

SOLUTIONS MANUAL

SECOND EDITION

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY



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Chapter 2: Rhetoric and Technical Communication

Real People, Real Writing

Introduction

Workplace Problems

Rhetorical Problems

Exigency and Purpose

Audiences

Workplace Writers

Context and Constraints

Documents

Overview

Notice that most of the questions in the “Real People, Real Writing” interview are questions about how Darren Barefoot uses rhetoric in his decisions about documents—questions of audience, purpose, and credibility. These are the kinds of questions that workplace writers should ask themselves whenever they begin a writing project.

Many students may come to this class with a definition of “rhetoric” that is much like the negative examples given in this chapter. They see it as “mere rhetoric” instead of as a term with a long and complicated history. It is not important to provide a complete history of the debates over what is and isn’t rhetoric, but this chapter clearly lays out the definition that will serve as the basis for all discussions of rhetoric throughout the book: rhetoric is “a set of tools to help you understand how writing works in context.” Discuss the importance of context in workplace writing. What kinds of workplace communication do students have experience with? How much of it was written? Verbal? Were there differences in the kinds of information that was communicated in written and verbal form? Were there times that they wished that information that had been communicated verbally had been written down? In addition to discussing the rhetorical aims of workplace documents (to inform, define, explain, propose, and convince), it is important that students understand that workplace writing is designed to do, not just to say.

Discuss the problem-solving approach as a series of rhetorical problems. Even decisions about visual elements in a document can be rhetorical decisions (see Chapter 8). The key rhetorical elements addressed in the problem-solving approach are exigency, purpose, audience, and genre.

Students are probably familiar with discussions of audience from their composition classes, but some characteristics of workplace readers may be new to them. In technical communication, such audience awareness is sometimes called the “you attitude.” Workplace readers aren’t just passive readers; they are stakeholders. They judge workplace documents by how well the documents help them achieve their goals, and a single workplace document may have multiple stakeholders with multiple goals. Workplace writers need to be aware of how their readers will use the document. For example, while most workplace writing is persuasive to some extent (even a set of instructions, by its simplicity, implies “this is the best way to perform this task”), writers

should be aware of the degree to which they are being asked to shape readers' opinions. Are they being asked to evaluate and recommend? Or are they being asked to provide enough information that someone else will be able to evaluate and recommend a course of action? A final characteristic of workplace readers that may be new to students is their approach to documents. Because workplace readers are busy, they usually do not read documents in a linear, beginning-to-end, order. Instead, they usually skim a document, using visual cues like headings to help them find the section they are looking for. Workplace readers probably won't read a document as thoroughly as teachers read students' papers, and they aren't required to read something that is confusing or poorly written. They will simply return it to the writer, or ask someone else to complete the project. This can have a serious effect on a workplace writer's credibility.

Teaching Notes

It's very important at the outset of this chapter to discuss "rhetoric" and "problem solving" with students. Many students do not have a strong sense of "rhetoric," and many simply understand it as synonymous with persuasion. Thus, allow students time to research, talk, and write about rhetoric, particularly as it applies to numerous types of situations when communication is necessary. Discussing rhetoric thoroughly allows students an easier time understanding problem solving and the problem-solving approach in this textbook. Even if instructors do not want students to use the problem-solving approach as a strict heuristic, discussing the problem-solving approach early in the semester at least lets students see that acts of communication in the workplace are highly complex and require a great deal of thinking, writing, and other activities. It is this notion of complexity that students need to understand early and often.

Case Study 1: When Alligators Attack: Informing Tourists about Dangers in the Park

Audience: Visitors to the park comprise the primary audience for the brochure and signs. Most of the park's visitors are from out of state, so they may know little about alligator behavior. Other important stakeholders are park employees and members of the state park service. They are interested in increasing park visitations, improving the park's image, and provide a safe, rewarding experience for park visitors.

Purpose: At first glance, it may appear that the brochure and signs are primarily informative. The goal is to keep park visitors safe. But these are also persuasive documents. Visitors must be convinced that it is easy to remain safe, and that a visit to the park is a worthwhile experience.

Document: Although the two documents—a brochure and a sign—may draw on the same information, the information should be presented differently. Students should consider the different conditions under which each will be read. This will affect organization strategies. Visual elements are also important for both types of documents. To create effective signs and brochures, a public relations specialist would probably need to consult a biologist for information about alligator behavior.

Ethical Considerations: It may seem like there are no serious ethical considerations here,

but one issue that should be discussed is the issue of legal liability. The documents created for this scenario should be careful not to make any guarantees. They must balance an emphasis on the safety of the park with enough information about the dangers to avoid lawsuits if someone is injured.

Case Study 2: Saving the Puma at Eastern Delaware University

This case provides the opportunity to discuss the many kinds of audiences that students will have to consider when gathering information on the puma. The two main audiences involved include Jenny Carlson and the university president. However, behind both of these initial audiences are others; the students that Jenny will write to, and other administrators that the president might have to turn to for advice. Of course, beyond these audiences there are others, and this case provides a good opportunity for a class discussion on who might eventually see SEA campaign documents.

Activities

- Ask students to bring examples of writing that are designed to help readers do something. Identify the rhetorical aims of the documents (to inform, define, explain, propose, or convince). How might the documents be different if the aim was different? Why might this document be written with a different rhetorical aim? Ask students to write a paragraph explaining their response. This can be done individually, or in small groups. (Group members would decide which document to write about.) Asking small groups to write short responses like this provides students with experience writing collaboratively, an important workplace writing skill.

- Discuss the issues surrounding cross-cultural writing. Ask students to create a guide for writers from another culture (for example, China or India) who would like advice about writing for American audiences. What do such writers need to know about linguistic, religious, technological, and social aspects of an American audience? For humorous examples of problems with cross-cultural communication, see websites like www.English.com.

Cases on the Companion Website

“Elegance Limousines: The Difficulties of Cross-Cultural Communication”

General Understanding

Because this case emphasizes points made in Chapter 2, instructors should help students recognize the importance of planning when writing to audiences that they are not familiar with, particularly when the audience is at odds with them. In such instances, students should understand that sometimes planning leads directly to research, that in a situation like this one, the writer might need to gather research about his audience and audience’s culture before addressing him or her directly.

“The Baby Comfort 5.2: The Whistle-blower’s Dilemma”

General Understanding

Because this case emphasizes points made in Chapter 2, instructors should again focus on problem solving; however, while discussing and working on this particular case, it’s important for students to notice that any given situation can involve multiple problems to

address: in this case, not just what to do but how to act in such a way that solves the problems of multiple audiences (customers, supervisors, co-workers in other departments at the company). In situations like this one, there is not a one-size fits all approach that can satisfy everyone's needs. Workers, rather, might need to engage in multiple actions and communications to ensure adequate resolutions.

“Carolina Construction: Meeting the Needs of Multiple Audiences”

General Understanding

Because this case emphasizes points made in Chapter 2, instructors should emphasize to students that problem solving is not always just about fixing problems for others, though much of it is. Additionally, while engaging in problem-solving activities, writers must often do so by thinking carefully about how these activities reflect back upon themselves and their organizations. This case is very complex in that the workplace writer must address the needs of several different audiences; however, one of the most important tasks will be to do all of these things while attempting to rebuild the company's credibility, if at all possible.

“Is the Customer Always Right?”

General Understanding

Because this case emphasizes points made in Chapter 2, instructors should again focus on problem solving; however, while discussing and working on this particular case, it's important for students to notice that any given situation can involve multiple problems to address: for example, in this case, the document that the students write may potentially cause or alleviate future problems. If they write a letter granting a refund, they lose money but also create a precedent for future law suits. If they decline the refund request, they might face a law suit anyway. Additionally, while engaging in problem-solving activities, writers must often do so by thinking carefully about how these activities reflect back upon themselves and their organizations. This case is very complex in that the workplace writer must address the needs of several different audiences; however, one of the most important tasks will be to do all of these things while attempting to maintain or rebuild the company's credibility, if at all possible.

Video Case Instructor's Notes

“Planning the Shobu Automobile Proposal”

General Understanding

Since this is the video case study for Chapter 2, instructors should be sure to address the following facets of the case with students:

Rhetorical Problem Solving

Instructors may wish to give students a bit more background on the nature of RFPs and proposals as well as remind them about the distinctions between external and internal audiences, which are both important in this particular case. When discussing with students the ways that the different documents can create trust and credibility with their audiences, be sure students recall Chapter 2's focus on cross-cultural communication, that they remember that one of these documents is composed for a company in Japan.

Writing, Editing, and Document Design

Like Chapter 1, this Chapter is probably assigned early in the semester before students have had the opportunity to read much about particular genres such as reports, proposals, and RFPs. If they have some sense of these documents and their purposes, they will better be able to think in a rhetorical fashion, so instructors should provide some basic information about the kinds of documents being discussed in this case, if at all possible.

Technology

Because DeSoto Global is working on documents that will be written for employees in a Japanese corporation, instructors might discuss technology in this case as it relates to research. Specifically, encourage students to discuss ways that technology can be used nowadays to learn more about companies and corporate cultures in other nations around the globe. This discussion can then serve as a precursor to Chapter 6, which discusses research in much more detail.

Ethics

If students have already read Chapter 4: Ethics, they will be able to recognize more ethical implications involved in DeSoto Global's situation. If not, however, students can still review the overview of ethics in Chapter 1 and begin to formulate some basic ethical concerns involved when a company is writing a proposal for a potential client: for example, making sure that promises can be met, not exaggerating any claims, giving accurate budgetary figures, as well as making sure that the document is written clearly and effectively for this particular audience. Additionally, students can discuss the links between credibility and ethics. In particular, when people like Tosh and Bill attempt to create credibility and trust in themselves and their company, how might those attempts verge into unethical territory?

Collaboration

Tosh and Bill are collaborating closely on these documents, yet they are also collaborating with their supervisor as well (Dora Harbin). Have students discuss how they might split up responsibilities as well as work together to complete the documents and work assigned to them. In particular, have students think carefully about each person's background (strengths and weaknesses), and then discuss how collaboration can be most effective given their distinct backgrounds.