



# Framing

When you last walked into a museum, you may have been stunned by the beauty of the space, the light, the floors. But you knew this beauty was not “the art.”

How did you know? The art is in the frames, or on the pedestals. The frames in particular say: This is the important stuff. Look in here.

In discourse, “framing” refers to what we believe is important, our real focus in a conversation.

Usually, we frame situations *automatically*. We may not be consciously aware of how we are framing a situation, even though how we frame affects everything we say and do in that situation.

Answering these three questions helps us recognize our framing:

- How do I view the other?
- How do I view myself?
- How do I view the task at hand?

For me, answering these questions sometimes reveals that I embark on a task with a less-than-useful view of the Other. (“You’re stupid” or “You’re trying to make this difficult, aren’t you?”) Sometimes it reveals I have a less-than-constructive view the task at hand. (“It’s my job to fix this again” or “I have to spell out everything.”)

And how am I viewing myself in this situation? I’m the smart one, the capable one.

You can imagine how this framing will come across in the tone of whatever I write or say in this situation. You can almost hear my typing become pounding as I respond to an email when I am framing a situation in this way.

The good news: When we recognize our framing, we can change it. We can change our answers to each of those three questions.

For example:

How do I view you?

*You're a student feeling overwhelmed by the number and variety of assignments in the course.*

How do I view me?

*I'm someone who cares about your learning—not just the material, but also how to help yourself navigate your challenges.*

Then, how do I view the task at hand?

*Meeting you where you are, helping you get unstuck.*

Making our framing explicit creates the opportunity to choose productive framing. Framing is absolutely relevant to narrative writing.

Before beginning a narrative, we can make explicit our desired framing by writing answers to these three questions that reveal—and create—a productive approach to the task.

For example:

How do I view myself?

*I am a competent, creative faculty member who engages in teaching, research, and service.*

How do I view the Other, the reader of the dossier?

*You are someone who wants the university, and the academy more broadly, to execute faithfully on its missions and so help our society.*

How do I view the task at hand?

*I provide evidence—valid information—so that you can see the ways I contribute to students' learning and progressing to earn degrees, to the academy's endeavors to build new knowledge, and to many committees and initiatives that keep our college, university, and academy functioning well day-to-day and year-to-year*

When you are writing a professional narrative, it is worth taking time to consider these questions and form your framing explicitly. A constructive framing will help you perceive, so you can write it: This is the real focus. This is what's important.