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Chapter 3

## Composing Rhetorically

### What You Will Learn

- To define rhetoric
- To explain the rhetorical appeals of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*
- To identify the elements of the rhetorical triangle
- To take a rhetorical approach to composing
- To analyze the rhetorical appeals in verbal and visual texts

**H**ave you ever considered what a magical act *composition* is? If you're a painter, you take some oil or water colors, put them together on a canvas and, lo and behold, you have a work of art that people look at and say "I wonder what that means" or "Aha, I see exactly what that means." If you're a musician, you take some notes, some harmonies, some rhythms and put them together on a score or play them on an instrument, and, lo and behold, you have a song, a sonata, a symphony that people listen to and say, "I can really feel the emotion in that number." If you're a film maker preparing to post on YouTube, you take a plot and characters, set them in action in a scene with sound effects, and, lo and behold, you have a video that people can view and say, "Wow, what an exciting story you told."

Notice what all of these acts share: Each of them involves creating something that invites people to read, to analyze and comprehend (and sometimes challenge) not only some central idea or point but also the impact that the piece they've experienced has on them and the impact you have on them as well. As the creator, you pull together and arrange different parts to create an idea, an impression, an attitude. Each part you design invites the audience—the people who look at the painting, hear the music, experience the video—to examine (and you hope admire) the way you have combined the parts so effectively.

Each of the genres above—the painting, the song, the film—is a *composition*, a common word in English that comes from the combination of the Latin prefix *com-* meaning “together,” and *positio*, meaning “a putting.” It makes sense, doesn’t it?

*com* + *positio* = *composition* = *a putting together*

The chances are that if you’re reading this book, you’re taking a course that’s teaching you *composition*. You may be taking a course called Advanced Placement English Language and Composition. You may be taking a course that’s simply called “English” or “American Literature.” But whatever it’s called, the course is probably designed to teach you to do with *language* what painters do with color and form, what musicians do with tunes and harmonies and rhythms, what film makers do with dialog, video images, and sound effects. Your course teaches you to put *together* various “component parts” of language—patterns of organization, word choice, and sentence structure—to help you convey a compelling idea, produce an effect, achieve a purpose for your readers. You’re learning to compose in ways that help readers trust your knowledge and your sincerity.

## Rhetoric: A Good Thing for Composing

As the first two chapters made clear, when you read, you read inventively, capitalizing on how you, the reader, and the text and its author interact to make meaning. It makes sense, then, to understand that when you compose—in writing, in music, in art—you do so in the same way. In this chapter, we make clear that this way of writing—selecting and using the “component parts” of a text so that you accomplish a purpose and create meaning with a reader—is, in the very best sense of the word, *rhetorical*.

The word *rhetoric* has unfortunately been misused by critics sometimes, to suggest something empty, something that carries no authentic meaning, or even worse, something shady that obscures authentic meaning. It’s too bad that some folks misunderstand the meaning of rhetoric. It doesn’t mean empty words, dishonest communication, or overblown speechifying. Instead, rhetoric is an ancient and noble art that has been taught in schools for centuries, and it remains the most powerful tool for writers and readers as they interpret the world around them.

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle called rhetoric “the faculty of observing all the available means of persuasion in a given case.” The Roman educator Quintilian described rhetoric simply as “the art of speaking well.” (And we would add “writing well.”)

Our definition builds on these classical concepts to define rhetoric as *the way people produce texts to create meaning*. The way we make meaning depends on whether we speak or write, read or listen. It depends on who is listening to us as we speak, what our backgrounds are as we read, and where in time and space we’re located.

## The Appeals: *Logos*, *Ethos*, and *Pathos*

When readers interpret, they predict main points or central themes, they respond to the character and knowledge of the writer they read, and they are moved by language and examples that touch an emotional chord. Similarly, when writers or speakers communicate, they

- Create a main point, a central argument, that seems logical and reasonable—what some people call *appealing to logos*;
- Demonstrate knowledge as well as good character and good will—what some people call *appealing to ethos*;
- Understand and speak to the emotional and the personal—what some people call *appealing to pathos*.

Aristotle developed these three categories of response that writers and speakers use to make connections with audiences and move them to agreement or action. These appeals are useful to consider for readers who are reacting to them as they read and for writers who are attempting to convey ideas effectively, provide evidence for analysis or for arguments or for evaluating the claims of a variety of positions or of several texts.

These three appeals are usually all in operation in any text, but depending on the rhetorical situation—the aim of the writer, the genre, the needs of an audience—one might be privileged over another.

- **Logos:** The emphasis is in the use of *logos* is the reasoned and carefully constructed argument, with evidence that can be followed clearly and seems verifiable or rational. In much of the writing you do in school, for example, whether you’re writing to analyze or to argue or claim or to evaluate, you likely privilege *logos* in the way you invent ideas, arrange them, and prove them.
  - **Ethos:** The writer who appeals to an audience through *ethos* establishes credibility as the most telling or effective evidence for claims. If the writer can show superior knowledge, strength of character, understanding of situations, the audience might be convinced of the rightness of the position. Additionally, writers who use appeals to an audience’s sense of ethical behavior—fair play, honesty, neighborliness—highlight this appeal.
  - **Pathos:** The emotional appeal of *pathos* centers on the response from an audience and on a writer’s focus on emotional effects of the claims made and evidence offered. The reactions of anger, pity, fear, sorrow, and others are elicited by careful choices of organization and word choice. *Pathos* is the most powerful appeal since it so often moves audiences to action; it is the most misused for that reason as well.
- Writers who make use of the appeals consciously and appropriately are usually also readers who have been affected consciously by those appeals. Knowing how

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- ▶ Watch the Video on Appeals to Reason: Logos at Your Pearson MyLab
- ▶ Watch the Video on Appeals to Authority: Ethos at Your Pearson MyLab
- ▶ Watch the Video on Appeals to Emotions: Pathos at Your Pearson MyLab

to respond and how to manipulate appeals is an important part of learning how to compose rhetorically.

### The Writer's Rhetorical Triangle

Most important is the fact that the way we read and structure language is always *rhetorical*—always dependent on how speakers or writers, subjects, audiences, contexts and purposes interact to make communication work.

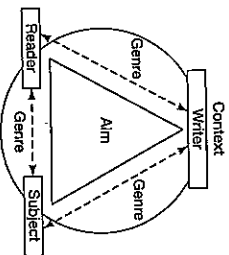


FIGURE 3.1 The Writer's Rhetorical Triangle

Figure 3.1 is a triangle showing rhetoric at work. The lines between speaker/writer—subject—audience illustrate the connections among those three elements. *Aim* (sometimes called “intention” or “purpose”) is at the center of the triangle because it informs how the three components of the triangle will interact. Surrounding the triangle is the circle of *context*; the conditions of the interaction. And the space between triangle and circle is filled by *genre*, the characteristic forms and formats that are part of the interaction.

You'll notice that this triangle is similar to the reader's rhetorical triangle we examined in Chapter 1, and of course this similarity is intentional (see page 6). Not only do readers use the rhetorical triangle to analyze and interpret what they read, but also the act of reading itself involves a combination of elements—texts and the writers who make them, readers, aims, and effects. You can see that reading and writing require similar acts of thinking, similar strategies of connection. Above all, both are rhetorical acts, and the more you understand and practice rhetoric the more skillful and confident reader and writer you will be.

#### ACTIVITY Using the Rhetorical Triangle to Analyze a Text

On July 13, 1865, Horace Greeley editor of the *New York Tribune*, writes an editorial encouraging Civil War veterans to take advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862 and apply for ownership of a 160-acre “stake” of undeveloped land, owned by the U.S. Government, west of the Mississippi River. The editorial contained the following sentences:

Washington is not a place to live in. The rents are high, the food is bad, the dust is disgusting and the morals are deplorable. Go West, young man, go West and grow up with the country.

With a classmate or in a group, refer to the Writer's Rhetorical Triangle diagram and discuss the following questions:

1. What is the context of Greeley's editorial and how does that context influence his aim?
2. Who is the primary audience for this editorial, and why might this audience be interested in the subject?
3. Judging just from this excerpt, what kind of personality do you think Greeley has?
4. What is the genre Greeley chooses to create, and why is it an appropriate one for the context and his aim?

### Using Rhetoric to Compose

You may never have thought about writing, or composition, in this dynamic, rhetorical way before. Maybe you've thought of composing more in terms of fulfilling assignments, answering questions, producing the required number of pages, and making sure your grammar and spelling were correct. There's nothing wrong with thinking of writing that way: When a writer chooses to focus solely on correct form and conventions, it is a rhetorical decision—a choice to help achieve a purpose or create meaning—like any other strategy a writer might employ. But this book invites you to consider more interesting possibilities for yourself as a writer—to think of yourself as making meaning when you compose, not just following a guide to complete an assignment. As a meaning maker you use your growing rhetorical awareness, and you come to understand that *how* you decide to say something is as important as *what* you say. As you read and write, thinking about what you want to say and why, you might pause to ask yourself questions like these, questions that go beyond simply meeting the demands of an assignment.

#### Rhetorical Questions for Writers

- What is my **intention** (or aim or purpose) in creating this composition? Is it to convince people to think in a new way about my topic? To behave in a different way? Is my purpose to inform someone about something I know and they don't? Is my purpose to explain something to them? Is my purpose actually some combination of these?
- Who is my **audience**? Am I writing solely to my teacher? Am I writing to a community of people who are interested in the same things I am? Am I writing to other students in my course? Do I need to imagine an audience who'd like to hear what I'm saying?
- What is my **main point**, my central argument? Have I stated it directly? If not, could my audience infer it?

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- **What kind of effect—emotional or psychological—do I want to have on my audience (*pathos*)?** How do my words or examples help achieve that effect?
- **What kind of person do I want my readers to perceive me to be (*ethos*)?** How do I want them, just from my writing, to characterize my personality? How do my words and ideas help to create this personality?
- **What tools of language will help me best communicate my argument, help me affect my audience's perceptions or opinions?** How can I create sentences, find words, craft images, and give examples that help persuade readers?

#### ACTIVITY

##### Analyzing a Brief Passage

An op-ed column by Kyle Janraud in the *International Herald-Tribune* titled “Those ‘More the Books’” begins with this passage: “That’s it, the world is truly coming to an end. Eirechypasadia Britannica is going online only, after 244 years of print publication. A sadness comes over me, as when I see a book, any paper book, tossed into the maw of the internet.”

Working first with this passage, discuss with a classmate Janraud’s aim, audience, and main point. In addition, discuss what kind of effect you think he wants to have on his audience and what kind of personality he hopes the audience will perceive him to have.

### A Writer’s Tools: Bringing the Appeals to Life

Good writers tap into the three related appeals—*logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*—plus they also convey tone, the writer’s attitude toward his or her subject, as they compose. They do so by selecting the best tools for the job. In other words, good writers make strategic choices about

- the organization or the arrangement of their texts,
- the words and phrases or the diction they employ,
- the shape and structure or the syntax of their sentences, and
- the images, allusions, metaphors or the figurative language they use.

Here is a basic list of the kinds of choices you as a good writer make as you flesh out your main idea, establish your credibility, influence your readers’ emotions, and convey your attitude toward the subject.

### Rhetorical Choices for Writers: Arrangement, Diction, Syntax, Voice, Persona

- **Arrangement:** the organization and structure of your composition—including, as we made clear in Chapter 2, its genre (an essay, a letter, an op-ed column,

a brochure, a web page, a blog); its beginning, middle, and end; the order you choose for your details and evidence; transitional words and phrases; the incorporation of headings and subheadings.

- **Diction:** your word choice—the complexity of your words, whether multisyllable and formal or single syllable and colloquial; your use of special terminology or everyday speech; your choice of emotional or nonemotional words.
- **Syntax:** your sentence structure—your use of long complex sentences or short simple ones; your use of active and passive verbs to change emphasis; your variation of sentence length and complexity.
- **Voice 1:** your tone—the attitude (serious, reverential, humorous, sarcastic, straightforward) you want to convey about your subject; matter; your variation of tone for effect.
- **Voice 2:** your stance—the degree of your forcefulness or directness in the way you address an audience; your distance from the audience as a persona.
- **Persona:** your personality, your character—the way you come across as a person, a human being, to your readers.

### Reading and Writing Rhetorically: An Example

Let’s pull together everything we’ve unpacked so far about reading and writing. Let’s related acts of rhetorical composing by examining a text, tracing a rhetorical reading of it, and then planning a written response to it, a composition that might be published in a section of the same magazine where the original text appeared.

The anthology of this book introduces you to a broad array of themes that have dominated American thought and literature since the seventeenth century. A great many of those issues are still deeply embedded in the fabric of life in the United States today. One of these continuing central questions involves American ingenuity, especially in the area of technology. Americans value inventiveness, and Americans have faith in the power of technology to solve problems. In their time, the cotton gin, the sewing machine, the grain reaper, the assembly line—all invented by Americans—and the train, not invented but certainly exploited by Americans, were seen not only as advances but as problem solvers. Yes, in many cases, problems persist despite technology and our belief in it. In some cases new technologies might worsen rather than alleviate problems. So we confront a question: How much can we or should we rely on technology, especially to solve ongoing issues and problems of justice and equality?

In his essay for the *New Yorker*, Malcolm Gladwell writes of the problems with new technologies, and he links technology to community, another important theme for American literature and culture.

## Malcolm Gladwell Small Change

### Why the revolution will not be tweeted

At four-thirty in the afternoon on Monday, February 1, 1960, four college students sat down at the lunch counter at the Woolworth's in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina. They were freshmen at North Carolina A&T, a black college a mile or so away.

"I'd like a cup of coffee, please," one of the four, Ezell Blair, said to the waitress.

"We don't serve Negroes here," she replied.

The Woolworth's lunch counter was a long L-shaped bar that could seat sixty-six people, with a standup snack bar at one end. The seats were for whites. The snack bar was for blacks. Another employee, a black woman who worked at the steam table, approached the students and tried to warn them away. "You're acting stupid, ignorant!" she said. They didn't move. Around five-thirty, the front doors to the store were locked. The four still didn't move. Finally, they left by a side door. Outside, a small crowd had gathered, including a photographer from the *Greensboro Record*. "I'll be back tomorrow with A&T College," one of the students said.

Now, let's stop at this opening, which functions as the setup for the argument Gladwell will make, as well as his method of drawing readers into that argument through the story he tells. As Chapter 4 will explain, this "drawing in" is called in rhetorical terms the *exordium*, the web a writer creates to prepare readers for what might come next and to stimulate their interest.

How does the reading of this small opening demonstrate how readers must be inventive with the text they're reading? First, as in writing, readers locate and make context. Gladwell tells us that the story takes place February 1, 1960, but his essay is written in 2010. We must write in our own context as we read the story. Maybe we're thinking about civil rights in 2010, perhaps how different the world seems now from that day. Maybe we're predicting that Gladwell is going to use that story somehow to make a point about 2010 issues since it doesn't seem to be simply a history given the essay's title.

As we read even these few lines, then, we are making meaning for ourselves, speculating about the reasons for the story. Gladwell's take on it, how it's going to be used, what it has to do with today, and, maybe most of all, what it has to do with Twitter. These questions, asked by us as readers, are the very ones we ask ourselves (mostly unconsciously) as we write. *Why should I use the quotes? How can I make the connection to my argument clear? Will people think what I'm saying is relevant to today? Will they get the reference to the title?*

There's more. You may know the story of the four North Carolina A&T students who walked from their university downtown to sit at the Woolworth's counter and changed history. You may have heard that the civil rights movement began that day, even if you also know that the movement had been active long before 1960. Maybe you live in North Carolina and know about A&T's homecoming weekends. Your background as a reader and your personal situation—where you live, the family stories you hear, how often you read the news—help you as you create, or write, the text you begin to read.

Gladwell continues:

By next morning, the protest had grown to twenty-seven men and four women, most from the same dormitory as the original four. The men were dressed in suits and ties. The students had brought their schoolwork, and studied as they sat at the counter. On Wednesday, students from Greensboro's "Negro" secondary school, Dudley High, joined in, and the number of protesters swelled to eighty. By Thursday, the protesters numbered three hundred, including three white women, from the Greensboro campus of the University of North Carolina. By Saturday, the sit-in had reached six hundred. People spilled out onto the street. White teen-agers waved Confederate flags. Someone threw a firecracker. At noon, the A&T football team arrived. "Here comes the wrecking crew" one of the white students shouted.

By the following Monday, sit-ins had spread to Winston-Salem, twenty-five miles away, and Durham, fifty miles away. The day after that, students at Fayetteville State Teachers College and at Johnson C. Smith College, in Charlotte, joined in, followed on Wednesday by students at St. Augustine's College and Shaw University, in Raleigh. On Thursday and Friday, the protest crossed state lines, surfacing in Hampton and Portsmouth, Virginia, in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and in Chattanooga, Tennessee. By the end of the month, there were sit-ins throughout the South, as far west as Texas. "I asked every student I met what the first day of the sit-downs had been like on his campus," the political theorist Michael Walzer wrote in *Dissent*. "The answer was always the same: 'It was like a fever. Everyone wanted to go.'" Some seventy thousand students eventually took part. Thousands were arrested and untold thousands more radicalized. . . .

Here is the end of the *exordium*.

. . . These events in the early sixties became a civil-rights war that engulfed the South for the rest of the decade—and it happened without e-mail, texting, Facebook, or Twitter.

Now you can tell that Gladwell uses the Greensboro sit-ins as the first of a series that follows, and that the series of events taken together leads to the success of the civil rights movement in this country. You know it was a success because you mentally incorporate those events into what you know about life now. There are no more segregated lunch counters, no legal refusals to serve anyone on the basis of ethnicity or race. Gladwell's discussion of these events and the way he ends, by listing what the events did not depend on, tell the reader something important: Gladwell believes the civil rights movement was important and successful. And he doesn't believe new technology helps movements like this one occur.

Read the rest of this essay to see how Gladwell makes this connection. You may find yourself arguing with him or qualifying his conclusions. Maybe you have other evidence to offer. Or maybe you agree: community depends on factors that technology doesn't increase in significant ways.

As you read consider how you respond. Are you nodding or shaking your head? Are you coming up with rejoinders or more examples that make his point? Do you resist his implication about generational difference or find yourself asserting if all these questions show how you're reading inventively—indeed, how you're writing—creating, interpreting, assigning value to—what you read.

The world, we are told, is in the midst of a revolution. The new tools of social media have reinvented social activism. With Facebook and Twitter and the like, the traditional relationship between political authority and popular will has been upended, making it easier for the powerless to collaborate, coordinate, and give voice to their concerns. When ten thousand protesters took to the streets in Moldova in the spring of 2009 to protest against their country's Communist government, the action was dubbed the Twitter Revolution, because of the means by which the demonstrators had been brought together. A few months after that, when student protests rocked Tehran, the State Department took the unusual step of asking Twitter to suspend scheduled maintenance of its Web site, because the Administration didn't want such a critical organizing tool out of service at the height of the demonstrations. "Without Twitter the people of Iran would not have felt empowered and confident to stand up for freedom and democracy," Mark Pfeiffer, a former national-security adviser, later wrote, calling for Twitter to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Where activists were once defined by their causes, they are now defined by their tools. Facebook warriors go online to push for change. "You are the best hope for us all," James K. Glassman, a former senior State Department official, told a crowd of cyber activists at a recent conference sponsored by Facebook, AT&T, Comcast, MTV, and Google. Sites like Facebook, Glassman said, "give the U.S. a significant competitive advantage over terrorists. Some time ago, I said that Al Qaeda was eating our lunch on the Internet. That is no longer the case. Al Qaeda is stuck in

These are strong, and puzzling, claims. Why does it matter who is eating whose lunch on the Internet? Are people who log on to their Facebook page really the best hope for us all? As for Moldova's so-called Twitter Revolution, Evgeny Morozov, a scholar at Stanford who has been the most persistent of digital evangelists's critics, points out that Twitter had scant internal significance in Moldova, a country where very few Twitter accounts exist. Nor does it seem to have been a revolution, not least because the protests—as Anne Applebaum suggested in the *Washington Post*—may well have been a bit of stagecraft cooked up by the government. (In a country paranoid about Romanian revanchism, the protesters flew a Romanian flag over the Parliament building.) In the Iranian case, meanwhile, the people tweeting about the demonstrations were almost all in the West. "It is time to get Twitter's role in the events in Iran right," Golnaz Esfandiari wrote, this past summer, in *Foreign Policy*. "Simply put: There was no Twitter Revolution inside Iran." The cadre of prominent bloggers, like Andrew Sullivan, who championed the role of social media in Iran, Esfandiari continued, misunderstood the situation. "Western journalists who couldn't reach—or didn't bother reaching—people on the ground in Iran simply scrolled through the English-language tweets posts with tag #Iranelection," she wrote. "Through it all, no one seemed to wonder why people trying to coordinate protests in Iran would be writing in any language other than Farsi."

Some of this grandiosity is to be expected. Innovators tend to be solipsists. They often want to cram every stray fact and experience into their new model. As the historian Robert Darnton has written, "The marvels of communication technology in the present have produced a false consciousness about the past—even a sense that communication has no history, or had nothing of importance to consider before the days of television and the Internet." But there is something else at work here, in the outsized enthusiasm for social media. Fifty years after one of the most extraordinary episodes of social upheaval in American history, we seem to have forgotten what activism is.

Greensboro in the early nineteen-sixties was the kind of place where racial insubordination was routinely met with violence. The four students who first sat down at the lunch counter were terrified. "I suppose if anyone had come up behind me and yelled 'Boo,' I think I would have fallen off my seat," one of them said later. On the first day, the store manager notified the police chief, who immediately sent two officers to the store. On the third day, a gang of white toughs showed up at the lunch counter and stood ostentatiously behind the protesters, ominously muttering epithets such as "bur-head nigger." A local Ku Klux Klan leader made an appearance. On Saturday, as tensions grew, someone called in a bomb threat, and the entire store had to be evacuated.

The dangers were even clearer in the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964, another of the sentinel campaigns of the civil-rights movement. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee recruited hundreds of Northern, largely white unpaid volunteers to run Freedom Schools, register black voters, and raise civil-rights awareness in the Deep South. “No one should go *anywhere* alone, but certainly not in an automobile and certainly not at night,” they were instructed. Within days of arriving in Mississippi, three volunteers—Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman—were kidnapped and killed, and, during the rest of the summer, thirty-seven black churches were set on fire and dozens of safe houses were bombed; volunteers were beaten, shot at, arrested, and trailed by pickup trucks full of armed men. A quarter of those in the program dropped out. Activism that challenges the status quo—that attacks deeply rooted problems—is not for the faint of heart.

What makes people capable of this kind of activism? The Stanford sociologist Doug McAdam compared the Freedom Summer dropouts with the participants who stayed, and discovered that the key difference wasn’t, as might be expected, ideological fervor: “All of the applicants—participants and withdrawals alike—emerge as highly committed, articulate supporters of the goals and values of the summer program,” he concluded. What mattered more was an applicant’s degree of personal connection to the civil-rights movement. All the volunteers were required to provide a list of personal contacts—the people they wanted kept apprised of their activities—and participants were far more likely than dropouts to have close friends who were also going to Mississippi. High-risk activism, McAdam concluded, is a “strong-tie” phenomenon.

This pattern shows up again and again. One study of the Red Brigades, the Italian terrorist group of the nineteen-seventies, found that seventy per cent of recruits had at least one good friend already in the organization. The same is true of the men who joined the mujahideen in Afghanistan. In revolutionary actions that look spontaneous, like the demonstrations in East Germany that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, are, at core, strong-tie phenomena. The opposition movement in East Germany consisted of several hundred groups, each with roughly a dozen members. Each group was in limited contact with the others: at the time, only thirteen per cent of East Germans even had a phone. All they knew was that, on Monday nights, outside St. Nicholas Church in downtown Leipzig, people gathered to voice their anger at the state. And the primary determinant of who showed up was “critical friends”—the more friends you had who were critical of the regime the more likely you were to join the protest.

So one crucial fact about the four freshmen at the Greensboro lunch counter—David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, and Joseph McNeil—was their relationship with one another. McNeil was a roommate of Blair’s in A&T’s Scott Hall dormitory. Richmond roomed with McCain one floor up, and Blair, Richmond, and McCain had all gone to Dudley High

School. The four would smuggle beer into the dorm and talk late into the night in Blair and McNeil’s room. They would all have remembered the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, the Montgomery bus boycott that same year, and the showdown in Little Rock in 1957. It was McNeil who brought up the idea of a sit-in at Woolworth’s. They’d discussed it for nearly a month. Then McNeil came into the dorm room and asked the others if they were ready. There was a pause, and McCain said, in a way that works only with people who talk late into the night with one another, “Are you guys chicken or not?” Ezell Blair worked up the courage the next day to ask for a cup of coffee because he was flanked by his roommate and two good friends from high school.

The kind of activism associated with social media isn’t like this at all. The platforms of social media are built around weak ties. Twitter is a way of following (or being followed by) people you may never have met. Facebook is a tool for efficiently managing your acquaintances, for keeping up with the people you would not otherwise be able to stay in touch with. That’s why you can have a thousand “friends” on Facebook, as you never could in real life.

This is in many ways a wonderful thing. There is strength in weak ties, as the sociologist Mark Granovetter has observed. Our acquaintances—not our friends—are our greatest source of new ideas and information. The Internet lets us exploit the power of these kinds of distant connections with marvelous efficiency. It’s terrific at the diffusion of innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, seamlessly matching up buyers and sellers, and the logistical functions of the dating world. But weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism.

In a new book called “The Dragonfly Effect: Quick, Effective, and Powerful Ways to Use Social Media to Drive Social Change,” the business consultant Andy Smith and the Stanford Business School professor Jennifer Aaker tell the story of Sameer Bhatia, a young Silicon Valley entrepreneur who came down with acute myelogenous leukemia. It’s a perfect illustration of social media’s strengths. Bhatia needed a bone-marrow transplant, but he could not find a match among his relatives and friends. The odds were best with a donor of his ethnicity, and there were few South Asians in the national bone-marrow database. So Bhatia’s business partner sent out an e-mail explaining Bhatia’s plight to more than four hundred of their acquaintances, who forwarded the e-mail to their personal contacts; Facebook pages and YouTube videos were devoted to the Help Saneer campaign. Eventually, nearly twenty-five thousand new people were registered in the bone-marrow database, and Bhatia found a match.

But how did the campaign get so many people to sign up? By not asking too much of them. That’s the only way you can get someone you don’t really know to do something on your behalf. You can get thousands of people to sign up for a donor registry, because doing so is pretty easy. You have to send in a cheek swab and—in the highly unlikely event that your bone marrow is a good match for someone in need—spend a few hours at the hospital. Donating bone marrow isn’t a trivial matter. But it doesn’t involve financial or personal

risk; it doesn't mean spending a summer being chased by armed men in pickup trucks. It doesn't require that you confront socially entrenched norms and practices. In fact, it's the kind of commitment that will bring only social acknowledgment and praise.

The evangelists of social media don't understand this distinction; they seem to believe that a Facebook friend is the same as a real friend and that signing up for a donor registry in Silicon Valley today is activism in the same sense as sitting at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro in 1960. "Social networks are particularly effective at increasing motivation," Aaker and Smith write. But that's not true. Social networks are effective at increasing participation—by lessening the level of motivation that participation requires. The Facebook page of the Save Darfur Coalition has 1,282,339 members, who have donated an average of nine cents apiece. The next biggest Darfur charity on Facebook has 22,073 members, who have donated an average of thirty-five cents. Help Save Darfur has 2,797 members, who have given, on average, fifteen cents. A spokesperson for the Save Darfur Coalition told *Newsweek*, "We wouldn't necessarily gauge someone's value to the advocacy movement based on what they've given. This is a powerful mechanism to engage this critical population. They inform their community, attend events, volunteer. It's not something you can measure by looking at a ledger." In other words, Facebook activism succeeds not by motivating people to make a real sacrifice but by motivating them to do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice. We are a long way from the lunch counters of Greensboro.

The students who joined the sit-ins across the South during the winter of 1960 described the movement as a "fever." But the civil-rights movement was more like a military campaign than like a contagion. In the late nineteenth-fifties, there had been sixteen sit-ins in various cities throughout the South, fifteen of which were formally organized by civil-rights organizations like the N.A.A.C.P. and CORE. Possible locations for activism were scouted. Plans would-be protesters. The Greensboro Four were a product of this groundwork: all were members of the N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council. They had close ties with the head of the local N.A.A.C.P. chapter. They had been briefed on the earlier wave of sit-ins in Durham, and had been part of a series of movement meetings in activist churches. When the sit-in movement spread from Greensboro throughout the South, it did not spread indiscriminately. It spread to those cities which had preexisting "movement centers"—a core of dedicated and trained activists ready to turn the "fever" into action.

The civil-rights movement was high-risk activism. It was also, crucially, strategic activism: a challenge to the establishment mounted with precision and discipline. The N.A.A.C.P. was a centralized organization, run from New York according to highly formalized operating procedures. At the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Martin Luther King Jr. was the

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unquestioned authority. At the center of the movement was the black church, which had, as Aldon D. Morris points out in his superb 1984 study, "The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement," a carefully demarcated division of labor, with various standing committees and disciplined groups. "Each group was task-oriented and coordinated its activities through authority structures," Morris writes. "Individuals were held accountable for their assigned duties, and important conflicts were resolved by the minister, who usually exercised ultimate authority over the congregation."

This is the second crucial distinction between traditional activism and its online variant: social media are not about this kind of hierarchical organization. Facebook and the like are tools for building networks, which are the opposite in structure and character, of hierarchies. Unlike hierarchies, with their rules and procedures, networks aren't controlled by a single central authority. Decisions are made through consensus, and the ties that bind people to the group are loose.

This structure makes networks enormously resilient and adaptable in low-risk situations. Wikipedia is a perfect example. It doesn't have an editor, sitting in New York, who directs and corrects each entry. The effort of putting together each entry is self-organized. If every entry in Wikipedia were to be erased tomorrow, the content would swiftly be restored, because that's what happens when a network of thousands spontaneously devote their time to a task.

There are many things, though, that networks don't do well. Car companies sensibly use a network to organize their hundreds of suppliers, but not to design their cars. No one believes that the articulation of a coherent design philosophy is best handled by a sprawling, leaderless organizational system. Because networks don't have a centralized leadership structure and clear lines of authority, they have real difficulty reaching consensus and setting goals. They can't think strategically; they are chronically prone to conflict and error. How do you make difficult choices about tactics or strategy or philosophical direction when everyone has an equal say?

The Palestine Liberation Organization originated as a network, and the international-relations scholars Mette Ellstrup-Sangiovanni and Calvert Jones argue in a recent essay in *International Security* that this is why it ran into such trouble as it grew: "Structural features typical of networks—the absence of central authority, the unchecked autonomy of rival groups, and the inability to arbitrate quarrels through formal mechanisms—made the P.L.O. excessively vulnerable to outside manipulation and internal strife."

In Germany in the nineteen-seventies, they go on, "the far more unified and successful left-wing terrorists tended to organize hierarchically, with professional management and clear divisions of labor. They were concentrated geographically in universities, where they could establish central leadership, trust, and camaraderie through regular, face-to-face meetings." They seldom betrayed their comrades in arms during police interrogations. Their

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counterparts on the right were organized as decentralized networks, and had no such discipline. These groups were regularly infiltrated, and members, once arrested, easily gave up their comrades. Similarly, Al Qaeda was most dangerous when it was a unified hierarchy. Now that it has dissipated into a network, it has proved far less effective.

The drawbacks of networks scarcely matter if the network isn't interested in systemic change—if it just wants to frighten or humiliate or make a splash—or if it doesn't need to think strategically. But if you're taking on a powerful and organized establishment you have to be a hierarchy. The Montgomery bus boycott required the participation of tens of thousands of people who depended on public transit to get to and from work each day. It lasted a year. In order to persuade those people to stay true to the cause, the boycott's organizers tasked each local black church with maintaining morale, and put together a free alternative private carpool service, with forty-eight dispatchers and forty-two pickup stations. Even the White Citizens Council, King later said, conceded that the carpool system moved with "military precision." By the time King came to Birmingham, for the dramatic showdown with Police Commissioner Eugene (Bull) Connor, he had a budget of a million dollars, and a hundred full-time staff members on the ground, divided into operational units. The operation itself was divided into steadily escalating phases, mapped out in advance. Support was maintained through consecutive mass meetings rotating from church to church around the city.

Boycotts and sit-ins and nonviolent confrontations—which were the weapons of choice for the civil-rights movement—are high-risk strategies. They leave little room for conflict and error. The moment even one protester deviates from the script and responds to provocation, the moral legitimacy of the entire protest is compromised. Enthusiasts for social media would no doubt have us believe that King's task in Birmingham would have been made infinitely easier had he been able to communicate with his followers through Facebook, and contented himself with tweets from a Birmingham jail. But networks are messy; think of the ceaseless pattern of correction and revision, amendment and debate, that characterizes Wikipedia. If Martin Luther King, Jr., had tried to do a walk-out in Montgomery, he would have been steamrollered by the white power structure. And of what use would a digital communication tool be in a town where ninety-eight per cent of the black community could be reached every Sunday morning at church? The things that King needed in Birmingham—discipline and strategy—were things that online social media cannot provide.

The bible of the social-media movement is Clay Shirky's "Here Comes Everybody." Shirky, who teaches at New York University, sets out to demonstrate the organizing power of the Internet, and he begins with the story of Evan, who worked on Wall Street, and his friend Ivanna, after she left her smart phone, an expensive Sidekick, on the back seat of a New York City taxicab. The

whereupon she and Evan discovered that the Sidekick was now in the hands of a teen-ager from Queens, who was using it to take photographs of herself and her friends.

When Evan e-mailed the teen-ager, Sasha, asking for the phone back, she replied that his "white ass" didn't deserve to have it back. Miffed, he set up a Web page with her picture and a description of what had happened. He forwarded the link to his friends, and they forwarded it to their friends. Someone found the Myspace page of Sasha's boyfriend, and a link to it found its way onto the site. Someone found her address online and took a video of her home while driving by; Evan posted the video on the site. The story was picked up by the news filter Digg. Evan was now up to ten e-mails a minute. He created a bulletin board for his readers to share their stories, but it crashed under the weight of responses. Evan and Ivanna went to the police, but the police filed the report under "lost," rather than "stolen," which essentially closed the case. "By this point millions of readers were watching," Shirky writes, "and dozens of mainstream news outlets had covered the story." Bowing to the pressure, the N.Y.P.D. reclassified the item as "stolen." Sasha was arrested, and Evan got his friend's Sidekick back.

Shirky's argument is that this is the kind of thing that could never have happened in the pre-Internet age—and he's right. Evan could never have tracked down Sasha. The story of the Sidekick would never have been publicized. An army of people could never have been assembled to wage this fight. The police wouldn't have bowed to the pressure of a lone person who had misplaced something as trivial as a cell phone. The story, to Shirky, illustrates "the ease and speed with which a group can be mobilized for the right kind of cause" in the Internet age.

Shirky considers this model of activism an upgrade. But it is simply a form of organizing which favors the weak—the connections that give us access to information over the strong—the connections that help us persevere in the face of danger. It shifts our energies from organizations that promote strategic and disciplined activity and toward those which promote resilience and adaptability. It makes it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact. The instruments of social media are well suited to making the existing social order more efficient. They are not a natural enemy of the status quo. If you are of the opinion that all the world needs is a little buffing around the edges, this should not trouble you. But if you think that there are still lunch counters out there that need integrating it ought to give you pause.

Shirky ends the story of the lost Sidekick by asking, portentously, "What happens next?"—no doubt imagining future waves of digital protesters. But he has already answered the question. What happens next is more of the same. A networked, weak-tie world is good at things like helping Wall Streeters get phones back from teen-age girls. *Viva la revolución.*

### Rhetorical Questions for Readers: Responding to Gladwell

The questions that follow help you make conscious what you do when you read rhetorically. A student has answered each question based on her reading of the Gladwell article. You may answer them differently; this is simply an example.

**What do you predict about the text's central argument as you begin to read? What do you think the author wants you to take away after reading the text?** Community is something that happens face to face, as people know and respect one another to stand together. Twitter and other social network sites don't provoke that kind of mutual responsibility.

**What specific material can you point to—literally, put your finger on in the text—that is evidence for your hypothesized central argument or main idea?**

The examples from the early civil rights movement are in the first three paragraphs. The Moldova example shows how technology was wrongly seen as responsible for the revolution there.

**If someone were to ask you how this evidence supports the article's central claim, what would you say?** The movement was successful, and it still produces resounding effects. Something else, not the easy availability of information afforded by networks like Twitter, must be responsible for this kind of social action for justice.

**What is the tone of the text? That is, what do you think is the author's attitude toward the subject matter he or she is writing about? How do you respond to it?**

Gladwell is definite, maybe even defiant, about his position, which runs counter to what some claim about the wonders of the new technology where instant communication is possible. If I'm a reader who likes Twitter, I might be skeptical.

**What specific evidence can you point to that supports your hypothesized tone?**

His use of phrases like "we are told," as he calls into question the importance of instant message in the revolution in Moldova, carries a message that suggests the media's belief in technology is suspicious. He asks questions that put the Internet in its place: "Why does it matter who is eating whose lunch on the Internet?"

**Does the author or speaker strike you as credible? Does he or she strike you as a person who is knowledgeable and who has his or her readers' best interests in mind?**

He may not be in line with popular culture or popular ideas, but his facts seem straight and his voice clear.

These kinds of questions illustrate the kind of reading you do that keeps you actively making meaning as you read and reflect, and asking them helps you "write" or interpret what you think of the claims, the voice, the intention, and the effect of the piece. These sorts of rhetorical questions can guide you as a writer when you begin to analyze or respond to this piece in an essay of your own.

Other questions might concern the arrangement and genre of the essay and how it works to further the aim, the choice of diction and sentence structure that helps define the character of the speaker and the attitude toward the subject, the kinds of evidence presented and the strength of that evidence, and the way the piece ends. All these ideas strengthen the making of meaning with texts you read and write.

### Writing Activities to Strengthen Reading

**Before we get to the activity that calls on you to respond rhetorically, as a writer, to Gladwell's essay, let's consider two practices that will promote your development as a rhetorically savvy reader and writer.**

#### Keeping a Journal

We introduced the reader's journal in Chapter 1 as a useful device for guiding your inventive reading. Let's return to it now, and tweak the label, calling it a "reader's/writer's journal." The journal, an ongoing record of how you're responding to a piece of reading, is also a powerful way to write your way into a text, and it can become the basis for more formal or researched essays on the text or its issues. It's just a bit more expansive than taking marginal notes because it gives a writer more space to comment (But marginal notes are good as well: they are the first and most important bits of interpretation a reader makes).

As you read, stop to comment where you are interested, perplexed or appreciative, or where you notice a particular rhetorical move, or where you see a pattern, or where you have a strong positive or negative reaction. Any of these moments can be the sites of your own interpretation developing, and any can help develop a piece of writing that might emerge from your reading. The Gladwell article occasioned marginal comments like these among some first-year college readers:

What was Woolworth's?  
I think I've seen a picture of this.  
Can't believe the waitress would say that!!!

A beginning comment in a reader's journal might stop at the end of the exordium:

So the writer is sort of falling us that we think it's not possible to connect without Facebook. Does he not trust networks or does he think the younger generation is lost?

When you reread these comments, you might see the beginning of an argument that would play off of Gladwell's position or a good analysis of how Gladwell communicates his contention about the need for what he calls "authentic" communication. The reader's journal is one way that readers can locate the ways in which they are affected by what they read and how writers manipulate texts to achieve effects.

### Writing Before You Read

One way to strengthen your ability to enter the world a text asks you to be a part of, whether it's a history or biography or textbook, is to write down ideas you have about the subject of the text or its time period or other elements before you read.

If you knew you were assigned the Gladwell article, for example, and you saw the title, a small beginning of your own would help you understand and be part of the argument Gladwell creates from the first. If you are on Facebook often, if you follow someone on Twitter or send many text messages during the day, you might begin by thinking through how these networks are useful to you. Do they help you know about other people? Do they make you feel part of a community? Writing like this builds your connections to the text and helps you find your own arguments and ideas as you're reading. Some of the "big questions" we include as the beginning inquiry in each of the units in the *Anthology* might be ones that you could speculate on in writing before you read any texts in the unit. Writing in this way, you'll find yourself participating in the texts you read much more confidently and with much more pleasure.

### ACTIVITY Responding to Gladwell

You've already read the article, so write a response to Gladwell, one that might go in the *Mail* column in the *New Yorker*. (To see examples from the *Mail* column go to the *New Yorker* Web site, click on "This Week's Issue" and then click on "The Mail.") How will you be persuasive? How will you provide your own claims, your own details to offer your own version of his argument, to agree with his position, to change his mind, or to take what he says in a new direction? Your letter shouldn't be too long—a page is all you'll be able to persuade the editors to publish—so you need to think how to get to your point efficiently and eloquently. As you plan this composition, make notes in response to the following questions and discuss your ideas with a classmate or in a group.

1. What is your primary aim, intention, or purpose?
2. Who is your audience?
3. What main point do you intend to make?

4. What kind of effect do you want your response to have on your audience?
5. What kind of person/personality do you want your audience to perceive that you are/have?
6. How do you think you will organize and arrange your response?
7. What kinds of effective word choices do you think you will make?
8. How do you want your sentences to look and sound?
9. What do you want your audience to perceive your tone to be?
10. What do you want your audience to perceive your stance to be?

### CHAPTER ACTIVITY

#### Analyzing the Appeals in Visual Texts

Images often carry great emotional appeal. They have their own logic as well, and their creators often have their own ethical personae and call up the audience's own ethics. In this book, you'll examine a fair number of visual texts—and perhaps be invited to produce some of your own.

As a way to begin considering how the visual text appeals to its viewers, examine the visuals below and on the next page (Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

These are images that reflect the Greensboro, North Carolina, civil rights sit-in protest on February 1, 1960. Figure 3.2 is a photograph taken that day of the four students who asked to be served at Woolworth's; Figure 3.3 is a statue commemorating the act that stands now on the campus of North Carolina A&T University.

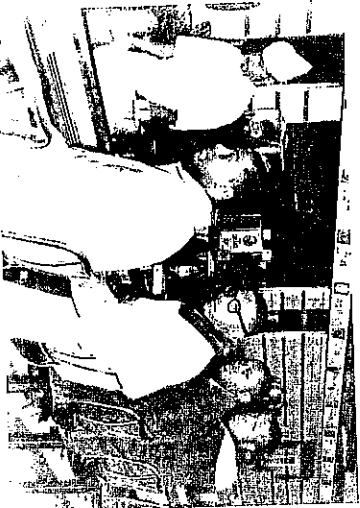


FIGURE 3.2