# Rhetorical Situation Worksheet

**Your name**:

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Completing this worksheet may take more time than you think. It's worth the time. The information you gather will help you later when writing up assignments. But more importantly, the process of addressing each of the questions below will slowly work to change *how* you read texts. Keep in mind that some answers will not be obvious or even observable in the text, and so you may have to do some critical thinking and, at times, even some online research. Use full sentences. Take as much space as you need.

**Context & Exigence**: What topic/conversation is this text responding to? What year is the text published? What is the exigence--that is, what motivating occasion/issue/concern prompted the writing? The motivating occasion could be a current or historical event, a crisis, pending legislation, a recently published alternative view, or another ongoing problem.

The TED Talk is responding to the stigmas and the prejudices that people often have regarding voice and language. This video was posted on YouTube in 2016, which is in a very high and tense political state, with conversations often regarding race and culture like Salem touches on here. He explains that because of spiteful comments under a YouTube video he posted, he stopped narrating and doing voiceover because he was embarrassed to speak. Between his stutter and his Pakistan accent, people often made fun of him as a child and used "have you forgotten your name" when he was asked his name to put him down. Saleem obviously does not want the same to happen to anyone else, so he cites the origin of his personal struggle with voice in hopes to relate to a person who might be listening to him and feeling the same prejudice.

**Author**: Who is the author of this text? What are the author's credentials and what is their investment in the issue?

The speaker is Safwat Saleem, a Pakistani-American visual artist that uses his art to create images that are politically provoking and charged. His work is often noted to be satirical, and some of that is shown throughout his humorous TikTok. As a Pakistani, his accent is very prevalent and is very easy to be misunderstood and taken advantage of by native speakers of English. He has a very strong sense of identity and does not run from who he is, stating that he used to be embarrassed to introduce himself.

**Text**: What can you find out about the publication? What is the genre of the text (e.g., poem, personal essay, essay, news/academic article, blog, textbook chapter, etc.)? How do the conventions of that genre help determine the depth, complexity, and even appearance of the argument? What information about the publication or source (magazine, newspaper, advocacy Web site) helps explain the writer's perspective or the structure and style of the argument?

TED Talks are often formatted as structured speeches about some sort of lesson or universal truth the speaker wants to bestow upon the audience. They can be humorous, sorrowful, though-provoking even all at once. Saleem's choice to tell his story through this medium is more effective than anything he could have done in a number of ways. His voice is a major topic within this TED Talk, and the concept of him being admonished because of it becomes easier go understand as you hear his accent through the video. It also allows him to utilize the comedy and satire weaved through some of his

visual art, and make a difficult topic easier to swallow by being somewhat lighthearted about it. Visualization is also a very large part of the TED Talk, the screen vividly depicts everything Saleem is saying, further more adding to the vibrancy and personality of his TED Talk.

**Audience**: Who is the author's <u>intended</u> audience? What can you infer about the audience (think about beliefs and political association but also age, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, profession, education, geographic location, religion, etc.)? Look for clues from the text (especially the original publication) to support your inference.

Saleem's audience is quite literally made up of all different types of people, most likely from high academic backgrounds. But that's not who his TED Talk is meant to target necessarily. His TED Talk is for those who are embarrassed of their accent and voice, and have been indoctrinated into thinking their way of speaking is inferior or something to be ashamed about. To narrow it down even further, by being Pakistani and dealing with the issues of being a narrator with that kind of accent, Saleem's TED Talk provides an example for Pakistani people to hurdle obstacles and use their voice no matter what they may have to say because their voice is as good as anyone else's, and they should never be made fun of because of it.

**Purpose**: What is the author trying to accomplish? To persuade, entertain, inform, educate, call to action, shock? How do you know?

The speaker is trying to establish a narrative that is different than the one the country may have been portraying at the time and different from the things that the people on Saleem's comments were saying. He is trying to show that although voice is an important identity trait and may things can be based on voice, it should never be a means to separate and discriminate. He pushes forth that people with different voices and different accents should be proud of what they sound like, or else the self-pity and wallowing shame that he experienced as a child would cripple them as well. He acknowledges that he is only "slowly" starting to use his voice in videos again but knows that he cannot realistically let the comments of a few people rob of what he does the most. The TED Talk, although very humorous, has a very serious subject matter and is told on a very inspiring and creative fashion.

**Argument**: What do you believe is the main claim/idea/argument that the author is trying to communicate? What stance does s/he take?

Safwat Saleem's argument here is that the definition of what "normal" is is completely subjective and relative to social constructs (much of what cisgender, straight white men built) and normal can and should be challenged. He says that if normal tells him he cannot have an accent as a narrator, then it should be questioned, even though people on both sides of this "normalcy" have gotten comfortable for the way things are.

**Evidence**: How is the argument supported? Types of support include reasons and logical explanations as well as evidence. Types of evidence include anecdotes, examples, hypothetical situations, (expert) testimony, quotes, citing sources, statistics, charts/graphs, research the author or another source conducts, scientific or other facts, general knowledge, historical references, metaphors/analogies, etc.

"I can accept the pre-existing notion of normal, that normal is good and anything outside of that very narrow definition of normal is good and anything else is bad, or I can challenge that definition of normal—with my work."

**Rhetorical Strategies**: What aspects of this text stand out for you as a *rhetorical* reader? In other words, what do you observe about what the author strategically *does* (consciously or not) in hopes of appealing to their audience? List here as many observations as you can make about what the text *does*.

The one strategy that Saleem uses that sticks out at me is humor, and using it to get his point across. Humor is not as often used in writing as it is in oral addresses, and Saleem uses humor and satire to emphasize how ridiculous the idea of judging someone based on their accent is but conversely how that stigma is a very real and serious topic. He also uses anecdotes in his own right, with his story about the YouTube comments being the driving storyline throughout the TED Talk.

**Citation**: Add the correct MLA or APA bibliographic entry for this text. Use easybib.com if you prefer.

"Why I Keep Speaking up, Even When People Mock My Accent: Safwat Saleem." *YouTube*, 15 Aug. 2016, https://youtu.be/B4a0NvLTebw.

**Notes**: What do you want to remember about this text?

Frankenstein's monster grumbling. I thought it was funny :)