

Discourse Modes or Types of Discourse

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ABSTRACT: There are four rhetorical modes. They are also known as the ‘Four Modes of Discourse’ and they may be used synonymously with “text type”, and are a long-standing attempt to classify the major kinds of language-based communication particularly writing and speaking, into narration description, exposition, and argumentation.

KEYWORD: discourse mode, rhetorical modes, communication, narration, description, exposition, argumentation, purpose, persuade, analyze information.

The first one is narration and the purpose of this is to tell a story or narrate an event or series of events. This writing mode frequently uses the tools of descriptive writing, but also exposition (a clear and detailed explanation). Narration is an especially useful tool for sequencing or putting details and information into some kind of logical order, traditionally chronological. Working with narration helps us see clear sequences separate from other modes.

A narrative essay recounts something that has happened. That something can be as small as a minor personal experience or as large as a war, and the narrator's tone can be either intimate and casual or neutrally objective and performed in a serious way. Inevitably, a good part of narration is taken up with describing. But a narrative essay differs from a descriptive one in its emphasis on *time* and *sequence*. The essayist turns storyteller, establishing when and in what order a series of related events occurred.

Exactly the same guidelines that hold for a descriptive or narrative essay can be used for the descriptive or narrative paragraph. That is, such a paragraph should be vivid, precise, and climactic, so that the details add up to something more than random observations.

Examples of narration include:

- *Anecdote:* An anecdote is "a story with a point, such as to communicate an abstract idea about a person, place, or thing through the concrete details of a short narrative or to characterize by delineating a specific quirk or trait. Occasionally humorous, anecdotes differ from jokes because their primary purpose is not simply to provoke laughter but to reveal a truth more general than the brief tale itself. Example:

A STRANGE ROOM

A man asked for a room at a London hotel. He was shown into a very small room. There was nothing in it. “I don’t like this room,” he said. “I ‘II not have it.”

“We don’t ask you to sleep here,” said the porter. “This is not a bedroom. This is the lift.”

- *Autobiography*: An autobiography sometimes informally called an auto bio, is a self-written account of one's own life. Example:

My name is Michael Smith and I was born on the 30th of August, 1967 in Long Beach, California. My parents were Eddie Smith and Joan Smith. Both of my parents are deceased. My mom died at the age of 57 in 1994 from lung cancer which was the result of smoking her whole lifetime. My father died at the age of 69 in 2006 from a massive heart attack, which was also the likely result from a lifetime of smoking. Fortunately I have been smart enough to avoid that bad habit.

- *Novel*: A novel is a relatively long work of narrative fiction, typically written in prose and published as a book.
- *Oral history*: Oral history is the collection and study of historical information about individuals, families, important events, or everyday life using audiotapes, videotapes, or transcriptions of planned interviews.
- *Short story*: A short story is a piece of prose fiction that typically can be read in one sitting and focuses on a self-contained incident or series of linked incidents, with the intent of evoking a single effect or mood.
- *Travel literature*: The genre of travel literature encompasses outdoor literature, guide books, nature writing, and travel memoirs.

The second type of discourse is *descriptive*, the purpose of this mode is to re-create, invent, or visually present a person, place, event, or action so that the reader can picture that which is being described. Descriptive writing can be found in the other rhetorical modes.

A *descriptive* essay aims to *make vivid* a place, an object, a character, or a group. It acts as an imaginative guide to stimulate the thoughts of the reader in the form of allowing the mind to personally interact with what the writer has molded through literary enhancement of thoughtful impressions. The writer tries, not simply to convey facts about the object, but to give readers a direct impression of that object, as if they were standing in its presence. The descriptive writer's task is one of translation: he wants to find words to capture the way his five senses have registered the item, so a reader of those words will have a mental picture of it.

Essays whose governing intent is descriptive or narrative are relatively uncommon in college writing. *Exposition* and *argument* tend to prevail.

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Examples include:

Journal writing: A diary is a written or audiovisual record with discrete entries arranged by date reporting on what has happened over the course of a day or other period.

Poetry: poetry (derived from the Greek *poiesis*, "making"), also called verse, is a form of literature that uses aesthetic and often rhythmic^{[1][2][3]} qualities of language – such as phonaesthetics, sound symbolism, and metre – to evoke meanings in addition to, or in place of, a prosaic ostensible meaning.

The third type of discourse is *expository* and the purpose of this mode is to explain, inform, or even describe. It is considered one of the four most common rhetorical modes.

The purpose of expository writing is to explain and analyze information by presenting an idea, relevant evidence, and appropriate discussion. In narrative contexts (such as history and fiction), exposition provides

background information to teach or entertain. In other nonfiction contexts (such as technical communication), the purpose is to teach and inform.

Some basic elements of expository writing are the *subject* being examined; the *thesis*, or statement of the point the author is trying to prove; the *argument*, or backing, for the thesis, which consists of data and facts to serve as proof for the thesis; and the *conclusion*, or restatement of the proved thesis.

Examples include:

- a) business: business letters, reports, press releases,
- b) journalism: essays, recipes and other instructions,
- c) personal: personal letters, wills,
- d) academic and technical communication,
- e) scientific writing: scientific reports, scientific articles,
- f) academic writing: term papers, textbooks, general reference works, encyclopedia articles
- g) technical writing: user guides, technical standards

Shortly, an *expository* essay is one whose chief aim is to present information or to explain something. To *expound* is to set forth in detail, so that a reader will learn some facts about a given subject. However, no essay is merely a set of facts. Behind all the details lies an attitude, a *point of view*. In exposition, as in all the other modes, details must be selected and ordered according to the writer's sense of their importance and interest. Though the expository writer isn't primarily taking a stand on an issue, he can't and shouldn't try to keep his opinions completely hidden. There is no interesting way of expounding certain subjects without at least implying a position.

The forth mode of discourse is called *argumentation*. This mode covers a discussion between people representing two (or more) sides of an issue. It is often conducted both orally and written, and a formal oral argument is a debate.

The purpose of argumentation (also called *persuasive writing*) is to prove the validity of an idea, or point of view, by presenting sound reasoning, discussion, and argument to thoroughly convince the reader. Persuasive writing/persuasion is a type of argumentation with the additional aim to urge the reader to take some form of action.

Examples include:

- a) advertising copy
- b) critical reviews
- c) critiques
- d) editorials
- e) job application letter
- f) job evaluation
- g) letter of recommendation
- h) letters to the editor
- i) resumes

When an essay writer's position is not implied but openly and centrally maintained, the essay is *argumentative*. An argument is simply *a reasoned attempt to have one's opinions accepted*. The ideal is to present *supporting evidence* which points so plainly to the correctness of one's stand that one can afford to be civil and even generous toward those who believe otherwise.

In conclusion, all discourse modes are important in communication and provides the language to boost.

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