

Responding to One Event: Two Rhetorical Situations, Two Genres

Arch Collapse at a National Park

In this case study, two writers report on a single event. One writes a press release, the other a blog post.

The event. In August 2008, a rock formation in Utah's famous Arches National Park collapsed.

The writers. Paul Henderson, a ranger at the park who also wrote press releases, and Shaan Hurley, a blogger and fan of the park who had hiked and photographed it.

The compositions. **Press Release:** "Wall Arch Collapses" (Henderson); **Blog Post:** "The Wall Arch Collapses in Arches National Park" (Hurley).

As you'll see, Henderson and Hurley provide much of the same information about the arch collapse, but they write in different genres and with different purposes and audiences in mind. The notes in the margins of each piece explain their rhetorical situations and how they work within the conventions of the press release and the blog post.

Guided Reading | Press Release

At the time of the collapse, Paul Henderson was chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services for Arches National Park, which is managed by the National Park Service, part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. When the arch collapsed, Henderson was interviewed by news outlets, including MSNBC, which also quoted from the press release below.

Paul Henderson, *Wall Arch Collapses*

RHETORICAL SITUATION & CHOICES	GENRE CONVENTIONS
<p>PURPOSE Henderson, who works for the National Park Service, a government agency, writes to inform readers about the collapse. He reports that there were no injuries and that the area is temporarily closed. He reassures readers that the event is normal, that arches are temporary and "eventually succumb to the forces of gravity and erosion."</p> <p>AUDIENCE Henderson's readers want an official statement from park management, rather than one by an outside observer. Readers are mainly members of news organizations—but also park patrons, including hikers and nature photographers, looking for details.</p> <p>RHETORICAL APPEALS For Henderson and other press release writers, ethos is crucial. Readers need to trust the authority of the writer and his information, especially because Henderson represents a government agency. Henderson establishes</p>	<p>What is the composer, Paul Henderson, doing?</p> <p>How do I know this is a press release?</p> <p>ELEMENTS OF THE GENRE Facts: Henderson explains: Who = people at the site of the collapse What = the arch collapse When = 8/4/08 Where = specific location of the collapse Why = gravity and erosion How = falling debris Brevity, timeliness: Like most press releases, this is concisely worded, just a few paragraphs long. Henderson wrote it just four days after the event. Pointedness: Henderson begins with the most crucial information and follows it with significant details. Contact information: Henderson wants readers, especially the news media (the target audience for press releases), to be able to get in touch. STYLE Tone: Henderson is objective in his writing. He doesn't give his opinion and writes in the neutral third person. Clarity, directness: Henderson provides facts simply and details concisely (e.g., "Rock debris has</p>