

Note: This document was created for my mid-probationary review at Salem College. The purpose of this information is to explain to faculty across the disciplines both what my work is and how it is part of larger conversations. These definitions are starting points and not meant to be concrete.

What is cultural rhetorics?

Cultural rhetorics—purposefully plural to show an intersectional approach to rhetorical theory—is an approach to rhetorical theory rooted in understandings of decolonial, indigenous, queer, and feminist theories and often applied to material, ideological, and/or embodied situations. Cultural rhetorics posits that all culture is rhetorical and all rhetoric is culturally situated. Seeing culture and rhetoric as inherently connected means being able to see how systems of power—often invisible to us—function and reproduce circumstances that keep certain people in power while leaving others oppressed.

What is professional writing?

Even within rhetoric and composition, professional writing can encompass many different things: technical writing, business writing, work place communication, document design, and editing and publishing. Most professional writing courses/programs take some sort of external writing situation as their context (social media for a company, a personal portfolio for freelance work, grant writing, etc.) and teach students how to understand the common conventions of the discourse.

How is cultural rhetorics related to professional writing?

Cultural rhetorics hones in on the underlying power structures of “common conventions” or “best practices” and offers students a way to understand how “excellent work” can sometimes be part of a racist, sexist, sizeist, classist, ageist system and recognizes that the ways that communication happens can often take the form of multimodality and/or embodiment. In the classroom, for example, while learning about best practices for digital writing (grammar, spelling, brevity, formality, etc.) a professional writing course with a cultural rhetorical lens asks students to research who decided what constitutes “proper” grammar, and how the rules changed throughout time. Class conversations touch on issues of race, class, and gender. While students are encouraged to use “proper” grammar in professional settings, it is always with the understanding that there is no inherent moral value to one version of communicative structures. Cultural rhetoricians try to teach the students to become more ethically engaged citizens of the workplace by making it clear that they need to understand the current norms in order to get into positions of power in their future workplaces so that one day make things more fair for the people who come after them.

