

the  
**Bedford**  
**Book** of  
**Genres** ◐  
a guide & reader

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## UNDERSTANDING GENRES

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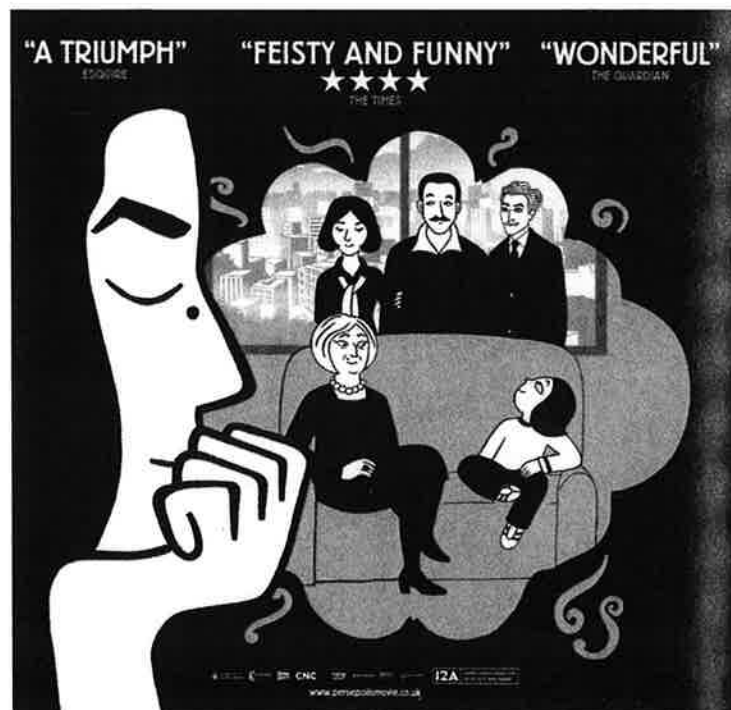
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What is a *genre*, anyway? A *genre* is a composition's kind, category, or sort. Genres give us a way to categorize or describe types of compositions. For example, a song is a musical composition—but individual songs fall into specific genre categories, including punk, rap, R&B, soul, indie, and death metal.

Why bother thinking about genres? Because they represent possibilities. We wrote this book to acknowledge that in college and beyond there are way more genres available to us besides the five-paragraph essay or the traditional term paper. As respectable and time-honored as those genres are, there are a whole lot of other options out there. We wrote this book to help you understand and create in a variety of genres—and we invite you to produce works that matter to you and enjoy doing so. As an added bonus, paying attention to genre will make you a better writer and artist. Why? Because you'll be focused on the needs of your audiences and your own purposes as a composer. ▶

What do you need to know about genres? First, genres change according to the ways people use them. Before digital composing, writers who wanted to record their thoughts wrote with a pen in a journal or diary, in a physical notebook. Then blogs were created.

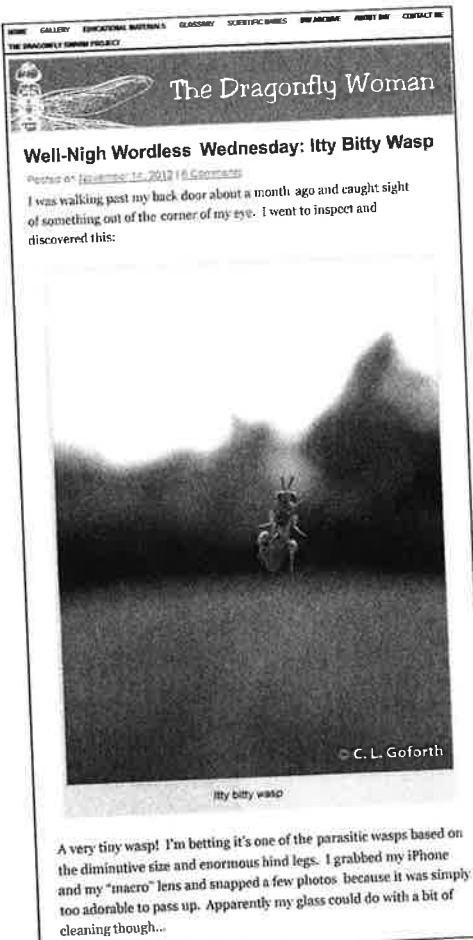
Second, genres are flexible: They overlap and don't fall neatly into the categories and primary purposes we've outlined in this book. For example, we present graphic memoirs in Chapter 2, "Narrative Genres," but this genre could also work in Chapter 4, "Persuasive Genres." That's because while memoirists tell the stories of their own lives, they also persuade readers to empathize with them and to see the world in a certain way. Remember that as a writer, you define your use of a genre based on your purposes and audiences, and you can do more than one thing at a time. Your ad can do more than persuade; your literacy narrative can do more than tell a story.

What do you already know about genres? Think for a minute about the different genres you compose in each day. As a student, you write research papers and presentations; these are two examples of academic genres. In each case, you know what is expected of you as a writer, because you understand certain features of the genre. You know that to write a research

What kinds of composing have you done so far as a student? What are some of the features that define the works you've composed?

▼ BLOG

*The Dragonfly Woman*  
Blog, Christine L. Goforth.



HOME GALLERY EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS CLASSROOM SCRIBBLES BLOG ARCHIVE ABOUT ME CONTACT ME


THE DRAGONFLY WOMAN PROJECT

## The Dragonfly Woman

### Well-Nigh Wordless Wednesday: Itty Bitty Wasp

Posted on [November 14, 2012](#) in [Education](#)

I was walking past my back door about a month ago and caught sight of something out of the corner of my eye. I went to inspect and discovered this:



© C. L. Goforth

itty bitty wasp

A very tiny wasp! I'm betting it's one of the parasitic wasps based on the diminutive size and enormous hind legs. I grabbed my iPhone and my "macro" lens and snapped a few photos because it was simply too adorable to pass up. Apparently my glass could do with a bit of cleaning though...

**e** For an Index of Sources & Contexts for material referenced in this chapter, see the e-Pages at [bedfordstmartins.com/bookofgenres](http://bedfordstmartins.com/bookofgenres).

What do you already know about advertising? What qualities make an ad successful?

paper, you must gather and interpret a variety of reliable sources and cite them in a specific way.

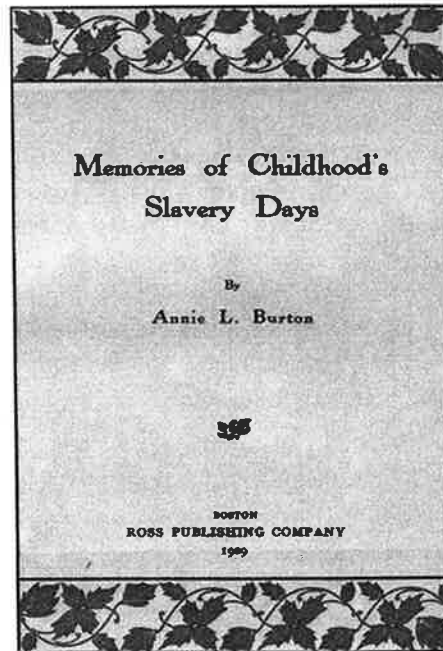
In other situations, you choose your own genre to compose in, depending on what you want to say, who you want to say it to, and how you want to say it. Your choice of genre also depends on your own skills and interests, as well as the materials available to you. For example, your band is playing next week and you need to advertise the event. Your purpose is to persuade your potential audience to come to your show. You might choose to present your ad as a poster. Depending on your supplies and desired effect, you could create a handmade poster to tape up at school or design one on your computer to post on Facebook. Alternatively, you might choose to advertise by creating and posting a short music video.

One of the best ways to become a better writer/composer is to read like one—to pay attention to what other writers/composers do, how and why they work in a particular genre, and how they make that genre work for them.

Let's look at an example from history. Annie L. Burton (ca. 1858–unknown) was born a slave and as an adult decided

PHOTO ▶

**Annie L. Burton**  
author of the memoir *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* (1909).  
Images courtesy of Documenting the American South, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries.



to write about her experiences; her 1909 memoir is titled *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days*. Why did she choose to write a memoir instead of poetry or editorials or technical manuals? Most likely, Burton chose the memoir because it was a popular genre in her day that allowed her to tell the story she wanted to tell, suited her interests and skills, and reached the audience she wanted to reach. Maybe if she had been trained in music, she would have written operas, or if she had been born a little later, she would have told her story as a documentary film.

Our clothes were little homespun cotton slips, with short sleeves. I never knew what shoes were until I got big enough to earn them myself. If a slave man and woman wished to marry, a party would be arranged some Saturday night among the slaves. The marriage ceremony consisted of the pair jumping over a stick. If no children were born within a year or so, the wife was sold. At New Year's, if there was any debt or mortgage on the plantation, the extra slaves were taken to Clayton and sold at the court house. In this way families were separated.

—Annie L. Burton

What we do know is that Burton wrote a memoir (a genre), specifically one that detailed her life as a slave. In her memoir, Burton wrote in the first person, portrayed real people, described settings, conveyed conflict, and told stories from her own life. These elements are features of the memoir genre and of any autobiography. Burton's purpose as a memoirist would have been to inform readers about what life as a slave—and later as a free person—was like; another purpose might have been to connect with women readers about what it was like to be a woman and a slave; yet another might have been to engage the imagination of readers. Her audience would have been literate former slaves and white readers, most likely in the North because her book was published in Boston. Her current readers might include students, scholars, and historians who want to read a firsthand account of slave life.

Do you read memoirs? What other observations can you make about the memoir as a genre?

## The Rhetorical Situation

What is *rhetoric*? *Rhetoric* refers to the ability to communicate effectively and with a purpose. So what is a *rhetorical situation*? It's the context in which you create a composition. To put it simply, as a writer, you have a specific purpose and an audi-

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For examples of **literacy narratives** and **memoirs**, see the Index of Genres on page G-1.

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ence. You need to know what you want to say; you also need to know your readers' expectations and accommodate them in some way. For example, when you write a review of a restaurant on *yelp.com*, you know that Yelp readers want to know your opinion of the meal; they also expect specific details about the individual dishes, service, and ambience you experienced.

### **Purpose:** Why are you composing?

Every time you write—or compose anything, in any genre—you do so for a reason. In this book, we've identified three main purposes for composing:

- » To present a narrative / to tell a story (Chapter 2)
- » To inform (Chapter 3)
- » To persuade (Chapter 4)

There are many reasons to write and sometimes these reasons overlap. As writers, we often have several purposes for creating a single text. Let's look at a possible example. Let's assume that you love farmers' markets and want to establish one in your town.

**Your purpose** You want to start up a weekly local farmers' market. To make this happen, you need to (1) present your idea to others and (2) persuade them that it's worth acting upon. You expect that some people will object.

**Your rhetorical situation** In this context, you have more than one purpose. In order to persuade others, you need to explain your idea, say what's great about it, provide supporting statistics, and tell a persuasive story about how a similar plan succeeded in a neighboring town. You also have more than one audience. Some people will agree with you 100 per-

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### **CHECKLIST** Composing with a Purpose

As you begin to compose, ask yourself:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Why am I writing? What do I want to communicate? And to whom?                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> If I'm telling a story, why is it significant, and how will I make it compelling?             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What do I want my audience to believe or do after reading my composition?                           | <input type="checkbox"/> If I'm sharing information, why is it important, and how will I communicate its authority?    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is what I'm communicating objectionable or controversial to anyone? If so, how will I address this? | <input type="checkbox"/> If I'm trying to persuade others, what are the best ways to do so, for my particular readers? |

cent; others won't be so sure; still others, maybe grocery store owners or city planners, will reject your idea altogether.

**Your plan and genre choice** After considering your purpose and audience, you decide to write an editorial on your local newspaper's blog. You also plan to present your idea in person at the next town meeting.

As you begin writing your editorial, you may shift your purpose slightly—away from simply proposing and arguing for your plan—and toward focusing on the success of neighboring towns' farmers' markets and how they benefited local grocery stores. This will boost your persuasiveness with your resistant grocery store owners.

However, you may decide that rather than an editorial or a presentation, some other genre might better serve your purpose. For example, you may find that the best way to establish a farmers' market is to take a more personal approach by writing a letter to the mayor. You might also survey local citizens to see whether they'd like the opportunity to buy produce from local farmers. The point here is to see how your purpose affects your choice of genre, and how you can work in your genre to impact your audience.

### **Audience:** Who are you composing for?

Every time you compose, you do so for an audience. Audiences are made up of people—and people can be easily bored, pressed for time, or generally disinterested. You need to grab their attention and keep it.

Let's look at an example: Imagine you are traveling across the country and want to tell stories of your adventures (your purpose) to your friends, family, and even strangers interested in travel (your audience). You decide that the best way to reach your audience is to create a blog where you can write about your experiences, show maps and photos, and connect to other social media sites. That is what the world-traveling blogger who calls himself Giladhiz decided to do (see p. 10).

Giladhiz clearly understands his audience and wants them to stick with him. To this end, he:

- » Provides a photo of himself and an "About the Author" section so that readers can make a personal connection with him.

What genres have you written in today? Why? And who were your audiences?

### **CHECKLIST** Composing for an Audience

As you begin to compose, ask yourself:

- Who is my audience in terms of demographics? Are they mostly male or mostly female? What is their age range? Where do they live? What do they like? Do they have particular religious beliefs? Are they from a particular social class? Are they of a particular race or ethnic background?
- What is my audience's stake in the issue I'm presenting? Do they care? Why or why not?
- What does my audience value? Will my message be in line with—or contradictory to—their values? How can I present my message so that my audience will consider it? And perhaps even be persuaded by it?
- What level of education does my audience have? What kind of language will best reach them?

INFORMATIVE ▶  
TRAVEL BLOG  
**Blogger Giladhiz,**  
from *Gilad Is Doing*  
*South America, Gilad H.*

When you write, do you think of who will read your writing? When you compose a song, a video, or even a status update, do you think of who will experience what you've created?

- » Addresses his readers directly: "So, dear friends and accidental surfers, allow me to begin with the reasons that brought me to plan and go on that trip."
- » Writes in a casual, readable, and humorous style, meant to hook his readers and keep them interested in his ongoing adventures.

## Prologue - The beginning

[Giladhiz's Profile](#) • [About this Blog](#) • [Entry from Nazara](#)

**Trip Start**  
Oct 11, 2010

**Trip End**  
Jun 15, 2011

**My Home**  
Monday, October 11, 2010


Like 1 One person likes this. Be the first of your friends.

**Prologue - The beginning.**

This really isn't an interesting part of my journey... This part is meant for those of you who wish to know me a little bit better, for some friends who hasn't been in close touch with me lately and for others who just happen to have too much free time and nothing better to do at the moment.

*Mellow excitement*

If you were about to embark on a 7 months journey around South America, rafting through rapid rivers, exploring the jungle, diving with sharks, climbing icy mountains, dancing (or watching other people dance) at the famous Brazilian carnival and partying wildly at night – how would that make you feel? I assume "mellow" would not be one of the ways to describe your feelings. And yet, I'm pretty convinced that this is how I feel at the moment.



But I jump ahead... first of all – thank you all for navigating your browsers to my Blog. If you've read all the way down to this line – I assume you're the "reader" kind of person rather than the "browser" type who's looking for anchor words or just looking at the pretty pictures... so from now on I'll consider my writing as a kind of a monologue, knowing that there's someone out there who actually listens to me babble.

So, dear friends and accidental surfers, allow me to begin with the reasons that brought me to plan and go on that trip.


**Reason #1**  
*Coincidence*

I still have no idea how it happened. One day I was in a middle of a long term relationship (3 year), living in a rented apartment in Beirut, working at a place I'd rather not mention – while studying for my MEA degree.

The next day I found myself alone, mourning the loss of a dead-end relationship (which ended like a train crash – unexpected derailling and crashing into the mountain side instead of going through a dark tunnel). And on the next day – I graduated my MBA, giving me even more free time for myself, alone. Lo and behold – at the very next day I decided to dump my promising career and quit, surprising many of my colleagues who were convinced I would reach a high position in my organization, as I was a highly valued (and well rewarded) employee.


Hmm...

**About the Author**  
Giladhiz




- Send a message
- Add as favorite
- Get email updates
- Turn blog into a book
- Share
- RSS

**About this Blog**  
Gilad is doing South America



Start your own travel blog



Where I stayed  
Home  
marche hotels



- » Structures his post with subheadings to guide readers, and provides options for navigating content and for e-mailing or connecting by social media.

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For examples of **blogs** and **blog posts**, see the Index of Genres on page G-1.

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## Rhetorical Appeals: Ethos, pathos, and logos

Whether your purpose is to tell a story, report information, or persuade, you need to get your audience on board. Even when persuasion is not your primary goal, it is always part of what you're doing, no matter what. We persuade our audiences by using what are called rhetorical appeals. There are three types of these, and they are often used in combination:

- » *Ethos* is the credibility, authority, and trustworthiness the writer/composer conveys to the audience.
- » *Pathos* is an appeal to an audience's emotions or values.
- » *Logos* is the logic and connection of facts and evidence to the point being made.

As a writer/composer, you get to decide which appeals to use, depending on your audience, purposes, and choice of genre. For example:

- » You're creating a memoir or an encyclopedia entry; you need to get readers to see you as an expert and accept your information as credible. In this case, you rely on *ethos*.
- » You're creating an ad to persuade your audience to buy a product (especially something without tangible benefits, such as potato chips or a vacation package). In this case, you might appeal to their emotions and desires, relying on *pathos*.
- » You're writing an editorial or an argumentative essay; you need to get your readers to agree with your conclusions. In this case, you might take them logically through the different elements of the arguments you're analyzing, relying on *logos*.

## Modes & Media

What is a *mode*? What does it have to do with *media*? *Mode* is how a composition is experienced by readers/viewers/listeners.

For the purposes of this book, we work with three modes: writer or text-based, visual, and audio.

Media is the delivery mechanism of the composition, including the following:

- » Print
- » Digital
- » Face-to-face

A particular mode can be delivered in multiple media; for example, an audio essay could be recorded either on an old-fashioned tape recorder or digitally. We've broken out the modes and media of some of the genres in this chapter.

For examples of **graphic works**, see the Index of Genres on page G-1.

<b>NARRATIVE GENRES</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Medium</b>
<b>MEMOIR</b> Marjane Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i> (p. 4)	<b>WRITTEN AND VISUAL</b>	<b>PRINT AND FILM</b>
<b>MEMOIR</b> Annie L. Burton, <i>Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days</i> (p. 6)	<b>WRITTEN</b>	<b>PRINT</b>
<b>TRAVEL BLOG</b> Giladhiz, <i>Gilad Is Doing South America</i> (p. 10)	<b>WRITTEN AND VISUAL</b>	<b>DIGITAL</b>
<b>ARTIST'S STATEMENT</b> Kristen LaCroix, <i>Prescription for Change</i> (p. 33)	<b>WRITTEN (BUT ACCOMPANIES A COLLAGE/SCULPTURE</b>	<b>DIGITAL</b>

## Genre Conventions

Do you want to be a great writer or composer? If so, you need to know something about the genre you're composing in; you need to know its basic qualities and agreed-upon rules, and you need to be familiar with some examples. As Scott McCloud shows in his book *Understanding Comics*, writers ► and artists who work on comics use visual images and text to convey ideas, balloons to indicate dialogue, and simple but dynamic drawings and design to hold the reader's attention. Let's say you want to tell a story and you want to convey it graphically. You don't need to be McCloud or Picasso or Art Spiegelman, but you do need to understand how artists, graphic novelists, and memoirists work with visuals and text

to tell stories. It helps to have some familiarity with the genre (read a few examples!) and perhaps have one example in mind as a model (see p. G-1 for some ideas). Or let's say you want to draw an annotated map of your neighborhood. It would help to know some of the established conventions of map-makers, such as using color to represent specific geography, or symbols to identify features or places. If your blog posts give your opinions on the editorials published on *Slate* or *The Huffington Post*, for example, you will have more authority if you link directly to the material you're responding to. Hyperlinking is a convention of the blog genre.

How much do you need to know? Keep an open mind as you choose genres to compose in. Consider collaborating with classmates who have more detailed knowledge of the genres that you're less familiar with. Often students in our writing



◀ COMIC  
**Scott McCloud**,  
from his book  
*Understanding Comics:  
The Invisible Art*,  
HarperCollins.



classes will discuss and figure out together the conventions of specific genres and media (e.g., video or PowerPoint) and go from there. Other times they keep it simple but thoughtful, creating scrapbooks, print-based texts, or audio essays.

## Elements of the Genre

In this book, we ask you to pay attention to the main features of a given genre: the specific elements that are common to most examples of the genre. For instance, most press release writers try to be as brief and objective as possible, and aim at answering the questions who, what, why, where, and when. For those reasons, we consider brevity, objectivity, and thoroughness to be elements of the press release genre. (For an example, see Paul Henderson's press release on p. 18 about the Wall Arch collapse.)

## Style

*Style* refers to the particular ways we communicate. In this book, we pay attention to the techniques that individual writers use—and to what extent these techniques reflect the style of others composing in the same genre. We look at how much detail writers include, and how precise that detail is. We listen for tone (seriousness, humor, etc.) and voice (the presence of the author) and analyze how these qualities affect the overall composition. How a writer uses sources is part of style, as well. A writer who has cultivated a serious, academic style will probably use serious, academic sources as evidence. On the other hand, a writer with a more casual, chatty style might depend more on conversations with friends for evidence.

As a writer, you use style when you compose. The trick is to make sure that the style you're using is appropriate to your purpose and accessible and persuasive to your audience. For example, the writer and traveler Giladhiz uses a particular style on his blog. Because he is interested in attracting "accidental surfers" to his blog—that is, people who stumble upon his blog accidentally—he takes a casual and funny approach to his travels rather than a serious, scholarly tone. A serious, scholarly tone would probably appeal to an audience interested in the economics or politics of his travels, but because Giladhiz's purpose is to share his quirky, funny adventures, his casual, humorous style makes more sense.

## Design


*Design* describes the visual features of a composition, including the use of headings, format, color, and illustration. Design is aesthetic but also functional. As we discuss throughout the book, the design features you and other writers choose can play an important role in the level of success in achieving purposes and reaching audiences. Take a look at how Giladhiz uses images in his blog. Maps show readers exactly where this traveler is, and the photos of Giladhiz help readers connect with him personally. Giladhiz's photos documenting his travels let readers see what he saw. Because one of his purposes is to allow others to share in his travels vicariously, the photos are particularly important.

## Sources

*Sources* are the people, conversations, documents, books, journal articles, movies, and other works that we refer to for facts, perspectives, and models as we compose. For example, sources Giladhiz drew on for his travel blog (see p. 10) include Google Maps, the people he meets, and tourist information, such as brochures from historical sites. In this book, we consider sources because sources shape what writers create.

When you compose in certain genres, such as academic and research essays, you need to document the sources you refer to. In other cases, such as novels, comics, and music lyrics, while you've read and used sources, you're not required to document them formally. Whether or not sources need to be documented depends on the rhetorical situation. Sources referred to in a research essay aimed at academic readers should be documented because readers will want to know where ideas and information came from; the purposes of song lyrics are different, though. Listeners of a song aren't listening for information, so the sources of information are less important. Throughout the book we look at the conventions of specific genres in this regard, and in Chapter 7, we provide specific guidelines for using documentation styles.

In order to compose in different genres, you first should be able to identify them, see how other writers use them to achieve purposes and reach audiences, and learn some of the basic features so you can experiment.



How might the use of sources help boost—or undermine—your ethos as a composer?

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**CHECKLIST: Identifying Genres** Are you looking at a particular composition and wondering what genre it is? Keep the following questions in mind.

**THE RHETORICAL SITUATION**

- Purpose.** Is the author telling a story? (See Chapter 2, "Narrative Genres.") Is the author reporting information? (See Chapter 3, "Informative Genres.") Is the author persuading? (See Chapter 4, "Persuasive Genres.") Is the writer telling a story, reporting, writing creatively, and persuading all at the same time? Don't worry. Sometimes purposes for writing/composing—and the genres we use—overlap.
- Audience.** Who seems to be the author's primary audience? Secondary audience? How do you know? Why do you think someone would read (view, listen to, etc.) the text? How does the author capture and sustain audience attention?
- Rhetorical appeals.** How does the author use the rhetorical appeals—ethos, pathos, and logos—to reach his or her audience? How does the author convey credibility? What kinds of evidence does the author offer to support the point of the piece?
- Modes & media.** What choices has the writer made about mode? If multiple modes are used, how do they interact with each other? For example, if the piece includes both visuals and writing, is meaning conveyed by both the visuals and the writing, or does one mode convey more meaning than the other? What choices has the writer made about media? How do the writer's choices about modes and media reflect his or her purposes and audiences?

**THE GENRE'S CONVENTIONS**

- Elements of the genre.** What do you know about this genre already? What are some of the typical features of this genre? How is the content organized? How does the author use words, images, or other media to convey a purpose and reach an audience?
- Style.** What is the author's tone? How would you describe the language of the piece? How much detail does the author use?
- Design.** What does the composition look (sound, feel, smell, etc.) like? How do words and visuals and other media work together in the genre, physically? How would you describe the format of the composition? Would the format change if the mode were changed? For example, if a newspaper editorial moves from a print medium to an online medium, what changes occur in the genre?
- Sources.** What sources does the author draw on for research? How do you know? How does the author incorporate and give credit to sources? Is there documentation? Hyperlinking?