

## The Rhetorical Contexts for Written Deliverables in BUS 302

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**Course:** BUS 302

**Title:** *The Gateway Experience* (3 units)

“Writing is thinking on paper.”

---William Zinsser (1922-)

### Introduction

The purpose of this brief document is to help students write well—that is, writing beyond the formalities of language use such as grammar and mechanics.

The name of the required business communication course at CSU Northridge is ENGLISH 205—“Business Communication in its Rhetorical Contexts.” So at a minimum, BUS 302 students need to understand the rhetorical contexts that contribute to success in BUS 302, subsequent courses, and professional life.

The subject of composition that leverages rhetorical techniques is complex indeed. Only the most relevant elements of composition to the BUS 302 writing process will be discussed below. Recall also that writing well requires a significant cognitive and time commitment. It is prudent to read this document more than once.

If this document is unclear, please contact the instructor.

### Performative Reading

#### What is mastery of comprehension?

A rhetorical reader is an exquisite reader. Take the facts in each case as they strike you—nothing more, nothing less. Just as horse on a parade route usually has blinders on to avoid distractions, you should eschew your prior experiences, especially work experiences, during a reading and interpretation of a case. Each case, and therefore each set of facts and circumstances, is inherently idiosyncratic. Your case report is a technical paper that navigates towards a reasonably general set of recommendations through the use of elegant argument and logic. For a business student, *rhetoric* (a proliferation of differences) is the starting point and *philosophy* (compelling rationale) is the end point.

### Privilege

#### What is valued?

Beyond the thesis of any given text, a reader must discern what concept is privileged. As with a thesis, the privileged concepts are nuanced and often not stated directly. In parliamentary procedure as used in a formal meeting or a court of law, a privileged motion is a motion that takes precedence over, or pre-empts, another motion. In the context of academic study, an examined life is privileged over hedonistic pursuits. In the context of a business major, organizational value is privileged over individual value or even societal value. In the context of BUS 302, team merit is privileged over individual merit. In the context of a business case analysis, key privileges are clarity over obscurity, impact over pedant, and substance over superficiality.

## **Multiplicity (many entities) and Multi-valence (many relationships)**

### **Why does contrast matter?**

There are at least three good reasons why articulating contrasting elements is prudent:

1. A case report that doesn't have any contrasting elements is needlessly dull. You need to keep the reader engaged. Engagement can often be nurtured by something as simple as using a variety of sentence types or a delightful and colorful cover page. The extrinsic motivation for engagement in class is a score or grade. The extrinsic motivation for engagement in professional practice is pecuniary remuneration or the ability to attract a subsequent and higher-level work activity. The intrinsic motivation for engagement is that you have met or exceeded a "stretch goal" that you set for yourself in writing well and moreover, the fact that you met or exceeded that goal is readily and immediately apparent to everyone you know.
2. A case report that doesn't have any contrasting elements is suspect. Either the report reflects a dysfunctional team process or the writing is sufficiently weak to represent key nuances or differences of perspective in the team discussion. As to the former, a team process where each member tends to "agree by default and without substantive challenge" on the facts, issues, rules/regulations, alternatives, and conclusions of a case is characterized less by contrast and characterized more by what the management discipline refers to as "groupthink." As to the latter, a case report with non-existent or weak contrast implies a team process that may lack both breadth and depth.
3. A case report that doesn't have any contrasting elements is likely to be incomplete. A narrative related to an accounting statement or statistical procedure might have relatively few (or no) contrasting details; however, a narrative related to economic analysis or interpretation of the law is likely to have a few (or many) contrasting details. Economic analysis requires understanding the various elements of applicable theory, making reasonable assumptions, and selecting diligent pathways through the divergent calculation alternatives. Legal interpretation requires not only deep consensus on the semantics of a statute or a prior case decision, but also a thorough analysis of "the other side" of the issue. If

you don't know "the other side" of the issue, then how do you possibly know "your side" of the issue?

Note that using contrast well also means knowing when to use it and when to avoid it. For example, there is likely some contrast in the ethical considerations, but likely little contrast in the executive summary.

## **Authority**

### **What is the appropriate authority?**

The words author and authority share the same etymological root. Students, faculty, and even the owner(s) of the business in the case, are neither the authors nor the authority. A team does not *author* a case report; a team *writes* a case report. The team is merely crafting a response to a request. The team uses the authority inherent in the theories, models, and frameworks from economics, accounting, statistics, and law as the central arguments in the case report. Similarly, the team uses the authority inherent in the principles of mathematics, computing, and communication to instantiate the process of physically writing a case report. The concept of author is even more confusing when one considers that BUS 302 cases are written collaboratively.

## **Argument**

### **What counts as evidence?**

Let the evidence tell a compelling story. This means, at least, two things:

1. You need to relate quantitative elements ("things about numbers") in a qualitative manner ("things about words"). This is much easier said than done. Again, re-writing will be critical to achieving this goal.
2. Get your opinion and intuition out of the way. This can be done by pinching yourself occasionally and asking "Am I making the most objective analysis of this [potentially subjective] case or situation?" Be careful of the "risk of success" here. A strategy that was successful for one type of case may not be successful for another kind of case. In other words, take a fresh approach to each case.