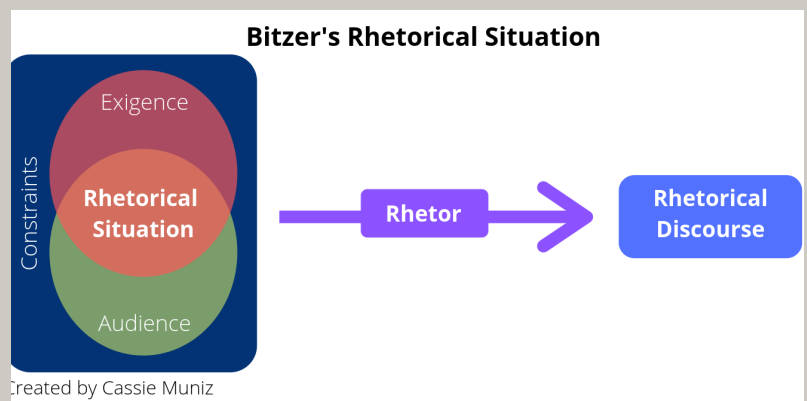




What is Genre?

Genre is a complex term with rounded edges and a never-ending cycle of absorption and evolution. From being a little kid with the extent of genre just being the type of book I was reading to the modern-day genres of social media platforms and systems of learning in college, genre theory has evolved astronomically. This term gains fluidity through time and by absorbing itself and evolving to something new. Genre is used to refer to form and how to fill in the blanks of categories. But due to the findings of Lloyd Bitzer on how a situation can form a response and affect further responses, a domino effect of reactions is insinuated, and the creation of a new genre is formed (Dirk 252). These new genres root in situational experiences, such as COVID-19 in the modern age or George Washington becoming the first president. Furthermore, Bitzer's ideology of repetition in rhetorical situations has evolved to something even newer.

Produced by Carolyn Miller, the rhetorical definition of genre needs to be centered on the action used to accomplish it. Knowing what a certain genre is used for can help people reach their potential and accomplish their goals. If someone is writing an essay for a certain course or completing a level on a video game, these differing genres function to tell us the formality and structure of how to accomplish certain tasks.



Genres shape our everyday lives...

They are picked and used for specific reasons. Understanding the individual reason behind a chosen genre can provide better insight into the world. Genre ranges from everyday tasks and duties in a college student's life to building a thesis statement.

Rules accompany the genre and appeal to people, which become sets and systems in their lives. But as genres change and evolve, so do the rules within (Dirk 258). Genre in this way is helpful for communication and decision making. Knowing many different arrays of genres is better than mastering just one, as Kerry Dirk emphasizes in "Navigating Genres." Awareness is more important than acquisition. At a global level, genre transforms and becomes a general scale of recognition that unites communication and knowledge.

In this way, genre is a social activity. Rhetoricians run into the issue that "rhetorical genres have been defined by similarities or forms in the discourse."

Miller, 151.

But they have also been defined in many other ways, including by similar audiences, modes of thinking, and rhetorical situations.

These differences have raised the question of whether the work of rhetoricians in genre is ethical. While one person may perceive a genre based on the audience, another may think of a genre based on the context surrounding it. According to "Genre as Social Action", John H. Patton and Thomas M. Conley believe that genre criticism has created too much space or distance between the reader and the text which leads to claims that can make a genre too formal or structured with too many rules.

Genre becomes a formal entity since "rhetorical forms that establish genres are stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands" (Miller, 153). This formality creates common factors within a genre and organized principles that distinguish methods of classifying discourse. These common factors in everyday life can limit a person's ability or functionality since they may come to believe that what they can produce in a certain workforce or classroom is limited by the genre.

Walter R. Fisher created a four-level genre constitution in tie with genre theory:

- 1. The general level distinguishes rhetoric from other types of discourse**
- 2. Classifications within rhetoric**
- 3. Rhetorical forms that are commonly identified as genres**
- 4. Categories are determined in terms of style**



This discussion of genre is like that of Harrell and Linkugel which is based on theory becoming a restraint. This can be compared to the organized principles and common factors as stated before under the render of Campbell and Jamison. All these rhetorics and theorists tie into the criticism that genre may be classified in regard to its discourse and rhetorical practice.

Because of this appeal to making genre a more functional tool, according to the National Council of Teachers of English, we know genres by what they both are and are not. Genre does not exist solely to be an independent idea; they are created and absorbed and evolved to compete with other genres.

Furthermore, genres are hierarchal and the best way to understand a genre is to know the generic system in which it is involved (Devitt 700). This is where the historical context becomes necessary in genre; since they are evolved (example being My Space evolving to Facebook as a genre), history and situational factors play in to make genres more dynamic and responsive to change.

For the past thirty years, the peak of genre evolution has surfaced. But although there have been many findings in genre scholarship, "the term genre itself remains fraught with confusion, competing with popular theories of genre as a text type and as an artificial system of classification." (Bawarshi). This confusion is rooted in many factors, including:

1. Whether to sort genre by experiences, events, or actions
2. Whether genre helps reflect, shape, or generate how they represent culturally defined ways

Genre stems from the word genus, which is Latin for "a class of things."

According to the book *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, the range in which genre is used is based on its etymology, which is the study of the origin and historical context of a word. Commonly, genre has been defined and used mainly as a classificatory tool, a way to sort and organize kinds of texts and other cultural objects.

More recently, this term has come to be defined less as a means of organizing kinds of texts and more as a powerful and historical way of shaping texts, meanings, and social actions (Bawarshi). This evolution in how genres' importance is classified has made genre a more cultural term that frames how we act in certain situations. While someone from one culture may believe the genre of social media to mean one thing, a teenager in the United States may come to think of social media in another way. It is all based on the historical context of how someone is raised and what they absorb through communication and knowledge.

Furthermore, this has caused genre to both generate and organize kinds of social actions and texts, which makes it an even more dynamic concept than ever before. The United States has researched and produced various materials about genre theory, from collections of composition to textbooks. A round-up of genre classifications through time is as follows:

1. Neoclassical – utilized a theoretical, trans-historical set of categories to classify literary texts and rely on taxonomy. Northrop Frye sees this as clarifying over classifying.

2. Structuralism – literary texts exist as systematic, intertextual relations. Northrop Frye saw this study as a “coordinating principle”.

3. Romantic and Post-Romantic – usually reject genre’s constitutive power and instead argue status is gained by exceeding genre conventions (taxonomies and constraints). What matters, in the end, is the text itself which exceeds the genre in which it belongs.

4. Reader Response – present relation between text and genre where the genre is recognized by the performance of the reader. This makes the same study subject different genres.

5. Cultural Studies – challenges bipolar attitudes towards genre and seeks the dynamic between genres, literary texts, and socio-culture. Historical social practices and structures are used.

These approaches to genre have absorbed and evolved to the finding of John Frow who offers that genre theory is about how meaning and truth are produced in the various kinds of writing, talking, painting, filming, and acting that discourse offers (Bawarshi). Over the past two decades, the ideas of genre to English Studies and Rhetoric have gone widespread. While film genres are categorized by their narrative and stylistic elements, the music genre is categorized by conventions and traditions. Rhetorical situations have shaped the distinguishments of genre and caused a fuzzy gap in what the true definition of the term genre could or will ever be. From the cultural context to audience expectations, and even to the expanding mediums in which genre is focalized, the term, in terms of rhetoric discourse, is up for interpretation by the creators, producers, and consumers.