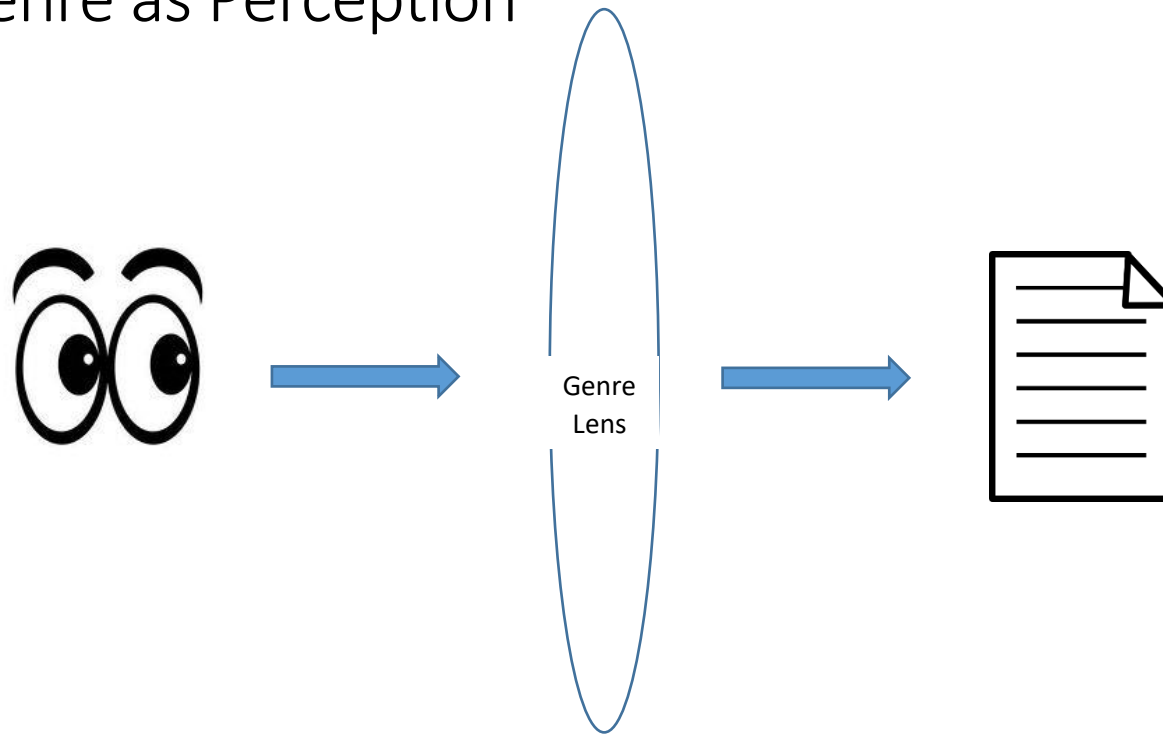


Genre as Perception



“Form is a strategy for apprehending”

Kenneth Burke

- What we see and how we see it.
- Method of reasoning
- Ways of knowing (Who do I believe? How do I determine what’s true? What’s my relationship to the known?)

Genre is a “typified” response to a recurring rhetorical situation. But it’s also a lens through which we see things. Genre influences what we look at and how we look at it. For example, when writing a lab report we might look at data for the patterns it reveals. When writing an argument, we might look at the same data as evidence, either supporting or disputing a proposition. This has major implications when we *shift* the *genre* to communicate the same information. When Taylor re-purposed her 2000-word research paper on concussions in women’s soccer to an infographic, she had to shift from textual explanation to a visual story. Not only did she have to find ways to transform text into visuals—a fundamental shift in language-- but she had to decide to adapt to the new limitations of the infographic: what could be said in a graphic was a lot different than what could be said in a 2000-word text. Many genres also use different methods of reasoning. A personal essay comes to conclusions over time. An argument wastes little time establishing its proposition. As a result, each approaches information differently. Finally, genre shifts our ways of knowing, especially how writer represent themselves in relationship to knowledge.

Impersonal academic genres imply certainty. Exploratory genres like the essay foreground the writer's *situation*: this is what I know now based on who and where I am.

Characteristics of Genres (from Dean)

- **Social.** Social context—along with content-- is what gives them meaning. Genres also have “social consequences.” (Trying making things up in a work of narrative nonfiction).
- **Rhetorical.** Genres are a response and adaptation to particular rhetorical situations.
- **Dynamic.** They change as the needs of the situation and rhetor change, often over time.
- **Historical.** Genres emerge from traditions; they have descendants. They also arise when existing genres don't meet writers' needs.
- **Context.** We expect certain genres in particular situations, and this shapes our response to them.
- **Ideological.** Genres favor a certain way of looking at and representing the world; each genre promotes a set of values and beliefs about how to think (e.g. five paragraph theme)

Rhetorical Analysis of a Genre

1. Who uses this genre?
2. In what situations?
3. For what purpose?

Features and Conventions

1. What kinds of information (narration, exposition, argument, etc.) and types of discourse (text, visual, audio, etc.) does it emphasize?
2. What are the primary rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos)?
3. What is the typical format or structure? What are design principles?
4. What kinds of language does it use (e.g. informal, elevated, conversational, colloquial, impersonal, familiar, slang, etc.)? What are the sentence patterns?
5. What relationship does it encourage between reader and writer?
6. What ideas or beliefs does it promote about how to see the world?