

SOAPS

In discussing the rhetorical situation surrounding a text, we've talked about some of the background that you should consider (like the occasion, context, and purpose) and relationships that are more directly related to the text (like those among the speaker, audience, and subject). One way to remember all of these things is to use the acronym **SOAPS**, which stands for Subject, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, and Speaker. It's a mnemonic device that offers a practical way to approach the concept of the rhetorical situation. Think of it as a kind of checklist that helps you organize your ideas rhetorically. Let's use SOAPS to look at the rhetorical situation in a letter written by Albert Einstein.

Widely considered the greatest scientist of the twentieth century, Einstein (1879–1955) is responsible for the theory of relativity, quantum mechanics, and other foundational scientific concepts. He won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921. In 1936, he wrote the following letter to a sixth-grade student, Phyllis Wright, in response to her questions: Do scientists pray? And if so, what do they pray for?

January 24, 1936

Dear Phyllis,

I have tried to respond to your question as simply as I could. Here is my answer. Scientific research is based on the idea that everything that takes place is determined by laws of nature, and therefore this holds for the actions of people. For this reason, a research scientist will hardly be inclined to believe that events could be influenced by a prayer, i.e., by a wish addressed to a supernatural being.

However, it must be admitted that our actual knowledge of these laws is only imperfect and fragmentary, so that, actually, the belief in the existence of basic all-embracing laws in Nature also rests on a sort of faith. All the same this faith has been largely justified so far by the success of scientific research.

But, on the other hand, every one who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe—a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble. In this way the pursuit of science leads to a religious feeling of a special sort, which is indeed quite different from the religiosity of someone more naive.

I hope this answers your question.

Best wishes

Yours,

Albert Einstein