**What is *rhetoric?***

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**Rhetoric is the study of effective speaking and writing. And the art of persuasion. And many other things.**

**In its long and vigorous history rhetoric has enjoyed many definitions, accommodated different purposes, and varied widely in what it included. And yet, for most of its history it has maintained its fundamental character as a discipline for training students 1) to perceive how language is at work orally and in writing, and 2) to become proficient in applying the resources of language in their own speaking and writing.**

**Discerning how language is working in others’ or one’s own writing and speaking, one must (artificially) divide form and content, *what* is being said and *how* this is said. Because rhetoric examines so attentively the *how* of the language, the *methods* and *means* of communication, it has sometimes been discounted as something only concerned with style and appearances, and not with the quality or *content* of communication. For many (such as Plato) rhetoric deals with the superficial at best, the deceptive at worst (“mere rhetoric”), when one might better attend to matters of substance, truth, or reason as attempted in dialectic and philosophy of religion.**

**Rhetoric has sometimes lived down its critics, but as set forth from antiquity, rhetoric was a comprehensive art just as much concerned with *what* one could say as *how* one might say it. Indeed, a basic premise for rhetoric is the indivisibility of means from meaning; *how* one says something conveys meaning as much as *what* one says. Rhetoric studies the effectiveness of language comprehensively, including its emotional impact (pathos), as much as its propositional content (logos). To see how language and thought worked together, however, it has first been necessary to artificially divide content and form.**