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Written Rhetorical Analysis Essay

Persuasiveness

Effective writing persuades almost invisibly. As we read, we find ourselves agreeing with the writer and not questioning their reasoning because the writer has crafted a piece of writing that presents an argument that relies on multiple appeals. Sometimes this is bad because we can be misled by the writer’s intentions. One way to make ourselves aware of how persuasive writing has an effect on us is to study just what makes a piece of writing persuasive.

Prompt

**Write an essay in which you summarize an existing piece of writing of your choice and show how it is persuasive rhetorically as well as reflect on whether you were persuaded by the writer’s argument.**

Rhetorical motifs

Your analysis should include how the piece of writing you chose uses the rhetorical appeals and whatever other rhetorical motifs are present.

* How does the writer draw attention to the interior structure of their piece? Is the reasoning of the argument clear and logical and thus an example of an appeal to **logos**?
* How does the writer make positive assumptions about their audience (the people that will read their essay)? How does the writer drop hints about their credibility or **ethos**, that allows their work to be persuasive? How does the writer grant themselves the authority to write about their subject matter?
* How does the writer rouse the reader to emotions, and to which emotions exactly? Which words or phrases does the writer use to appeal to **pathos** to get the audience to feel a certain way?
* How does the writer emphasize the timeliness or **kairos** of their essay? How does the writer show that it is the exact time to discuss whatever they discuss in their essay? What choices does the writer make to show that their subject matter is relevant?
* Does the writer use a **rhetorical situation**? This term refers to the background information surrounding a speech that influences its effectiveness. A rhetorical situation always includes three parts. An **exigence** is a problem that is current or imminent that is the impetus for the rhetor’s speech. The **audience** is the people to be influenced by the speech who also have the agency to help resolve the problem in some way. The **constraints** are the factors or subjects that get in the way of resolving the exigence.
* Does the essay use **symbols** or **metaphors**? What is persuasive about the symbols or metaphors used and how does that contribute or not contribute to the essay’s argument?
* Does the essay use **syllogism** and **enthymeme**, two types of reasoning mentioned in the *Rhetoric* of that Aristotle? The former occurs when two premises (statements that are taken to be true) lead to a stated conclusion which draws from the premises. The latter occurs when a single premise leads to a conclusion, meaning that a second premise is implied, but not stated. Enthymemes are generally more common in essays since they are shorter and since they fit with positive assumptions about the audience made by the writer.
* How would you describe the **tone** of the essay? This has to do with word choice and style and the choices the writer makes in crafting their argument. Often the tone of an essay relates to the essay’s appeal to pathos.
* All writing is inherently visual. Visual symbols (letters) combine with words to form meaning, and words form themselves into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into entire essays. How would you describe the **visual design** of the essay you choose to analyze? How does that visual design contribute to its effectiveness rhetorically? Visual design has to do with the spacing on the printed or digital page. How much white space is there? Does the writer use bullet points, subheadings, or other means of making their essay easy to read? If the writer includes images of themselves or something or someone else does that make their argument more credible?

Choosing an Essay to Analyze

Your choice should be an example of writing to persuade, instead of writing to inform. It does not have to be printed in paper format, nor does it have to be scholarly. The essay you choose must have an argument. You should be able to identify the writer’s argument and the reasons supporting their position (if any). You should choose an essay that will yield three full pages of analysis but there is no length requirement of the essay that you choose to analyze. You should avoid choosing critical essays about pieces of literature (or other types of media) with which you are not familiar because you will have difficulty understanding the writer’s argument in such essays.

Organization

Your analysis should have three parts: an introduction paragraph, the rhetorical analysis itself, and a conclusion paragraph.

In the introduction paragraph, you should first briefly summarize the argument of the essay that you choose. Your introduction should also assess whether the title of the essay matches the subject matter of the essay.

In the rhetorical analysis section, list each relevant rhetorical motif and discuss how the writer uses it in their essay. This assignment requires that you either directly quote or paraphrase from the essay that you choose to analyze. You may choose to use bullet points for this section but remember to use complete sentences. Each rhetorical motif discussed should have its own paragraph in your analysis. You do not need to discuss rhetorical motifs that are not used by the writer of the essay you chose to analyze.

In the conclusion paragraph, write about whether you find the writer’s argument effective or not and why. Your conclusion should also discuss the effects of what could happen if readers agree with the writer’s point of view about the subject matter of their essay.

Style

You may write in whatever point of view you are comfortable using. You are encouraged to connect the writer’s points to examples in your own life as evidence of the rhetorical persuasiveness at work in the essay you choose (particularly in the conclusion paragraph).

Your essay should otherwise adhere to MLA format and should include page numbers in the top right of each page with your last name preceding the number. Citation and a works cited page are both required for this assignment.

Your essay must be at least three full, double-spaced pages (in 12 pt. font size) to not be penalized for lack of length. The header of your essay and title count towards the page length but the works cited page (if applicable) does not. Your essay should have a creative title that previews what it will discuss.

Resources for finding essays

Archives/websites:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/05/slightly-more-than-100-fantastic-pieces-of-journalism/284564/>

<http://www.salon.com/topic/personal_essays/>

<https://www.newyorker.com/>

<http://grantland.com/>

<https://www.theplayerstribune.com/>

<https://www3.bostonglobe.com/section/connections?arc404=true>

<https://thewritelife.com/personal-essay/>

<https://medium.com/>

Specific essays recommended by the instructor (for the depth of rhetorical terms present in each essay, not necessarily for the argument presented in each essay):

“The Coddling of the American Mind” by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/>

“Charlie Sheen is Winning” by Bret Easton Ellis:

<http://www.newsweek.com/charlie-sheen-winning-66173>

“Generation Wuss” by Bret Easton Ellis:

<http://www.vanityfair.fr/culture/livre/articles/generation-wuss-by-bret-easton-ellis/15837>

“Is Inclusivity Bad for Fashion?” by Bret Easton Ellis:

<https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/opinion/op-ed-bret-easton-ellis-is-inclusivity-bad-for-fashion>

“A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again” by David Foster Wallace:

[mark.levengood.people.cpcc.edu/HIS132/LessonDocs/Wallace1.pdf](http://www.mark.levengood.people.cpcc.edu/HIS132/LessonDocs/Wallace1.pdf) [mark.levengood.people.cpcc.edu/HIS132/LessonDocs/Wallace2.pdf](http://mark.levengood.people.cpcc.edu/HIS132/LessonDocs/Wallace2.pdf)

“Consider the Lobster” by David Foster Wallace:

<http://www.columbia.edu/~col8/lobsterarticle.pdf>

“Eco-fashion’s Animal Rights Delusion” by Alden Wicker:

<https://craftsmanship.net/eco-fashions-animal-rights-delusion/>

“Aliens Cause Global Warming” by Michael Crichton:

<https://stephenschneider.stanford.edu/Publications/PDF_Papers/Crichton2003.pdf>

“The Riddle of the Gun” by Sam Harris:

<https://samharris.org/the-riddle-of-the-gun/>

“We are what we wear: How sports jerseys became ubiquitous in the U.S.” by Tim Layden

<https://www.si.com/nfl/2016/02/01/mlb-nba-nhl-sports-jersys-rise-popularity>

Collections of essays owned by the instructor which can be leant out to students:

*Facing Unpleasant Facts* by George Orwell

*Both Flesh and Not* by David Foster Wallace

*Consider the Lobster* by David Foster Wallace

*A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* by David Foster Wallace

*Sunshine State* by Sarah Gerard

*Florida* edited by Jeff Rice

*White* by Bret Easton Ellis

*40 Model Essays: A Portable Anthology* edited by Jane E. Aaron and Ellen Kuhl Repetto

Due Dates

The first draft is due in class 23 September 2019. Please bring at least one printed copy of your essay for peer review. For peer review days (23, 25 September 2019), please make certain that you bring a printed or digital copy of the essay that you chose to analyze for your peer reviewer to consult. You will receive digital feedback on your drafts from your instructor.

The final draft is due in class 14 October 2019. Please submit your first and final drafts digitally on the course Moodle page.