiful, but you know what? F--- it.

Many people changed their profile pictures on Facebook to show solidarity. Perhaps you read or posted a blog about it. At the Tony Awards, which took place the evening after the shootings, *Hamilton* playwright Lin-Manuel Miranda chose to respond in a line in his acceptance speech: "And love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love cannot be killed or swept aside."

Consider different ways people might protest against something. They might make signs and march, give a speech, create a public service announcement, circulate a petition, or write a letter to the editor. The genre is chosen based on the rhetorical situation.

There are times, however, when genre is stipulated for you. In academic settings, you are often given an assignment and told to compose a research essay, write a poem, or create a lab report based on an experiment. In business settings, you might need to create a proposal, write a recommendation report, or prepare a presentation. We will discuss academic genres in more detail in Chapter 7.

## A Meme Responds to a Rhetorical Situation

An Internet meme is a concept that spreads quickly from person to person via the Internet through blogging, e-mail, or social media. Memes are easily replicated and altered; for example, when Elizabeth sees that a blogger has posted a photo of his ferret wearing a party hat and looking irritated, she can take that concept and post on her Instagram account a photo of her dog wearing a cowboy hat and looking irritated. Amy might then see Elizabeth's meme and post to her Facebook status a photo of her cat wearing a baseball cap and looking irritated.

The rhetorical situation that the original blogger and Elizabeth and Amy are all responding to is simple: They all have pets that they think are just adorable and find their pets' reactions to being anthropomorphized hilarious. They are participating in a long tradition of pet owners sharing the silliness of their own pets (purpose) with other pet owners (audience).

A related example is the *Hipster Llama* meme (see p. 30). *Hipster Llama* appears in many variations online. Like most memes, authorship is not identified. Rather, the meme can be revised, remixed, and shared repeatedly and anonymously online. To unpack this particular meme, let's first consider that a person or persons composed it (or revised an existing version of it). Like all composers, the meme creators worked within a **rhetorical situation**. Let's start by asking: What are the meme creators doing, and why? What are some decisions they have made as composers? Following is a preliminary reading:

- The composers are providing a commentary (**purpose**).
- They are communicating to like-minded readers on the Internet (**audience**).
- They are using humor and satire to connect with their audience (drawing on the **rhetorical appeal**, pathos).
- They are working with both text and imagery (**mode**) and delivering the composition digitally, online (**medium**).

Now, let's think about the composers' **choice of genre**. What are memes? How do they function? What are their typical qualities and conventions?

- Memes often parody or poke fun at something or someone. They take many forms but often feature an image and a brief caption written in informal language (**elements and style**).
- Often an image is prominent, and the words—typically what the subject of the meme is saying or thinking—are presented in a large display font (**design**).
- Memes draw on current topics and popular culture (**sources**).

Here we provide a partial reading of the *Hipster Llama* meme. Notice the structure of the annotations in the margins. This is a “guided reading,” a feature we discuss in detail in the next section.

## Guided Reading | Meme

Author Unknown, *Hipster Llama*

### RHETORICAL SITUATION & CHOICES

#### PURPOSE

The composer of *Hipster Llama* memes poke fun at hipsters, making fun of things hipsters say, their values, and specifically, their haircuts. This particular meme focuses on the stereotype that hipsters are more concerned with exploring their aesthetic sides than on focusing on paid work, and are perhaps more concerned with their personal style than what they produce.

#### AUDIENCE

Because hipsters are often self-referentially ironic, it's likely that hipsters themselves are an audience. People who make fun of hipsters are also clearly part of the audience.

#### RHETORICAL APPEALS

The humor in the meme is an appeal to pathos because laughter is considered an emotional response. The composer's knowledge of hipster hairstyles and attitudes is an appeal to ethos.

#### MODES & MEDIA

Modes = text and visual.

The meaning of the meme depends upon both the text and the visual working together.

Medium = digital.

Memes circulate on the Internet and so are digital.

### GENRE CONVENTIONS

The composer of *Hipster Llama* chose to create a meme. What are the conventions of a meme? To what extent is the composer adhering to them?

### ELEMENTS OF THE GENRE

**Humor:** Memes are designed to be humorous. The composer of the *Hipster Llama* memes use humor to poke fun at a particular group.

**Repetition:** This meme is part of a series. Viewers can instantly recognize the use of the llama and the fact that this is a part of a larger series.

**Social media:** Memes are distributed online. They can be sent by e-mail, posted on a blog, or shared on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

#### STYLE

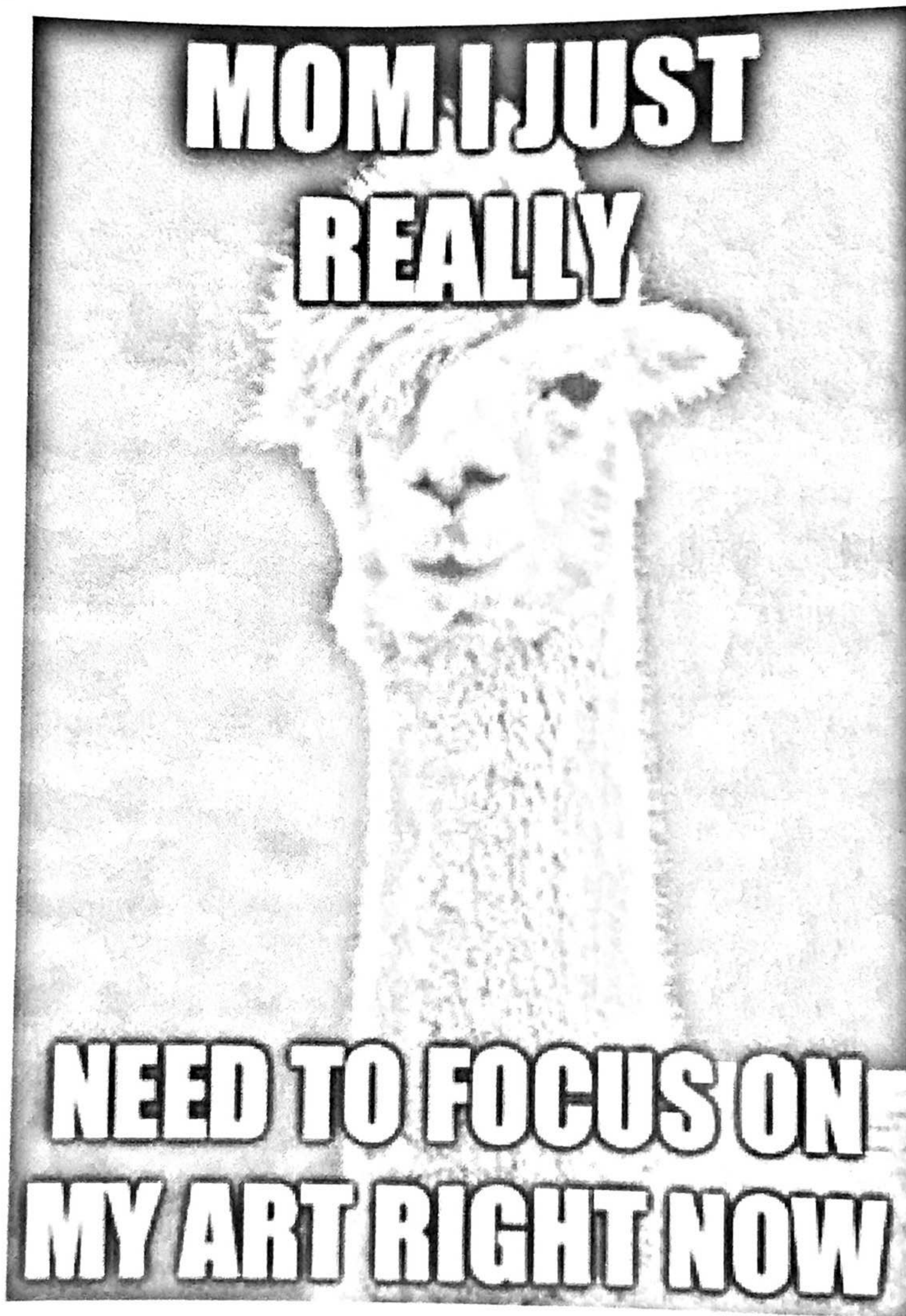
The text in this meme uses a *conversational tone*. Additionally, the text in a meme is fairly brief, as is the case here.

#### DESIGN

**Visual with text.** The llama is the center of focus, with the text complementing it. A meme usually begins with a funny photo and then attaches a caption that amplifies the humor. Here the visual shows the *Hipster Llama* accompanied by words he might say.

**Font:** The font is usually bold, sans serif, and not too flashy.

◀ What is the composer of *Hipster Llama* doing?



#### SOURCES

Memes usually draw on ideas in popular culture, respond to news events, or highlight a celebrity. Memes are often remixes of a visual and a quote that already exist. Here, the meme focuses on the concept of the hipster, a popular culture concept.

## GUIDED READINGS

# Visualizing Rhetorical Situations & Genres

## What Is a Guided Reading?

Guided readings throughout this book (such as the one provided on the previous page for *Hipster Llama*) highlight the moves that writers and composers make in different genres and modes, and they also point out common genre conventions. These readings are presented with critical annotations in the margins of the page or screen. The annotations focus on two main ideas:

1. The composer's **rhetorical situation and choices** (purpose, audience, rhetorical appeals, modes/media) and
2. The **typical conventions of the genre** the author chose to compose in (common elements, style, design, and sources).

We've designed the annotations to help you see how authors respond to their rhetorical situations. Seeing the choices and decisions that experienced authors made can help you learn how to think through and respond to the rhetorical situations you will find yourself in.

Guided readings appear in the table of contents at the beginning of the book and in the brief contents that open chapters, and they are also listed in the adjacent directory.

## Ways to Apply Guided Readings

As you read in different genres on your own, you might use the headings we've used for the guided readings to remind you of things to notice. We are big fans of annotating, as you might have noticed, and we hope you might try annotating the pieces you read the same way we've annotated the guided readings. We find that annotating a reading helps us articulate our thoughts and move them from being fuzzy, half-formed ideas to concrete observations and analysis.

When you are composing, find a guided reading in the genre you're using (or one close to it), and refresh your mind about the different choices you should consider. Consider your purpose, and as you compose, ask yourself if that purpose will be evident to your reader. Pay close attention to the genre conventions. These will help guide you and remind you of certain stylistic principles you need to consider.

## GUIDED READING GENRE DIRECTORY

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Artist's Statement	74, 98
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Presentation	79, 206
Poster	82
Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles	118
Researched Poster Presentation	139
Critical Analysis	145
Literacy Narrative	152
Digital Story	158
Cover Letter & Resume	174
Business Memo	186
Infographic	192
Proposal	197
News Article	220
Editorial	228
Wiki Entry	241
Photo Essay	247
Graphic Memoir	245
Fairy Tale	262

## Sample Grid | A Framework for Reading Any Text Rhetorically

When you are reading or composing, consider applying the framework of the guided reading to what you're analyzing or creating. The image below is the grid that we use for the guided readings in this text. It's a grid that you can use for approaching any text and for evaluating your own compositions.

### RHETORICAL SITUATION & CHOICES

#### PURPOSE

What is the composer trying to do? Inform? Persuade? Tell a story? Something else? Does he or she have multiple purposes? And how can you tell?

#### AUDIENCE

Who is the composer communicating to? Are there secondary audiences?

#### RHETORICAL APPEALS

How does the composer entice his or her audience(s)? To what extent does the composer establish his or her ethos? Is logos evident in the text? Does the author appeal to readers' emotions (pathos)?

#### MODES & MEDIA

What is the mode (visual, text, audio)? Why do you think the composer chose that mode? Or perhaps more than one mode is used; if so, why do you think the author made that choice? What is the medium (print or digital)? Why do you think the composer chose that medium?

### GENRE CONVENTIONS

What genre has the composer chosen to work in? To what extent is he or she adhering to that genre's conventions?

### ELEMENTS OF THE GENRE

What are some of the patterns you notice across several examples of this genre? Is there a typical organization pattern or approach? Do sentences or paragraphs seem to be notably short or long? Does one element always seem to appear, such as an anecdote, or an abstract, or notes in the margin?

### STYLE

Is it in the first or third person? Is the tone formal or informal? What is the level of vocabulary used?

### DESIGN

How is formatting used? Are images included? Is color used?

### SOURCES

What kind of source material is used (personal experience, Internet research, interviews, etc.)? How are sources referenced within the piece?

◀ What is the composer doing?

Place the text that you're reading or evaluating right here in the middle.

Next, read through the annotations in the margins to look more closely at the composer's rhetorical choices and how the composer works within his or her chosen genre.



## Guided Reading | Advertisement

Following is an excerpt from another guided reading (for the full guided reading and more on advertisements, see Chapter 9, "Public Genres," p. 232). The annotations in the margin to the left of the advertisement for Evian water analyze the rhetorical situation and the rhetorical choices the composers made. The annotations to the right of the ad analyze some typical conventions of advertisements, the genre the composers chose in response to their specific rhetorical situation.

**Left: rhetorical situation & choices.** In the analysis of the rhetorical situation and choices, the first thing you'll notice is a discussion of the ad creators' **purpose**. In this case, the composers' intention is to persuade the viewer to purchase Evian. Directly below that is a discussion of **audience**. You will see that the audience is not *everyone*. Instead, the audience is specific, such as "people looking for health benefits." After examining these aspects of the rhetorical situation, the guided reading then presents an analysis of the choices the creators made to **appeal to their audience**. For the Evian ad you will notice that **pathos** is the central appeal (see Chapter 9, p. 236). Noticing this will help you understand how an advertisement might be motivating you to take action. Finally, the annotations note the composers' choice of **modes and media**. The Evian ad offers an example of the power of a prominent visual with just a bit of text.

**Right: genre conventions.** In the guided reading for the Evian ad, we examine the ad's conventions. While we might not note all the **elements**, we do describe the key ones associated with an advertisement (such as it being an argument, having a headline, and having particular ad copy). The next topics are the **style and design** of the genre, and finally how **sources** are used (for full annotations, see Chapter 9, p. 236).

# Danone/Evian and Havas Worldwide, *Detox with Evian*

## RHETORICAL SITUATION & CHOICES

### PURPOSE

Havas Worldwide, the creators of this ad (hired by Danone/Evian), hope to persuade consumers to buy Evian water.

### AUDIENCE . . .

### RHETORICAL APPEALS . . .

### MODES & MEDIA . . .

(See p. 235 for the complete Guided Reading.)

## GENRE CONVENTIONS

◀ What are the composers of the ad, Havas Worldwide, doing?

How do I know this is an advertisement? ▶



## ELEMENTS OF THE GENRE

**Argument:** This ad presents an argument (which is visual and textual) for purchasing a product.

**Action:** The headline, "Detox with Evian," is brief, direct, and directive. The ad copy, "Return to purity with water from the French Alps that's been naturally filtered for over 15 years," suggests . . .

### DESIGN . . .

### SOURCES . . .