

ESSAY # 3: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF ONE TEXT

Length: 1000-2500 words (please single space).

- Email me your RRR version as a WORD document before class.
- Email me your Mandatory Revision **WORD** document before class.
- If you use a text that is not on the course website **attach that full text to your email** (that text can be a pdf since I am not going to be correcting the text you analyze)

Task: Select a **written text** to analyze and evaluate rhetorically and to interpret. You will need a sophisticated and complex text. A text that overtly tries to persuade its audience is probably more fruitful and easier to analyze than one that tries merely to convey information.

The text can be a speech (from the past, from the present, or from a play), any persuasive piece of non-fiction prose. Write a thoughtful essay which demonstrates what you've learned about rhetoric and rhetorical analysis, both by your insights into your topic and by the way you write your essay. As with all academic writing, your ultimate goal is to persuade your readers that your claims about rhetoric and the text are valid and provable.

We have several examples to use as models for how to write your essay: Selzer's analysis of White's "Education" (he uses, e.g., language, metaphor, & arrangement) and of Friedman's "Letter to Bill Bennett" are really good examples as is Campbell's analysis of Nixon's speech.

Although they are not complete acts of criticism of any one text, partial rhetorical analysis and criticism of various texts (analyses which can give you some clues about how to do rhetorical analysis) can be found in Campbell and Jamieson discussing pieces of individual inaugural addresses; Ware and Linkugel discussing pieces of individual apologies; Hahn discussing metaphors in Goldwater's speech. Essays on the course website but not assigned for class which also could serve as models include Frank's "Obama's Rhetorical Signature" & Frank's "Prophetic Voice and the Face of Other in Obama's 'A More Perfect Union'"; Hahn and Morlando's "Burkean Analysis of Lincoln's Inaugural Address"; Ling's "Pentadic Analysis of Edward Kennedy's Chappaquiddick Speech."

Focus on **one written text** (i.e., this is not an assignment for which you can create a genre). If you wish, you may use genre to help with your evaluation of your text (the way Selzer uses context to evaluate Friedman's "Letter"), but your analysis needs more than just genre analysis since your goal is analysis, evaluation, and interpretation (like Campbell and Selzer). (Also, if you use genre, you need to fully define *the specific genre* as you did for Essay #2 or use a pro source about the genre to define it).

Your interpretation might include things like Selzer (White's essay *seems like* epideictic nostalgia *but really is*, in fact, deliberative because...); Friedman's "Letter" includes no new arguments but is original in the sense that he placed it in *Wall Street Journal* and is wrong in asserting that drug use would decline if legalized); Campbell's interpretation includes her idea about Nixon continuing the mythical America instead of telling reality of non-mythical America, etc. Feel free to use ideas/concepts/insights from any of the readings we've done this semester (summarize, paraphrase, or quote them).

Rhetoric Tool Chest. You now have a much more fully stocked personal Rhetoric Tool Chest than you had at the beginning of the semester. Look again at Strang's Rhetoric Tool Chest to remind yourself of the tools available.

One question to always ask yourself stems from Aristotle's injunction that we should find all available means of persuasion—namely, "What means of persuasion did this rhetor decide **not** to use and why?" And part of that question is what opposition arguments did the rhetor ignore (and perhaps how you think the rhetor could have/should have answered those arguments)

Research Question: You need an explicit Research Question about rhetoric (stated in general terms without naming the rhetor or the text you are analyzing) and stated as a question—minus 1/3rd of a grade if Research Question is missing or not stated in general terms and as a question.

Your Audience: Our class, plus students and professors from other comparable universities (e.g., Harvard, Brown, Stanford, Georgia Tech) who have not read the text you are analyzing, do not know the genre (if you mention genre) and have not taken rhetoric. Your goal is to convince these **skeptical readers** of the value of your claims. Implications of your audience:

- You need to give a complete summary of the text in one lump before beginning your analysis
 - To summarize any text, *explicitly* use the terms: **rhetorical situation (the occasion, the intended audience, the implied audience), rhetor’s purpose, major claims, types of evidence**)—minus 1/3rd of a grade if you don’t use the terms explicitly.
- You need to clearly and completely define any rhetorical terms or concepts you use
- You need to establish common ground and kairos with your readers in your introduction.
- You need a complete MLA Works Cited, give paragraph or page number for every reference to a text, Acknowledgements for Workshop and WCC (if not in workshop or WCC, write N/A) —minus 1/3rd of a grade for any missing element

Your Goals as Rhetor:

1. Teach your readers something new about rhetoric either explicitly (in an analysis paper) or implicitly (by demonstrating how to argue effectively)
2. Teach your readers something about your artifact(s) that is not obvious to a one-time reader of that artifact(s) or a person who is only slightly familiar with the debate about the controversy.

Your Goals as Learner:

1. Continue to develop your skills analyzing an artifact(s) using a rhetorical approach
2. Continue to develop and deepen your ability to apply the concepts and terminology of rhetorical analysis/criticism
3. Move beyond class discussions

Suggested Possibilities to Analyze on the course website (but feel free to select your own)

- Allen, “Random Reflections of a Second Rate Mind”
- Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation”—*pro rhetorician*
- Black, “Second Persona”—*pro rhetorician*
- Dillard, “Living Like Weasels”
- King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
- Obama, “A More Perfect Union”
- Singer, “Animal Liberation”
- Taylor, “Are Humans Superior to Animals and Plants”
- Twain, “The Lowest Animal”
- Vatz, “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation”—*pro rhetorician*
- Weaver, “Responsible Rhetoric”—*pro rhetorician*
- Williams, “Save the Whales, Screw the Shrimp”

Some possible sources of other texts are *AmericanRhetoric.com* for speeches, journals and magazines such as *The Nation* (liberal), *National Review* (conservative), *The Atlantic* (middle-of-the-road), *Harpers* (middle-of-the-road), *New York Review of Books* (middle of road)—all accessible from MIT library’s Vera E-journals and databases. Many other sources, of course, are available. The trick is to not select some text whose content and rhetoric is too thin and too obvious to be worth the effort. The test—if reading the text one time through gives you everything, the text is not worth analyzing. You want a text that puzzles you in places, or makes you stop and think about implications, etc. Avoid are newspaper “Letters to the Editor.”

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21W.747 Rhetoric
Spring 2015

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.