

A short guide to the rhetorical functions

Rhetoric has to do with “the study of methods employed to write or speak effectively and persuasively” (Microsoft® Encarta® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation). The rhetorical functions are ways of organizing information. This is just a brief guide intended to introduce the student in their use in academic texts (your teacher must provide you with additional information).

1. Definition

- 1.1. Formal definition: $T = C + D$ (**Term** = Class + *Differences*).
- 1.2. Semi-formal definition: it only contains **T** and **D**.
- 1.3. Non-formal definition: they are usually given in form of synonyms or antonyms.
- 1.4. Complex definition: it requires extensive explanatory information.

Key grammatical points: Verb to be, noun phrases.

- **Assets** are economic resources *that are expected to produce economic benefits for its owners*. ($T = C + D$)
- **Current assets** are assets *that are usually converted to cash within one year*.

2. Description

- 2.1. Physical description: characteristics of an object.
- 2.2. Function description: information about a device.
- 2.3. Process description: steps in a procedure.

Key grammatical points: Verb to be, noun phrases, passive voice.

- The balance sheet provides information on what the company owns (its assets), what it owes (its liabilities), and the value of the business to its stockholders (the shareholders' equity). It is reported to investors at least once per year. It may also be presented quarterly, semiannually or monthly.
- Balance sheets are typically presented in two different forms. In the report form, the balance sheet can be arranged vertically starting with assets and then proceeding to detail liabilities and shareholders' equity. In the account form, it is organized in a horizontal manner, with the asset accounts listed on the left side and the liabilities and owners' equity accounts listed on the right side.

3. Generalizations

They help to establish levels of importance when the readers are dealing with information.

Key grammatical points:

- A. Proportions or percentages.
- B. Adverbs of frequency: always, ever, frequently, never, occasionally, often, once, rarely, seldom, sometimes, twice, usually.
 - Assets must **always** equal the sum of liabilities and shareholders' equity.
 - **Almost all** firms buy some or all of their goods on account. Therefore, you will **often** see accounts payable on most balance sheets.

4. Classification

It involves grouping things together (on the basis of similarities) and dividing them (according to differences).

- 4.1 Complete classification: it must provide *the items* being classified, *the class* to which they belong, and *the basis* for classification.
- 4.2 Partial classification: it lacks *the basis* for classification (authors tend to think it is obvious).
- 4.3 Implicit classification: the text contains several elements belonging to the same category, but they are not explicitly classified.

- The essence of the distinction between current assets and noncurrent assets is time. Current assets are those resources that are held for less than a year. The one-year time interval or current operating cycle criterion that applies to classifying assets also applies to liabilities.
- A manufacturing entity will often have three different types of inventory: raw materials, works in process, and finished goods.

5. Order of importance

It involves classifying parts according to their relative position in terms of some predefined criteria, such as: importance, appeal, authority, benefit, cost, delivery, durability, frequency, size, difficulty etc. It is closely related to **generalizations**.

- On most business balance sheets, assets are listed in decreasing order of their liquidity or probable conversion into cash. On some balance sheets, notably those of public utilities, the order is reversed, and the least liquid assets are listed first.

6. Cause-effect (causality and result)

It happens when an action (cause) has a direct result (effect) on something else.

6.1 Contributory cause.

6.2 Necessary (but not enough) cause.

6.3 Sufficient cause.

Key grammatical points:

A. Causal connectors: as, because, for, in order to, since.

B. Consequential connectors: as a result, consequently, hence, so that, thereby, therefore, thus.

- Speculative short-term capitals (such as shares, bonds and currency) can rush abroad, **causing** massive damage to fragile domestic economies. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 was an example. In Indonesia, a mass withdrawal of short-term capital **caused** real wages in manufacturing to drop 44 percent. It is widely believed that China, India and Malaysia escaped the brunt of the Asian financial crisis **because of** their stringent controls on capital flight.

7. Argumentation (pros and cons)

Its function is to persuade by giving reasons in favor (**pros**) or against (**cons**) something, either by inductive reasoning (going from particular facts to general facts), or deductive reasoning (going from generalizations to specific facts).

7.1 Persuasive: it appeals to the reader's thoughts or emotions.

7.2 Logical: it uses rational facts or reasons.

- In a sense, Henry Ford was both the most brilliant and the most senseless marketer in American history. He was senseless because he refused to give the customer anything but a black car. He was brilliant because he fashioned a production system designed to fit market needs. We habitually celebrate him for the wrong reason: for his production genius. His real genius was marketing. We think he was able to cut his selling price and therefore sell millions of \$500 cars because his invention of the assembly line had reduced the costs. Actually, he invented the assembly line because he had concluded that at \$500 he could sell millions of cars. Mass production was the result, not the cause, of his low prices.

8. Comparison and contrast - Analogy - Metaphor

8.1 A **comparison** points out similarities (when two things are alike). A **contrast** points out differences. You compare two or more things when they share common traits (like short-term assets vs long-term assets), but when they are clearly different, you contrast them (like assets vs liabilities).

8.2 An **analogy** is a special form of comparison and contrast which allows a writer to compare and contrast subjects in different classes to make a point, comparing and contrasting, for example, life to a rubber band, as Forest Gump did: “life is like a rubber band; harder you go forward, harder you snap back. So do not make slip-ups.” (Gumpisms) In Biology, analogy means equivalence between two parts: gills in fish and lungs in other vertebrates (both are breathing organs).

8.3 A **metaphor** involves a meaning shift: one thing is considered to represent another. This rhetoric figure is widely used in subjects such as Economics:

- The economy is overheating (the Economy is like an engine).
- A financial injection (the Economy is like a patient).
- The battle for control of the market (the Economy is like a war).

9 Instructions

9.1 Direct instructions: they involve the imperative form of the verbs.

9.2 Indirect instructions: they involve modal verbs and passive voice.

- The basic philosophy required for succesful marketing requires that a company:
 - Define consumer needs.
 - Identify consumer segments that have these needs.
 - Position new products or reposition existing products to meet those needs.
 - Evaluate these strategies for their effectiveness.

10 Exemplifications - Illustrations (visual-verbal relationships)

They consist of short accounts to clarify something (*exemplifications*), or *illustrative* material and a piece of text in order to give additional information: algorithms, cartoons, charts, diagrams, drawings, graphs, maps, photographs, schematics, tables.

- In a balance sheet, the following equation must hold true:

$$\text{Assets} = \text{Liabilities} + \text{Shareholders' Equity}$$

Total Liabilities	\$30,000
<u>Shareholders' Equity</u>	<u>\$50,000</u>
Total Assets	\$80,000

11 Situation-Problem-Solution-Evaluation

The essential principles are these:

- 11.1 Understand and describe the situation to be faced.
- 11.2 Analyze the specific problem to be tackled.
- 11.3 Establish methods or protocol for solving the problem.
- 11.4 Create, analyze and refine a solution (or several possible alternatives).
- 11.5 Evaluate how well the proposed solution addresses the problem.

ACTIVITIES: analyzing rhetorical functions in academic texts

Which do you think are the predominant rhetorical functions in the following texts? Explain.

Activity 1

Safeguarding our water: More than one billion people lack access to clean drinking water; some two and a half billion do not have adequate sanitation services. Preventable water-related diseases kill an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 children every day, and the latest evidence suggests that we are falling behind in efforts to solve these problems. Massive cholera outbreaks appeared in the mid-1990s in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Millions of people in Bangladesh and India drink water contaminated with arsenic. And the surging populations throughout the

developing world are intensifying the pressures on limited water supplies. But the effects of our water policies extend beyond jeopardizing human health. Tens of millions of people have been forced to move from their homes--often with little warning or compensation--to make way for the reservoirs behind dams. More than 20 percent of all freshwater fish species are now threatened or endangered because dams and water withdrawals have destroyed the free-flowing river ecosystems where they thrive. Certain irrigation practices degrade soil quality and reduce agricultural productivity, heralding a premature end to the green revolution. Groundwater aquifers are being pumped down faster than they are naturally replenished in parts of India, China, the U.S. and elsewhere. And disputes over shared water resources have led to violence and continue to raise local, national and even international tensions. At the outset of the new millennium, however, the way resource planners think about water is beginning to change. The focus is slowly shifting back to the provision of basic human and environmental needs as the top priority--ensuring "some for all, instead of more for some," as put by Kader Asmal, former minister for water affairs and forestry in South Africa. To accomplish these goals and meet the demands of booming populations, some water experts now call for using existing infrastructure in smarter ways rather than building new facilities, which is increasingly considered the option of last, not first, resort. The challenges we face are to use the water we have more efficiently, to rethink our priorities for water use and to identify alternative supplies of this precious resource.

Activity 2

Economic profit: In general terms, profit is measured as the difference between total revenue and total cost. Total cost and total revenue are determined by how much output is supplied to the market and purchased by consumers. Supply decisions in turn depend upon the actual or anticipated benefits and costs of producing goods and services. The total costs of production are the full opportunity costs of all resources used in production of the firm's output. The full opportunity costs of production are equal to the sum of explicit and implicit costs. The revenue generated by the sale of a firm's output constitutes the benefits of production and is determined by the demand curve for the firm's output. Having established the determinants of the firm's costs and revenues we are in a position to define economic profit. Economic profit is the difference between total revenue and the total costs of production:

Economic Profit = Total Revenue - Total Costs of Production [including normal profit]

It is important to keep the distinction between economic profit and normal profit in mind. Normal profit is an implicit cost of production. It is the amount of money the entrepreneur could earn by employing the resources he or she owns in the next best alternative. Economic profit is the revenue earned by the firm in excess of its total (explicit plus implicit) costs of production. When total revenues equal total costs, economic profit is zero. In this case the firm is earning a normal profit, which is acceptable to the firm. All costs are covered, including payments to the entrepreneurs/owners for their contributions, and each input receives as payment the value of its opportunity cost--the highest payment the inputs would receive in the market (in the next-best alternative). If economic profit is positive, resources in the firm are receiving higher payments than can be received elsewhere. If economic profit is less than zero, the firm is experiencing losses. Resources employed by the firm are earning payments that are less than they would receive elsewhere.

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That's all folks. If you have any doubt, comment, or suggestion; please do not hesitate to ask your teacher. Alternatively, you can e-mail me.

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