

## Project 2: Rhetorical Situation Analysis

**Background:** In this project, you will draw on Lloyd Bitzer’s theory of the rhetorical situation to rhetorically analyze a text produced by an organization such as a local charity, campus group, professional organization, advocacy group, online group, or any number of other types of organizations. By successfully completing this assignment, you will learn how to analyze a source’s *rhetorical situation*, a practice that can help you respond effectively to other writing situations you encounter in school and beyond.

**Assignment:** Locate a text composed by members of your selected organization and analyze its rhetorical situation. Write a multimodal essay that

- Analyzes the text’s rhetorical situation, identifying its exigence, audience, and constraints
- Argues whether the text presents a fitting response to its rhetorical situation

Substantiate the claims you make about the text’s rhetorical situation, and its response to this situation, with evidence from the text itself and other relevant sources.

**Audience and Context:** Write with the intent of submitting your essay to the [First-Year Writing Awards](#), which are sponsored by the English Department at CofC. This means your audience includes not only professors of the English department, who may review and reward your essay, but also includes students, faculty, alumni, and anyone else involved with CofC if you were to win an award<sup>1</sup>. Keep in mind that not all readers will be familiar with Bitzer’s ideas.

**\*Include** with the *final version* of the article a “Dear Reader” letter, addressed to the class, that answers the following questions:

- What is the purpose of your essay? (Please put this in your own words - do not copy/paste from the prompt and/or your essay.)
- What are the strengths of your essay? What are its problems?
- What were the challenges you encountered writing the essay and how did you address them?
- What specific revisions did you make from your first draft? How do you think this enabled you to write a stronger paper?
- If you had two more days to revise the essay, what additional changes would you make and why?

Support your response to these questions with specific details from your essay and experience. **Please note that this letter does not count towards the word count requirement for this assignment.**

**Length & Format:** 1700-2200 words, double-spaced, sources cited in MLA

Please consult [this link](#) for additional tips for research and writing.

**Due Dates:**

- Draft 1 (of at least 900 words) due by Friday, March 1, 11:59 PM

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<sup>1</sup> Please note: you are *not* actually required to submit your essay for the Awards (though I encourage you to do so!) – just write as if you *intend* to submit.

- *Conferences March 4-8*
- Final draft (of at *least* 1700 words) due by Friday, March 15, 11:59 PM

**Assignment Specifications:** Below are the criteria I will use to assess each student's essay.

An effective essay

- Rhetorically analyzes a text produced by a specific organization
- Identifies and analyzes the text's exigence, audience, and constraints
- Presents a well-reasoned case for how the text does or doesn't offer a fitting response to its rhetorical situation
- Substantiates its claims about the text's rhetorical situation **and** fitting response with evidence from the text itself and other relevant sources
- Demonstrates an accurate understanding of Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation
- Integrates visuals and other media effectively, following strategies discussed in the readings
- Is appropriately and effectively organized
- Documents sources using MLA in-text citations and a Works Cited
- Avoids excessive basic writing errors and stylistic problems that prevent readers from comprehending the essay
- Includes a Dear Reader letter that answers the five questions listed above, using evidence from the author's writing and/or experience

English 110

15 March 2019

### Advice from an Actor

“You know, happiness can be given to no man. It must be earned. It must be earned through - through generosity and through purpose. But the right to pursue it - the right to pursue it is every man’s right“ (Kutcher).



Ashton Kutcher is a celebrated actor who is well-known for his comedic roles in many popular tv shows and movies. However, nearly ten years ago Kutcher and his then-wife Demi Moore founded Thorn, a nonprofit organization that develops software and technology used to fight human trafficking. Between the advancing programs Thorn has produced and Kutcher’s influence as an agent of change, successful action has been taken towards ending the war against trafficking.

The United States government has a department specifically devoted to monitoring internal relations with the nation’s foreign allies. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) has the ability to control U.S. foreign policy and offer economic and military assistance to underdeveloped countries. They also have the power over boundary lines, loans, intervention programs, export control and commercial enterprises between the United States and foreign nations. Current topics of legislation concerning the SFRC involve Iraq stabilization and reconstruction, global energy security issues, and trafficking in women and children in East Asia (“Senate”).

In February of 2017, the SFRC met in Washington, D.C. to determine prospective efforts to be made on the path to eliminating human slavery and trafficking. Ashton Kutcher testified before the Senate Committee, calling for the assistance of their authoritative capabilities and powerful resources to promote the development of organizations like Thorn. He also advocated for the Committee's direct involvement implementing political policies, such as labor regulations to prevent foreign enterprises from employing forced labor.

When a person communicates any written or spoken form of discourse with the purpose of influencing, persuading or educating others through skillfully constructed language, they are employing rhetoric. Communicants apply rhetorical techniques and devices in order to compose a message that is fitting and effective to its contexture. To understand the circumstantial context constraining a rhetorical discourse, you must analyze the surrounding rhetorical situation. Lloyd F. Bitzer investigates the concept of these conditions throughout his essay "The Rhetorical Situation." Within his examination of such situations, Bitzer identifies three components that structure the rhetorical situation: an exigence, the audience and possible constraints. These elements construct the situational context that the rhetor is responding to and determine if the rhetorical discourse was appropriate and effective. However, the delivery of the rhetorical response is just as crucial to the influence it may have on the audience. The writerly choices and manipulation of language employed by the speaker/writer determines the rhetoric's potency.

Kutcher gave his statement with the intentions of informing, influencing and persuading the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to undertake active measures, specifically to provide funding, regulate labor laws, reform the American foster-care system and promote relations between private and public sectors. Since the power of the SFRC is within the jurisdiction to act upon these steps, Kutcher's discourse is a direct response to the war on human trafficking and modern slavery. In an application of Bitzer's theory to Kutcher's speech, it is understood how

the exigence, audience and constraints of the rhetorical situation shaped his given rhetoric. In a further examination of the language, tone, and presentational mannerisms that Kutcher displayed while giving this statement, the effectiveness of his discourse in the rhetorical situation will be apprehensible.



### **The Rhetorical Situation**

In Bitzer's analysis of the rhetorical situation he defines the term "exigence" as "an imperfection marked by urgency" (6). He further develops this concept as a component of the rhetorical situation by establishing the exigence as grounds for rhetorical discourse. Bitzer notes that many exigences may surround a situation and should only be considered rhetorical when "it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse" (6). This notion distinguishes what circumstances demanded the communicant's rhetorical response, since an exigence is only rhetorical if it can be resolved with words. Ashton Kutcher's opening deposition to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was warranted in regard to the modern war on human trafficking. Given Kutcher's familiarity and expertise dealing with the monstrous crisis, the Senate Committee requested his direction on a course of future action. Within the rhetorical situation of his testimony, Kutcher is attempting to reform the issue at hand: human trafficking.

The opportunity to propose a course of action to an audience as powerful and authoritative as the committee before him gave Kutcher a platform for significant influence since Thorn and similar organizations lack the political authority and resources needed to cross the inevitable threshold between action and resolution. The only ones equipped to combat operations in the war with human trafficking were those sitting before him. In Bitzer's analysis of the rhetorical situation, he claims a "rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are

capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (7). Standing before the committee officials, Kutcher is in the presence of the agents of potential change, which prompted his ambitious discourse. He challenges the Senate to regulate labor forces stating, “if we want to create job in the United States, I would ask you to consider eliminating slavery from the pipelines of corporations because a lot of that slavery is happening abroad” (Kutcher). This proposed policy control is a step towards fighting human slavery that only those with a stature as powerful as the Senate Foreign Relations Committee could enforce. Kutcher acknowledged the potential capabilities of the Committee when he insisted “bringing jobs to America can be the consequence of doing the right thing, or it can be the consequence of doing the wrong thing. But that choice is up to you” (6). Although his impactful message influenced many people, Kutcher distinguished the listeners from his intended audience as he sought the assistance of the Senate Committee.

Despite the tremendous effort and action Ashton Kutcher has dedicated to helping victims of human trafficking, his reputation as a frivolous actor constrains his statement. Regardless of his higher education studying biochemical engineering and prosperous success as a business investor (“Ashton Kutcher”), Kutcher’s credibility is hindered by his career as an entertainer. Seeking ways to overcome how people see him is a constraint that may challenge his effect on viewers, a notion that Bitzer mentions in his essay. Bitzer’s claim that impediments potentially “constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence” (8), alludes to how Kutcher’s reputation as an actor may hinder his discourse, which was created in response to the situational exigence he is advocating for. However, Kutcher takes an opportunity to acknowledge this constraint himself, to provide a counterclaim challenging predisposed attitudes or beliefs his audience may have towards his credibility. Asserting “...and this is about the time when I start talking about politics – that the internet trolls tell me to stick to my day job. So I’d like to talk

about my day job” (Kutcher 2), followed by shocking and provoking accounts he has witnessed since founding his human rights organization. He shared stories of a two-year old child in Cambodia who was being abused by a “sex tourist” (Kutcher 2) and a fifteen-year old who was “abused, raped, and forced into trafficking” (Kutcher 3), within hours of meeting up with a man she had talked to online. Attempting to disprove the negative connotation constraining his testimony, Kutcher constitutes his reliability and expertise concerning the crisis.



### **Rhetorical Analysis**

Through Bitzer’s lens of the rhetorical situation, a pertinent discourse is seen as a response to contextual happenings surrounding the rhetor and/or their environment. In order for a rhetor to do so profitably, they must acknowledge the three constituents contributing to the circumstance. To determine the success of a piece of discourse, one can examine how the rhetor crafted and delivered their response to fit the situation by studying the literary and performative devices employed. The effectiveness of Ashton Kutcher’s opening statement to the SFRC can be examined through his rhetorical craftsmanship and presentational mannerisms.

When formulating a deposition that would leave an influential presence on the Senate Committee, Kutcher manipulated his tone, voice, and diction in order to produce a fitting response. These rhetorical devices are stylistic choices made by the writer to dictate the thoughts and feelings of their audience to produce action. His speech called on the SFRC to provide funding to Thorn, as well as proposed potential action to take against human trafficking. Kutcher included alarming stories of the terrible truth behind this modern-day slavery and tabulated measures for the Committee to undertake. The inclusion of his first-hand encounters exposed the audience to the heartbreaking reality of trafficking and leave them feeling emotionally compelled to provide help to those in need. He further manipulated his use of rhetoric by sharing these

stories with an impassioned and sentimental tone. Kutcher establishes Thorn's leading role as a national method of attack on predators by recalling the following:

Now when the Department of Homeland Security called us and asked for our help, and asked if we had a tool, I had to say no. And it devastated me. It haunted me because for the next three months I had to go to sleep every night and think about that little girl that was still being abused; and the fact that if I built the right thing, we could save her (4).

His assertion of responsibility and self-accountability work to convince listeners that he is doing the most he physically can, intimating that the SFRC is responsible for stepping in with their assistance and resources. Through a perspicaciously planned connection, Kutcher explains to the Senate Committee that they hold the resources and power to make a change for the suffering. These are only some of the writerly choices exercised by Kutcher while prevailing upon proceedings of the SFRC through a purposeful discourse.

Since Ashton Kutcher delivered this message at a public hearing, he took advantage of several presentation characteristics in order to further facilitate the impact of his statement. Through visual recordings of the account (see figure 1), the distressed and sympathetic expression on Kutcher's face is clear, conveying the strong sense of commitment he has towards fighting human exploitation. Linguistic modes were also present in his statement, as Kutcher took pausing breaths and controlled the volume of his voice to imply direct significance on what



**Figure 1.** Ashton's emotional expression (Kutcher).

he was saying. The gentle body language and gestural motions he portrayed through his upright posture, head nods and clenching grip lead to a trustworthy and impactful testimony. Utilizing these performative attributes empowered Ashton Kutcher to characterize his discourse through linguistic, visual and gestural cues.



The opening statement given by Kutcher at the SFRC hearing was an appropriately fitting and conceptually effective response to the transpiring rhetorical situation. He was able to initiate change from those capable of such by presenting an impressive and convincing piece of discourse through persuasive writerly and presentational devices that invoked emotional accountability from those he was addressing.



Despite the weighty efforts of Kutcher and similar organizations, the battle against human trafficking is one they are not capable of fighting themselves. Ideally, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee could use their authority to intervene and offer their resourceful power as the head of external affairs. Kutcher keenly called on the SFRC to offer assistance through strengthened control over the nation's global enterprises to eliminate existent forced labor, to supply capital needed to fund the development of technological software, to advocate for reconstruction of the American foster care system and to encourage private-public partnerships to create sponsored exchanges of service and support. Through compelling writerly choices and notable modes of communication, Kutcher produced a seamlessly fitting and effective discourse that responded to the ongoing exigency of human trafficking. The situation that prompted his statement was made rhetorical through Kutcher's application of language to bring about change. The SFRC hearing was a platform to influence and encourage diplomatic action from those capable of producing such, so Kutcher authored a rhetorically effective discourse to voice potential difference.

## Works Cited

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Biography.com Editors. "Ashton Kutcher Biography." *Biography.com*, A&E Television Networks, Updated 16 Feb. 2017, [www.biography.com/people/ashton-kutcher-267570](http://www.biography.com/people/ashton-kutcher-267570).

Dear Reader,

During the past several weeks spent writing this essay, I struggled with several components of literacy. I wanted to write with a sophisticated and formal tone, so selecting word choices for my thoughts and arguments was a constant struggle. I constantly referred back to thesaurus and dictionary websites that provided me with a more advanced set of vocabulary. My peer evaluations and lexical density calculations acknowledged the formality I was hoping for, but I am still unsure all readers will perceive it as such. I kept our projects intended audience of faculty and staff in mind while writing, which prompted me to ensure I was including enough background information about both Bitzer and Kutcher. I also had to construct my essay coherently so readers could fluently follow along. I do believe that my persuasive and fluent tone is my most evident strength within this essay.

The purpose of my essay was to determine how fitting Ashton Kutcher's opening statement to the SFRC was in response to human trafficking. In order to do this, I had to thoroughly introduce Bitzer's idea of the rhetorical situation as well as Kutcher's speech, making sure to explain them to unfamiliar readers. I then needed to connect both ideas in a cohesive manner that would effectively answer the project's prompt. I took the peer revisions and teacher conference into a great deal of consideration when adding in substantial context, however, I feel this may still pose as my essay's greatest weakness. I had a hard time stepping back from my position as the writer to that of my readers, in a sense that I had not read or listened to either source. There may be questions or connections that plague readers concerning context, which threatens my essay's ability to successfully analysis Kutcher's rhetorical situation.

The discussion post we have done regarding this project have been the most beneficial revisions to my final draft. My first draft was unfinished, so the posts concerning introductions

and conclusions, the works cited page and lexical density gave me a designated time and the direction I needed to write these sections. I took one of my professor's comments about reworking the order of my introductory paragraphs, which I think made a very big difference to the start of my paper. If I had two more days to work on this project, I would research how to limit excessive pronoun usage and continue to substitute word choices for more formal options. I would also have another set of eyes read through and provide me with more feedback.

Thank you for reading,