Whether the purpose of your writing is to tell a story, explain a process, or change the minds or behaviors of your audience, each essay must have a purpose that controls the way you approach the topic and subsequently write about the topic. The purpose and organization of all essays conform to rhetorical modes. The nine basic rhetorical modes are selected based on a writer's intent for writing and the audience's needs. The goal of your specific text or writing should correspond with the rhetorical purpose of the mode. Although rhetorical modes are often used in combination, this text will look at each rhetorical mode separately.

**Description**

In general, there are two types of description: objective and subjective. Whether or not you need to use description depends on the purpose of your text and the level of your audience's anticipated understanding. For example, describing a technical process will probably necessitate an objective description, but choosing the technical level and specificity of the description should be a function of audience analysis.

**Narration**

*Narration* is a sophisticated term for a story used to make a point or clarify an idea. The narrative can be subsumed within an expository or argumentative rhetorical mode. For example, narratives may be used as the entire mode (that is, the point is related to the significance of experience) or as supplementary evidence or documentation within a persuasive text (in other words, relating a story to emotionally illustrate the perils of an environmental or cultural problem).

**Illustration**

Illustrative writing is an act of making your work "come alive." Illustration is often subsumed within another rhetorical mode; for instance, using vivid examples may be part of a well-written narrative or an emotionally evocative, persuasive text.
Process Analysis

Process analysis is a form of exposing or explaining. Typically, process analysis essays fall under one of the following two main types:

- giving directions, which tells the audience how to do something
- giving information, which analyzes how something works or how something happened

Comparison and Contrast

Comparison and contrast are used to frame people's understanding by placing one subject or object next to another. People look for similarities (compare) while they simultaneously or sequentially look for dissimilarities (contrast) to arrive at a conclusion.

Division and Classification

Like comparison and contrast, division and classification are really two parts of the same process. Division is the process of sorting or dividing something into its component parts, and classification is the process of grouping items together from component parts to an articulated whole. Bear in mind that the same items can be divided and classified in any number of ways.

Definition

Definition is the process of explaining what constitutes a word, an object, or an idea. A good definition focuses on what is special about a word or an idea and what sets it apart from similar words, concepts, or previous definitions.

Causation and Effect

Analyzing causes and effects requires the ability to look for connections between two or more items or events and analyze the reasons for those connections.
Argumentation

An argument is a persuasive method that writers should select when trying to convince readers or listeners to act or believe in specified ways.

Rhetorical modes change the way people write and think about a subject. One subject can be written about in many ways depending on the purpose and rhetorical mode of the essay. After selecting a particular mode of writing, the author might use any number of methods to achieve the desired purpose.