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Digital Writing



In the film *The Matrix* (Figure 1.1), the protagonist, named Neo (played by Keanu Reeves), comes to learn that the world he inhabits is not made of matter that he can touch and hold, but rather it is one of illusion, a virtual reality made up of digital codes that only seems to be real. As the story unfolds, Neo no longer sees the illusion, but the actual strings of code, the binary code of 1s and 0s that create every structure, every image, and every word. His entire world is written with digital codes, and he can only defeat his enemies once he learns to master the digital world that surrounds him. He does this by becoming a digital writer.

Credit: Everett Collection



Figure 1.1
Neo from *The Matrix*, or “the one,” learns to see his whole world as strings of digital codes.

Becoming Digital

You might not live in a world controlled by machines, but you must still learn how to master the digital technologies you interact with on a daily basis. Although the buildings, vehicles, appliances, clothes, and other objects you encounter aren't made *of* digital writing, they are made *with* digital writing. Many of the daily objects you encounter require complex computer software programs to design them, computer algorithms to run the machinery that makes them,

Credit: Konstantin Von Wedelstaedt



Figure 1.2
How many kinds of digital codes do you think it takes to deliver a package?

and digital writing programs to create their instruction manuals. Even if an object isn't designed with a computer, such as an ear of corn, digital writing at some point intersects with that corn's growth and production, such as the tractor harvester that collects it or the transportation logistics that get it to the grocery store (Figure 1.2).

While Neo is a fictional character, Thomas Suarez is not. Suarez writes code for real, and he was just 12 years old when he taught himself how to code and build iPhone apps. Eventually, he started a school coding club and taught other kids how to build apps for themselves, helping them all become digital writers (Figure 1.3).

However, digital writing appeared long before computer algorithms and codes. Digital, in one sense, simply means larger wholes that can be broken into discrete parts and rearranged elsewhere, as opposed to analog, which are wholes that cannot be broken apart (and still function). An MP3 file can be broken into smaller units, transferred across the world, and then reassembled into the same song. You cannot do this with a record. If you break the record into pieces, you might be able to glue it back together again, but the sounds won't be exactly the same as they were before.

In the same way, the alphabet provides a digital code. With only 26 symbols, you can create millions of words and rearrange them in any conceivable order to create existing words or even new words. The digital nature of the alphabet allows you to remember only 26 symbols you can rearrange to make up any

Credit: TEDx

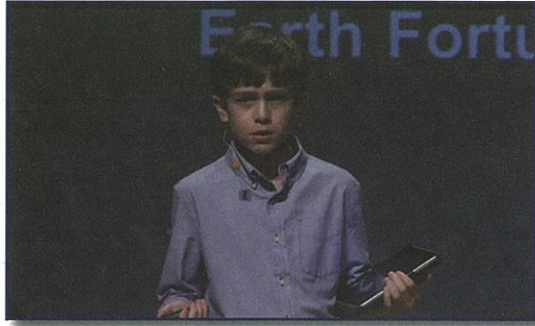


Figure 1.3
Suarez wasn't interested in just playing video games; he wanted to make them as well.

word, rather than individual symbols for each object, action, or idea you may want to name.

Of course, another meaning of "digital" refers not to the writing itself, but the means of writing: your fingers (this is what "digit" originally meant in Latin). Whether pressing cuneiform into clay tablets, inking hieroglyphics onto papyrus, chiseling letters into marble, typing text with a typewriter or a keyboard, or gesturing words onto a touch screen or in the air for a motion sensor, you typically rely upon the digits of your hands to write with. For those who no longer have the use of their hands, other means of writing exist, such as voice-to-text programs. However, you predominantly use your digits to write, especially the thumbs, when texting from a smartphone. When you write digitally, you do so in more ways than one.

To think of a "digital writer" is to consider all these ways of writing digitally, and you can probably think of many other ways that writing is digital. In fact, nearly all writing you do is connected to digital writing in some way, from the smartphones you use to send text messages, to the laptops you take to school, the electronic pens you use to sign a credit card purchase, or the news you might follow on television.

Link Building

Stop for a minute. In a group, write down a list of all the digital writing technologies you used since you got up this morning. Now, next to this list, create a second list that identifies the last writing you did without the use of digital technologies. Discuss these examples, particularly the nondigital writing. Is there a sense that even these nondigital writing technologies are still digital?

Search Engine

How would you define "digital writing"? What instruments or tools do you associate with digital writing? In what locations would you expect digital writing to occur? How might you describe digital writing to your parents or grandparents? What tasks, jobs, or careers do you most associate with digital writing? Create your own definition, and compare it with the definitions that follow.

Defining Digital Writing

Even if you wrote with a pencil and paper and sent your messages via carrier pigeons, a whole network of international collaboration, commerce, and transport has been synchronized with digital technologies in order to make that pencil and paper (and perhaps breed and raise the carrier pigeon). When you write, you are interconnected with digital networks through digital writing; you are in the matrix. In a very real sense, you were born into a digital world with doctors and nurses who used digital writing technologies. If the first photo taken of you wasn't a digital sonogram, then it was most likely taken with a digital camera. You are a digital writer in more ways than one. Like Neo in *The Matrix*, once you realize the digital nature of all writing, once you see the world around you as it "really" is, you have an advantage by understanding the larger interconnectedness of writing and technology. You will more effectively use current digital writing technologies, but also you will adapt more easily to new writing technologies. For the purposes of this book, the term "digital writing"—as well as "digital writer"—mainly requires you to consider particular aspects (none of which involve knowing kung fu).

Requires electronic technology

This aspect may seem pretty obvious, but consider the many devices available for writing. While previous cultures may have adopted very few tools and media for writing—consider the ancient Babylonians who mainly used clay and a stylus to create cuneiform tablets—you have computers, smartphones, tablets, digital cameras, electronic pens, graphic design programs, presentation software programs, and many means available for writing digital texts. Moreover, "analog" texts composed on paper with ink or pencil can be digitized through optical scanners or digital snapshots.

Makes use of the Internet

While technically you can compose a digital text without being connected to the Internet, to be a truly savvy digital writer, you'll need to make use of the many digital writing tools available online. Resources and storage made available through cloud computing provide free or inexpensive ways to produce texts and can impact the kind of hardware you purchase or use. In addition, because many of your digital texts will be delivered through the Internet—not only through email but also through social media websites such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and many others—you will need to consider how online delivery and reception influences how you create the text. Chapter 11 will delve more deeply into the topic of digital delivery.

Relies on multiple codes

As discussed above, the alphabet itself provides a code for writing a visible form of spoken language. However, digital writing combines the alphabet with many other kinds of codes to create digital texts. For instance, Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is the main code used to build websites. This code includes letters from the alphabet, but these letters no longer mean the same thing. The HTML tag `` doesn't refer to the sound "b," but to the text property "bold," something seen and not heard. When you change a photograph from color to black and white in a photo editor, you're using an algorithmic code to enact the transition. Some codes, such as the QR code in Figure 1.4, may not use letters at all. Even if you don't know the many codes that make a software program work, you're still writing with them. Although you may not need to know all these codes to be a digital writer, having an awareness of them can help you consider the possibilities and limitations of constructing a particular text.

Uses digital images

Just like the relationship between digital writing and the Internet, you could compose digital texts without using any images at all. However, you've probably noticed that most digital texts, from professional websites to social media platforms, make heavy use of digital images. In fact, you might also compose digital texts that are only digital images, such as through Tumblr or Instagram. Even digital writing that is primarily text-based, such as email and SMS messages, often are used to send digital images in addition to alphabetic text. Because of the ease and prevalence of composing with images in online environments, your audience will expect to see images alongside text, and you should always think of digital writing as also writing with images.

Operates in more than one medium or genre

Professional writers are often required to be able to write a variety of documents, such as proposals, manuals, instructions, memos, letters, emails, reports, and many other genres. Your role as a digital writer is similar, for in addition to these document genres, you should be able to design websites, manage social media campaigns, create digital images, produce videos, and write other kinds of digital texts. In addition, the content for one medium or genre must often be adapted to others. For instance, a video advertisement might need to be converted to a radio spot, or a print document may need to be altered and turned into a web-based document. As a digital writer, when composing a document, you should ask yourself what other media or genres you might need to write toward.

Requires research

Just like any kind of writing, digital writing requires research when composing a document. However, the kinds of resources may vary from those you would use for a traditional print-based document. For instance, while you may use digital databases, such as Wikipedia or Google Scholar, to get you started with any kind of writing assignment, a digital text that includes images, videos, audio, and other media may require you to use digital resources, such as an image search, YouTube, Internet Movie Database (IMDb), or the Internet Archive. As with any reference source, you must be able to discern between trustworthy and untrustworthy digital research resources and know how to cite them. Chapter 6 will look at this topic in more detail.

Communicates in a social environment

A print-based document may be sent to a few people, or even distributed widely as a flyer or brochure, but doing so can be costly and often time consuming. By contrast, digital texts can be sent to one recipient or a million viewers with a few mouse clicks and within a few seconds. While the recipient of a print document may make copies and send them to others, she could do this much quicker if the document was in a digital format. Overall, writing and disseminating digital texts becomes a much more social activity for many digital writing genres, such as blogs, social media platforms, and other venues that encourage audience feedback and participation. As a digital writer, you need to be keenly aware of where your document may end up and how it might be reappropriated. While you can't account for every potential audience, you should at least consider the negative consequences of placing a particular text online.

Makes use of rhetorical devices

Usually, when you're writing for an external audience, you have some goal in mind: You want to persuade the reader to accept you into a graduate program or to give you a job; you might want to persuade your member of congress to vote yes or no on a particular bill; you might want to make people aware that your band is playing downtown this weekend. Whatever the purpose, you'll use rhetoric to help persuade your audience they should take a certain action. Digital writing is no different and requires careful attention to the rhetorical techniques found in traditional kinds of writing, such as *logos*, *pathos*, *ethos*, and *kairos*. However, digital writing requires more consideration of the medium, genre, and design of these texts. To help you consider the rhetorical situation when writing digital texts, this book will introduce you to the rhetorical tetrahedron discussed later in this chapter.

Has digital audiences

As discussed above, digital writing has an audience that interacts with your documents much more socially and interactively than with print-based forms of writing. This interaction through digital tools and technologies makes your audience into digital versions that often appear to you as digital codes and through identities such as avatars. Thus, you and your audience come to know about one another in ways specific to digital technologies because any of you can perform a Google search on one another or look up one another on Facebook. However, when considering your audience for digital texts, you also must consider the nonhuman readers of your documents, such as search engine robots that stand between you and your human readers. Digital writing must take into account these digital audiences as well as your final readers.

Rhetorical Continuities

Although digital writing makes use of new rhetorical techniques, some continuities with older rhetorical traditions still remain. For example, digital arguments are still arguments: They make a claim.

As discussed more in Chapter 3, a claim (also called a thesis statement) makes an argument to establish a position about the world, usually toward some purpose. A simple description about digital and nondigital writing technologies is not an argument. However, making a claim that one kind of technology is better than the other because of its use value is an argument, or at least begins an argument. The purpose might be to persuade the reader he should adopt one kind of technology over the other. In the assignment at the end of this chapter, you will be asked to write a report, and evaluate (make a claim about) digital versus nondigital forms of writing.

Remains in a constant state of revision

You may have heard the phrase, "Writing is never finished, only abandoned." This maxim suggests that a writer could revise and revise and revise a document, but deadlines or other constraints ultimately mean she has to stop at some point and distribute the document to her audience. You may experience this feeling every time you turn in an essay for class. Given the finality of print—and the expense of printing new editions—authors of print-based works cannot return to their works often to revise them if they want to. However, if this maxim holds true for print documents, it's even truer for digital writing—

at least, the first part of the saying. With digital writing, the writing is never finished, for it's much easier to revise hypertext in a digital medium than it is to change a printed document. In addition, audiences of websites, such as blogs, expect updated content on a regular basis, requiring you to return to digital writing. Moreover, because search robots are constantly changing how and where your online document might appear to a search engine—and thus to human readers—your document is constantly changing in the ways it interacts with audiences and the Internet as a whole. Even if you ultimately stop working on a digital text, it's never finished, and never totally abandoned.

Although you'll learn about many more aspects of digital writing that will be covered in this book, these are the major themes you'll most commonly encounter as you compose and analyze digital texts.



DIGITAL Connections

For more on how humans are becoming more digital, check out the BBC's podcast series "Digital Human" by Aleks Krotoski.

www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01n7094



Defining "Text" and "Writing"

Digital writing makes use of not just words, but images, sounds, code, and other forms of "texts." Toward a more comprehensive understanding of the kind of texts that digital writing produces, this book will refer to a "text" not simply as a text that uses alphabetic writing, but any kind of artifact produced by humans. Thus, a film, painting, sculpture, clothing, building, website, text message, video, song—virtually any object—can be read as a text. For instance, you might think of an airplane as a vehicle rather than a text, but as soon as that airplane has a paint job and a logo, it becomes a symbol and more than just a means to travel. As soon as that airplane includes more legroom than another, it makes an argument for why you should fly in it versus its competitor. Text can be seen, it can be heard, and it can be felt through textures and patterns, such as braille or larger seats. While we might say a food-based text such as a cake can also be smelled and tasted, this textbook doesn't cover these senses, although they certainly contribute to how you compose and interpret such texts.

In addition, this textbook uses the term "writing" to describe any action that produces a text. Thus, writing might refer to composing a traditional essay, but it also might refer to making a video or editing computer code. When the textbook uses the term, "alphabetic writing," it's specifically referring to writing that uses the alphabet to make words.

Rhetorical Links: Classical Greece to the Digital Globe

You have probably heard this term before, but what is "rhetoric" anyway? The answer depends on whom you ask. Many people, upon hearing the word rhetoric, equate the term with descriptions such as "hot air," "empty," "lacking substance," or "overblown." Such descriptions paint rhetoric in a negative light, that suggests rhetoric may make words "pretty" at best, but "manipulative" at worst.

However, rhetoric might be better understood according to some of the definitions below. These people understood rhetoric not as a devious tool, but as a necessary method for making an argument. In fact, any time you try to argue a point, you're using rhetoric to help you do so.

Aristotle: Rhetoric is "the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion."

Cicero: "Rhetoric is one great art composed of five lesser arts: inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and pronuntiatio." Rhetoric is "speech designed to persuade."

Quintilian: "Rhetoric is the art of speaking well" or "... good man speaking well."

Francis Bacon: "Rhetoric is the application of reason to imagination for the better moving of the will."

I. A. Richards: "Rhetoric is the study of misunderstandings and their remedies."

Erika Lindemann: "Rhetoric is a form of reasoning about probabilities, based on assumptions people share as members of a community."

Philip Johnson: “Rhetoric is the art of framing an argument so that it can be appreciated by an audience.”

Andrea Lunsford: “Rhetoric is the art, practice, and study of human communication.”

Sidney I. Dobrin: “Rhetoric, quite simply, is how we use language to communicate—to persuade, to inform, to narrate, to remember, or to do any number of the things we use language to do.”

Kenneth Burke: “Rhetoric [is] the manipulation of men’s beliefs for political ends...the basic function of rhetoric [is] the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents.”

As this last definition from Kenneth Burke implies, it’s important to understand that rhetoric itself can be an act, and a person making an argument is taking an action. Theodore Roosevelt has stated that “Rhetoric is a poor substitute for action, and we have trusted only to rhetoric. If we are really to be a great nation, we must not merely talk; we must act big.”

What Roosevelt misunderstands is that rhetoric *is* action, that his words *create* action. Without rhetoric, he could not persuade the nation to become great.

Plato and Aristotle

Most of our Western tradition of rhetoric and philosophy originates from classical Greece (508–322 BCE), particularly from the figures of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and we can still trace many rhetorical and philosophical terms and principles back to this trio.

Although he helped develop literate concepts, Socrates himself did not read or write. Still, he was able to think in abstract ways that most could only do through the tools and technologies of reading and writing, and so it is sometimes said that Socrates was the only man able to do literacy in his head alone. Luckily, Socrates’s student, Plato, recorded many of Socrates’s dialogues, giving us an idea of what Socrates thought and taught his students. Of course, Plato filtered these dialogues based on his own ideas and perceptions, and he would take these teachings and tutor his own students, forming the Academy, one of the first schools and a predecessor to the modern university.

Plato understood rhetoric as persuasion but felt that rhetoric needed to be tied to dialectic, a method of dialogue identified by Simon Blackburn as “the process of eliciting the truth by means of questions aimed at opening out what is already implicitly known, or at exposing the contradictions and muddles of an opponent’s position.” Here, rhetoric as dialectic works as philosophy, trying to uncover the truth as flaws and inconsistencies are identified and stripped away. Rhetoric, then, is not only about persuasion but also about uncovering the truth. For Plato, however, this “truth” was “Truth” with a capital “T”; he believed there were universal Truths that existed in heaven and could be discovered only through philosophy. One couldn’t uncover this Truth through observing the world, for the world was an imperfect reflection of the real Truths that existed in heaven. Only by engaging in dialectic could Truth be revealed.

Many of Plato’s ideas about rhetoric work against the Sophists, teachers of rhetoric who would travel from city to city and recruit students whom they would teach for a fee. Sophists typically taught logic, analysis of language and thought, and how to develop and form arguments. In general, Sophists taught there was no universal truth that existed outside of man, but that our words and discourse shape the world. Thus, any use of rhetoric seeks not to uncover some universal state of being but is rather used toward the particular context and circumstances surrounding the issue, including its application toward concepts of morality and immorality. Because they were looking for particular, situational truths (little “t”) instead of universal Truths (big “T”), Plato accused the Sophists of offering weaker or “worse” forms of rhetoric that misled an audience, making a weaker argument seem stronger than it was.

In his dialogue the *Gorgias*, Plato works against these Sophistic ideas and attacks rhetoric when it is separated from dialectic; in other words, he attacks rhetoric when it’s not used with dialectic to uncover Truths. Throughout the dialogue, Plato and his fellow participants attempt to define rhetoric, with Plato offering that “...one part of it would be flattery, I suppose, and shameful public harangue, while the other—that of getting the souls of the citizens to be as good as possible and of striving valiantly to say what is best, whether the audience will find it more pleasant or more unpleasant—is something admirable. But you’ve never seen this type of oratory...” Alone, Plato identifies rhetoric as mere flattery, simply trying to win the audience regardless of the truth, and this is the most common form, because he feels one has never seen orators trying to use rhetoric to get “the souls of the citizens to be as good as possible.” As such, he argues this is a bad, immoral use of rhetoric. Rhetoric used for good must be tied to philosophy so that it will have a moral compass to help guide its proper use. The only way to get at this truth is through discussion with others in order to gain knowledge of each other’s souls, which is dialectic.

In another of Plato's dialogues, the *Phaedrus*, Plato attacks writing because—unlike a person—a piece of writing itself cannot answer questions, cannot be tailored to specific audiences, and cannot defend itself. In other words, writing cannot engage in dialectic conversation, so the reader cannot interrogate the writing's "soul" and know if it uses rhetoric for good or bad purposes. Writing, therefore, cannot be used as a method for uncovering Truth.

For Aristotle, a student of Plato, the dialectic method is also one of persuasion, but he splits rhetoric from dialectic so rhetoric has a more applied, practical dimension while reserving dialectic for theoretical inquiry and seeking essential truths. In other words, the application of the dialectic took place in courts or the assembly when a practical decision must be made, and not when attempting to think about universal truths.

This practical dimension of rhetoric was important because of Greece's democratic government. Within a democratic country of laws, we rarely settle disputes and misunderstandings through violence (although, unfortunately, this sometimes happens). Rhetoric is one of the primary ways we settle these disputes. Aristotle realized this within his own context of a fledgling Greek democracy and understood that rhetoric was an important means to communicate effectively, a skill that was now needed by all citizens to participate in government. In his text *Rhetoric*, Aristotle wrote:

Again, it is absurd to hold that a man ought to be ashamed of being unable to defend himself with his limbs, but not of being unable to defend himself with speech and reason, when the use of rational speech is more distinctive of a human being than the use of his limbs. And if it be objected that one who uses such power of speech unjustly might do great harm, that is a charge which may be made in common against all good things except virtue, and above all against the things that are most useful, as strength, health, wealth, generalship. A man can confer the greatest of benefits by a right use of these, and inflict the greatest of injuries by using them wrongly.

In other words, rhetorical power is just as important (if not more so) as physical power, and just as you shouldn't use physical force for ill gains, neither should you employ rhetoric for unethical purposes. As with any other skill or tool, you should be proud of the ability to create savvy, rhetorically sound arguments to persuade an audience of your point of view.

Aristotle composed a treatise on rhetoric in order to identify those parts or elements of rhetoric that seemed to be most successful and useful. While Aristotle does think those who use rhetoric should be moral, he offers that the main

goal of rhetoric should be to persuade an audience, and much of his advice focuses on how to invent arguments that will best convince an audience. In his work, *Rhetoric*, Aristotle gives us the concepts of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, as well as the canons of rhetoric—invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—that you will learn more about throughout this text.

While this text is more concerned with giving you practical techniques and tools for rhetorical practice in your daily lives, and not helping you to uncover big truths, some aspects of digital writing do bring up some of the issues Plato was concerned about. For instance, even though you might be separated from your audience by thousands of miles, digital writing tools allow you to engage in rhetorical dialogue in ways that older media don't allow. You can literally be face to face with your audience via Skype, or you can converse through microblogging or SMS messaging in real time. The instantaneous response of digital writing platforms allows for rhetorical engagements to happen at a rapid pace, and for rhetors and audiences to refine their statements and uncover "truth," whatever that might mean for each participant.

Modes and Forms of Rhetoric

Although Plato and Aristotle wrote about rhetoric 2,500 years ago, many of their insights still resonate today. This text attempts to make some of these connections explicit in the Rhetorical Continuities sections. However, as you read the text, consider for yourself how new, emerging forms of digital rhetorics connect back to these ancient ideas.

Building

In a group, discuss how you understood the term "rhetoric" before starting this chapter. Had you only understood the term negatively, such as "empty rhetoric," or had you previously studied rhetoric as a means to communicate and build arguments? Draft a report based on your discussion, and share it with the class.

Engine

Based on the understanding of rhetoric presented so far, when was the last time you used rhetoric and what was the context? Were you successful, or did you fail to persuade your audience? Write a short report of this experience, and share it with the class.

Another important consideration of rhetoric is that it doesn't occur only in writing with words, or alphabetic writing, but in other modes of writing as well, and in all the technologies used for writing. As Aristotle states above, rhetoric includes "all" the available means of persuasion, and sometimes these means include other forms of writing than just words and text. Images, physical objects, movies, television, and music can all be used rhetorically. A film, such as Disney's *Wall-E*, can try to warn us of a possible future should we use up all of Earth's resources. A powerful photograph can make audiences rethink an issue and start political change. A blog can be created in order to more quickly spread an issue important to its author.

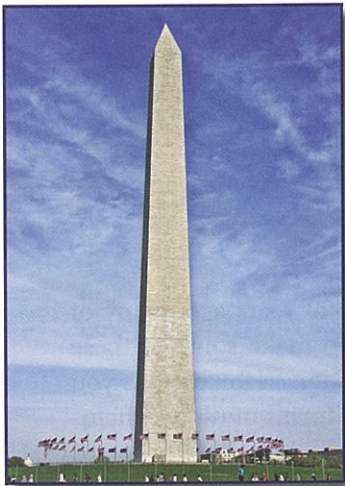


Figure 1.5
The very shape of the Washington Monument is itself rhetorical.

The buildings and monuments around us are rhetorical. The Washington Monument uses the shape of the obelisk, which can be read as tall, strong, straight, and upright, all values that the designer hoped to associate with George Washington and the United States in general. The shape of the monument makes an argument for how you should remember Washington, and the choice of the monument's shape is one of the "means of persuasion" used to do this. The Washington National Monument Society, who drafted the first proposal for the monument, understood the monument's rhetorical impact very well:

It is proposed that the contemplated monument shall be like him in whose honor it is to be constructed, unparalleled in the world, and commensurate with the gratitude, liberality, and patriotism of the

people by whom it is to be erected . . . [It] should blend stupendousness with elegance, and be of such magnitude and beauty as to be an object of pride to the American people, and of admiration to all who see it. Its material is intended to be wholly American, and to be of marble and granite brought from each state, that each state may participate in the glory of contributing material as well as in funds to its construction.

By including stone from each state, the monument, as seen in Figure 1.5, makes a rhetorical gesture that the states were all connected through Washington and his leadership during the American Revolution.

The logos for your favorite sports teams are also rhetorical, especially those that use a fierce, menacing animal. For instance, the Florida Panthers NHL hockey team partially chose the Florida panther as a logo because, as the former team manager stated, the Florida panther "is the quickest striking of all cats. Hopefully, that's how we will be on the ice." However, the former team owner, Wayne Huizenga, also selected the Florida Panther because of the animal's endangered status, helping to communicate the panther's plight across the country. This logo choice in Figure 1.6 was rhetorical and was used to help spread an environmental message as well as make his hockey team seem tough.

Other sports teams use logos to connect with ideas or citizens of a region. The New England Patriots are appealing to the revolutionary spirit of the Boston area and their patriotism. The Miami Heat connects with South Florida's hot temperatures, but also the threat that their opponents might get "burned." Fans in these local areas identify with this message, helping to persuade them to support the team and see themselves as part of a larger group. And what is the action to which the authors hope this rhetorical strategy ultimately leads? Ticket and merchandise sales. One action begets another.

Credit: NHL, Florida Panthers



Figure 1.6
The Florida panther was chosen as a mascot because it conveys an argument about the quickness and ferocity of the Florida Panthers NHL hockey team. However, this choice also makes an argument that the Florida Panthers team cares about the plight of the endangered Florida panther.



DIGITAL Connections

Top Gun Boosting Service Sign-ups

By Mark Evje

SAN DIEGO—Regulations prohibit the Navy from promoting the hit movie *Top Gun* in its recruitment efforts, but the film extolling the service's best fighter jocks apparently has become a valuable tool . . . in some parts of the Southwest anyway.

As Chapter 3 will discuss in more detail, movies can also use rhetoric to make a point or create an argument, even if this argument is implied and not immediately obvious. Moreover, sometimes an organization or movement can use a movie as rhetorical evidence to help them take an action.

When the film opened in May, recruiters in some cities manned tables outside movie houses during *Top Gun* premieres to answer questions from would-be flyboys emerging with a new-found need for speed from an F-14 warplane.

Navy recruiting officials say they didn't keep track of that operation's success, but they have noticed more inquiries than usual about the naval aviation officer candidate program since the movie's release.

They don't think it's a coincidence.

"Two groups I can identify (as having increased interest) are individuals who have applied in the past and were turned down or dropped out of Aviation Officers Training School, and individuals who are approaching the maximum age limit (to apply)," said Lt. Ray Gray, head of the officer programs department in Los Angeles.

"There seems to have been a big rush in those categories that I have to attribute to the movie. I've asked several of these individuals if they've seen the movie and if that's why they came down to talk to us again and they've said 'yes'.

"On the other end of the spectrum, we've seen a general increase in interest in young men who don't yet qualify for the program, and I have to attribute that to *Top Gun* also."

Lt. Sandy Stairs, the Navy's representative while the film was in production, said Navy regulations prohibit the service from "selectively endorsing or appearing to endorse a commercial product," like the movie, even though it favorably portrays the Navy and could aid in recruiting.

In 1986, the movie *Top Gun*, starring Tom Cruise, was released in theaters. The film portrays the psychological struggles of one of the country's best naval aviators as he comes to terms with personal and professional difficulties, ultimately overcoming them. Because of the positive portrayal of the U.S. Navy and the excitement of flying Navy aircraft, the real-life U.S. Navy saw a dramatic increase in recruitment numbers, even setting up recruiting tables outside of movie theaters. Consider Mark Evje's article "*Top Gun* Boosting Service Sign-ups" originally published in the *Los Angeles Times*.

"Some recruiters have said to me that a lot of young high school graduates said they've seen the movie and would like to sign up for naval aviation, but we don't actively go out and say, 'Go see the movie.' We're not in the business of promoting the movie, we're in the business of recruiting people," Stairs said.

But Lt. Cmdr. Laura Marlowe, officer in charge of recruiting for the naval officer program in Arizona and San Diego, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties, said her recruiters in Phoenix have received twice as many calls as usual about the aviation program in the last month.

"They couldn't specifically say it was a direct result of *Top Gun*, but they suspect it probably had a lot to do with it because when they would talk to applicants, about 90 percent said they had seen the movie," Marlowe said.

"Maybe it hadn't made them call in, but they'd been thinking about (joining the Navy) and this was just the kicker that put them over the line," Marlowe said.

The high-adrenaline aerial fight scenes, high-tech jets, and patriotic overtones all provide rhetorical appeals to help persuade audiences of the honor and valor of serving as a naval aviator, even if the movie's ultimate goal is to entertain and earn ticket sales. Although it didn't directly promote the movie, the U.S. Navy was able to capitalize on the rhetorical messages implied within the movie and use these messages toward other actions, such as signing up new recruits.

As you'll read more in Chapter 2 (and throughout the book), digital rhetoric uses many forms of rhetoric but also incorporates digital practices that other kinds of writing do not allow. For instance, the act of making text into a hyperlink is a rhetorical choice that signals to readers they should click on the hyperlink, that doing so is in their best interest to learn more. Creating a hyperlink is an act meant to produce another act. Incorporating a YouTube clip into a blog post can help provide an example to your audience, helping them to better understand your point and hopefully act in the way you desire. Using a hashtag in a Twitter post suggests to the audience your message is part of a broader conversation, rhetorically situating the tweet within a larger argument. All of these choices can improve the chances of persuading your audience, and that's all rhetoric really is, whether in an oral speech, a written essay, or a Facebook post.

Link Building

As you've probably noticed, blockbuster films often are used to sell products by linking a soft drink, snack, or restaurant with the movies' releases. In this way, the companies that produce the affiliated products are attempting to use the movies as a way to convince viewers to buy their goods. However, what other ways do you think movies can be used rhetorically? With a partner, find examples of how movies can be incorporated into other texts, or used as examples in arguments, to help illustrate or argue a point. Write down your examples, and share them with the class.

Search Engine

Analyze the top trending Twitter hashtags. What kind of tweets are these tags linked to? Why do you think the authors are incorporating these tags? What rhetorical advantage do you think they gain (how does it help their attempt at communicating)? Write a summary of your findings, and share them with the class.

From Literacy to Electracy: Writing Technologies

The examples of digital rhetoric listed above require a specific technology: digital applications—such as a word processor or a photo editor—and the digital Internet. Up until now, traditional forms of rhetoric usually involved techniques developed for speech (orality) or for writing with the alphabet (literacy). While you still continue to use literate techniques and technologies when forming arguments, you must begin to think beyond this literate frame when using digital technologies, for digital writing tools can do a lot more than those that developed literacy.

For instance, when you think about writing, you might imagine sitting at a desk with paper and pencil, typing a document on your computer for class, or writing on your blog. You might also envision the different situations in which you write. You probably write notes for class, scribble a list for the store, jot down a phone number, or post a message for a roommate. You write in a variety of contexts every day, whether within formal academic settings or toward informal, everyday tasks.

And while all these situations call for writing, do you ever use images to supplement or replace writing? Do you create shopping lists with images of what you plan to buy, or jot a diagram to help you remember a concept from class? Do you take a picture of a new contact when you add her to your phone's address book?

In some respect, the first question posed above is misleading. You always use images when you write, for that's what writing is—images used as representations for aural words. In essence, this is what the alphabet is—a set of images for the basic sounds you use to say those words. The “words” you're reading right now are not “words” exactly, but images of words. Whenever you write, you write with images.

Writing with the images of the alphabet—what this book will call alphabetic writing—has existed for roughly 2,500 years in various incarnations of alphabets. However, its logic system, how you use these systems of images, has been evolving slowly during that time. Many cite the ancient Greeks as the first culture that really analyzed how writing could be used and developed, especially the figures of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Figure 1.7).

For example, the concept of giving an object a “definition” didn't always exist and had to be invented as a literate practice. The ability to write the essence of a thing (its definition), and commit it to an image, provided one of the first early inventions of what writing could create. Eventually, dividing the “things” of the world into particular definitions produced the natural sciences. Even though natural historians still argue about how to divide animals, plants, rocks, or planets into different categories, they still use definitions to accomplish their work.



Figure 1.7
Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle helped determine how you use alphabetic writing nearly 2,500 years later.

Rhetoric and electracy

In general, the term “literacy” refers to the ability to use alphabetic writing, which denotes mastery in both reading and writing with letters. This ability includes not only skill at making the letters, but also understanding the logic and

practices that make them work to build words, sentences, paragraphs, pages, and books, as well as arguments, proofs, concepts, and definitions. Reading or writing a book is certainly one aspect of literacy, but a literate person also can use inductive or deductive logic, make and break apart an argument, understand a fallacy, or organize information into a logical system.

Writing, however, continues to evolve and society is moving into a postliterate age that uses other kinds of writing tools, practices, and logics. Since the invention of photography in the 1800s, the image has come into prominence as a mode of recording experience, prompting scholars such as W.J.T. Mitchell to call the current age the “pictorial turn.”

Credit: Mack Male



Figure 1.8
Before the photographer ever takes the actual photo, she has to make a lot of choices, such as camera angle, subject positioning, lighting, what to include in the frame, and what to leave out.

However, composing an image doesn't stop once you “take” a picture. These photographs are often incorporated into other media, and new images are composed. Taking a photograph, as Roland Barthes describes, is not simply an act of “recording” what's in front of the lens, but a rhetorical process. The photographer chooses what elements of a photo should remain in the frame, what elements receive the focus or most prominence, how the people or object should be positioned, or whether the person or object should even be aware his/her/its photograph is being taken (Figure 1.8).

Many of your own photos probably end up on social media sites. In this way, you compose images and then compose with images, just as you compose with images of words when you write a paper. And after you take a picture, you often revise it, using a photo editor to remove distortions or crop a photo to focus on a particular element.

While this textbook is partly constructed with alphabetic writing, and at times discusses alphabetic writing, it is mostly focused on writing with the image, both the skills and logics necessary to do so. Such skill sets are not inherently literate, but what Gregory L. Ulmer refers to as “electrate,” the skill sets needed to effectively communicate within a digital media environment. As a supplement to the literate skills you've already developed, this text looks at electracy (sometimes referred to as “digital literacy” or “media literacy”).

Why use the term “electracy” over ones such as “digital literacy?” As Jan Holmevik explains:

What has happened during the process of the digitization of writing is that it has escaped its traditional forms and arenas, and thus the literate apparatus as conceived by the ancient Greeks is no longer sufficient to account for all its forms and permutations. Therefore, writing can no longer be a privileged form of expression now that so many other expressive forms exist in the digital space. (Inter/vention, p. 5)

In other words, because “literacy” refers specifically to alphabetic writing, terms such as “digital literacies” are no longer sufficient to explain and account for the many innovative and creative ways people are using digital writing. In fact, a term like “literacy” limits the ways you can think about digital writing since it tries to frame it in terms of older writing technologies and logics.

Electrate skills and emerging technologies

Such logic and skill sets don't just appear from nothing but have to be invented. While someone invented the automobile (or horseless carriage) and probably had the idea that it would be used for transportation, many other practices and purposes for the car were invented since the invention of the actual technology. You don't just use automobiles for transportation, but also for fun, relaxation, or sport. The rules for driving had to be invented, as well as making sure people knew the rules (thus, driver's licenses) and techniques for making sure cars kept working (changing the oil, checking tire pressure, filling it with fuel). Being “literate” in the automobile entails more than just building a car and more than just driving one.

The same process occurred with writing. But just as the ancient Greeks began the invention process for literacy, someone needs to invent the logic and practices of electracy. Who is currently developing electrate skill sets? To the extent that people as individuals have adopted digital technologies, all users of these technologies invent new practices and uses every day, whether or not these practices catch on and become used by everyone else. For example, people are inventing uses for the emerging technology of augmented reality, which overlays digital information onto physical spaces, to display information in museum exhibits, create new kinds of mobile games, display repair instructions to astronauts, train medical doctors, and help consumers see how furniture will look in their homes, with new practices being developed every day (Figure 1.9). Eventually, such practices will become institutionalized and their uses become widespread. Regarding these practices, another question arises: Which institutions have spread the most usage practices of an emerging electracy?

Credit: Mr3641



Figure 1.9
Emerging writing technologies, such as augmented reality, need people to invent how to use them.

Ulmer cites the institution of “entertainment” as the dominant producer of electrated practices, which can be widely understood as the products of Hollywood movies, but also the smaller units of media entertainment, including video games, graphic novels, and photography. In addition, advertising and marketing adopt the logic of cinema and make advertisements entertaining, humorous, sad, and ironic, and give them other narrative techniques to hook a viewer and make them part of a product’s “story.”

The underlying principle of these entertainment practices is that they don’t necessarily appeal to a person’s conscious literate logic of analysis, but to their emotions. Such logic is based in aesthetics, or what the viewer likes. If a viewer doesn’t like the “look” of a design, then chances are he will have a negative reaction to whatever the design is trying to argue, whether or not he agrees with the “literate” message the design is trying to communicate.

The electrated skill set this text will present, then, is one of design and aesthetics, and how these aspects of writing can be used toward rhetorical goals in digital environments. This text will present general design aesthetics that most beginning arts classes might teach, such as courses in photography, painting, or web design. However, this text will place these practices under the larger umbrella of “writing,” because these are all ways to produce a mark, to create visible (and sometimes audible) ways of communicating through the digital Internet, even if some of those visuals become printed and distributed in hard copy.

Electracy, although postliterate, is also parallel to literacy. Literacy is useful and will always exist alongside electracy (just as people still use oral modes, such as the church recital, theatrical plays, and political debates). Part of learning electrated skill sets is also learning how alphabetic writing adapts, integrates, and supports certain practices of visual communication. Throughout the examples and assignments in this text, you will still need to rely on literate modes of analysis and composition and apply them to understanding and creating more electrated modes of writing. Authors will use the practices that they’re best at as a way to build and develop new ones.

Link Building

Link

In a group, discuss when you use images as a substitute for alphabetic writing, such as with shopping lists, diagrams, directions, a color, or other information. Do you feel the image is more effective than writing something out? Is it quicker? Write down your examples, and share them with the class.

Search Engine

Search

Research the term “electracy,” and find a scholarly article that uses this term. Write a brief report on the article, including its main ideas and purpose, and share it with the class.

Building Links Across Rhetorical Tools

The “rhetorical triangle,” is a diagram meant to help students learn about the different rhetorical elements at play when communicating with an audience.

Figure 1.10 offers one version of the rhetorical triangle that focuses on the different people involved when communicating. The three vertices represent the writer, audience, and message. Together, these three elements make up the major parts of any rhetorical exchange.

The point labeled, “writer,” represents not simply the person writing, but those aspects of the person that affect her or his rhetorical appeal, such as her character, credibility as a speaker, eloquence in delivery, style of writing, choice of examples, and other rhetorical choices she might make.

The “audience” makes up another point of the rhetorical triangle. The audience has its own beliefs, values, expectations, and experiences the author must consider when crafting an argument. Failure to ask these questions when designing a text can lead you to make poor rhetorical choices and fail to

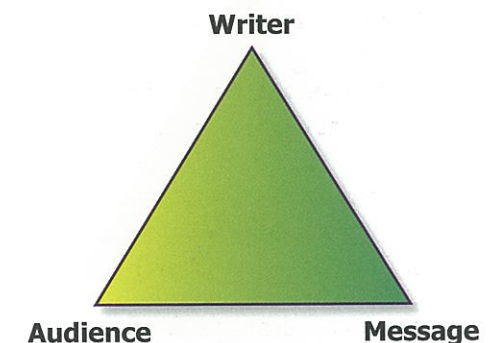


Figure 1.10
The rhetorical triangle showing writer, audience, and message

convince your audience. Even worse, you might offend them and make it harder to communicate with them in the future.

The last point represents the actual “message” or the subject of a text, including its information, claims, style, examples, evidence, and structure. Reading a text for these aspects of its message can help you identify an ethical argument from one that is unethical, “good” rhetoric from “bad” rhetoric, and can also help you identify where the argument is weak due to lack of evidence or information about the subject. Asking these questions can also help you strengthen your own writing by helping you to become aware of how you’ve constructed your text.

While this triangle can be useful for thinking about how different rhetorical elements interact when communicating, it provides a very static way of understanding how communication works. The act of making an argument doesn’t occur in a two-dimensional world, but one in which people, things, events, and time all affect the larger situation. The argument you might make at one point in time could completely change five minutes later. The simplicity of the rhetorical triangle can’t take this complexity into account.

Credit: © Fountainhead Press

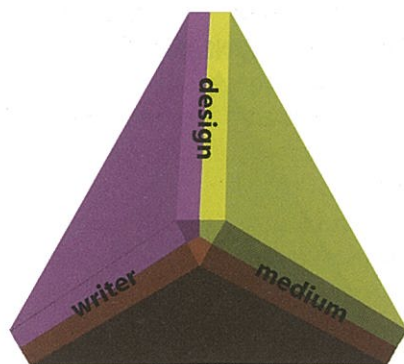


Figure 1.11
The rhetorical tetrahedron
youtu.be/QM996yemH5o



places them on the edges. A point only represents a single number, while the edge can represent a continuum. Rather than considering just a single audience, the edge labeled, “audience,” suggests you consider all the possible audiences that might read a particular work, for in a world with Facebook and Twitter, documents can quickly circulate beyond your intended audience. Rarely does a document find a single audience, and often an author must consider everyone

As an alternative, this book suggests a three-dimensional version called the rhetorical tetrahedron (Figure 1.11). A tetrahedron is a three-dimensional shape made up of four triangles. This model incorporates the traditional labels of writer, audience, and message but also adds three other elements that are important to digital writing, a kind of writing that goes beyond writing on paper. These elements are medium, design, and genre.

As you can see in Figure 1.11, instead of placing these six aspects on the points of the tetrahedron, this book

that will encounter the document. This includes not only human audiences, but also nonhuman ones, such as search engine robots, bits of code that search the web on behalf of search engines like Google or Bing and categorize this information to optimize a user’s search results. You may never directly encounter these invisible audiences, but if you post a document online, these audiences will eventually find it.

Of course, the rhetorical tetrahedron also helps you analyze other works of digital writing. You can use the same six elements to ask questions of the message itself, of the writer of the work, its intended audience, why a particular medium was chosen, how it was designed, and why a particular genre was selected. These questions can help you understand digital texts as you encounter them on a daily basis.

Link Building

As a class, leave the classroom and explore campus for 15 minutes. Look for as many kinds of writing as you can find, and note the medium, design, and genre in which the writing appears. You might even snap pictures of each example with your smartphone, especially if you have difficulty identifying these aspects. After 15 minutes, return to class and share your examples. Discuss why you think each example of writing was created in a certain medium, was designed in its current form, and why a particular genre was used.

Search Engine

Research the history of the rhetorical triangle. When did it first become widely used as an educational aid to study rhetoric? How has it changed throughout the years? Write a report based on your research, and share it with the class.

Writing Digitally: Medium, Design, and Genre

For writing traditional essays, the questions of medium, design, and genre are usually pretty simple. Most often, the medium is 8.5" x 11" white paper, the design consists of double-spaced 12 pt. Times New Roman font, and the genre is a five-paragraph essay, short response, or term paper.

When writing digitally, the number of choices you have for each of these explodes. For a medium, should you choose paper? Video? A website? A podcast? A blog? How will the design of your website, video, or blog look

when you're not simply limited to font selection and margin size? And should you present your work as an essay? A short documentary? The tetrahedron represents these aspects of writing, helping you to remember to take them into account as you compose in digital modes.

As the old cliché states, "It's not what you say, but how you say it." This "how" relates to these three aspects. As already discussed, aesthetics play an important role in rhetoric. If an audience "likes" what they see or hear, then the audience is more inclined to act in the way the writer is requesting. The design of a composition (and this includes something as "literate" as an essay for class) can be as important as the content of its message. Instead of separating the design (form) from content, consider them integral and always interrelated.

As part of the design, the genre plays an important role in how the piece communicates to an audience. Should you create the design as a flyer or brochure, or make it interactive as a website or online video? Does the audience expect the information to appear in a certain form, such as an email, memo, or letter? If so, these expectations limit the choices you have. The genre you choose will influence how you design the visual composition, and your ideas for a design will likewise influence what genres you feel will best fit your overall message.

The design and genre come together in the medium you choose. The proposal genre can appear in the medium of paper, but it also can appear via a website or video. An essay also can appear in a different medium than you're probably used to, and your instructor may have you complete the video essay assignment in Chapter 9. Much of your choice in medium will depend upon your audience's expectations about standard pairings of genre and medium, or limitations your audience may have in using different media. While you should be creative in thinking about new ways to mix the two, if your audience does not have the resources to play a video proposal sent to them on DVD, they will never see your design nor receive your message. Whenever you're considering design, genre, and medium, you often have to consider all of them together simultaneously, just as you do writer, audience, and message.

The sliding continuum along the edge of the tetrahedron allows you to visualize the flux of possibilities that may exist when you're working on a document with others. Likewise, a range of mediums, designs, and genres may be selected from, and a single point ignores this diverse range.

Moreover, many texts are not written by a single writer, but instead have many collaborators that contribute to a piece of writing, whether it's a simple memo or something more complex like a website.

As a three-dimensional object, the tetrahedron also moves in space and time to represent the shifting nature of a rhetorical situation. In Chapter 2, you'll learn about *kairos*, the timing of rhetoric, an often neglected component that helps you to think about the "right" moment for speaking or writing. *Kairos* is an important element the traditional two-dimensional rhetorical triangles leave out. Furthermore, *kairos* is especially important in digital writing because the Internet allows the delivery of a document at a moment's whim, and as Figure

1.12 demonstrates, once a document is on the web, there are no "take-backs."

"The Medium Is the Message"

"The medium is the message." This famous quote from media scholar Marshall McLuhan suggests the medium becomes a message in itself, no matter what the content (Figure 1.13). One of his examples for this was the light bulb (a different kind of medium than you're probably used to thinking about). By itself, the light bulb emits light, and it doesn't matter what that light is used for. This light can be used to do anything from working on your car to watching a football game at night. The important feature is not what you do with the light bulb, but that the light bulb allows you to alter how you conduct your life. The important message is that you can do anything at night because of the medium of the light bulb and not the particular activity (content) you choose.

Beyond the light bulb, McLuhan was interested in how all media affect human lives, from print to television. Given the new devices being released every day in your own time, you might consider other media, from smartphones to tablets, as media that have their own messages, no matter what content the user is viewing or interacting with. The fact that the user can interact with

Credit: Ad Council



Figure 1.12
Remember to "think before you post" images or other documents to the Internet, because once you hit send, it's "out of your hands."

youtu.be/oPZZu7reBEs



Credit: John Reeves

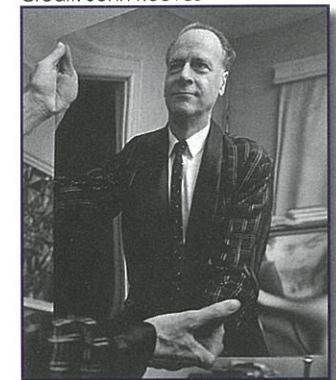


Figure 1.13
Marshall McLuhan argues that "the medium is the message."



Figure 1.14
Sergey Brin, wearing Google Glass.

what they see on a touchscreen has become a message in its own right, but one often masked by the content.

The choice of medium, then, becomes an important part of an author's *ethos* and reflects on the author's character. What if Sergey Brin, the co-founder of Google, started using an old Polaroid camera to take pictures instead of his recent project, Google Glass (Figure 1.14)? You would probably ask why the leader of one

of the biggest computer software companies and one of the leading computer innovators is using technology that is more than 60 years old. Doesn't he have something better available, and doesn't he know how to use it? In fact, he does, and he uses Google Glass to post pictures and video instantly to his Google+ page.

Focus on Production: Theory and Praxis

This text will analyze—and ask you to analyze—a variety of digital compositions to reveal how they function rhetorically. These analytical dissections can help you recognize persuasive elements in the texts you see around you every day. However, this analysis is mainly focused on the production of your own texts. While it is important to know how to “read” an image, this text's ultimate goal is for you to be able to produce your own digital writings for a variety of purposes, audiences, contexts, and rhetorical situations.

As you encounter sections in the text that analyze an image or video, the analysis will suggest ways you can use similar techniques within your own works. Use these examples as relays or models to construct your own digital writings. Remember, however, that yours will be much different given that you will have a different rhetorical situation. The basic principles in the example, however, will be applicable to all of your works.

Focus on Environment: Images and the Outside World

When this text discusses “environment,” it's referring to more than just the natural environment. For instance, this text will often discuss the environmental effects of using different kinds of media. However, “environment” also refers to the larger rhetorical environment in which you might see, make, or

place an image. This larger visual environment will most likely contain many other images, whether this is a public bulletin board where you might place a flyer, or a website that has a variety of images, videos, and texts (Figure 1.15). Each chapter will consider some of these environmental aspects you should be aware of when taking a particular step in the production process (Figure 1.16).



Figure 1.15
After Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, many residents of the city temporarily moved to Houston for shelter. During the natural disaster, many families were separated, and bulletin boards such as this one provided a location to place notes. This bulletin board provides just one example of how environment, in many senses of the word, influences writing.



Figure 1.16
Unlike more “natural” writing technologies, such as paper and pencils, electronic writing tools can poison the environment if not disposed of properly. However, they are usually just tossed into landfills without thinking about the toxic effects.

KEY Terms

alphabet
analog
Aristotle
audience
augmented reality
code
dialectic
digital
digital writing
electracy
environment
genre
image
Internet

kairos
literacy
medium
message
Plato
QR code
rhetoric
rhetorical tetrahedron
rhetorical triangle
technology
text
writer
writing