

CONTEXTUALIZATION (THE DRAMATISTIC METHOD)

Aside from the rhetorical triangle, many writers and readers use an additional schema (and/or method) for understanding the context of a text, a gesture, or a social act. Scholars often refer to this method as Kenneth Burke's *Dramatistic Pentad*. Burke's Pentad asks specific questions of the text while applying terminology borrowed from the principles of Drama or stage performance:

Act: What happened in the text? (What did the author do to construct the text?)

Scene: When and where did the actions occur? (When and where was the text written?)

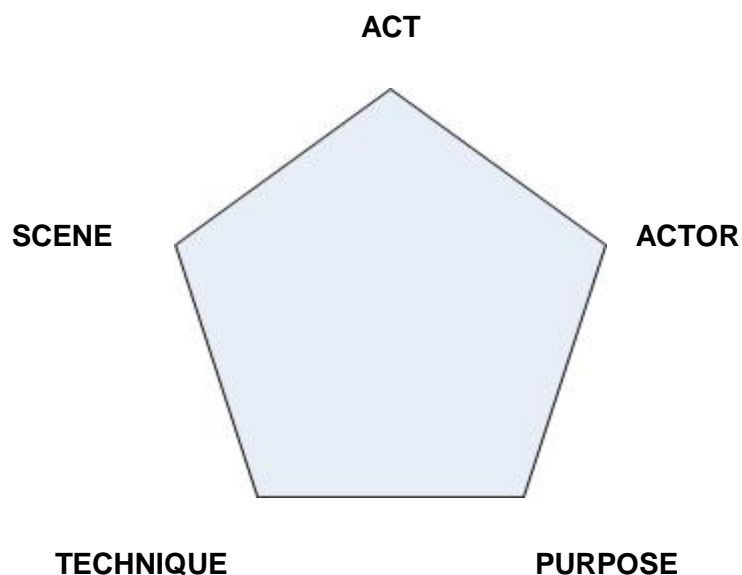
Actor/Agent: Who did the action? (Who created/wrote the text?)

Technique/Agency: How was the action done? (How did the author create/write the text?)

Purpose: Why was the action done? (For what purpose did the author create/write the text?)

Applying these questions to a text may help you to understand the text both internally (e.g., identifying the traits of a story, poem, or other text) and externally (e.g., identifying the traits outside of the actual text - such as the author, audience, etc.).

Similar to the use of a rhetorical triangle, using the Pentad may help you to understand the relationship between each of the components (e.g. the act, the scene, the actor, the technique, and/or the purpose). Moreover, the Pentad forms a kind of pentagon-like orientation.



For example, if you know from reading a text that the speaker (the agent) uses particular language to describe something (the act), then you can probably decide why it was done (the agency) and how it was done (the technique) as well as when and where (the scene)?

Asking these questions of a text will help you to better understand the context as well as help you to better evaluate or assess the text or even a smaller section of the text.

The most important facet of the Dramatistic Pentad is that this form adds the contextual components of Time/Space and Technique to the traditional rhetorical model (e.g., the rhetorical triangle).