- Try to gather samples from more than one place in order to obtain the most diverse and accurate representation of the genre. Make sure there are not significant deviations, but remember that little can be learned from looking at only one publication or one author.
- Collect several samples, at least three for longer genres and five to ten for shorter genres. Several samples allow for more evidence of clear patterns. However, too many samples can be overwhelming to analyze.

■ Step 2: Describe the Rhetorical Situation of the Genre

- **Setting:** Where does the genre appear? How and when is it used? With what other genres does this genre interact? How?
- **Subject:** What topics, issues, ideas, and so forth does this genre address? When people use this genre, what is it they are interacting about?
- **Participants:** Who uses the genre?

  Writers: Who writes the texts in this genre? Are multiple writers possible? What roles do they perform? What characteristics must writers of this genre possess? Under what circumstances do writers write the genre (e.g., in teams, on a computer, in a rush)?

  Readers: Who reads the texts in this genre? Is there more than one type of reader for this genre? What roles do they perform? What characteristics must readers of this genre possess? Under what circumstances do readers read the genre (e.g., at their leisure, on the run, in waiting rooms)?

- **Purposes:** Why do writers write this genre, and why do readers read it? What purposes does the genre fulfill for the people who use it?

■ Step 3: Identify the Patterns of the Genre

What recurrent features do the samples of the genre share? For example:

- What **content** is typically included? What is excluded? How is the content treated? What sorts of examples are used? What counts as evidence (personal testimony, facts, etc.)?
- What **rhetorical appeals** are used? What appeals to logos, pathos, and ethos appear?
- How are the texts in the genre **structured**? What are their parts, and how are they organized?
- In what **format** are texts in this genre presented? What layout or appearance is common? How long is a typical text of this genre?
- What types of **sentences** do texts in the genre typically use? How long are they? Are they simple or complex, passive or active? Are the sentences varied? Do they share a certain style?

STEPS FOR GENRE ANALYSIS

Genre analysis is a method that can help you not only to understand the expectations and responses of the participants in a discourse community but also to identify specific genre conventions and determine their rhetorical effects. Such a method can provide you with the means to develop genre awareness in order to make effective writing choices.

The following steps, adapted from the textbook *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres*, by Amy Devitt, Mary Jo Reiff, and Anis Bawarshi, will guide you through the process of describing the situations of a genre, identifying its relevant patterns and conventions, and analyzing what these patterns can tell us about how the genre functions and how it reflects the values of the community of participants who use it.

■ Step 1: Collect Samples of the Genre

- Determine where you can find samples of your genre. Public genres, like ones in newspapers or on Web sites, are easy to locate online. Academic and business genres can usually be found in textbooks, through peers or mentors, or on the Internet. For genres that are very specific to a given situation, like medical forms or internal administrative communication, you may need to personally visit relevant locations to find samples.

- What **diction** (types of words) is most common? Is a type of jargon used? Is slang used? How would you describe the writer's voice?

■ Step 4: Analyze the Meaning of the Patterns

What do these rhetorical patterns reveal about the genre and its situation? Why are these patterns significant? What can you learn about the actions being performed through the genre by observing the patterns? What arguments can you make about the patterns? As you consider these questions, focus on the following:

- What do participants have to know, believe, or understand to appreciate the genre?
- Who is invited into the genre, and who is excluded?
- What roles for writers and readers does the genre encourage or discourage?
- What values, beliefs, goals, and assumptions are revealed through the genre's patterns?
- How is the subject of the genre treated? What content is considered most important? What content (topics or details) is ignored?
- What actions does the genre help make possible? What actions does the genre make difficult?
- What attitude toward readers is implied in the genre? What attitude toward the world is implied in it?

While not all of these questions may be applicable to your chosen genre, they are designed to help you gain insight into the most prominent patterns and most *relevant* features of the genre. Through these steps, you should be able to arrive at a clearer understanding of the typical features of a genre. Taking note of the deviations can be just as important as identifying the patterns, though. These deviations can indicate certain opportunities for creativity and give you an idea about the constraints and room for creativity within a genre.