

# What is Technical Communication?

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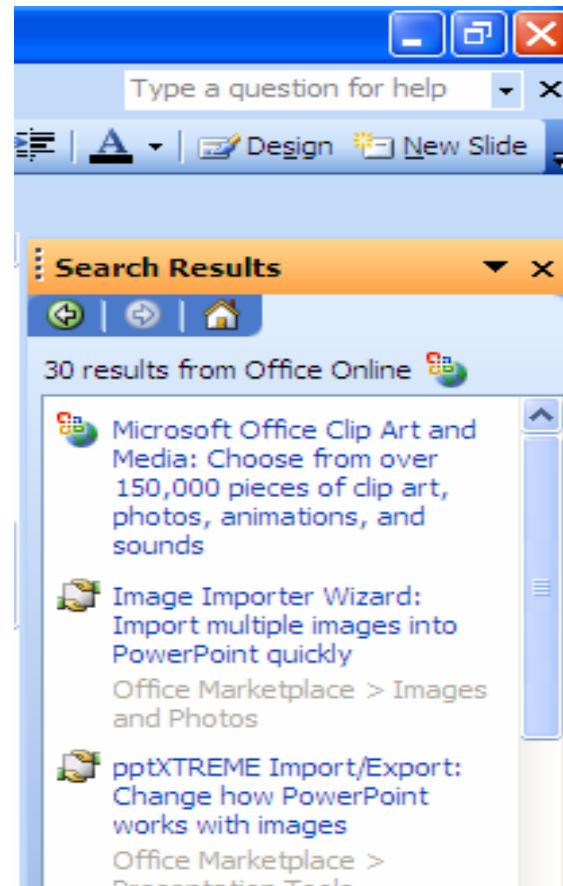
Faculty of Arts and Humanities



No matter how many technical skills you have, you still need to deal with people at a level they can understand, so communication skills are just as important as technical skills. —Paula Anthony, Tech support team leader

# What is technical communication?

- Communication that focuses on instrumental discourse (discourse that aims to do something)
  - Computer manuals (print and help screens)
  - Assembly instructions
  - Research articles



# Other examples

- ❑ Magazine articles that explain how to complete a process
- ❑ Instructions on how to enroll in courses

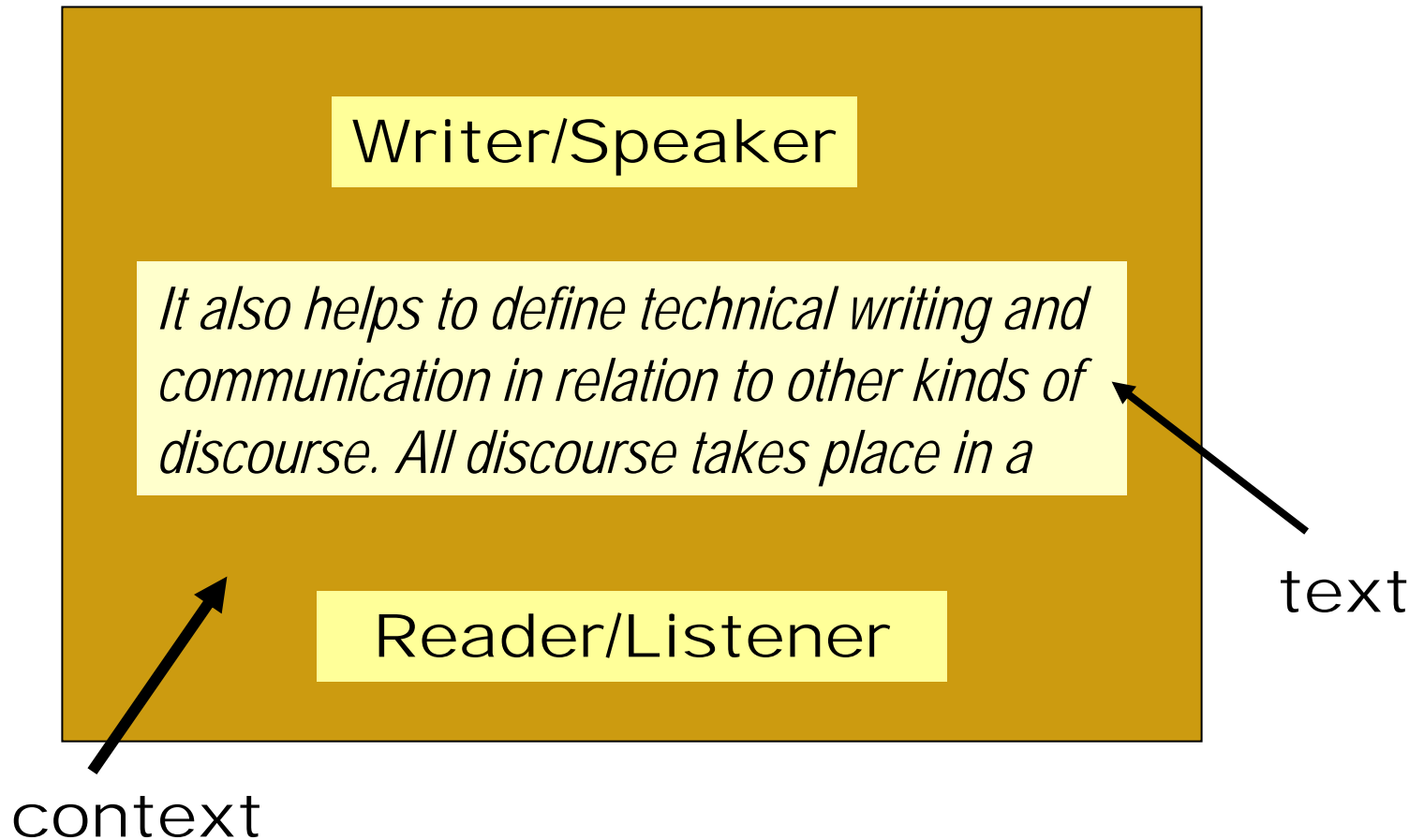


Purpose of all these documents:

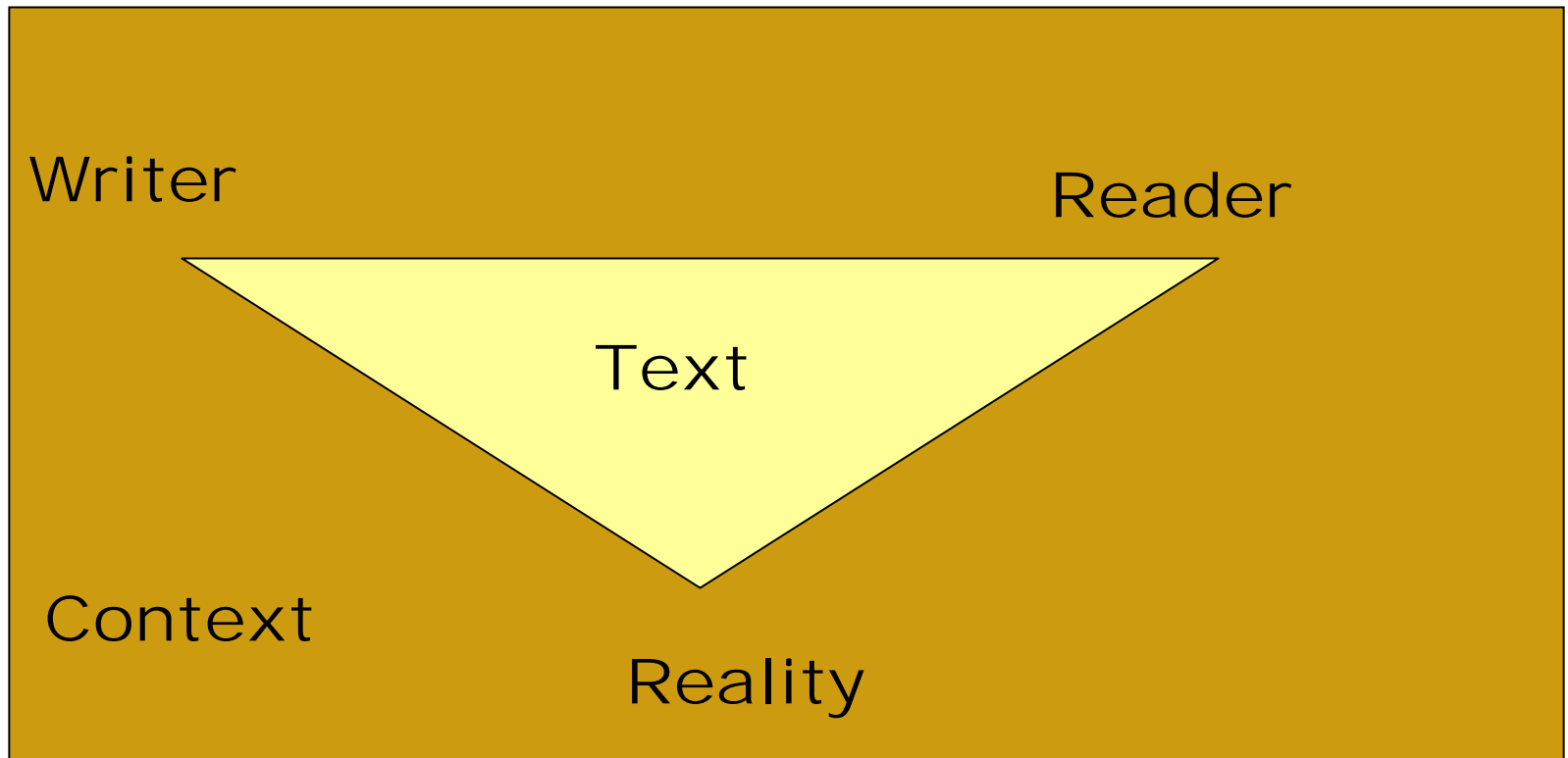
- ❑ To inform
- ❑ To be “instruments” or tools for people to use to get things done.

The documents technical communicators write share this sense of purpose.

# A model of communication



# Communication Triangle



Adapted from James Kinneavy, *A Theory of Discourse*. (New York: Norton, 1971), 61.

# Different kinds of discourse

- ❑ Focus on writer/speaker: expressive
  - ❑ Journals, diaries, manifestoes
- ❑ Focus on reader/listener: persuasive
  - ❑ Advertising, editorials in newspapers
- ❑ Focus on reality: technical & scientific
  - ❑ Textbooks, reports, manuals
- ❑ Focus on text: literary
  - ❑ Poetry, plays, fiction, non-fiction

# What's the problem with the communication triangle?

- ❑ Too easy to think of these four areas as separate, but they are not
- ❑ Rhetorical genres always overlap

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"There is great suffering in America, where every day people face the terrible pain of stomach upset, heartburn, and problem gas," a statement released by the General

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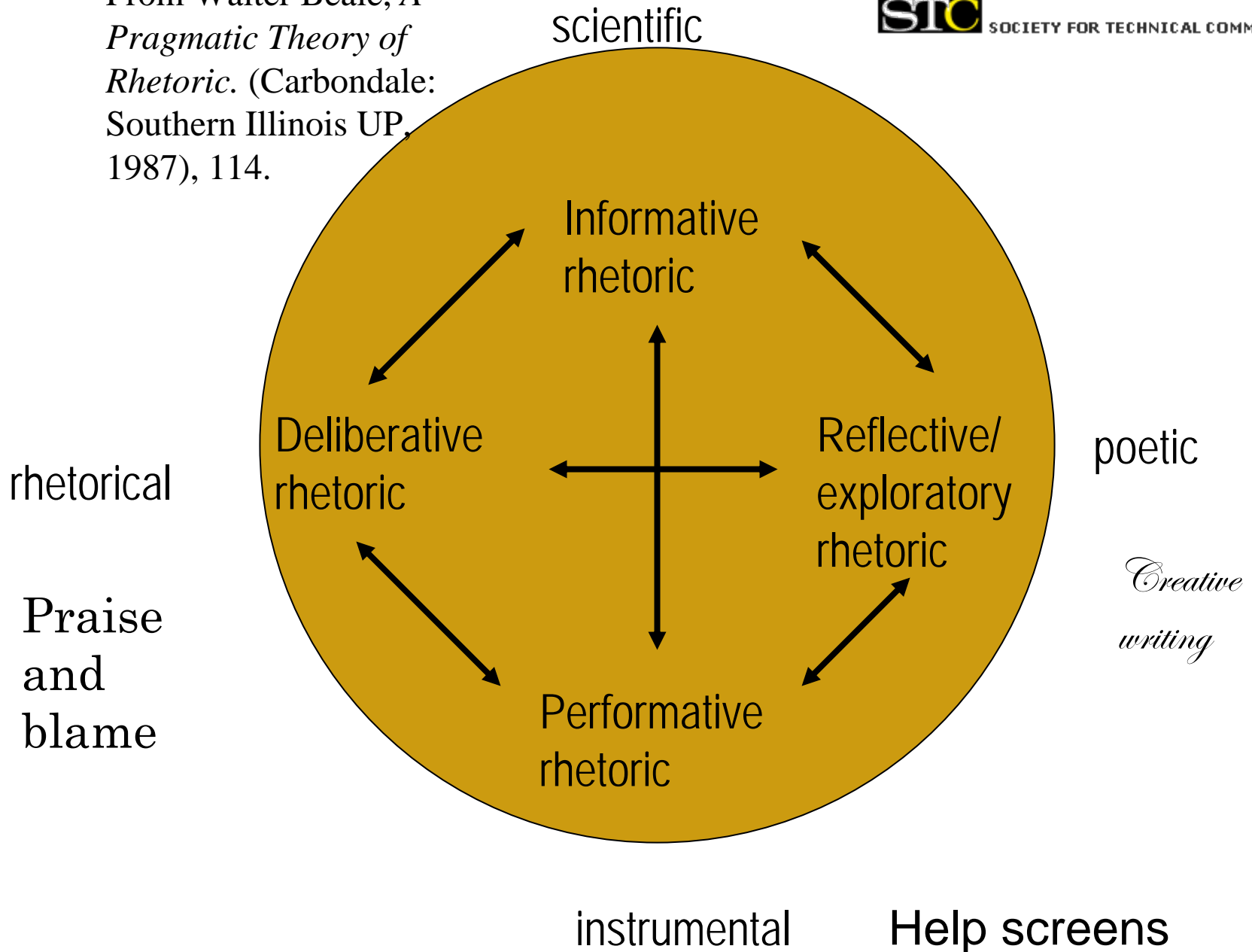
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From Walter Beale, *A Pragmatic Theory of Rhetoric*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987), 114.



# The circular model

- Highlights the dual aims of discourse
- A piece of writing can both persuade and inform
- Any piece of writing has at least two aims  
For example, your resume both informs and persuades

# Audience(s) and Purpose

- ❑ Understand your audience(s)/users for a piece of writing
- ❑ Understand your purpose for a piece of writing
- ❑ The better you understand your audience(s)/users and purpose, the better your document will accomplish your goals