

Assignment 2: Rhetoric, Genre, Discourse

Analyzing the Rhetorical Needs of Discourse Communities: Joining a Conversation

Readings:

- Laura Bolin Carroll: “Backpacks vs. Briefcases: Steps Towards Rhetorical Analysis”
- John Swales: “The Concept of Discourse Community”
- Anthony Bourdain, “Don’t Eat Before Reading This”
- Excerpt, Ta-Nehisi Coates, “My President Was Black”

Rhetorical Situation, or Your Jumping Off Point for Writing:

How do discourse communities make claims that situate them in relation to society, and to what extent are those claims effective? For example, how does a special interest group or a cultural minority, professional association, or demographic group sway political leaders or influence elections, policies, or laws? (Some examples could include labor unions, LGBT groups, cultural minorities, etc.) This analytical project involves a deep analysis of the rhetorical components of a text or artifact as functional objects, helping you define links between rhetorical situations, discourse communities, and genre.

You’ll deploy these analytical insights to synthesize your ideas into the production of your own text to enter the conversation about a particular social or cultural issue. In particular, you’ll analyze how authors respond to rhetorical situations using research, appeals, and rhetorical moves to effectively appeal to their audiences. You’ll also have the opportunity to perform your own primary source fieldwork to develop your own argument about a specific issue that would appeal to a popular audience in a print or digital magazine.

Analyzing how a given publication appeals to a specific audience using certain genre conventions will also help you succeed in reproducing this genre, and the selection of a “mentor text” will help you guide your choice of rhetorical moves accordingly.

Your Task:

In this assignment, you’ll define a discourse community that you want to explore and analyze a single text or cultural artifact of that discourse community, to define how a particular topic is addressed rhetorically.

Then, you will pick a topic and develop an argument in the form of a popular article for a specific print or digital publication of your choosing, and use a mentor text to help you model effective frameworks for framing your argument. You will ultimately produce a thoughtfully written article of 1,200 – 2,500 words (depending on where you would want to place the piece), with an accompanying reflection on how your analytical approach helped you make specific conscious choices about your writing process based on genre, rhetorical situation, research, audience, and relationship with the discourse community in question.

Writing Assignment Instructions and Due Dates:

Thurs 2/28 Rhetorical Analysis Proposal of 2-3 pages

Pick a discourse community: either a cultural group, religious group, political group, advocacy group, nonprofit organization, creative community, or other group linked by commonalities, interests, language, and literacy. Explain **who and what this discourse community is as you understand it** – in a paragraph or two – and your relation to it. Why is it interesting to you?

Then, **choose a text or cultural artifact to analyze**, consider the issues involved, and **choose a mentor text from a popular magazine** (or website) to work with in crafting an argument about one particular issue. Analyze your chosen text or artifact from this discourse community, using the analytical criteria we define in class. What is their audience, how are they establishing credibility, using what types of rhetorical moves, ethos/pathos/logos, or other appeals, language, and/or visual rhetoric? Finally, decide who the audience for your popular article will be, how you will appeal to them, and **what types of field research and secondary sources will be needed**.

Thurs 3/7 Report of Field Research Notes (with 1-page cover letter)

Do an ethnography, field research visit, and/or interview with a member of the community. First, brainstorm a list of questions and then go into this community, and conduct a 30-60 minute interview, exploration, or visit into this group. Either record or transcribe your interview, or take detailed notes and type up a 2-3 page report of the research notes you captured in this community. Introduce your notes with a one-page letter to me. What happened? What were your impressions? How will you use this first hand research in your article?

Thurs 3/14 Working Draft of Article (uploaded via Open Lab + 1 Hard Copy)

Write a Working Draft of your article, depending on the length and word count requirements for the publication of your choice. Make a specific argument about some facet of this discourse community, using an integrated combination of first hand research and secondary sources. Use your analysis of the mentor text to help you draft your argument – what moves does it use, and what can you learn from those and employ in your genre and argument? How are you positioning yourself in relation to this discourse community and appealing to your intended audience?

Tues 3/19 Peer Review Letter with Descriptive Outlining

Peer Review letter to partner due, using a technique called descriptive outlining.

Thurs 3/28 Final Draft Due via Open Lab + 1 Hard Copy

Including a 2-page Reflection Cover Letter explaining why and how you made the choices that you made for your target audience, using your mentor text, and for the publication of your choice.