

## WRITING THROUGH THE RHETORICAL MODES

### SECTION 1: A RHETORICAL MODES READER

#### Chapter One: The Narrative Mode

##### Narration and Reflection: Reading 1

Barbara Ehrenreich, "Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America"

*Barbara Ehrenreich is an American author, political activist, and outspoken social critic. She is most famous for her 2001 book, Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America, from which this excerpt is taken.*

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/e/ehrenreich-01nickel.html>

##### Questions for Reading and Discussion

- 1) Ehrenreich begins her essay by describing her dread at suddenly having to change roles, for the sake of her journalistic experiment, from consumer to worker in her community. In your own work history, have you experienced the same dread of "being recognized" by friends, family, or acquaintances while at work? Alternately, have you ever been in the consumer role and recognized the worker serving you? What do you think is the reason for Ehrenreich's dread of being recognized, and do you sympathize?
- 2) Ehrenreich writes, "So begins my career at the Hearthside, where for two weeks I work from 2:00 till 10:00 P.M. for \$2.43 an hour plus tips." What is the meaning of "career"? How does this word work in this sentence?
- 3) Reread the entire paragraph that begins with the sentence "So begins my career at the Hearthside, where for two weeks I work from 2:00 till 10:00 P.M. for \$2.43 an hour plus tips." Why might Ehrenreich alternate in her description between Gail's training instructions and details from Gail's life? What is the effect of this back-and-forth on you, the reader?

##### Questions for Writing and Research

- 1) Ehrenreich carried out this project in order to investigate the effects of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Research this law and the claims of those who supported it that it would "end welfare as we have come to know it" (President Bill Clinton) and restore "America's work ethic" (U.S. Chamber of Commerce). Then, write a short paper in which you explain the law and state whether you think Ehrenreich's experience makes an argument for or against this law. Be sure to support your claims with evidence from Ehrenreich's text.

2) As she is hired as a waitress at the Hearthside, Ehrenreich wants to say to the hiring manager, "Thank you for your time, sir, but this is just an experiment, you know, not my actual life." After *Nickel and Dimed* was published, Ehrenreich was criticized on precisely this point—minimum-wage employment and low-rent living accommodations were not her "actual life," but rather part of an investigative reporting project. Research this criticism and respond to it in a short paper. Do you believe Ehrenreich's project is worthwhile and informative, or too artificial in its design to present an accurate picture of the working poor in the United States?



Original content by Ashar Foley.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/)