**Considering Kairos**

Adapted from *Praxis: A Brief Rhetoric* by Carol Lee Clark

**Kairos**: A term from classical Greek rhetoric that means both the context of a speech (or piece of writing), including the time and place where it is delivered, and the writer’s motivation for speaking (or writing). In contemporary terms, this is what helps you answer the “So what?” question for the reader.

**Elements of Kairos to Consider in Your own Work**

**Determine Your Kairotic Moment**: Why is your topic timely? How can you connect it to issues in your audience’s lives, recent events, upcoming events, or historical events that relate to your topic. For Example: When President Obama began taking his jobs program to the people (after first presenting it to Congress), he staged his first speech at the base of a bridge that spans a river between the home states of two prominent political opponents to the bill. He called for them both to support his plan to put Americans to work building and repairing such bridges all over the country, and the bridge is a symbol of the bipartisan support he is calling for—a bridge across the GOP/Democrat divide.

**Know Your Audience(s),** and maybe refer to them directly. Consider their attitudes about your subject, their knowledge level, their experiences relating to the issue, and their personal stake in the outcome. Especially consider the neutral-to-hostile elements of your audience. They are the ones whose minds you want to change. You can’t get them to listen to you unless you can understand why they don’t already agree with you, and disarm their objections. For Example: In his “I Have a Dream” speech, King was careful to acknowledge the white members of his audience who had come to hear his speech, as a way to both thank them for their support and to signal to other white people that he wasn’t against them, that he wanted to address all Americans.

**Establish Your Ethos in Relation to the Topic:** If you have relevant experience, expertise, a personal connection to the topic, work it into your writing. If you don’t, work in stores of those who do and position yourself as their advocate. For example: If you were to take a stand on the American Dream Act, a bill before Congress that seeks support for college students who were brought to this country illegally, you should mention your own status as a college student. If your family’s immigrant story is recent, you could use that. If not, you could bring in immigrant students you know.

**Find Relevant Ground to Stand On,** whether literally or figuratively. Literally, you choose the site to deliver your speech carefully, as in the jobs speech example above. If it’s not a speech, you can begin by describing a site of particular significance. For example, you could start an essay about the American Dream Act by describing Ellis Island, a site that symbolizes our traditional embrace of immigrants and their right to seek the American Dream on our shores.