

## WRITING THROUGH THE RHETORICAL MODES

### SECTION 1: A RHETORICAL MODES READER

#### Chapter Four: The Persuasive Mode

##### Persuasion: Reading 2

Bill McKibben, “A Modest Proposal to Destroy Western Civilization as We Know It”

*Bill McKibben is an American environmentalist and journalist whose efforts include several books on climate change, protest against the Keystone XL Pipeline project, various People’s Climate Marches, and the founding of the global environmental organization 350.org. In this article, he riffs on Jonathan Swift’s classic essay, “A Modest Proposal,” in order to modestly propose a single solution to so many of the problems humankind faces today.*

<http://citytech.ezproxy.cuny.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9711131229&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

##### Questions for Reading and Discussion

- 1) How will widespread adoption of the \$100-Christmas rule going to “destroy Western Civilization as we know it”? What cultural practices, beliefs, and habits are implied in the phrase “Western Civilization”?
- 2) McKibben published this essay in 1997. If we adjust for inflation, the \$100 Christmas of 1997 becomes the \$250 Christmas of 2017. Could your family feasibly practice the \$250-Dollar Holiday? What would be your family’s reaction if you proposed it? What do you imagine would be the result if your family practiced it?
- 3) Is McKibben’s thesis statement direct or implied? If the former, locate the sentence or sentences that express the essay’s thesis.

##### Questions for Writing and Research

- 1) McKibben published this essay in 1997. If we adjust for inflation, the \$100 Christmas of 1997 becomes the \$250 Christmas of 2017. Could your family feasibly practice the \$250-Dollar Holiday? What would be your family’s reaction if you proposed it? What do you imagine would be the result if your family practiced it? Write a reaction piece in which you answer these questions.

2) Two things the English Department wants you to learn how to do in ENG 1101—and, most likely, two of the things you want to learn how to do as well—are to develop both “Rhetorical Awareness and Knowledge” and “Knowledge of Academic Conventions.” A big part of this knowledge of rhetorical and academic conventions (ie the standard techniques of persuasion in writing, and the standard techniques of writing in an academic setting) is how to engage a reader with a written argument.

In order to craft an engaging argument, writers must

- understand their purpose in writing
- have a clear picture of their audience
- respond to what others have said about their topic
- state the value of their work, why it matters (to prevent readers from asking, “So what?”)
- acknowledge opposing viewpoints
- adopt a voice of authority
- emphasize supporting evidence

(Adapted from Teresa Thonney, “Teaching the Conventions of Academic Discourse”)

Reread McKibben’s essay. On a sheet of paper, paraphrase or, where possible, write out the passages from the essay where you see each bulleted convention in action. As you do so, pay attention to how McKibben constructs his argument.



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/).