Group Activity: Exploring the Rhetorical Situation: Using Sources to Respond to Questions

Purpose:
The following exercise is designed for two reasons: (1) to further your understanding of the rhetorical situation; and (2) to prepare you to respond critically to readings.

Directions:
You will have ______ minutes to complete each exercise. Each round offers key terms, a question, and some direct quotations. The key terms are associated with a rhetorical situation. Please work together to discuss and answer the question. In the course of answering the question, please draw upon one or more quotations in some way, either through paraphrase, summary, or direct quotation. You are encouraged to use the templates provided in They Say/ I Say to help you include what others say. Don’t forget to add what you say as well. After discussion, record your group’s response to the question on a piece of paper. Put all members’ names on the sheet of paper as well.

Round Three: Rhetorical Situation
Key Term: Genre

Q: Will academic genres stifle writers’ creativity, locking them into a formal straight jacket?

“In our view, the above template and the others in this book will actually help your writing become more original and creative, not less. After all, even the most creative forms of expression depend on established patterns and structures” (Graff & Birkenstein, 2006, p. 10).

“Ultimately, then, creativity and originality lie not in the avoidance of established forms, but in the imaginative use of them” (Graff & Birkenstein, 2006, p. 11).

“Your letter sent home may have been occasioned by a letter received from home, but if not, the mere fact that it is a letter means it has ties to the history of letter writing and to letter writing as a genre. You knew how to write a letter or e-mail because you had seen and read many letters or e-mails before. You understand the letter thing” (Wysocki & Lynch, 2007, p. 183).

“Mistakenly, genres are sometimes defined by their structure alone (e.g., ‘A report has five parts: introduction, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion). But this understanding of genre is a bit misleading. Genres are not fixed or rigid patterns to be followed mechanically. They are not forms into which we insert sentences and paragraphs. Genres are ways of writing and speaking that help people interact and work together. In other words, genres reflect the things people do, and they are always evolving because human activities change over time to suit new social situations and new challenges” (Johnson-Sheehan & Paine, 2013, p. 4).
You see genres everywhere—in literature (think poetry, fiction, drama), in movies (westerns film noir, action adventure), and in music (punk rock, country, classical). These genres are never static or fixed. Rather they are flexible and expand and change over time. And when we talk about writing, we often talk about kinds—genres—of writing: narratives, lab reports, reviews, resumes, personal statements, letters, essays, and so on. Like all genres, those associated with writing have evolved over time as writers find new ways to communicate. (Lunsford et al, 2013, pp. 57-58).