A Rhetoric of Objects

Jonathan Price

The Communication Circle

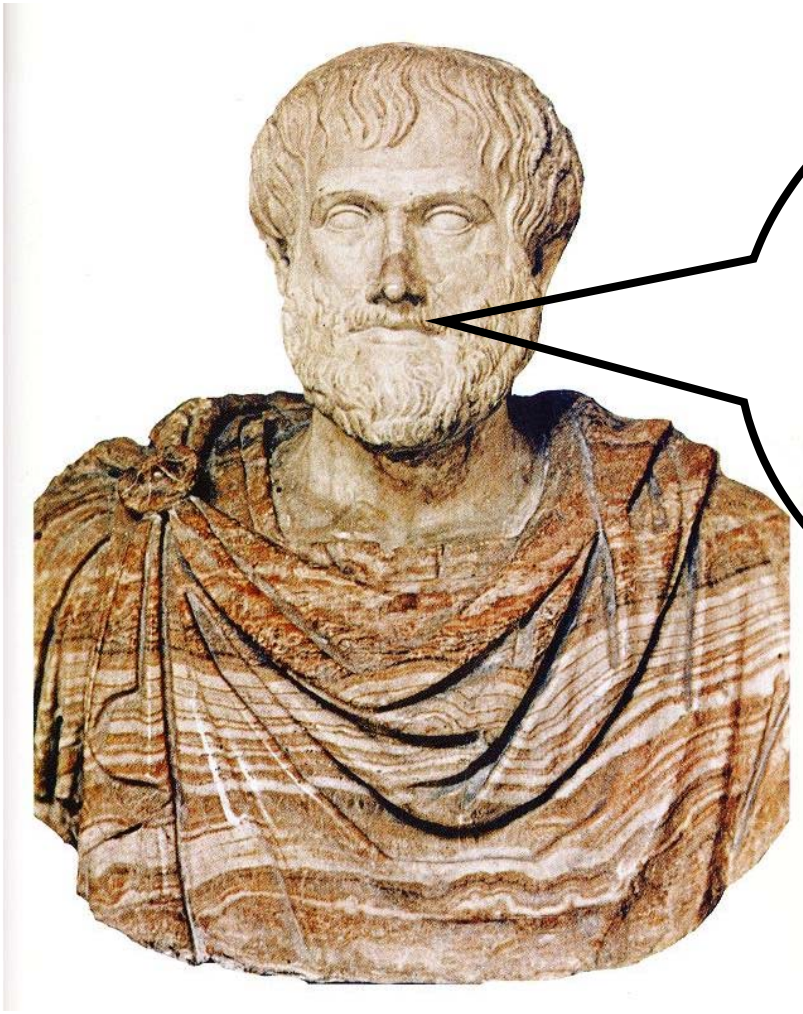
Conversations through many media

- Plato, in the Phaedrus: a range of verbal exchanges
- Direct dialog is better than any book.
  - Q&A
  - Adapting to the other as you go
  - A way of reminding, awaking soul

Soul = Awareness

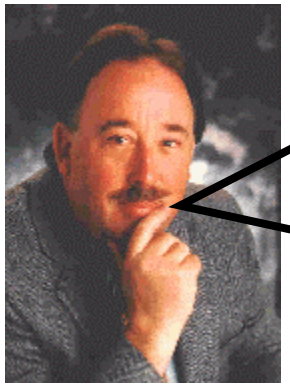
- Identifies with whatever body it finds itself in
- Attention is the antenna of the soul
- Hijacked by mind and passions
- Spiritual study = to regain control over attention, direct it upwards again

What is rhetoric?



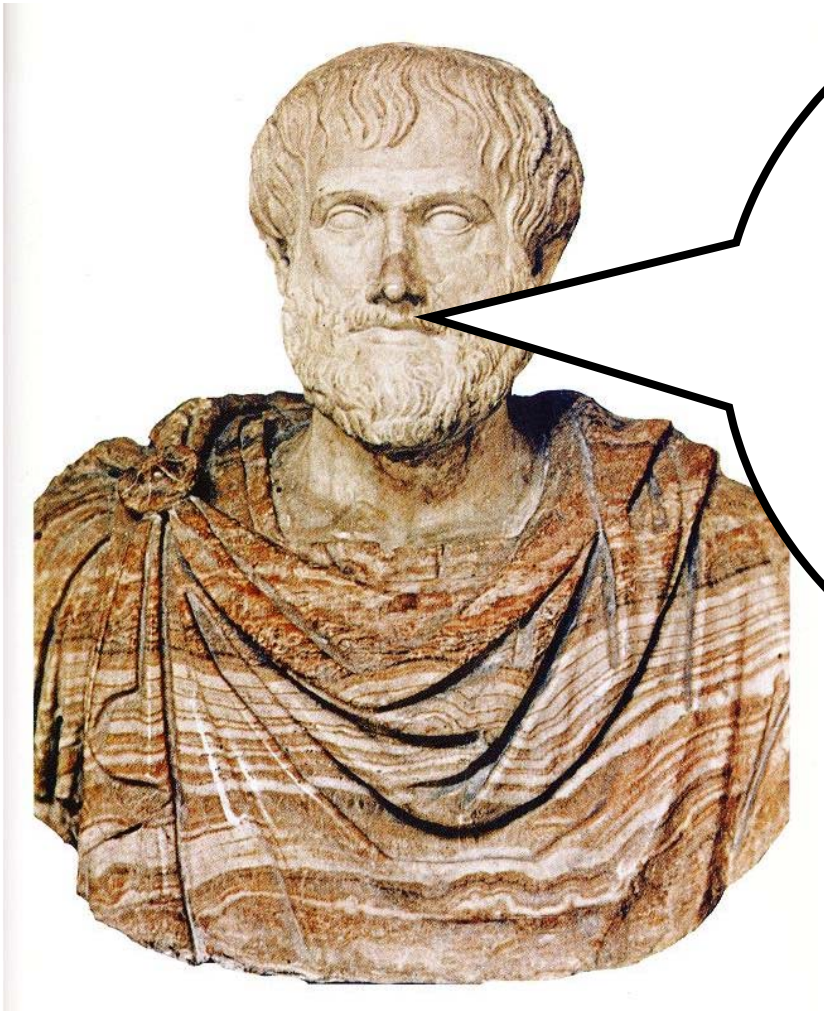
"Rhetoric is the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."

What is rhetoric?



The craft
of communicating through
one or more media,
exchanging expressive objects
with a particular set of
audiences
for specific purposes.

Who is my audience?



"People always think well of speeches adapted to, and reflecting, their own character."

Aristotle

- Hearer determines the speech's purpose.
  - Intelligent individual, in a dialectical discussion
  - Crowd: a coherent group of real people physically present
    - Passive receivers of meaning discovered by speaker
    - Typecast by emotion and class

Cicero

- Abandons dialog
- Audiences = crowd in Senate, judges in court
- May affect structure or style
- No idea that audience could help you invent content

Augustine

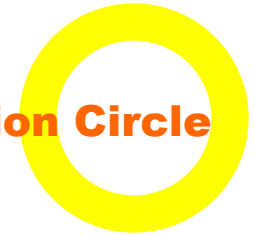
- Preacher must consider hearers
- But preacher does not look to them for guidance on message, or on interpreting scripture

E. B. White

- The whole duty of a writer is to please and satisfy himself, and the true writer always plays to an audience of one.
  - Audience is a threat to your integrity.

Hayes & Flower

- Know the needs of your reader.
- The first step in designing your writing to be read is to understand the needs, attitudes, and knowledge of your particular reader, and to help that reader turn your written message into the meaning you intended.



Young, Becker, & Pike

- See context, social situations in which the discourse operates, constraints
- Writer has a lot of control, though
- Understands the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the readers, because these influence the composing process

Ede & Lunsford

- Audience addressed
- Audience invoked (in text)
- =Both involved in process of writing

Kenneth Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form

- We join a discussion already under way
  - Topics and styles already established
  - Listen, then contribute, then leave
  - Audience as an active force shaping what you say, defining topics, premises, tone
  - Discourse develops through interaction, as we change roles

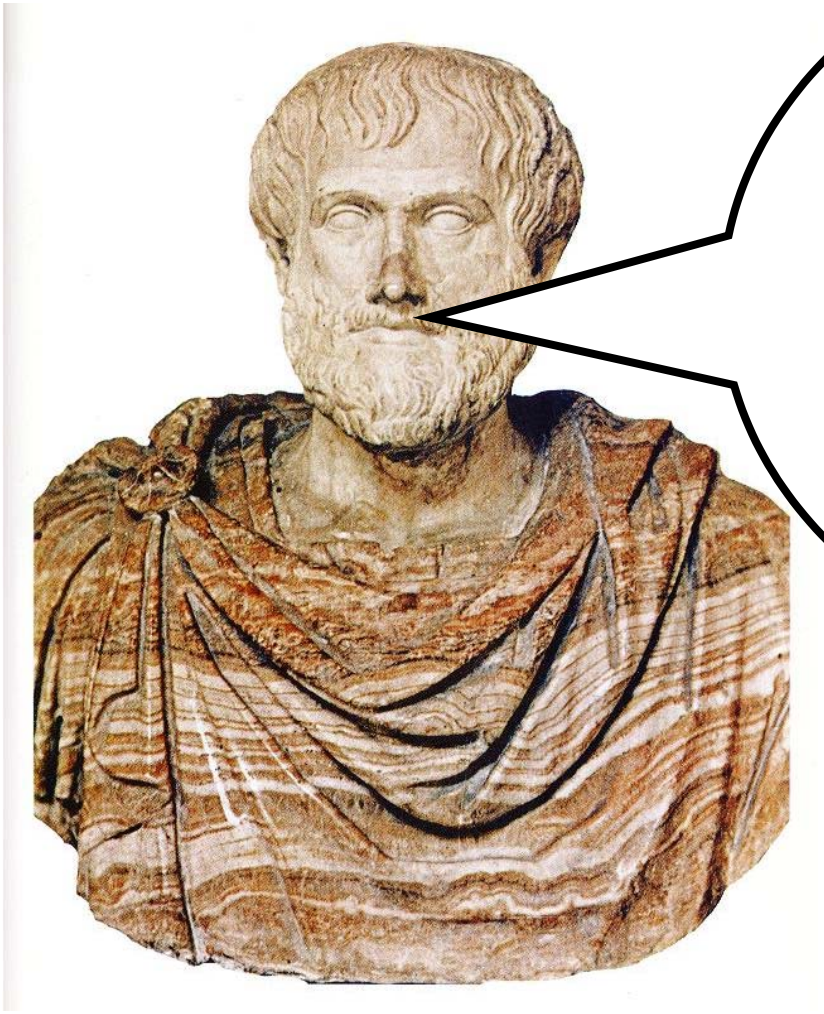
Kenneth Bruffee

- Knowledge = constructed by communities of like-minded peers
- A community of discourse is co-author
  - **Constrains writer**
  - **Defines writer**
  - **Creates writer**

Who is my audience?

- Audiences start and drive the conversation.
- We address many types at once.
- We analyze each group in depth.
- We customize for distinct groups, using audience personas.
- We allow individuals to pick and choose personal content.

How can I invent content?

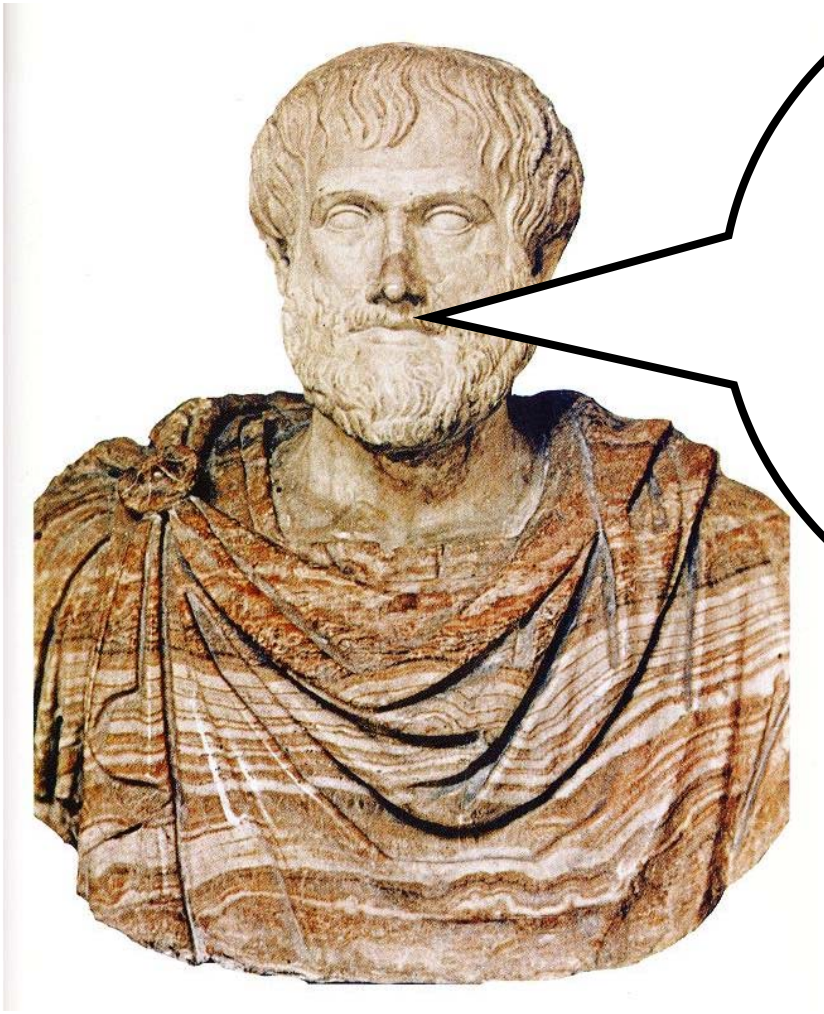


"The thought element is the way to invent and refute arguments."

How can I invent content?

- User and task analysis, user e-mail, and discussions point us to problem areas, tasks, questions.
- We respond by inventing standard objects, or genres, such as procedures.
- Each object has a responsibility to answer a particular type of question from the user.

How should I arrange material?



"A speech has two parts. You must state your case, and you must prove it."

A Rhetoric of Objects

How should I arrange material?

- Goodbye documents. Hello objects.
- We sort info into predefined objects that fit together into standard structures, and we learn by organizing.
- Informative objects are assembled on the fly, into structures aimed at target groups, or defined by individuals.

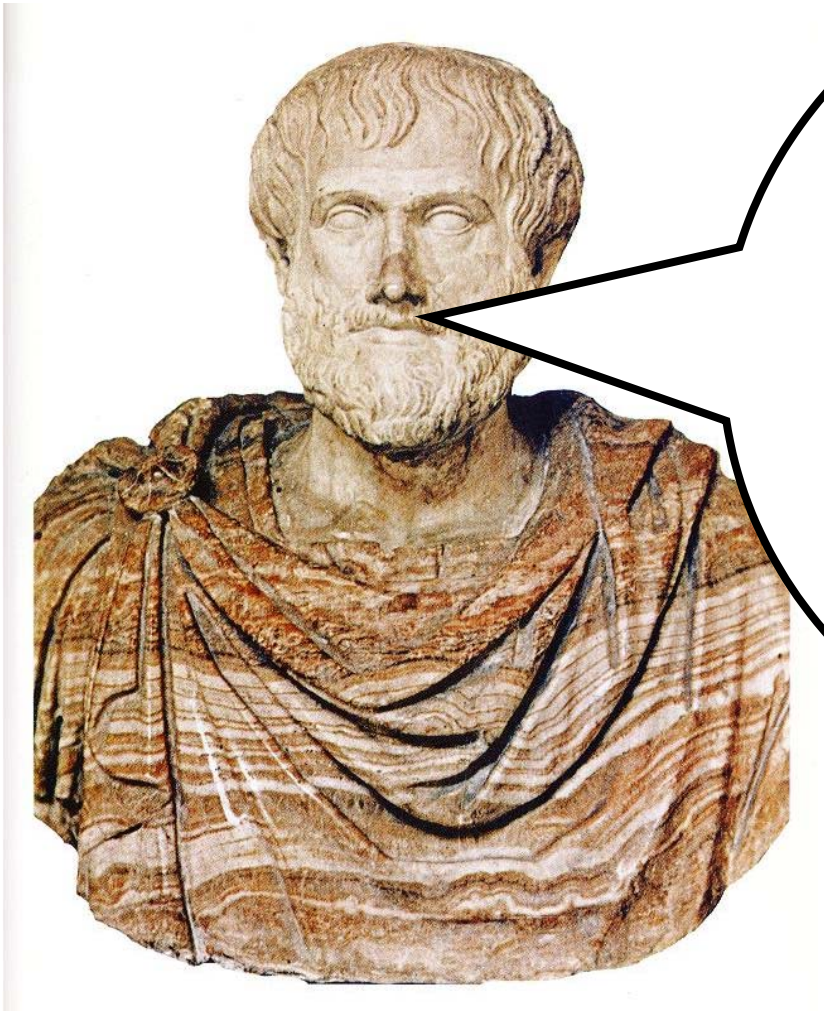
A Rhetoric of Objects

How should I arrange material?

Each object has…

- A responsibility (to answer a type of question)
- Relationships (it is a component within other objects; other objects are components within it)
- A standard internal structure
- Attributes (info about the info)
- Messages it can send to other objects

What style should I use?



"Give everyday speech an unfamiliar air. ..But you must disguise your art, and give the impression of speaking naturally."

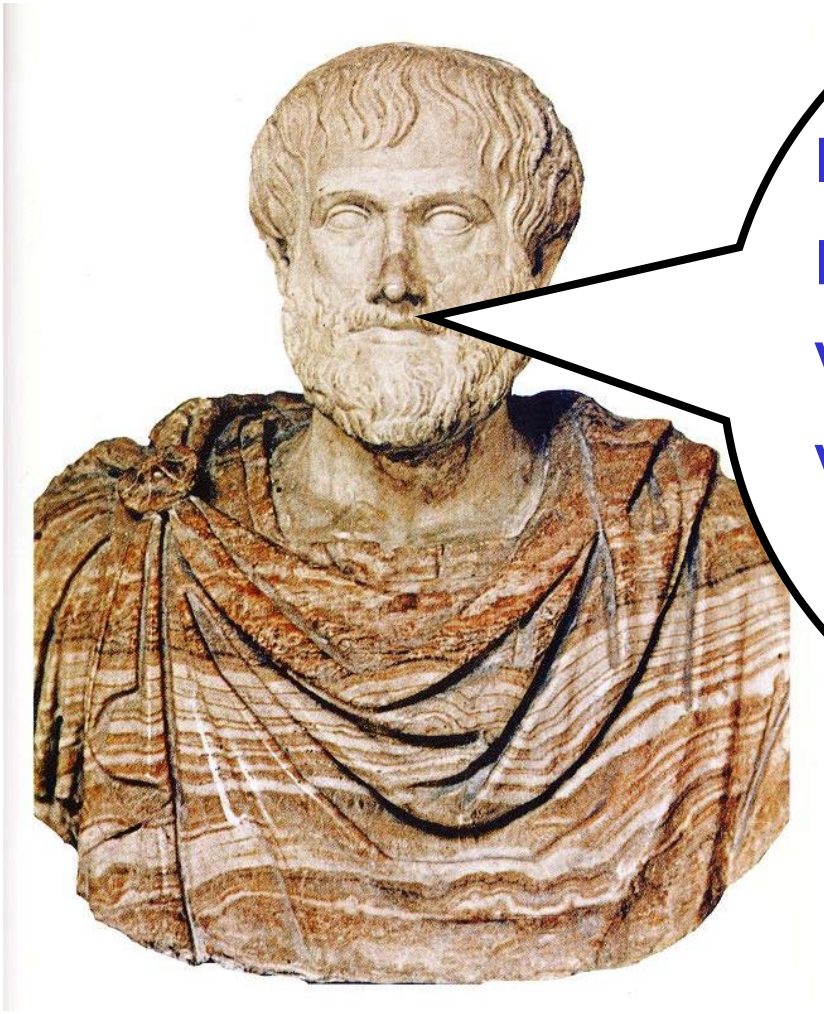
A Rhetoric of Objects

What style should I use?

Each object has…

- A conventional style inherited from the conventions of its medium (tv, photography, diagrams, text)
- A style inherited from its genre (procedure, news item).
- A corporate tone (many authors, one brand)
- A style refined through user testing, click stream analysis, customer service call volumes, discussion lists.

How should I deliver information?



"It is essentially a matter of the right management of the voice to express the various emotions."

Volume, pitch, rhythm.

How should I deliver information?

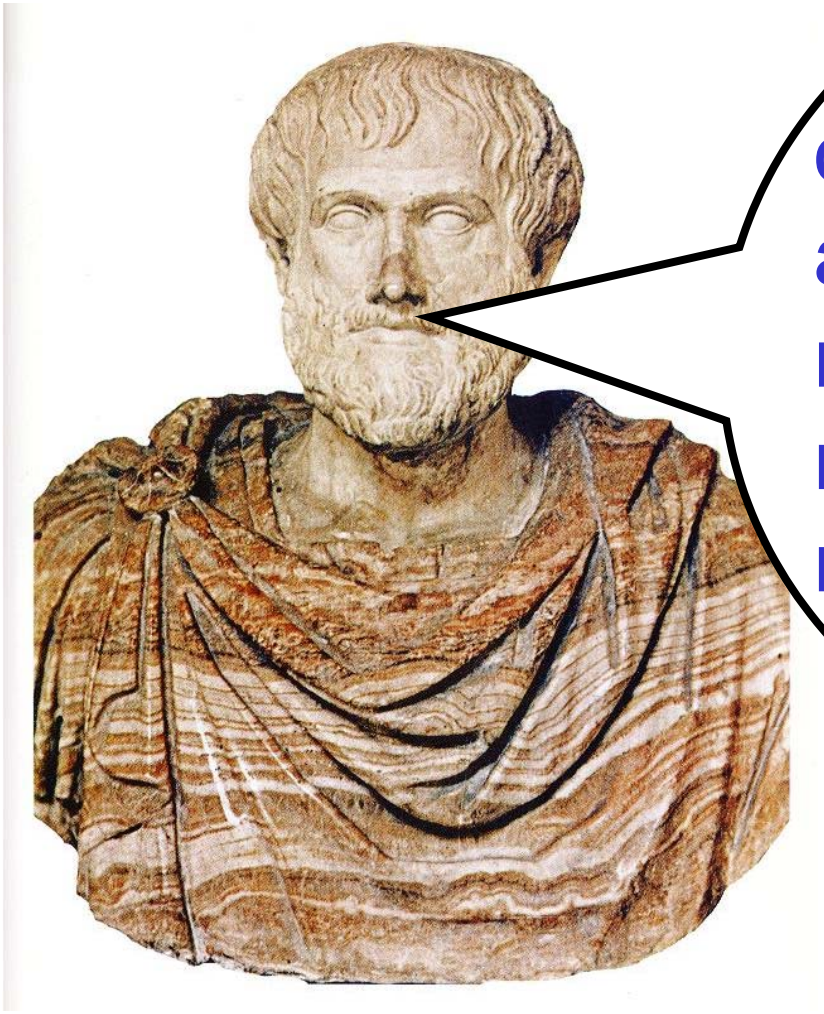
Our conversation is mostly electronic.

We create an environment for exchange:

- Web sites
- E-Mail
- Discussion Lists, Chats
- Content Management Systems
- Customer Relationship Management
- Customization
- Personalization

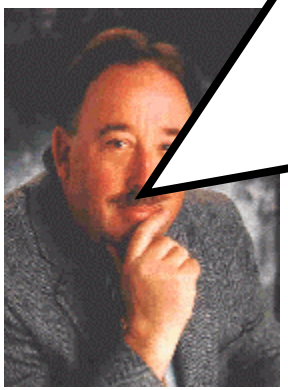
A Rhetoric of Objects

How can I remember my material?



"The animals other than man live by appearances and memories..but the human race lives also by art and reasonings."

How can I remember my material?

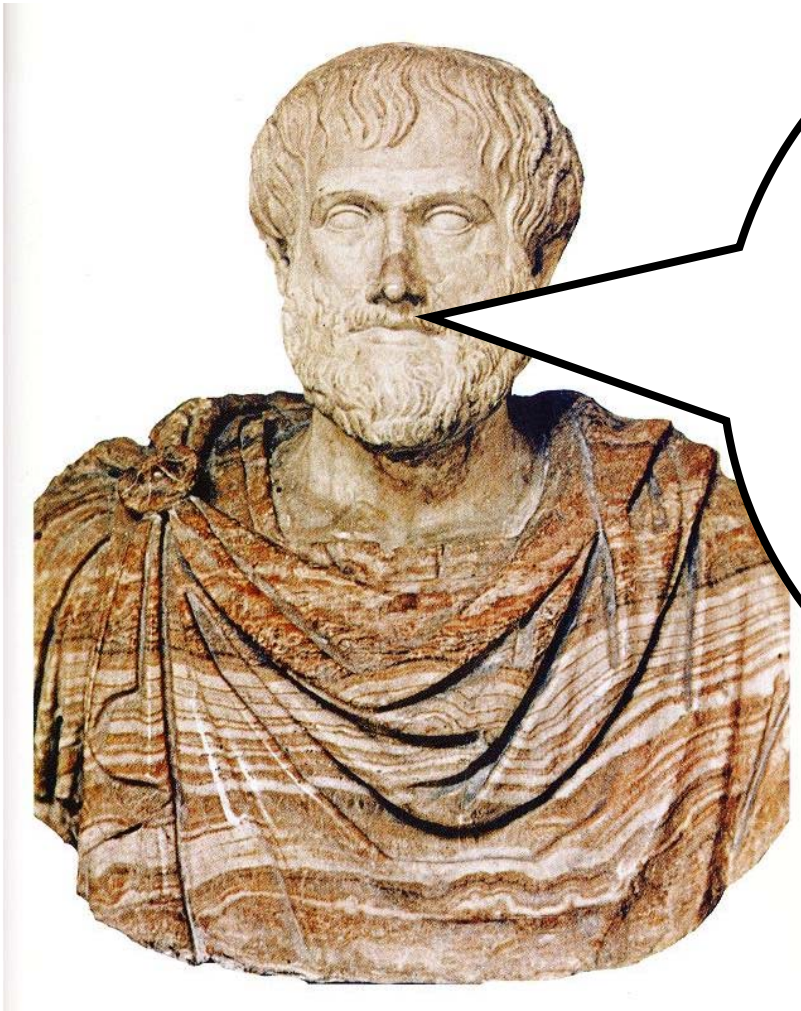


We don't. Instead, we rely on databases, Web pages, files, printouts, books, help systems, as an aid to memory.

We learn, but rarely memorize, these days.

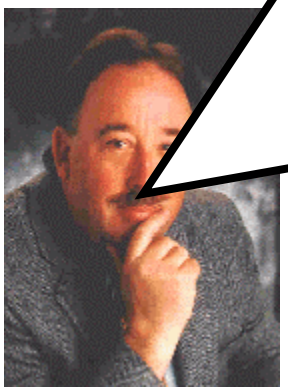
We build long-term memory by expanding our existing mental structures, fitting in snippets of new information. After writing, we know where to look up the details.

What is our role?



"The orator's own character should look right and he should be thought to entertain the right feelings toward his hearers."

What is our role?



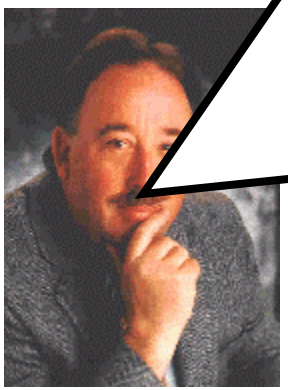
Traditionally, we too adopted personas to signal our relationship with our audiences.

But now the audience has exploded into many different groups, each represented by its own persona.

Now we write persona to persona. And our own persona must get more personal.

A rhetoric of objects ...

- A conversation through many media
- Addressing multiple audiences, often for different purposes
- Provoked and driven by individuals
- With content objects invented in response to their questions, demands, problems
- Arranged the way they want it now



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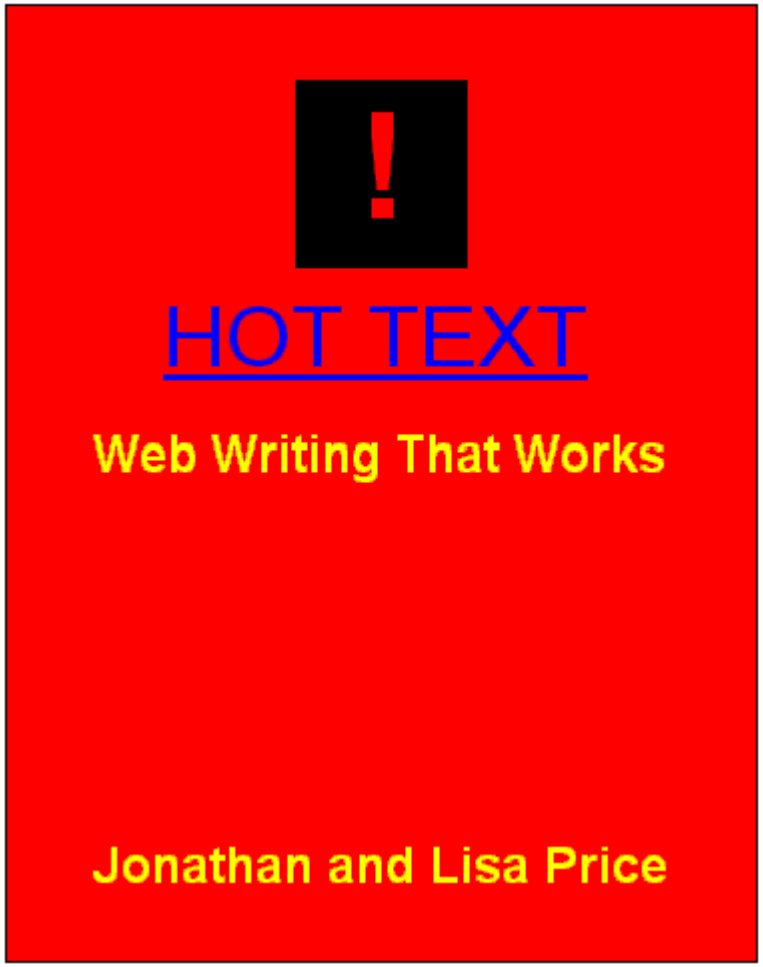

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