

# Helvetica (2007)

In Chapter 3 of *Technical Communication*, Anderson argues that professional writers assess their objectives by measuring a reader's response; that is, the degree to which workplace communication is successful is contingent upon how the audience reacts -- through a hire, promotion, rejection, or simply with a "thank you" or by asking a question. This assessment can be predicted, argues Anderson, by looking at three factors: **purpose**, **reader**, and **context**.

The goal in watching *Helvetica*, Gary Hustwit's documentary about the most ubiquitous font in the Western world, is to see how one minuscule component of a document's design -- the typeface -- can have enormous, varying effects on audiences. Some questions to consider as you watch and post for the first week of discussion:

- **Purpose:** According to the designers in the film, what are their intended objectives for choosing Helvetica as a typeface? What do these purposes tell us about document design more generally? When would it be appropriate to use Helvetica? When would it not? When would it matter? When would it not?
- **Reader:** Who are the intended audiences of the Helvetica font? How do they differ? Why does the font succeed with some audiences but not others? If you were a designer, when would you use Helvetica?
- **Context:** Some folks argued for Helvetica's simplicity and beauty while other claimed it would "bore the shit" out of readers. How do interpretations of the font differ from culture to culture or from job to job? How do they differ based on the venue of communication (advertising spaces versus magazine, for example)? How is time affect its reception?

