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978-0-521-82111-7 - Rhetoric and Composition: An Introduction

Steven Lynn

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Rhetoric and Composition

An Introduction

Rhetoric and composition is an academic discipline that informs all other fields in teaching students how to communicate their ideas and construct their arguments. It has grown dramatically to become a cornerstone of many undergraduate courses and curricula, and it is a particularly dynamic field for scholarly research. This book offers an accessible introduction to teaching and studying rhetoric and composition. By combining the history of rhetoric, explorations of its underlying theories, and a survey of current research (with practical examples and advice), Steven Lynn offers a solid foundation for further study in the field. Readers will find useful information on how students have been taught to invent and organize materials, to express themselves correctly and effectively, and how the ancient study of memory and delivery illuminates discourse and pedagogy today. This concise book thus provides a starting point for learning about the discipline that engages writing, thinking, and argument.

Steven Lynn is Louise Fry Scudder Professor and Senior Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, University of South Carolina.

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For Annette and Anna

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Acknowledgments

Some years ago I proposed a collection of essays on rhetoric and composition to Ray Ryan at Cambridge, thinking that it would be easy enough and fun to renew some relationships, initiate others, and gather a useful introduction to the field. Dr. Ryan was interested instead, he said, in a single-author introduction to the field. Having crossed over to the dark side of administration, and spread myself more thinly by dabbling in science fiction, nanotechnology, eighteenth-century rhetoric, Samuel Johnson's eyesight, and science and religion (not to mention table tennis and bluegrass fiddling), I doubted I could write such a book – but I knew that several of my colleagues could, including especially Christy Friend. So Christy agreed to “help me” (meaning in my mind that I would hitch a ride on her intellect), and she participated in the early crucial stages in conceiving and planning this book. All the problems here however, as the author's standard disclaimer goes, are my own, as Christy became trapped in the timewarp forcefield that is directing a large first-year English program (not to mention two daughters and a dashing husband). A more reasonable person would have given up this project – there is, I discovered, a very good explanation why there hasn't been a book quite like this one previously, despite the obvious need – but I was driven to write this book by Dr. Ryan's fiendishly clever manipulations, by my own experiences of the absence of such an introduction, by the encouragement and exasperation of my exceedingly patient and wonderful wife and daughter, and by the need to focus on something more constructive than my father's declining health. This book has been a good friend to me in various hospital and hospice rooms, through some very long

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nights and gloomy sunrises. I say this not to court any forgiveness or lowered expectations, but simply as a way of acknowledging that my father's elegant courage and pervasive desire to be useful inspired me to press on. And that this book, although it gave me fits, has been very good for me, and I sincerely hope that it is useful for others.

In addition to Ray, Christy, Anna, Annette, and Benjamin, I am also indebted to my colleagues in the English department. I've learned much from reading and talking with the Davids (Coward, Miller, and Shields), Nina Levine, John Muckelbauer, William Rivers, Chris Holcombe, Susan Courtney, Rebecca Stern, and many others. I'm also deeply appreciative to Dean Mary Anne Fitzpatrick for her superb guidance and leadership. My fellow academic deans, Tim Mousseau and Roger Sawyer, kept me out of some trouble and provided good cheer. My staff assistant, Latasha Middleton, and my research assistant, Pang Li, were industrious and imaginative in their efforts to help me. Lisa Meloncon at the University of Cincinnati and Philip Sipiora at the University of South Florida provided excellent responses to drafts of the manuscript, as did the anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press. I deeply appreciate Lynn T. Aitchison's careful copy-editing. My graduate-school colleagues at the University of Texas – Thomas Miller, Cynthia Selfe, Philip Sipiora, Brooks Landon – have inspired and educated me in various ways over the years. We were all privileged to study with James L. Kinneavy, and even though this book is a very pale reflection of his erudition, I continue to be inspired by his example. At Texas, Kinneavy, along with Maxine Hairston, Steve Witte, Lester Faigley, John Trimble, John Rusckiewicz, and John Walter, helped to lay the foundation for the emergence of Rhetoric and Composition as an academic field, convincing generations of graduate students that the history and pedagogy of writing and argument ought to be widely understood and studied. There was a twinkle that would come into Kinneavy's eyes whenever he was about to make some

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mind-boggling connection, between say medieval grammarians and *Gilligan's Island*, that reminded me of the look in my dad's eyes when he would realize that a few innovative holes bored here and there would render the instructions-for-assembly unnecessary.

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Jan Steen, "Rhetoricians at the Window," The Philadelphia Museum.