ABSTRACT
                   To determine what effect the perceived audience and
purpose of a written piece has on its quality, 30 high ability and 30
low ability writers were selected on the basis of a college placement
examination and instructed to write two essays. Half of the students
were given specific rhetorical contexts (audience and purpose) as
well as topics. Holistic evaluations of the essays indicated that (1)
high ability students produced higher quality writing and low ability
students produced lower quality writing regardless of the task
assigned, and (2) the presence or absence of an assigned rhetorical
context produced no significant difference in writing quality or use
of syntactic structures. One possible explanation for the lack of
interaction between writing quality and described rhetorical context
is that all students were writing in response to the real rhetorical
situation--a writing course controlled by an instructor. (MM)

The Effect of an Assigned Rhetorical Context

on the Holistic Quality and Syntax

of the Writing of High and Low Ability College Writers

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Many large scale assessments of writing ability (New York State Regents

Examination: English 9-11, California High School Proficiency Examination,

The National Assessment of Educational Progress) have moved away from what

might be called the traditional assigned topic-only writing task to a more

rhetorically constrained task that assigns the writer, in addition to a

topic, an audience and a purpose to achieve with that audience. Classroom

teachers have also been encouraged to move in the direction of specifing

a full rhetorical context in their assignments (Hoffman and Schivsky, 1977).

A recent definition of competency in written discourse (Odell, 1981) stresses

the importance of selecting the language, syntax and content that are appro-

priate to the audience and purpose of the piece.

BACKGROUND

This emphasis on audience and purpose is, of course, not new. Classical

rhetoricians stressed the interrelationship of subject-audience-purpose, and,

today, this emphasis continues in the work of contemporary rhetoricians, com-

munication theorists and researchers in language and composition.

Contemporary rhetoricians agree that the communication situation itself or

one of its elements is the determining factor in discourse. Some look at the communication situation as a whole (Bitzer, 1968; Gibson, 1969). They believe the situation so controls communication that it is the very ground of discourse activity. The two essential determining forces of discourse, audience and purpose, are derived directly from the situational context of communication. Others argue for the centrality of purpose and outline a spectrum of discourse types based on the writer's purpose (Lloyd-Jones, 1977; Kinneavy, 1971). Still others argue for the centrality of audience whether that audience be as close as one's self or as distant as a composite, universal audience (Young, Becker, and Pike, 1970; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). They believe that the effective writer learns to predict readers' reactions to choices of words, syntax, organization and information. But, whether rhetoricians argue for the centrality of the communication situation or one of its elements, they agree that it controls the words, syntax and rhetorical features of a given piece of discourse.

Communication theorists alert us to the essentially complex nature of discourse, and to how the complex interrelations between audience, purpose, subject and circumstance, determine the appropriate words, syntax and rhetorical features of a given piece. Jakobson (1960) delineates the elements present in all communication situations: the addresser (speaker/writer), the addressee (audience), the context (something referred to), the message (the words and their interrelationships), the contact (the physical and psychological channel), and the code (the language, spoken or written). Others (Joos, 1961; Wilkinson, 1971) affirm these elements, add the idea of register or language appropriate to a specific situation, and attempt to create a spectrum of registers or language styles resulting from different communication situations. The basic structure of meaning in discourse is seen as grounded in the situation (Moffett, 1965, 1968; Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

Meaning is seen as a semantic-situational unit requiring a combination of both the linguistic and extra-linquistic.

Researchers in language and composition have also studied the rhetorical context and its effect on a number of different aspects of written products. The most frequently studied aspect is syntax. Arguing that rhetoric and communication theory support the belief that in adapting to different audiences writers will in turn modify their syntax, researchers have confirmed that audience does exert a significant effect on sentence structure (Crowburst and Piché, 1979; Rubin and Piché, 1979; Smith and Swan, 1978). When writers were asked to write to a variety of different audiences, they made significant changes in their syntax attempting to adapt to the audience constraints in the different situations. The same was true when the writer's purpose was varied (Hennig, 1980; Watson, 1980). Changes in purpose elicited significant changes in syntax. It would seem clear then that rhetorical constraints do leave imprints on syntax and that, as these researchers suggest, our notion of syntactic maturity should be augmented with a new understanding of syntactic variation within the levels of maturity.

Our understanding of the relationship between rhetorical context and holistic quality is far less clear. The only study to examine this relationship (Woodworth and Keech, 1980) found that different audience conditions did not elicit writing of different quality. Writers who write to a subject only, to an imagined audience and to a real, named audience of their choice, all wrote writing of equal quality. Although these three conditions of audience were stipulated in the task, each group was informed that their performance would be judged by outside readers. Woodworth and Keech speculate that this could have created a common sense of audience and purpose for all conditions, blurring the main effect.

The development of audience awareness is seen as part of the overall cognitive development of the individual (Piaget, 1967; Sinclair-de-Zwart, 1969; Vygotsky, 1962). Fourth graders were shown to have less audience awareness in writing than speech (Kroll, 1978), but first year college students showed equal awareness in both speech and writing (Krnacik, 1978). The older the writer, the more he/she was able to adjust to the audience, and,the more realistically the audience was described, the more concern the writer showed for that audience (Bracewell, Scardamlia and Bereiter, 1978). This concern for audience, especially the ability to pass beyond an immediate and known audience to a wider public, is an ability which marks the maturity of the writer (Britton, et.al., 1975).

Given what communication theorists and rhetoricaians tell us about the nature of the act of communication and what the above researchers have found in actual written products, we can conclude that:

1) the situation in which communication occurs has a general and power-
   ful effect on the resultant discourse,

2) specifically, the audience for and purpose of the communication
   account for a major part of this effect,

3) the syntax of the communication should directly show this effect,
   and

4) this effect should be most observable in the written discourse of
   writers of grade twelve age and beyond.

What communication theorists, rhetoricains and researchers fail to tell us are:

1) what effect the audience for and purpose of a written piece may have
   on the judged holistic quality of that piece, and

2) whether writers judged to be of high ability and those judged to be

of low ability are equally sensitive to the presence of an audience

and a purpose in a given situation.

The present research was designed to allow confirmation of the first four

above, and to make a first attempt to answer the last two.

METHOD

Design

A "Posttest-Only Control Group" Design (Campbell and Stanley, 1963) was

used in this study. Following the caution of Leedy (1974) about how important

random assignment was in this design, one-hundred-sixty-four subjects were

assigned to each of two groups, control and treatment. The subjects were stu-

dents in eight sections of English 101, English Composition, during the Fall,

1981, semester at an urban/suburban two-year college in Buffalo, New York.

The control group was asked to write in response to a task that simply des-

cribed a subject to write about while the treatment group was asked to write

in response to a task that described a full rhetorical context, a subject

plus an audience and a purpose. The presence of the rhetorical context, the

audience and purpose of the piece, here acted as the treatment in the design.

From the students who wrote in response to a task with rhetorical con-

text, the fifteen students with the highest writing ability and the fifteen

students with the lowest ability were selected. The same was done with the

students who wrote in response to the task without a full rhetorical context.

The independent treatment variable was rhetorical context and the independent

condition variable was writing ability. The writing was then rated for its

holistic quality, and its syntax was analyzed producing two dependent vari-

ables of quality and syntax.

Writing Tasks

It was decided that each student would write two pieces of writing in response to the type of task he/she was assigned. Two pieces seemed necessary for two reasons. First, Kincaid (1953) found that writers' success, especially that of good writers, varied from day to day and from topic to topic. Therefore, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer (1963) and Odell (1981) both suggest that when writing is collected for research purposes, each student should write at least twice and these writings should be done on two different occasions to ensure a reliable sample of the student's writing. A second reason for collecting two pieces from each student was to ensure the reliability of the syntactic analysis. O'Hare (1973) reports that forty-five T-units (an independent clause and its attached or embedded modification) are needed for reliable syntactic analysis, and two pieces ensured the necessary number of T-units.

The procedures described above produced a grouping of one-hundred-twenty pieces of writing as follows:

Rhetorical context task   N = 30

    high writing ability n = 15   (30 pieces)

    low writing ability   n = 15   (30 pieces)

Task without rhetorical context N = 30

    high writing ability n = 15   (30 pieces)

    low writing ability n = 15   (30 pieces)

The two writing tasks that each student responded to were, of course, different, but they were constructed in a similar manner. The rhetorical context tasks had an identical audience and purpose and comparable subjects;

the tasks without rhetorical contexts have the same subjects as the rhetor-
ical contexts and, therefore, are comparable. Table 1 outlines the situa-
tional elements of the tasks and supplies one pair.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The topics in this study were chosen because they were judged to both
stimulate interest and draw upon the subject's knowledge. This judgment was
made by the experimenter and six other instructors who were asked to read and
comment on the tasks as they were being written.

A second consideration in choosing the topics for the tasks was their
level of abstraction. Moffett's (1968) idea of a spectrum of discourse based
on the increasing extension of the topic over time and space and the increasing
distance between speaker and the original phenomena which he/she is abstracting
about was the basis for choosing equivalently abstract topics in the first and
second tasks. Both "Best Musical Entertainer(s)" and "Man or Woman of the
Year" were seen as having the same extension in time and space and the same
abstractive distance between writer and topic. It was important to ensure
the same level of abstraction in both topics not only because of Moffett's
arguments about the increased difficulty student writers find with more ab-
stract topics, but also because Knapp (1972) found that topic can have a
significant effect on the student prose produced in response to it.

The audience for each task was identical because of the powerful effect
audiences can have on written discourses. It was also decided to make the
audience one that would encourage student engagement but also demand the
highest quality writing. The editor as described in the tasks was selected
to meet both of these criteria.

In order to make the audience as real as possible, as Odell (1981)
suggests is essential in collecting a reliable sample of writing, the writer
needs a good deal of information about the audience. Winterowd (1975)

believes that before a writer can be expected to adjust to an audience, he/she

must form a concept of that audience by learning as much as he/she can about

it. In the writing tasks, this learning about the audience was facilitated by

relying on a heuristic for creating an audience developed by Pfister and

Petrick (1980) as a means to detail the audience in the tasks.

The purpose of the tasks was to persuade. This mode was chosen because

research indicates that a persuasive purpose requires the writer's most com-

plex syntax and because it puts the writer in a direct and defined relation-

ship with the audience; persuasion is audience-centered discourse requiring

the writ r's fullest syntactic abilities.

Letter-to-the-editor was chosen because it is a type of writing that

students know not only from reading the student newspaper but also the local

daily papers and magazines. Letter-to-the-editor was also chosen because

letters usually have immediate and known readers thereby restressing the aud-

ience in the task.

The tasks were tested in a pilot study conducted on twenty randomly se-

lected students the semester before the full study began. Students wrote in

response to the tasks, and, when finished, they were interviewed to find their

reactions. The tasks were finalized considering their reactions and the pilot

experience in general.

Procedure

Students wrote in response to assigned tasks during classes 2, 3, 4 (week

1) and 8, 9, 10 (week 3) of the semester. All writing was done in class.

The four instructors who taught the eight sections met with the experi-

menter the day before week 1 and week 3 to review what would be required of

them during each of the two weeks. They were asked to follow the procedure

described below. This procedure was based on the finding of Sanders and

Littlefield (1975) that if students were given ample time to reflect on a

topic before writing a first draft and to consider the topic further before

writing a revised draft, they would produce a piece of writing that reliably

represented their ability.

1. First class of week:
     During the last 20 minutes, announce only the subject of the task and
encourage students to take notes during a small group and then full class
discussion. Be careful not to suggest the audience (editor of the student
paper), the purpose (persuasion), or any other rhetorical aspect of the task;
in fact, try not to suggest any audience, purpose or rhetorical aspects.
Discuss possible subjects and what a writer might say about them. Work the
subject over as fully as possible. Then give them the appropriate task.

2. Second class of week:
     Give each student the "writing packet" (another copy of his/her task,
2 lined sheets, 2 blank sheets) and allow them the rest of the period to write
a draft. Encourage them to use their notes and recollections of the last class
period's discussion and their thoughts/notes from home.
     At the end of the class collect the draft and remind them that they will
have the next class period to revise their draft.

3. Third class of week:
     Re-distribute drafts and allow them the full class period to revise. En-
courage them to make their final version the absolute best possible piece they
can write. Collect their final versions and their first draft if they made a
new draft for their final version.

Placement Essay

     Sometime during May until August before the beginning of the semester

each student was required to write a Placement Essay, a standard part of the

assessment of entering first year students. The essay is a persuasive task

with a rhetorical context. It is mailed to the student at least a week be-

fore the student has signed up for placement testing and orientation. The

student is encouraged to think about the task and even jot notes about how

he/she might respond to the task. But during the forty minute period allowed for drafting and revising, the student is not allowed to use any previous writing. This essay is then rated holistically by two raters, and the students' score determines whether they are assigned to developmental, regular or advanced composition courses. To locate the high ability writers and low ability writers for this study, the placement essays were re-scored as described below to ensure the reliability of the scoring procedure.

Readability

In order to avoid confounding writing ability with readability of the task, a final piece of data was collected during week fourteen of the semester. The readability of the four original writing tasks, as presented to students, two tasks of each of the two types, was determined using the cloze readability procedure (Bormuth, 1967; Robinson, 1972).

ANALYSIS

Holistic Scoring

Three separate holistic quality ratings were conducted in this study. The first was a rating of the placement essay which all entering students write. The results of this rating were used to determine the high and low ability writers. Then both of the experimental essays of these high and low ability writers were rated.

The raters were chosen because they had a good deal of knowledge about composition, because they were experienced both in teaching composition

and in holistic scoring, and because it was felt that their knowledge and experience were similar enough to allow for the possibility of achieving the .80 inter-rater reliability need for research and evaluation (Diederich, 1974). As the literature on holistic scoring insists (Myers, 1980; Alloway, 1980; Bernstein and Tanner, 1977; Diederich, 1974), the raters were carefully trained utilizing those procedures most likely to produce the necessary intra-rater and inter-rater reliability. Reliable holistic scoring requires that each rater consistently score papers in the same way; similar papers, no matter when they are scored during the session, should receive the same scores. Reliable holistic scoring also requires that raters consistently agree with each other about the same paper. The object of training is to establish both of these consistencies.

The scoring itself followed what now has become almost standard procedure (Conlan, 1976; Cooper, 1977). For the placement essays, each piece was scored by both raters, and a writer's score was the sum of these two scores. For the experimental essays, each essay was also scored by both raters, and a writer's score was the sum of both scores on both pieces. The inter-rater reliability on the placement essay was .804, on the two experimental essays .77 and .76, respectively, and, on the summed score of the experimental essays, it was .79 (Pearson) and .88(Spearman-Brown).

Diederich and others (Breland and Gaynor, 1979; Coffman, 1971) report inter-rater reliabilities ranging from .38 to .55 on ratings of a single piece of writing scored by two raters. The inter-rater reliabilities in this study might seem surprisingly high in comparison, but a number of factors were built in to assure the necessary high reliability correlations. First, and, when all factors are considered, most important, was the fact that the two raters had very similar views about what good writing is. Second, the training that

the raters received combined many of the best training techniques suggested
by a variety of sources: pre-selected anchor papers and scoring rubric devel-
oped by scoring leader(s) (Bernstein and Tanner, 1977); training raters on
the pre-selected anchors (Spandel and Stiggins, 1980) but allowing them to
develop their own rubric or scoring guide and using both the anchor papers
and rubric as the basis for scoring (Breland and Gaynor, 1979); re-calibration
papers after every twenty papers (Alloway, 1980) and discussion of anchors
newly discovered during scoring (Myers, 1980); distributing rating error ran-
domly not systematically by having raters rate papers in opposite numerical
order (Coffman, 1971); sorting papers into a pre-determined distribution, in
this case approximately one-quarter at each of the four score points (Coffman,
1971). A third and final reason for the high inter-rater reliability was
using a third rater to arbitrate the scores that differed by more than one
point on the four-point scale. This procedure is common practice in most
holistic assessments, but the inter-rater reliability range of .38 to .55
reported above did not use this procedure. When used, the reliability can be
increased to from .67 to .85 (Cooper, 1977; Diederich, 1974). Following the
procedure for third ratings outlined in Diederich (1974), the score during
this third rating was substituted for the previous score that was farther from
it. If the previous scores were equally distant, the grade nearest the mean
was discarded.

Syntax

For the papers in this study, three syntactic variables were calculated,
namely, words-per-T-unit (W/TU), words-per-clause (W/CL)and clauses-per-T-unit
(CL/TU), following the procedures of O'Hare (1973, pp. 46-49). Additionally
the "Minor Sentence Schema" devised by Kline and Memering (1977) was used to

classify fragments as Dependent or Independent Minor Sentences or true frag-
ments. Dependent Minor Sentences, were counted as part of the previuos T-unit.
(There were fourteen.) Independent Minor Sentences were counted as separate
T-units. (There were two.) And, finally, true fragments were discarded.
(There were two.)

Another investigator with twelve years teaching experience and a Ph.D.
candidate in Rhetoric and Linguistics was trained to use these analytic
procedures and performed a confirmation analysis on ten per cent of the papers
randomly selected from the sample. The analysis was in 97% agreement with
that done by this investigator.

RESULTS

Placement Essay

The summed score of the two-rater rating allowed the identification of
the thirty high and thirty low ability writers, fifteen from the group with
an assigned rhetorical context and fifteen from the group with no assigned
rhetorical context at each of these ability levels. This grouping of ability X
rhetorical context produced a high ability group with a mean summed score of
7.57 and a low ability group with a summed mean of 2.23. A Pearson corre-
lation was calculated for these two groups to show the rater agreement. This
inter-rater reliability was $r = .91$.

Additionally, in order to establish that the high and low groups were
significantly different, a t-test was performed on the difference of their
means. The results indicated that the two ability groups were significantly
different at the .0001 level of confidence.

Experimental Essays

The mean scores and standard deviations by essay and by rater are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Table 3 presents the mean scores of these experimental essays in rhetorical context by writing ability cells. A 2 (rhetorical context) x 2 (writing ability) univariate analysis of variance of the results of scoring the experimental essays indicated that, as might be expected, writing ability did exert a significant main effect on the holistic quality of the experimental essays (Table 4).

TABLES 3 AND 4 ABOUT HERE

High ability writers produced higher quality writing, and low ability writers produced lower quality writing regardless of the type of task. The analysis of variance also indicated that there was no significant difference in quality based on the presence or absence of a description of an assigned rhetorical context. There were also no significant interactions. These results indicate that writing tasks with detailed descriptions of specific rhetorical contexts allow the writer to perform no better than tasks that simply describe a topic.

Each of the experimental essays was analyzed for six syntactic variables: number of T-units, number of clauses, number of words, words per T-unit (T-unit length), words per clause (clause length) and clauses per T-unit (subordination ratio). The means of these six variables are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Tables 6 and 7 present the cell, marginal and overall means of the analysis of these six syntactic variables. A 2 (rhetorical context) x 2 (writing ability) univariate analysis of variance of these six syntactic variables was then conducted. The results of these analyses appear in Tables 8 and 9.

TABLES 6, 7, 8 AND 9 ABOUT HERE

From these results it is apparent that writing ability again exerted a significant main effect. In this case it was on the two syntactic variables on number of T-units and number of words. Writers of high ability wrote more words in more T-units than writers of low ability. These results also indicated that rhetorical context again failed to exert a significant main effect this time on any of the six syntactic variables. Whether writers write to an assigned rhetorical context or not, there is no significant change in their syntactic structures. This held true whether the subject was a high or low ability writer.

A cloze readability analysis was performed on the experimental essays. The results appear in Table 10. The results indicate that, for the assigned rhetorical context tasks, reading of the task is clearly on the independent reading level, the level where the student needs no assistance. For the no rhetorical context tasks, the readability level is just below the 70% score needed to be on the independent level. This was still not seen as a con-founding factor since the difference is negligible and the task was read aloud in class thereby assisting the few students who may have had difficulty with independent reading.

TABLE 10 ABOUT HERE

DISCUSSION

The results of the analyses of variance indicated that the presence of a rhetorical context in a writing task did not stimulate subjects to produce writing of higher quality or different syntax than subjects who responded to only a topic. This was the case whether the writer was a high or low ability writer. These results indicate that it is not necessary to describe a complete rhetorical context in a writing task since it has no effect on the quality of the resultant pieces. Writers wrote equally well whether they wrote within the constraints of a specific rhetorical context or not.

After the significance claimed for the rhetorical situation by communication theorists, rhetoricians and researchers, it is suprising to see that a description of rhetorical context in a writing task had no effect on the holistic quality or syntax of the resultant pieces. These pieces were statistically the same in quality and syntax. Rather than seeing different writing stimulated by quite different tasks, the data indicated the writing was similar. The experimental treatment, the description of an audience and purpose, was, if not ignored, at least not powerful enough to affect the writing. Yet communication theorists and rhetoricians unamimously agree that to write is to experience the rhetorical context of the piece. Therefore, writers here must have experienced a rhetorical situation that was common to both the assigned rhetorical context and the no rhetorical context groups because their pieces were similar in quality and syntax. Similar contexts produce similar pieces.

Perhaps this is explained by the phenomenon mentioned by Lloyd-Jones (N.A.E.P., 1980) when discussing the results of the persuasive writing done as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. He speculates that students of the "Me Generation" may lack the developed social sense necessary to consider other peoples' priorities: what is considered is only

that within a very narrow range of self-interest. Subjects in this study, according to Lloyd-Jones' speculations, would find it difficult to consider the audience. Therefore, the writing in this study is not significantly different because subjects lack the social sense to make it so.

But perhaps precisely the opposite is true; their well developed, well learned social sense told them everything they needed to know about the rhetorical context. In this case, however, the context was not the created context of the task but rather the real context of the classroom. Britton et. al. (1975) followed this line of argument when they arrived at the conclusion that "whatever strategy the teacher adopts it is difficult for him to elude the stubborn reality of himself as audience, and he is likely, in our experience, to continue dominant in that role (p. 64)." Lloyd-Jones' sociocultural explanation of the decline in the proportion of writers able to imagine other people's needs and values may actually represent an increase in those writers who have learned the lesson of school--the instructor is the audience, always the audience and no other. Lloyd-Jones may be correct about self-interest being the prime mover; a student's self-interest is best served by addressing the instructor. This is a lesson, maybe the ultimate lesson, of all previous schooling. Students may be driven by self-interest, but it is a self-interest based on their clear, studied perception of the real rhetorical context in the classroom. This classroom context dominates any other that the instructor might try to create. Britton et.al. do state that at times it is possible for students to escape the dominance of the classroom context, but this is rare since their study indicated that the instructor is the audience about 90% of the time.

Woodworth and Keech (1980) would agree with this explanation of a lack of significant difference based on the power of the classroom context, a power learned by years of schooling and based on the teacher--as-grader role, the one most important to a student's self-interest. None of their audience conditions (no audience, imagined audience, named individual) elicited

writing of any higher quality than the others. They explained this with a classroom context explanation that, since the writers knew their writing would be judged, they wrote to the judges. Writers in the present study certainly knew that this was an important piece of writing and, therefore, marshalled all their previous experience with important classroom writing occasions to aid their reading of the real context, the classroom context.

This would make the writers in this study generally competent, at least in so far as competence is defined by Odell (1981) as the ability to discover what one wishes to say and to then say it in language appropriate to the audience and the writer's purpose with that audience.

Granting the writers the competence to see the real rhetorical situation not the one constructed by the researcher not only shows their ability to deal with the rhetorical elements of real writing situations but also shows a developed social sense in so far as they are able to weigh the merits of two competing situations and address appropriately the one judged of greater significance, namely, the classroom situation. Patton (1979) would explain this choice as a potential exigence, the classroom context of teacher and grades, replacing the actual exigence, the created context of the writing task, as the controlling exigence. In extending Bitzer (1968), Patton stresses the importance of the writer's perception of the context, of his/her reading of the social situation. In classrooms students deal with what Britton calls "the double-audience (p. 64)." They may address the audience of the task, but, when their perceptions indicate that importance is being placed on the piece of writing, students rely on their past experiences of classroom writing to guide them to the best possible grade. Students may address the audience of the task, but they write to the teacher; the double audience is the reality of learning to write in schools.

The analysis of variance of writing ability showed it to be a significant main effect for holistic quality. High ability writers wrote experimental

essays judged to be of higher quality than those of low ability writers. This

result is not suprising when one remembers that the high and low ability groups
were formed based on the decisions of two knowledgeable, experienced raters
whose agreement was over .91. The good writers were correctly identified at
the beginning of this study and continued to write well during the experimental
essays. Low ability writers were also correctly identified and continued to
produced low quality writing during the study. This was true whether the
writers wrote to rhetorical context or no rhetorical context tasks. A writer's
ability was the determining factor in the holistic quality of the pieces pro-
duced not the presence or absence of an assigned rhetorical context. Good
writers wrote equally well to either type of task; so did low ability writers.
These results suggest that the description of a specific rhetorical context
in a writing task neither helps nor hinders the quality of a writers' response
and, therefore, is unnecessary except for those instructional occasions when
rhetorical effects are studied.

Writing ability was also a significant main effect for two syntax vari-
ables, namely, total number of words and total number of T-units. High abil-
ity writers consistently wrote more words in more T-units whether they wrote
to a rhetorical context task or not. This difference in fluency or length of
expression is one that has been frequently observed (Gebhard, 1978; Watson,
1980; Leonard, 1977).

Just as frequently observed (Hunt, 1965; O'Hare, 1973; Gebhard, 1978;
Watson, 1980) is the fact that differences in writing ability produce differ-
ences in not only syntactic fluency but also syntactic complexity as measured
by T-unit length, clause length and the subordination ratio. However, this
study did not find these three syntactic complexity variables to be signif-
icantly different in the writing of the high and low ability groups. Mean
T-unit lentgh, the most frequently calculated index of syntactic maturity,
and mean clause length, the best indicator for writers of college level and
beyond, showed no difference by ability groupings. Mean clause length, how-

ever, was nearing significance (p = .067), and perhaps with a larger sample of writing would become so. Actually the sample size in this study, 41.82 T-units per writer, was just below the forty-five required for reliable calculations and may have contributed to the lack of significance for these complexity variables.

The interaction of writing ability and rhetorical context was found not to be statistically significant. Many recent attempts to describe the writing, both product and process, of low ability or basic writers have suggested that basic writers might be expected to have difficulty with the complexity of rhetorical constraints in a task that describes a full rhetorical context. Basic writers have difficulty remembering and returning to the overall purpose or organizing idea of the piece (Shaughnessy, 1977) and seem tied to topic at the expense of the rhetorical context (Flower and Hayes, 1980). This study did not support this theoretical profile of low ability writers. They wrote just as well to rhetorically complex tasks as they did to topic-only tasks. The explanation for this could again be that they actually wrote to the classroom context, a context that they would be very familiar with and, therefore, would be likely to control.

Table I

The Situational Elements of the Writing Tasks

RHETORICAL	SUBJECT	"Best Musical Entertainer(s)"	"Man or Woman of the Year"
CONTEXT	AUDIENCE	Editor, student paper	Editor, student paper
TASKS	PURPOSE	Persuasion	Persuasion
NO	SUBJECT	"Best Musical Entertainer"	"Man or Woman of the Year"
RHETORICAL	AUDIENCE	* * *	* * *
CONTEXT	PURPOSE	* * *	* * *
TASKS			

No Rhetorical Context Task

Great men and women have always received a good deal of recognition from the rest of society. Their achievement: are seldom neglected, and their accomplishments are discussed in many public forums.

Write an essay about a man or woman who is deserving of your own "Man or Woman of the Year" award. The man or woman could be from any walk of life, praised frequently or seldomly. The only really important thing is that this man or woman really be your "Man or Woman of the Year."

Rhetorical Context Task

The editor of the Penn (IUP's student newspaper) has just announced the annual contest to choose the "Man or Woman of the Year." The winner can be any man or woman from any walk of life, and he/she will receive a silver plaque and a check for $1,000 both of which will be presented as the highlight of the annual commencement in May.

You know of a man or woman who you think is very deserving of the award. Since the editor of the Penn will decide who the winner is, she has asked for letters of nomination for possible winners.

You decide to write, and you think you have a better than average chance to persuade the editor to choose your nominee because you know the editor. Her name is Cathy, and you grew up in the same neighborhood; you even went to the same elementary school. The editor was two years ahead of you, so you didn't know her really well. But you do remember that even then she was interested in writing because she was the editor of the elementary school's literary magazine. Now you are both in the same psychology class. You know from listening to the editor talk before the class that she is very career oriented; for her, to be a successful journalist is of the utmost importance. You also know that she is pleasant and mixes well with the other students. As far as who she thinks might be deserving be deserving of the "Man or Woman of the Year" award, you remember her saying that great people do what is required of them and do it well, but they also do more and do that still better.

With this in mind, write your letter of nomination to the editor making the best possible argument for the man or woman of your choice. Try your best to persuade the editor to choose the man or woman you pick as the "Man or Woman of the Year." If you convince the editor, you'll have the satisfaction of watching the man or woman you believe to be the most deserving receive the award during the Commencement in May.

Table 2

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for

Experimental Essays in Essay by Rater Cells

Essay	Rater A	Rater B	A + B
#1	2.65 (S=.8987)	2.60 (S=.9949)	5.25 (S=1.7815)
#2	2.72 (S=.7831)	2.68 (S=.8732)	5.40 (S=1.5536)
#1 + #2	5.37 (S=1.3756)	5.28 (S=1.5770)	10.65 (S=2.8393)

Table 3

Means for Holistic Quality of

Experimental Essays

		Writing Ability		
		High	Low	
Rhetorical	Assigned	12.33	9.07	10.70
Context	None	12.67	8.53	10.60
		12.50	8.80	

Table 4

Two-Way Analysis of Variance of

Experimental Essays' Holistic Quality Scores

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Rhetorical Context	1	.150	.150	.031
Writing Ability	1	205.350	205.350	43.016*
Context X Ability	1	2.817	2.817	.446
Error	56	267.333	4.774	
Total	59	475.650	8.062	

*Significant at .001 level

Table 5

Means for Six Syntactic Variables

in the Experimental Essays

Syntactic Variable	Essay #1	Essay #2	Total
T-Units	21.45	20.37	41.82
Clauses	33.00	32.28	65.28
Words	303.83	292.57	596.40
Words per T-Unit	14.38	14.87	14.52
Words per Clause	9.52	9.47	9.38
Clauses per T-Unit	1.53	1.59	1.57

Table 6

Cell, Marginal and Overall Means of T-Units, Clauses

and Words for Experimental Essays

			Writing Ability		
			High	Low	
Rhetorical	Assigned	TU	45.73	41.00	43.37
		CL	66.27	65.67	65.97
		WD	638.87	577.93	608.40
Context	None	TU	47.67	32.87	40.27
		CL	76.93	52.27	64.60
		WD	716.20	452.60	584.40
			46.70	36.93	41.82
			71.60	58.97	65.28
			677.53	515.27	596.40

Table 7

Cell, Marginal and Overall Means of

Words per T-Unit, Words per Clause and Clauses per T-Unit

<u>Writing Ability</u>

			High	Low	
		WD/TU	14.42	13.98	14.20
	Assigned	WD/CL	10.97	8.79	9.42
<u>Rhetorical</u>		CL/TU	1.45	1.58	1.52
		WD/TU	15.33	14.35	14.84
<u>Context</u>	None	WD/CL	9,55	9.13	9.34
		CL/TU	1.62	1.58	1.60
			14.87	14.16	14.52
			9.80	8.96	9.38
			1.53	1.58	1.56

Table 8

Two-Way Analysis of Variance of T-Units

Clauses and Words

Source	df	SS	MS	F
(T-Units)				
Rhetorical Context	1	144.150	144.150	.481
Writing Ability	1	1430.817	1430.817	4.771*
Context X Ability	1	380.017	380.017	1.267
Error	56	16794.000	299.893	
Total	59	18748.983	317.779	
(Clauses)				
Rhetorical Context	1	28.017	28.017	.034
Writing Ability	1	2394.017	2394.017	2.879
Context X Ability	1	2172.017	2172.017	2.612
Error	56	46574.133	831.681	
Total	59	51568.183	867.257	
(Words)				
Rhetorical Context	1	8460.000	8640.000	.134
Writing Ability	1	394957.067	394957.067	6.139*
Context X Ability	1	154026.667	154026.667	2.394
Error	56	3602628.667	64332.655	
Total	59	4160252.400	70512.753	

Table 9

Two-Way Analysis fo Variance of Words per T-Unit

Words per Clause and Clauses per T-Unit

Source	df	SS	MS	F
(Words per T-Unit)				
Rhetorical Context	1	6.131	6.131	.765
Writing Ability	1	7.576	7.576	.945
Context X Ability	1	1.099	1.099	.137
Error	56	448.994	8.018	
Total	59	463.800	7.861	
(Words per Clause)				
Rhetorical Context	1			
Writing Ability	1	.095	.095	.032
Context X Ability	1	10.492	10.492	3.495
Error	56	2.633	2.633	.877
Total	59	168.121	3.002	
		181.341	3.074	
(Clauses per T-Unit)				
Rhetorical Context	1	.103		
Writing Ability	1	.035	.103	2.420
Context X Ability	1	.118	.035	.816
Error	56	2.372	.118	2.784
Total	59	2.627	.042	
			.045	

*Significant at the .05 level

Table 10

The Cloze Readability of the Two Types

of Experimental Essays

Type of Task	Task #1	Task #2	Mean Readability	Readability Level
Assigned Rhetorical Context	76.43%	77.83%	76.58%	independent
No Rhetorical Context	71.32%	67.96%	69.03%	instructional (independent)

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