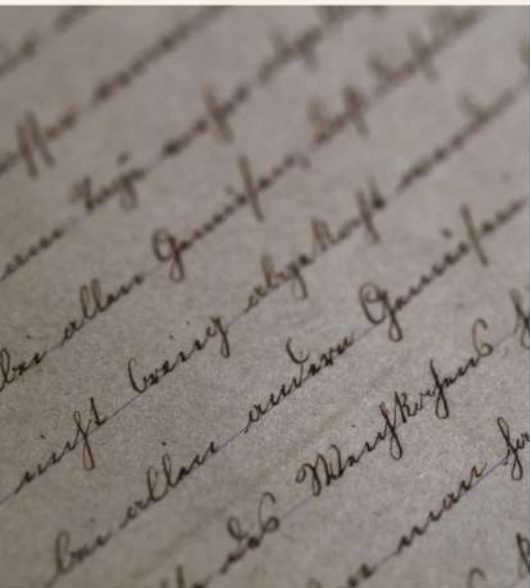


# CENTRAL WORDS

Overview of central words



# GENRE



Genres give shape and form to the way that we use language (discourse). Think of it as the “frame” or “container” for language that gives it a certain shape. Genres are used within particular contexts and for specific purposes, which determine what the genre actually is.

What is a **genre**? Genre this is defined as a type of text that gives particular shape to discourse (words, language). Please note that the word genre is not only used to talk about literary or film genres (but this is how it’s used by the general public and non-academics). In class, we’re talking about genres in a more inclusive way beyond books, music, and movies.



**Examples of genres:** emails, letters, movie posters, ads, research papers, conference proposals, research proposals, lab reports, bank statements, medical referral, tickets (the fun kind, for movies, concerts, and sporting events) and tickets (the bad kind, when you park in the wrong spot), poems, receipts, business cards, post-it notes, court documents, PowerPoint presentation, infographic, syllabus, outline and so on. As a human, you recognize these types of texts as genres because they have recurring patterns and conventions and are used in particular contexts with certain audiences for specific purposes. There's a reason why you know a letter isn't an email or a DM.



Within each genre category, there are various "subcategories" and differences across them. For instance, not all syllabi are the same. There are variations across departments, universities, disciplines, but also across time and across academic cultures transnationally.



# GENRE CONVENTIONS

**Genre conventions** are the specific features and patterns of a text that we can identify. It's the "writing stuff" that we can see, including format, color, design choices, and other multimodal elements. For instance, you know the features of a post card and how it's different from an Instagram post. Both are typically photos, but they have different conventions, are used in different ways, and have different affordances (one is digital and can include many photos, video, and audio, whereas the other one isn't). It's conventions and patterns that make a genre recognizable as, well, a genre. This includes the tiniest, tiniest, most mundane, obvious feature of a text that you can think of, like a period, exclamation point, indents, font style and size, and so on. While they are tiny, they matter and contribute to the unique features of a genre.

# CORE CONVENTIONS AND NEGOTIABLE CONVENTIONS

**Core conventions:** you will see these in probably every single iteration of the genre. For instance, all emails will show you who the sender is and who the recipient is. There's always an option for a subject line and attachments.

and other events, making your brand truly memorable.

For example, tax forms pretty much always have the same content year after year, and you will need your W-2 to answer many of the questions. It's very unlikely this will change any time soon!



**Negotiable conventions:** ever get frustrated when you write because you notice differences between examples you've seen? Yes, those differences are the negotiable aspects of writing. For instance, you may or may not address a professor as "Dr" or you might not even have a greeting in an email. It all depends on the audience and your relationship with them (the rhetorical situation, we'll get to it). And most of the time, it's the negotiable conventions that make writing complex and difficult writers with less experience, but that's why analytical skills are a life saver!

# GENRE RESEARCH

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**Genre research** is a fundamental writing/literacy practice. This is simply the practice of finding examples of your genre so that you can conduct a genre analysis to identify the conventions and the rhetorical situation.

**Conducting genre research** is a process and it might be slightly different for everyone. These are not fixed steps because everyone's practices are a little different.

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## 01.

We start by collecting examples of the genre you're trying to learn. Make sure they're as authentic as possible (i.e., that someone actually used it IRL). Make sure you have a decent set of examples so you can "get to know" the genre better.

## 02.

Organize them and document what you see during your initial round. What do you notice? Pay attention to words, phrases, design choices, formatting, length, paragraphs, and organizational details, level of (in)formality, punctuation and so on. What do you see? Document this information in a document, maybe create a table, bullet point lists and so on.

## 03.

Go back and do another round or two and pay more attention to the rhetorical choices and the language. What type of sentence structures and phrases are used? What grammatical choices are made, e.g., are there contractions? What types of words are used (are they formal/informal)? After that, you'll have a better sense and understanding of the genre.

# GENRE ANALYSIS

**Genre analysis** is another writing/literacy practice. When conducting an analysis, you examine the genres closely to identify micro- and macro level elements.

**Micro-level elements:** these are the conventions. What do you see? What are the features and patterns? For example: what type of language in terms of formality/informality, different languages, language structure, or grammar are used? These differ across genres and contexts! For instance, ever read official documents about taxes? Yes, they're very confusing! If you see the images, think of the micro elements as the building blocks, like legos.

**Macro-level elements:** this is the stuff you don't see but they directly shape the conventions. Learning about the rhetorical situation to analyze the context and audience will be critical to understand the macro-level aspect of writing. If you look at the images, think of macro elements as the big picture, which you see in the photo to the right.





**The rhetorical situation** is the macro-level stuff you don't see but directly shapes the rhetorical choices you make as a writer. It's usually described as having five components:

**1.Audience:** Who is your intended audience? What do they know or don't know about your topic? What is your relationship with them?

**2.Purpose:** Why are you writing this thing you're writing about? What are you trying to accomplish? Inform, persuade, argue? Writing is a conversation, so how are you contributing to the conversation?

**3.Context:** Is this written in an academic context? Professional (but non-academic) context? Or everyday/personal context? These three are the broader contextual categories. While they're helpful, they're not enough. Remember that genres are fluid and move across contexts. So, for example, if it's in an academic context, what genre is it? For whom? Is it a conference proposal? Meeting notes? Is it in biology or psychology? Maybe it's art? And what area of art? Painting or film making? As you can see, you need to understand the context like an onion—there are many layers to consider, and they all shape the writing that we do.

**4.Writer/speaker:** Who is the writer?

**5.Message:** what message is the writer trying to convey or articulate? Are they trying to persuade someone that their argument is wrong? Are they trying to inform the general public about an upcoming event?

# RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

A rhetorical analysis is an examination of the genre that you conduct to figure out what the rhetorical situation is. While genre conventions are directly visible in the genre itself (such as font, content, design choices, word choices), the elements of the rhetorical situation often isn't. So it requires some thinking and analysis of the genre to figure it out. For instance, emails are widely used in all context, so how can we determine whether it's used in an everyday, professional, or academic context (and the boundaries may not always be very clear because writing is dynamic).

The first clue is to look at the sender and the recipient. Examine what is written: what is it about, what social action are they trying to accomplish. Ask yourself: are they seeking information about something, making complaints or requests, or apologies?

# DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES

All writing we do takes place in different **communities** (or **contexts**). Different groups and communities have certain ways of using language and by extension writing/literacy, such as: baseball lingo, art communities, gardening jargon, people in NYC vs Chicago, English in Malaysia vs the US, academic language, and so on.



Because we have different ways of using language, there are different expectations for communicating. For instance, the academic discourse community is huge. We can look at smaller areas, such as chemistry, art, and applied linguistics, which are all academic disciplines, but they have very different ways of communicating.



We can go even further by looking at, for instance, subareas in different disciplines. Conversation Analysis (CA) is a branch of applied linguistics, but the way they write and research is different from the way people in second language (L2) writing conduct research and write. And it's even more different from how people in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) write and do research, even though they all belong to the same discipline.



Note that community boundaries are not fixed and often transcend physical boundaries because people move between communities and belong to many different groups. Humans and human activities are far more complex to fit into fixed borders and boundaries.



# MULTIMODALITY



While writing is often conceptualized as written or traditional print text, it's important to understand that writing, and by extension literacy, is multimodal. Oral and visual literacy practices have been part of human activities thousands of years (think about early stories that were passed down to each generation, early cave drawings that tell a story, Lascaux in France, hieroglyphs, and even rune stones). Written print literacy did not become common until much, much later in modern times. All writing and spoken communication are **multimodal**, meaning that we use multiple modes of meaning making. The written word is only ONE way of communicating with people. In many genres, the written word works together with visuals, and even audio. Writing is a dynamic and iterative activity and we have so many tools and ways of expressing ourselves available today.