A rhetoric for writing teachers

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What do teachers need to know about rhetoric?

[Rhetoric] is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature use symbols.

KENNETH BURKE

Preliminary questions

The history of rhetoric covers almost 2500 years, beginning with the work of Corax of Syracuse in the fifth century B.C. and extending to present-day discussions by those who study language "as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation." Throughout its history, the discipline has accumulated principles which reflect the changing needs of those who practice it. It has experienced countless shifts of emphasis. For most of its history, rhetoric has also been associated with education. A prominent discipline in the schools for centuries, rhetoric embraces the work of teachers who studied the tradition and taught others to practice it. As writing teachers, we are part of that tradition. Consequently we ought to understand its broader currents and crosscurrents.

We also need to know about rhetoric for other reasons. It is, first of all, a compelling subject to study. Of course, many of us could teach writing without ever having read Aristotle; knowing what he said won't necessarily make us better teachers. But we shouldn't feel reluctant to study rhetoric for its own sake. We can appreciate Aristotle simply because he had important things to say. Second, a knowledge of rhetoric helps us understand our world. Kenneth Burke's definition of the art, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, asserts that all human beings practice rhetoric and come under its influence.

Every day we use words to shape attitudes and encourage people to act in certain ways. In one sense, then, teaching represents a rhetorical art. We can also find language used "as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation" in literature, advertising, broadcast journalism, politics, religion, art, films, and conversation. Not all communication, of course, has a rhetorical purpose, but much of what we say, hear, read, and do involves somebody's influencing somebody else to make choices. Rhetoric is a humanistic discipline which enables us to understand those choices and the processes whereby we make them.

Important though they may be, none of these reasons for studying rhetoric applies to this chapter. Although the chapter surveys a great deal of history, that isn't its primary purpose. Nor will the chapter help you understand, except perhaps incidentally, how rhetoric functions in contemporary society. Instead, we will examine here a few significant developments which have influenced how we were taught, and how we teach, composition. As part of a centuries-old rhetorical tradition, these developments explain many contemporary teaching practices.[1] And because our profession has seen a resurgence of interest in the rhetorical tradition, we need to understand something of the history of rhetoric. Specifically, we want to answer the following questions:

> What is *rhetoric* (and why do people say bad things about it)?
>
> Why do we discuss writing in terms of writer-reader-subject?
>
> What is a topic?
>
> Where did the five-paragraph theme come from?

1. One of the best, brief historical surveys of rhetorical developments up to the twentieth century is Edward P. J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 594–630. For longer surveys of rhetorical theories from the Greeks to modern times see Peter Dixon, *Rhetoric* (London: Methuen, 1971); James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman, *The Rhetoric of Western Thought,* 2nd ed. (Dubuque, Ia.: Kendall Hunt, 1978); George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); and Aldo Scaglione, *The Classical Theory of Composition from Its Origins to the Present: A Historical Survey* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1972). For discussions of primary works and secondary scholarship, see Winifred B. Horner, ed., *The Present State of Scholarship in Historical and Contemporary Rhetoric* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1983).

Specific applications of rhetorical principles to contemporary teaching practices are too numerous to cite here; however, several essays in Gary Tate's *Teaching Composition: Twelve Bibliographical Essays* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Texas Christian University Press, 1987) cite important works which chart the influence of the rhetorical tradition on teaching. See also Richard M. Coe, "Rhetoric 2001," *Freshman English News* 3 (Spring 1974), 1–13; Edward P. J. Corbett, "The Usefulness of Classical Rhetoric," *College Composition and Communication* 14 (October 1963), 24–26; Robert M. Gorrell, ed., *Rhetoric: Theories for Application* (Champaign, Ill.: NCTE, 1967).

> What is *style* and what explains our preference for plain, clear writing?
>
> Why do traditional courses concern themselves with grammar instruction, imitating models of good prose, and studying literature?
>
> What is a mode?
>
> How is "new" rhetoric different from classical rhetoric?

Keep these questions in mind as you read. The chapter examines each of them in order, even though the discussion focuses on major figures in the history of rhetoric. You will find that many current definitions and teaching practices were first codified thousands of years ago. Other developments evolved fairly recently. Still other customs significantly reinterpret earlier practices. Understanding these principles from a historical perspective helps us teach them effectively. More important, a sense of the past prevents us from becoming trapped by the tradition and allows us to see rhetoric as an ongoing process, meeting the needs of different cultures in different ways.

What is rhetoric?

In 2500 years the word *rhetoric* has taken on a wide range of meaning. People may use the term to refer to skillful, but often deceptive, eloquence. They point to the empty pomposity of political oratory, the slick language of advertising, or the verbal sparring of heated discussions and claim, "That's all rhetoric, empty hot air with no substance behind it." Rhetoric, so defined, is a fraudulent practice intended to give some people an advantage over others by appealing to their emotions or prejudices, but not to their intelligence. Allied with this view is the notion that rhetoric deals exclusively with language rather than with ideas. Flowery figures of speech and doubletalk give the appearance of substance, while the "real questions" go unanswered. "The rhetoric was impressive," some people might say, "but he didn't tell us much." This view has had formidable support, most notably from Socrates and from Plato, who claims in the *Gorgias,* "The rhetorician need not know the truth about things; he has only to discover some way of persuading the ignorant that he has more knowledge than those who know." Although many people still attach negative connotations to the term *rhetoric,* most scholars do not. They now regard all uses of language as inherently suasive, in effect removing the onus of deception or manipulation evident in earlier discussions of the art.

Historically, *rhetoric* has also had positive connotations, suggesting a commendable skill with words. The Declaration of Independence, for example, eloquently expresses the consensus of a people persuaded to uphold certain self-evident truths. Similarly, writers of great

literature have employed language powerfully to make us cry, to poke fun at our human frailties, and to command our support for important causes. Those who believe that rhetoric has a useful function see it as a tool, inherently neither good or bad. A deceitful person will use the art to deceive; an ethical person, to make truth and justice prevail. Aristotle, who regards rhetoric as a practical art, defines it in the *Rhetoric* as "the faculty [power] of discovering in the particular case . . . the available means of persuasion" (p. 7). When rightly practiced, Aristotle argues, rhetoric serves an honest and useful purpose; "we apply the term 'rhetorician' alike to describe a speaker's command of the art and a speaker's moral purpose" (p. 7).

As we will see, every historical period has characterized the tradition differently, sometimes focusing on oral discourse, sometimes on written texts. Some rhetoricians have concerned themselves exclusively with style (narrowly defined), or delivery, or invention, while others have enlarged the discipline to include many arts and forms of communication. Currently, the term *rhetoric* can even refer to books—"Open your rhetorics to page 109"—and courses—"She teaches freshman rhetoric"—which may not, in fact, treat rhetorical principles at all or which subordinate them to the study of grammar and literature.

Given the multiplicity of meanings *rhetoric* has accumulated, it may be foolish to attempt a working definition here. Yet the term identifies a discipline fundamental to this book, as its title makes clear. To insure that we are attaching roughly similar connotations to the word, let me spell out five assumptions governing my use of the term:

1. Rhetoric is both a field of humane study and a pragmatic art; that is, we can read about it as well as practice it.
2. The practice of rhetoric must be viewed as a culturally determined, interdisciplinary process. Rhetoric enables writers and speakers to design messages for particular audiences and purposes. Since people in various cultures and historical periods are likely to adopt different perspectives on what makes communication effective, rhetoric will accommodate the needs of those who practice it. Although Aristotle's description of the art is still relevant, we must not assume that rhetorical principles articulated in the past *necessarily* determine or reflect contemporary practices.
3. When we practice rhetoric, we use language, either spoken or written, to "induce cooperation" in an audience.
4. The purpose of rhetoric, inducing cooperation, involves more than mere persuasion, narrowly defined. Discourse which affects an audience, which informs, moves, delights, and teaches, has a rhetorical aim. Not all verbal or written communication aims to create an effect in an audience; the brief exchanges between people engaged in informal conversation usually do not have a rhetorical purpose. But when we use language in more formal ways, with the premeditated intention of changing attitudes or behaviors, of explaining a subject matter, of expressing the self, or of calling attention to a text which can be appreciated for its artistic merits, our purpose is rhetorical.
5. Rhetoric implies choices, for both the speaker or writer and the audience. When we practice rhetoric we design the message, first by making decisions about our subject, audience, point of view, and purpose. Then, we select our best ideas, the best order in which to present them, and the best resources of language to express them. In other words, we develop strategies for creating an effect in our audience. However, the notion of choice carries with it an important ethical responsibility. Our strategies must be reasonable and honest. Furthermore, the audience must have a choice in responding to the message, must be able to adopt, modify, or reject the message. A burglar who holds a gun to my head and calmly expresses an intention to rob me may induce my cooperation, but not by means of rhetoric. Similarly, a formal argument which urges human beings not to age is not rhetorical. Many modern rhetoricians agree that rhetoric doesn't exist when the audience lacks the power to respond freely to the message.

Classical rhetoric

In classical (Greek and Roman) rhetoric lie the sources for many contemporary practices in the teaching of writing.[2] Aristotle's three appeals—to the good will of the speaker, to the nature of the audience, to the logic of the subject matter—suggest the writer-reader-subject relationship we discussed in Chapter 1. Aristotle also introduces the term *topic*, still in use today, although our definition of it differs from Aristotle's. Classical rhetoricians consider style as one of the five "departments" of rhetoric, and by Cicero's time, three levels of style had evolved, each intended to achieve a different purpose. Even in this early period, we find a school of rhetoricians, the sophists, whose emphasis on style prompted Plato's criticism that rhetoric amounted to no more than deceitful flattery. The notion of prewriting, discussed in Chapter 3, also has its roots in classical rhetoric, for invention or ways of discovering lines of argument is another one of rhetoric's five departments. Finally, we can discover similarities between the five-

2. Useful histories of Greek and Roman rhetoric are George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963) and his *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).

paragraph theme, the staple of many writing classes, and formulas the classical rhetoricians proposed for structuring arguments. Corax of Syracuse (fl. 460 B.C.), generally thought to have composed the first written rhetoric to help Sicilian landowners win title to disputed property, proposed that legal arguments have four parts. Aristotle adopted the same four divisions, and Cicero expanded them to six. Quintilian recommended that speeches arguing court cases have five parts. Although classical rhetoricians differed on precisely how many sections an argument should have, they firmly established the principle that speeches should be arranged in clearly defined sections, each realizing a different purpose.

Classical rhetoric is characterized by certain practices which distinguish it from the rhetorics of other periods. First, it was primarily a spoken, not a written, art. Second, it focused primarily on persuasive discourse, as it is traditionally defined. Rhetoric enabled politicians, lawyers, and statesmen to argue court cases (forensic or judicial rhetoric), shape political decisions about the nation's future (deliberative rhetoric), or make speeches of praise or blame on ceremonial occasions (epideictic rhetoric). When classical rhetoricians codified what had already become accepted practice, they divided rhetoric into five parts or departments: invention (*inventio*, ways of discovering relevant ideas and supporting evidence), arrangement (*dispositio*, ways of organizing the parts of a discourse), style (*elocutio*, ways of ornamenting discourse), memory (*memoria*, mnemonic techniques), and delivery (*pronuntiatio*, techniques for practicing and giving oral speeches). The most influential works which describe the practice of classical rhetoricians are the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), Cicero's *De inventione* and *De oratore*, and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is divided into three books, which treat respectively the nature of rhetoric, of invention, and of arrangement and style. For Aristotle, universal and verifiable truths belong to the science of logic; rhetoric, he maintains, deals with *probable* truth, with opinions and beliefs that can be advanced with greater or lesser certainty. He groups all arguments into two categories based on the kinds of proof used to support what the speaker believes to be true. Inartistic proofs make use of external evidence such as witnesses, contracts, evidence based on torture. Artistic proofs, on the other hand, rely on three means of persuasion. The speaker may argue from his own personal qualities as a sensible, moral man of good will (*ethos*). Or, he may appeal to the character or mental state of the audience (*pathos*). Or, he may argue from the subject matter (*logos*) by using the inductive logic of examples and the deductive logic of enthymemes.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* also introduces the notion of topics (*topoi* or commonplaces). However, by *topoi* (Greek for "places") Aristotle means not a list of subjects, but ways in which arguments applying to any subject matter can be discovered. In Book Two of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle illustrates twenty-eight *topoi* for inventing enthymemes. The *topoi* represent lines of inquiry—such as arguing from opposites, from cause and effect, from the definitions of words, from parts to the whole, and so on. These discovery procedures receive further elaboration in Aristotle's *Topics*, a work which Cicero later interpreted to include topics-as-subjects as well as topics-as-methods-of-inquiry. Much later, in Renaissance England, the *topoi* came to mean "commonplaces," subjects to write about. The usual definition of *topic* in today's English classes is "subject for writing about," not "way of approaching any subject."

In Book Three Aristotle maintains that arguments should have two parts; the first part states the case, and the second proves it. At most, arguments should have only four sections: the introduction (*proem*), the outline or narration of the subject (*statement* of the case), the proofs for and against the case (the *argument*), and the summary (*epilogue*). Believing that a discourse persuades by reason rather than by calling attention to itself as a work of art, Aristotle advocates a plain or natural style which exhibits the virtues of clarity, dignity, propriety, and correctness. This view of style contrasts significantly with rhetorical traditions that precede and follow Aristotle—the Greek sophistic tradition of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. and the Ciceronian tradition. The sophists emphasized style above all. It is to this dependence on ornamentation that Plato responds in the *Gorgias* by castigating rhetoric as an ignoble deceit, an attempt to flatter the audience. For Aristotle, though, rhetoric in itself was neither good nor bad; its tools could be used for good or evil purposes.

Cicero (106–43 B.C.), a brilliant Roman politician, philosopher, and speaker, expected the orator to command a broad understanding of culture:

> no one should be numbered with the orators who is not accomplished in all those arts that befit the well-bred; for though we do not actually parade these in our discourse, it is none the less made clear to demonstration whether we are strangers to them or have learned to know them. (*De oratore*, p. 100)

The orator must know a great deal about human experience in order to defend the political state eloquently. For Cicero, rhetoric is a branch of political science, if we define *political science* broadly, as "the liberal arts."

Cicero composed at least seven rhetorical treatises, one on invention when he was only nineteen years old. He also wrote numerous orations and epistles, which generations of students studied as models of the theoretical principles he outlined. He expanded the parts of an argument from four to six, dividing Aristotle's section on the proofs into separate categories: *exordium* (introduction), *narratio* (a discussion of what has occurred to generate the issue to be resolved), *partitio* (a

division of the argument or outline of the points to be proven), *confirmatio* (proofs "for" or confirmation of the argument), *refutatio* (proofs disproving the opponent's arguments), and *conclusio* (a review of the argument and a final appeal to the audience). Because the *Rhetorica ad herennium* for centuries was thought to have been written by Cicero, we credit him with having suggested three levels of style—high, middle, and low—intended respectively to move, delight, and teach the audience. Cicero's treatises tend to emphasize forensics, the use of rhetoric to argue legal cases, but because he believed that the orator needed to know many subjects, Cicero's influence had special significance during the Renaissance, with its emphasis on the humanistic training of clergy and statesmen.

Quintilian (A.D. 35–100) was born in Spain but later became a prominent teacher of rhetoric in Rome. He agrees with Cicero that the rhetor must be broadly educated but asserts that he must also be a good and moral man. Educational institutions from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century reflect Quintilian's insistence on the moral as well as the intellectual training of students. Although books three through twelve of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* represent traditional Ciceronian discussions of the five departments of rhetoric, books one and two detail an educational program for training the ideal orator of strong moral character.

As soon as he was able to read and write, the child received instruction in grammar, which was for Quintilian a twofold science that encompassed speaking and writing correctly as well as interpreting the poets. The grammar teacher (*grammaticus*) taught rules for proper word order, agreement, and word choice, and gave lectures on every kind of writer. In this way students could learn by imitation to recite and comment on literature, noting the type of feet in a metrical line, the parts of speech in a line, and so on. Then, students proceeded to write their own imitations of fables and verse as well as aphorisms, character sketches, and moral essays. Paraphrasing or imitating models was the major method of teaching grammar. After the child completed grammar instruction, the *rhetoricus,* a second teacher, then managed the student's education. The *rhetoricus* taught more advanced rhetorical studies and assigned exercises in epideictic speaking and disputation. In general, he taught students to master the five departments of classical rhetoric. Grammatical studies, then, gave students an understanding of what correct discourse and poetic interpretation entails (knowledge of *what*); rhetorical studies equipped them to accomplish things by action (knowledge of *how*).

Quintilian's curriculum sounds similar to some contemporary writing courses, doesn't it? Even though classical rhetoric exluded grammar (grammar, like logic, was a separate discipline), Quintilian codified a hierarchy of instruction which began with grammar and proceeded to rhetorical studies. Nowadays many people still believe

that students must study formal grammar before they can take writing courses. Notice too that Quintilian incorporates writing into the curriculum; he valued training in writing as a means of reinforcing speaking skills. Then, as now, literature served an important function in the classroom, for the most important methods Quintilian used to develop writing skill were imitating, translating, or paraphrasing literary models. Quintilian's model certainly isn't the only design for a writing course, and many contemporary writing teachers give the study of grammar and literature much less prominence than Quintilian did. Nevertheless, most of us probably were taught to write by methods at least indirectly traceable to Quintilian.

Medieval and Renaissance rhetoric

Although the classical tradition survived more or less intact throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, two developments especially interest us as writing teachers. First, rhetoric became both a practical art and an academic subject. Rhetorical treatises and commentaries were studied by Scholastic philosophers. Cicero was favored as a classical authority until about the thirteenth century, when Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was recovered in a Latin translation. As a practical art, rhetoric served the clergy, whose sermons persuaded congregations to accept Christianity, and secular or ecclesiastical courts, where letter-writing was an essential means of conducting legal and diplomatic transactions. Second, style (*elocutio*) began to assume greater importance, together with delivery dominating the other four departments of classical rhetoric. Through the influence of Christianity, invention became less significant, for biblical truths were inspired or "invented" by God; principles of style, however, helped men study God's Word and explain it to others. This attention to the Bible as a text, aided later by the development of the printing press, gave rhetoric a new focus. Whereas classical rhetoric had been concerned primarily with spoken discourse, medieval and Renaissance scholars increasingly applied rhetorical principles to written discourse.

In the Middle Ages, undergraduate students pursuing the bachelor of arts degree studied the *trivium:* grammar (*ars poetria* or verse-writing), logic, and rhetoric. Graduate students received additional training in the disciplines which made up the *quadrivium:* arithmetic, astronomy, music, and geometry. The study of rhetoric was divided into two arts, letter-writing (*ars dictaminis*), and preaching (*ars praedicandi*).[3] Both arts were heavily influenced by the so-called "Second Sophistic Tradition" (ca. A.D. 100–500) and writers like Cassiodorus and Bishop Isidore of Seville.

3. For a fuller discussion of medieval rhetoric, consult James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1974).

Cassiodorus (A.D. 490–586), minister to an illiterate Italian king, compiled twelve books of letters under the title *Variae.* Kings and nobles during this period often depended on literate servants to compose, write down, and deliver orally any messages of considerable political importance. Students in the Middle Ages studied model letters like those of Cassiodorus and learned how to imitate their formulas and stylistic embellishments.

Style is also the chief concern of Bishop Isidore of Seville (ca. A.D. 570–636). His work, known variously as *Origenes* or *Etymologiae,* devotes considerable attention to summarizing the arts of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic. "Like other encyclopedists," writes James Murphy, "he was trying merely to salvage what he could from the ancient heritage" (*Rhetoric in the Middle Ages,* p. 76). In cataloguing many traditional rhetorical figures, Isidore slights invention and arrangement and altogether ignores memory and delivery.

The sophists' concern with ornamentation can be traced back to the three Ciceronian levels of style: the grand style intended to move an audience, the middle style intended to delight an audience, and the plain style intended to teach an audience. To move a congregation to accept Christianity or to teach Christian precepts, the clergy ornamented sermons and letters with "figures" which had been conveniently catalogued in many stylistic compendia. The anonymously authored *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (ca. 86 B.C.) enjoyed enormous popularity as a standard list. Although the "doctrine of figures" had been well established in Quintilian's day, the tradition has defied the attempts of scholars to trace its shifting, growing classifications. Essentially, the figures were of two kinds: 1. *tropes* or figures of thought or sense (e.g., metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche), and 2. *schemes* or figures of words and arrangement (e.g., amplifying or repeating an idea, alliteration, assonance). The figures weren't merely ornamental; they often reflected strategies of invention and arrangement.

As Corbett points out in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (p. 605), Renaissance rhetoricians were also preoccupied with words, particularly with the distinction between words and the "things" they stood for, between *verba* and *res,* form and matter. Sister Miriam Joseph divides Renaissance rhetoricians into three groups: the traditionalists, the figurists, and the Ramists. The differences among them, she suggests, center on whether they viewed the topics of invention as belonging to rhetoric, to logic, or to both—a moot question really, since "notwithstanding the variety of opinion as to the number of topics or places, there was complete unanimity among all Renaissance groups as to their nature, use, and importance" (*Rhetoric in Shakespeare's Time,* p. 30).

The traditionalists, among them Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas Wilson, tended to appreciate the importance of all five departments of rhetoric. Erasmus' *De Copia* (1512) is divided into two parts, the first teaching students how to vary their arguments by means of schemes and tropes and the second encouraging students to master lines of inquiry (topics) in order to be able to invent subjects in a variety of ways. Even though words and things, form and matter, are treated separately, there is a close Aristotelian connection between them. Erasmus was probably the first to advocate constant practice in writing rather than rote drill as a teaching technique. He encouraged students to keep commonplace books as an aid to invention, to express the same argument in a variety of styles, and to treat the same topic along several lines of reasoning. Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553) presents the whole classical tradition in its five parts. It reintroduces a discussion of memory and delivery, often slighted in earlier works, and because it was one of the first rhetorics written in English rather than in Latin, it enjoyed considerable popularity as a model of English prose style.

The second group of rhetoricians, the figurists, subordinated logic to rhetoric, emphasizing above all the importance of style. George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), which treats 107 figures, and Henry Peacham's *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577), which catalogues 184 figures, are important representatives of this tradition. A third group, the Ramists, tended to subordinate rhetoric to logic. By assigning invention, arrangement, and memory to logic, and grouping style and delivery under rhetoric, in effect they created a dichotomy between matter and form, between processes which they said belonged to the intellect (logic) and those which sprang from the imagination (rhetoric).

Both Corbett and Joseph conclude that Renaissance rhetoricians were master classifiers and cataloguers concerned primarily about the matter of *copia,* literally "abundance." *Copia* refers not only to various techniques for embellishing the argument, but also to the many ways in which arguments could be invented. The poets and prose writers who studied these techniques produced a literature as rich in imagery and sound patterns as it was thoughtful and deeply rooted in logic.

The Renaissance to the twentieth century

In the centuries following the Renaissance several approaches to rhetoric held the field in what W. Ross Winterowd calls "the war between the plain, unadorned method of human discourse and the elegant and ornate" (*Rhetoric: A Synthesis,* p. 46). The war centered on a difference of opinion among prominent scholars who sought to adapt classical principles to new developments in literature and the sciences. In blending the old and new, however, they tended to emphasize different elements of the tradition. Throughout this period, at least three points of view shape rhetorical theory: the scientific, elocutionary, and literary perspectives. Although our current methods of teaching writ-

ing were not significantly influenced by any of these perspectives except perhaps the literary, all three support the principle that rhetoric is a dynamic process. It finds its roots not only in the past but also in contemporary concerns. People change the art to suit their purposes.

The scientific perspective stresses the importance of invention and advocates a plain style. It represents an attempt to adapt rhetoric to the emerging natural and social sciences. Although Francis Bacon (1561–1626) wrote no rhetorical treatises, many of his writings suggest new directions for rhetoric in the service of scientific studies. Bacon separates logic and rhetoric, reason and imagination, as distinct faculties which nevertheless must work harmoniously. "The duty and office of Rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the Will," writes Bacon in *Advancement of Learning*. In redefining invention, he minimizes the classical penchant for the deductive enthymeme, giving greater significance to inductive processes and memory, which help the scientist unlock knowledge stored in the mind. Bacon also advocates a "Senecan Style," characterized by relatively short sentences, simple words, and little ornamentation. In his view, the style should suit the subject matter and the audience. A plain style, a code similar to mathematics, best expresses the precise, objective observations of scientists.

In some ways, George Campbell (1719–96) also approaches rhetoric scientifically by incorporating principles from what we now call the social and behavioral sciences. Although upholding many precepts of classical rhetoric, Campbell's work is also influenced by Bacon, Locke, Hume, and Hartley, writers who attempted to explain the workings of the human mind. As the first sentence of Campbell's *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (1776) reveals, rhetoric is a process of effecting change in an audience; "In speaking there is always some end proposed, or some effect which the speaker intends to produce on the hearer." To be effective, rhetoricians must understand human nature, must analyze the audience they hope to influence. Elaborating on Locke and Hume's discussions, Campbell proposes a hierarchy of four mental "faculties" common to all human beings: an understanding, an imagination, passions, and a will. Although the speaker may have one predominant purpose—"to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will"—a speech may introduce secondary rhetorical aims which enhance its persuasive power. Campbell is best known for reestablishing an important connection between rhetoric and psychology, between the arts of eloquence a speaker uses and their effect on an audience. Nevertheless he also explored the use of wit, humor, and ridicule as rhetorical strategies; examined the limitations of the deductive syllogism; enlarged the kinds of evidence which could be used to support arguments, including common sense, experience, analogy, testimony, and "calculations concerning chances"; and established what is now known as the "doctrine of usage," which suggests that generalizations about language should be based not on classical "authorities" but on the contemporary practices of reputable English authors.

A second perspective on rhetoric emphasized delivery. Like Bacon and Campbell, the elocutionists hoped to give classical rhetoric a contemporary focus, but the principle aim of the elocutionary movement was to advance the art of public speaking. For too long, elocutionists claimed, rhetoricians had ignored delivery and emphasized the written word. But now public lectures, oral reading, parliamentary debates, and pulpit oratory offered numerous opportunities to express ideas orally. Thomas Sheridan's *Lectures on Elocution* (1762) and John Walker's *Elements of Elocution* (1781) offered speakers advice about pronunciation, gestures, voice control, and accent. Other elocutionary texts listed tropes and schemes for ornamenting speeches and provided models, often in the form of letters, for addressing various audiences in an elegant, genteel style. Very often prose and verse passages were included to give students practice reading material aloud. Although elocutionists didn't ignore invention altogether, in effect they reduced rhetoric to delivery and style and limited its practice to formal spoken contexts. As public speaking declined in importance, so did the elocutionary movement. Nevertheless, the elocutionists demonstrated that delivery could be studied seriously, and not only studied, but practiced. Although nowadays courses in public speaking tend to lie buried in theater or speech departments, we might well improve our teaching performance by investigating the more significant principles the elocutionary movement advanced.

The third perspective focused not so much on public speaking or the new science as on literary texts. The literary perspective, however, encompassed a spectrum of views concerning style. First, the neoclassicists, men like Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) and Jonathan Ward (d. 1758), revered the ancients and sought to reassert principles of taste built on classical precepts. A good writer, they maintained, studies classical authors and then imitates their style. The works of Horace, Homer, Virgil, and Cicero represented especially significant models. A good style, said the neoclassicists, need not show complete originality, need not be "modern." Rather, it should be relatively unadorned, free of ambiguity, and "correct," conforming to the style of Greek and Latin models. *Propriety* and *perspicuity* were the watchwords, and rhetorical choices tended to be primarily a matter of doctrine and rule. In reestablishing the importance of classical learning, these prominent men of letters hoped to give the English language the same power of expression they admired so much in Greek and Latin literature. Unfortunately, by slavishly adhering to classical principles and denigrating modern tastes, many of them reduced style to absolute law.

At the other end of the scale were literary scholars who admired

the ornate style and revived the study of invention. They claimed as their authority Longinus, a third-century Roman whose treatise *On the Sublime* had been translated into English in 1674. Longinus recognized enthusiasm as a respectable source of ideas. Rhetoric, he claimed, need not merely persuade audiences; it could also transport them. Writers like Joseph Addison (1672–1719) and Edmund Burke (1729–97) placed great emphasis on sublimity of thought as well as style. The "sublime" that Longinus discussed arises from contemplating greatness, from permitting the beautiful to act on the mind through the senses. Sublimity of style moves an audience with irresistible power, grand thoughts, and eloquent expression. The followers of Longinus yielded to their emotions, to forces of enthusiasm, in order to create, especially through metaphor, expressions which would transport their audience.

In between these two groups, the proponents of enthusiasm and the advocates of propriety, we find a large group of rhetoricians who blended the old and the new. They combined rhetoric and poetics, which the classical tradition had treated as separate verbal arts. They illustrated rhetorical principles, not by quoting Greek and Latin models, but by citing English literature. They looked to classical theories but also took into account contemporary discussions concerning genius, reason, and imagination. This synthesis represents the beginning of modern literary criticism and is best illustrated in the work of Hugh Blair (1718–1800).

Blair, a well-known preacher, was Regius Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh for more than twenty years, retiring in 1783. *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* was published in the same year. "Blair explains in the preface that many students, relying on superficial notes, were circulating imperfect copies of his lectures. The purpose of the volume, therefore, was to give to the public an accurate account of his teachings."[4] Addressing his forty-seven lectures to beginners, Blair presents a systematic overview of rhetoric-as-verbal-art. He deals with matters of taste and aesthetics, surveys classical and contemporary rhetoric, reviews grammar, offers a history of elocution, and explains stylistic principles by analyzing the prose of Addison and Swift. Although he prefers the plain style, he doesn't refute the Longinians' emphasis on the sublime. The sublime, he maintains, rests not in words but in things, not in stylistic adroitness but in noble and pleasurable ideas. For their time Blair's lectures offered the most comprehensive survey of the rhetorical tradition. They were enormously popular. In addition to summarizing the old, however, they also forge a new alliance between rhetoric and

4. Golden, Berquist, and Coleman, p. 95; see also James L. Golden and Edward P. J. Corbett, eds., *The Rhetoric of Blair, Campbell, and Whately* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

other verbal arts. For Blair, rhetoric doesn't focus merely on style, plain or ornate, but on culture, on human beings and how they use language to communicate with different audiences for different purposes.

Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* served as a popular textbook in colleges and universities, not only in England and Scotland but in America as well. Yale adopted it in 1785, Harvard in 1788, and Dartmouth in 1822.[5] The study of English in American universities, however, is a relatively recent development, generally considered to have begun in 1806, when John Quincy Adams became Boyleston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the impetus to add courses in English to the college curriculum was supported by scholarly developments in philology, the forerunner of modern linguistics, and by a popular interest in public lectures and debates. At first, these courses emphasized oratory, rhetoric, and the study of language and logic; as a rule, they were taught by clergymen, historians, or philosophers. In addition to Blair's *Lectures,* other texts enjoyed considerable influence: Thomas Sheridan's *Lectures on Elocution* (1762), Richard Whateley's *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828), and Alexander Bain's *English Composition and Rhetoric* (1866). Although courses in the reading and analysis of English literature were not to become part of the curriculum until the second half of the nineteenth century, by 1883 forty college teachers, representing twenty institutions, met in New York to establish the Modern Language Association. Most of the faculty members present taught modern foreign languages, but English teachers joined them in asserting "the disciplinary value of the modern as compared with the ancient languages" [Latin and Greek].[6] By the end of the century, the contributions of British and Scottish rhetoricians and philosophers to the centuries-old history of rhetoric had found a place in the curriculum of most major American universities.

Contemporary rhetoric

The twentieth century has seen a resurgence of interest in rhetoric. Modern scholars have continued to build on centuries-old traditions,

5. William Riley Parker, "Where Do English Departments Come From?" in *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook,* ed. Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 8. The history of rhetoric in America receives thorough discussion in James A. Berlin, *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges* (Studies in Writing and Rhetoric; Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984); Albert Kitzhaber, *Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1850–1900* (Diss. University of Washington, 1953); and Donald C. Stewart, "The Status of Composition and Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1880–1902: An MLA Perspective," *College English* 47 (November 1985), 734–46.

6. [George Winchester Stone], "The Beginning, Development, and Impact of the MLA as a Learned Society: 1883–1958," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 73 (December 1958), 25.

reinterpreting them to assert the importance of human communication here and now. Authors like I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, Chaim Perelman, Richard Weaver, Stephen Toulmin, and Marshall McLuhan view rhetoric from quite different perspectives, but they're all principally concerned with the uses of language in a complex society. Some focus on questions of meaning, on how we use language and other media to make sense of our world. Others, like Weaver, concern themselves with ethics: "As rhetoric confronts us with choices involving values, the rhetorician is a preacher to us, noble if he tries to direct our passion toward noble ends and base if he uses our passion to confuse and degrade us" (*Language Is Sermonic*, p. 179). Still others value rhetoric as a means of knowing. For them, language is crucial to thinking, to advancing human knowledge. Toulmin, for example, who finds formal syllogistic logic impractical, develops a model for arguments which use language not so much to proclaim truth but to foster understanding. Finally, some contemporary rhetoricians explore the impact of language on political and social relationships, viewing rhetoric as an instrument of social change. In some ways, of course, the "new" rhetoric isn't new; it reaches back to the classical tradition. But it also incorporates recent perspectives from linguistics, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, semantics, politics, and even advertising to synthesize the arts of rhetoric our culture now practices.

We won't survey here all of the significant contemporary developments in rhetoric. Some of them will be discussed later, when we can examine particular teaching strategies in light of current theories. So, although prewriting, for example, reflects a renewed interest in invention, we'll examine that contemporary development more closely in Chapters 5 and 6. In this section the discussion focuses on two individuals often cited in the professional literature English teachers read, Kenneth Burke and James Kinneavy.

Kenneth Burke (1897–) has had the greatest impact on rhetoric in the twentieth century. Since the publication of *Counter-Statement* (1931), a succession of books articulate Burke's concern with the problem of language. "To his thorough knowledge of classical tradition," writes Marie Hochmuth, "he has added rich insights gained from serious study of anthropology, sociology, history, psychology, philosophy, and the whole body of humane letters."[7] Although essentially a philosopher, Burke views rhetoric so comprehensively that social scientists and humanists, especially literary critics, find his work valuable. Instead of placing inordinate emphasis on persuasion, or style, or literary criticism, Burke enlarges the scope of rhetoric to include all of

7. Marie Hochmuth, "Kenneth Burke and the 'New Rhetoric,' " *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 38 (April 1952), p. 144; the essay offers an excellent overview of Burke's work and serves as my principal source for the following discussion.

the "symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (*A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 43).

Human beings, asserts Burke, are linguistic animals, using and misusing symbols. Rhetoric is a function of language which enables human beings to overcome the divisions separating them. Since human beings are, most of the time, at odds with one another, language permits them to "induce cooperation," to identify themselves with other individuals:

> If I had to sum up in one word the differences between the "old" rhetoric and a "new" (a rhetoric reinvigorated by fresh insights which the "new sciences" contributed to the subject), I would reduce it to this: The key term for the old rhetoric was "persuasion" and its stress was upon deliberate design. The key term for the "new" rhetoric would be "identification," which can include a partially "unconscious" factor in appeal. "Identification" at its simplest is also a deliberative device, as when the politician seeks to identify himself with his audience. In this respect, its equivalents are plentiful in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. But identification can also be an end, as when people earnestly yearn to identify themselves with some group or other. Here they are not necessarily being acted upon by a conscious external agent, but may be acting upon themselves to this end. ("Rhetoric—Old and New," p. 63)

Identification is a key concept in Burke's theory of rhetoric; it explains why human beings act rhetorically on one another—to promote social cohesion.

The central question Burke investigates is, "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (*A Grammar of Motives*, p. xv). In other words, he concerns himself with attributing motives to human actions. Instead of viewing motive in simple, mechanistic terms like "cause and effect" or "stimulus and response," Burke approaches the study of motivation through the analysis of drama. *Motive* acts as a kind of shorthand term for *situation:*

> In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person *(agent)* performed the act, what means or instruments he used *(agency)* and the *purpose*. Men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character of the person who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may even insist upon totally different words to name the act itself. But be that as it may, any complete statement about motives will offer *some kind of* answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose). (*A Grammar of Motives*, p. xv)

These five terms—act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose—become the "pentad" for examining human motivation dramatistically, in terms of action and its ends.

Burke's rhetoric of motives helps us understand human relations in terms of "signs," not just spoken language but also nonverbal communication which achieves identification. For example, regardless of what a department head may say to me when he visits my office, the visit itself represents a symbolic, nonverbal action associated with administrative rhetoric. Meeting me on my "territory" suggests that he identifies himself with my concerns, a rhetorical strategy more likely to induce my cooperation than if he had summoned me to his office. Similarly, the tendency toward identification is reflected in symbolic actions like signing a petition, attending a social function because we ought to make an appearance, remembering someone's birthday, or carefully selecting the clothes we wear on the first day of class.

Burke's major contribution to rhetorical theory is his attempt to broaden its scope. In *A Rhetoric of Motives,* he redefines *persuasion:* "All told, persuasion ranges from the bluntest quest of advantage, as in sales promotion or propaganda, through courtship, social etiquette, education, and the sermon, to a 'pure' form that delights in the process of appeal for itself alone, without ulterior purpose" (p. xiv). More important, Burke reasserts the importance of rhetoric at a time when most people have become conscious of the dehumanizing influence of technology. Rhetoric functions, he argues, not to ornament arguments or even to assert truths. Rather, it uses symbols as a means whereby human beings act out with each other the drama of life.

Much more limited in scope, James Kinneavy's *A Theory of Discourse* (1971) nevertheless brings together with extraordinary comprehensiveness classical and contemporary developments in rhetoric. His theory is essentially Aristotelian, but it also incorporates the perspectives of modern linguists, logicians, semioticians, propaganda analysts, literary critics, philosophers, information theorists, and social scientists. Kinneavy avoids the term *rhetoric,* primarily because it has taken on meanings as broad as "the general science or art of communication" and as restricted as "style." He focuses instead on the term *discourse,* "the full text . . . of an oral or written situation."[8] His work gives us a framework for understanding what is produced when people practice rhetoric, using language purposefully to communicate

8. James Kinneavy, *A Theory of Discourse* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 4. Kinneavy summarizes his *Theory of Discourse* and compares it to James Moffett's *Teaching the Universe of Discourse,* Frank D'Angelo's *A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric,* and James Britton's *The Development of Writing Abilities, 11–18* in "A Pluralistic Synthesis of Four Contemporary Models for Teaching Composition," in *Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition,* ed. Aviva Freedman and Ian Pringle (Conway, Ark.: L & S Books, 1980), pp. 37–52.

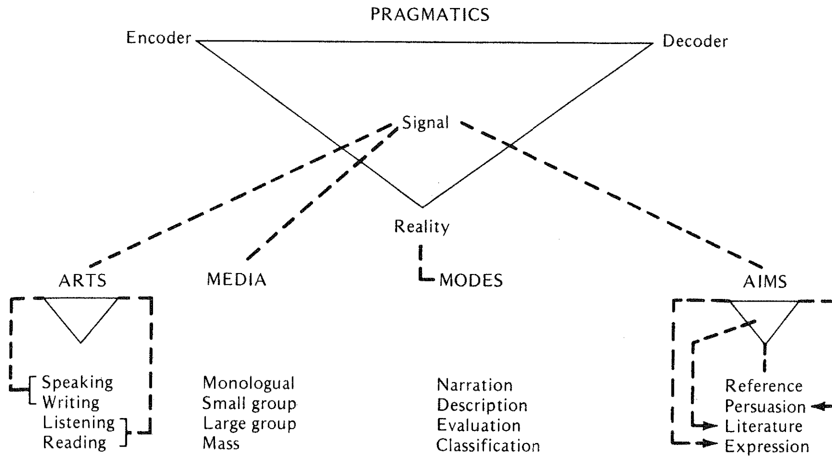

FIGURE 4.1 Pragmatics: The Study of Texts
Adapted from James Kinneavy, *A Theory of Discourse* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

ideas to an audience. His theory certainly includes a discussion of rhetoric-as-persuasion, but it also examines other purposes for oral and written communication.

Beginning with the communication triangle (encoder, decoder, reality, signal), Kinneavy divides the field of English into three areas of study, which explain human experience with some element of the triangle. (See Fig. 4.1). Only one of these areas, pragmatics, concerns us here. Pragmatics studies the actual *use* of meaningful signals by encoders and decoders. Viewed as the study of texts, pragmatics depends on all four terms in the communication triangle because every discourse, every spoken or written text, is characterized by an author who uses signals to communicate a reality for a particular purpose.

Kinneavy subdivides pragmatics into the arts, media, modes, and aims of discourse. The arts—speaking, writing, listening, and reading—reflect differences in the kinds of signals that encoders and decoders use and how they process these signals. The media define the *channels* through which the signal is transmitted. "In other words, arts of discourse are signals transmitted through various media of discourse" (p. 33). Media can be classified according to the number of encoders and decoders using the channels at a given time. From monologual to mass media, Kinneavy's classification includes lectures, soliloquies, telephone calls, counseling sessions, panels, questionnaires, conventions, newspapers, and television.

The term *mode* is difficult to define because it has accumulated multiple meanings over the years. Alexander Bain, in *English Composition and Rhetoric* (1866), established five modes, four of which are still found

in many contemporary textbooks: narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. In all probability, Bain's modes were adaptations of the classical "topics" of invention which, in time, came to denote ways of arranging material. However, Kinneavy notes that argumentation or persuasion is not a mode, but an aim of discourse, not a method or way of discussing reality, but a reason or purpose for using language. Consequently, he revises the traditional classification of modes to include narration, description, evaluation, and classification.

For Kinneavy, the term *mode* denotes the kinds of realities discourse refers to. Modes answer the question, "What is this text about?" We're naming modes when we respond to this question with "It's a story (narration)," "It's a description of my dog," "It's a criticism (evaluation) of President Reagan's energy policy," or "It's a discussion of the types (classification) of college students." Each mode, Kinneavy maintains, is grounded in a principle of thought which permits us to view reality a certain way. "Therefore," he claims, "each of the modes has its own peculiar logic. It also has its own organizational patterns and, to some extent, its own stylistic characteristics" (p. 37). Furthermore, the modes of discourse overlap; a given text may have a dominant mode, but "in actuality, it is impossible to have pure narration, description, evaluation, or classification" (p. 37).

Having defined the arts, media, and modes of discourse, Kinneavy devotes the rest of the book to a discussion of aims. The aims of discourse reflect the writer's or speaker's purpose for using language. They are perhaps the most significant subdivision of pragmatics in Kinneavy's theory because purpose determines everything else about the discourse. When our purpose is to discuss reality, we may produce what Kinneavy calls *reference discourse.* There are three kinds of reference discourse. If we know the reality and simply want to relay facts about it we use language to inform; Kinneavy cites weather reports, news stories, and telephone directories as examples of informative discourse. Second, "if this information is systematized and accompanied by demonstrative proof of its validity, there is a scientific use of language" (p. 39); some literary criticism and much history represents scientific discourse. Third, if we don't know the reality but our purpose is to explore it, we stress the exploratory use of language; exploratory discourse may include interviews, questionnaires, and some seminars.

Whereas reference discourse is reality-centered, the other three aims of discourse focus on different components of the communication triangle. (See Fig. 4.2.) Persuasive discourse uses language to persuade the audience; our primary purpose is to prompt a response in the reader or listener. Literary discourse calls attention to itself as a text; our primary purpose is to create artifacts "worthy of contemplation in their own right" (p. 39). Expressive discourse emphasizes the en-

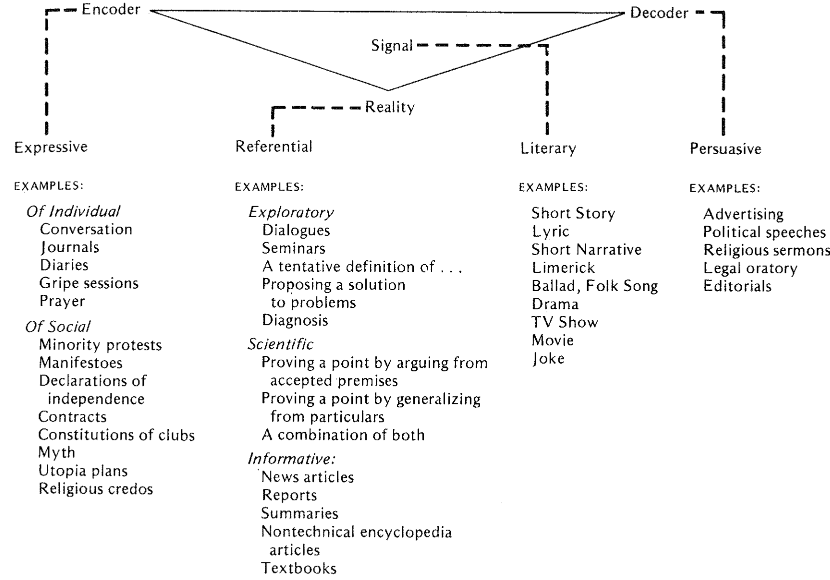

FIGURE 4.2 The Aims of Discourse
From James Kinneavy, *A Theory of Discourse* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

coder, either a person or a group, using language to assert the self. The four aims, like the four modes, overlap. We may use language primarily to emphasize one element of the communication triangle, but that doesn't deny the presence of lesser purposes and other uses of language: "Persuasion as a matter of course incorporates information about the product [to be advertised], maybe even some valid scientific proof of its superiority, and it may use such literary techniques as rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration in its slogan" (p. 60).

Each of these four uses of language, governed by the writer's or speaker's purpose, has its own logic, organizational patterns, and stylistic peculiarities. Kinneavy's discussion of these distinguishing characteristics occupies most of his book. Essentially, he applies the traditional departments of rhetoric—especially invention, arrangement, and style—to the four aims, consequently generating four "rhetorics." Rhetoric, traditionally viewed as the art of persuasion, is for Kinneavy only one use of language, only one aspect of a much larger study which describes how human beings use language to realize certain purposes in communicating with each other:

> Language is like a windowpane. I may throw bricks as it to vent my feelings about something; I may use a chunk of it to chase away an intruder; I may use it to mirror or explore reality; and I may use a

stained-glass windowpane to call attention to itself. Windows can be used expressively, persuasively, referentially, and artistically. (*A Theory of Discourse*, p. 40)

Conclusion

We must now return to the question the title of this chapter poses: What do teachers need to know about rhetoric? In and among the historical summaries you've read lie terms, principles, and emphases writing teachers need to understand. Why? Because they shaped the courses we took to become teachers. Because the texts we use as well as the literature of our profession make assumptions about rhetoric we need to understand if we want to teach well. Because we all practice rhetoric, composing written and spoken discourse for a variety of rhetorical purposes. And perhaps, in reading this chapter, you've gained other insights which will benefit your teaching.

One conclusion you might have reached is that the terms associated with rhetoric change. *Rhetoric* itself is difficult to define, for it denotes both a practice and a body of knowledge which describes the practice. We need to understand what people mean when they use the term. Are they referring to a theory? If so, whose? To a practice? If so, from what perspective do they view its use? Similarly, when we hear words like *persuasion, communication, style,* and *mode,* what do they mean? Does *style* simply refer to the kinds of words writers use or does it rather embody all of the rhetorical choices they make? We need to remember that the concern for stylistic "correctness" or "propriety" represents only one view of the rhetorical tradition, and a relatively recent view at that. We should also recognize that texts which urge students to "be clear, precise, and concise" reflect a neoclassical preference for the plain style.

These terms have taken on different meanings because the rhetorical tradition has experienced shifts in emphasis. As we have seen, classical rhetoric forms the foundation which subsequent rhetoricians modified. They practiced the art to meet their own needs and developed rhetorical theories which reflect a unique cultural perspective. As a result, various departments of rhetoric fluctuated in prominence. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, then again in the eighteenth century, rhetoricians focused primarily on style. Elocutionists concerned themselves principally with delivery. Longinians asserted the primacy of sublime thoughts or invention (as well as sublimity of style). In the twentieth century, especially among writing teachers, there has been a resurgence of interest in invention or prewriting, in part to counter an excessive preoccupation with the written product.

We can note other changes too. Historically some rhetoricans sought to combine rhetoric with other verbal arts: logic, grammar, and poetics. Writing courses which devote considerable time to the study of

grammar or literature represent such a blending of the arts; in fact, such courses, whatever else they may do, probably do not give students much practice in rhetoric. We should remember too that literature (or belles-lettres) hasn't always served as the model for teaching rhetorical principles. From time to time other forms of oral and written discourse—letters, sermons, debates, lectures, disputations on points of law—helped students understand rhetorical theory and practice.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from this chapter is that rhetoric changes. People change it as they use language to communicate with each other. For some time now, the narrower definition of rhetoric as the art of persuasion has failed to describe how we use language. That is why in this century the definition has been enlarged to incorporate other aims of discourse. Knowing that rhetoric is a dynamic process permits us to question assumptions which presume rhetoric "has always been thus" or "ought to treat such and such." It makes no more sense to assume that rhetoric is principally concerned with persuasion, or with stylistic flair, or with literary analysis than it would to assert that our students must demonstrate the elocutionary skills of medieval preachers. If we view rhetorical theory and practice as some irrelevant archaism, we will become trapped by the tradition. Instead, we must understand the varied and changing purposes people have for using language so that we can teach intelligently the arts of rhetoric our culture now practices.