Rhetorical Analysis

Proposal memo due **Sept. 5** / Rough Draft due **Sept. 15** / Final Draft due **Sept. 19**

**15%** of final grade / Length: **3-5 pages**

**Purpose:** A rhetorical analysis examines and explains how an author (or artist) attempts to reach, maybe even influence, an audience. Rhetorical analyses use specific evidence from a text (oral, written, verbal, or visual) to establish a general claim (thesis) about how the text “works.” No matter the text you select, you will be identifying and analyzing its details to make an argument. In writing this paper, you will become more familiar with important rhetorical strategies and gain a greater understanding of the flexible capacities of rhetoric. As the foundation for this course, rhetorical analysis will play a role in all of your assignments; by rhetorically analyzing another text, you will be better prepared to think about your own position as a rhetor.

**Directions:** Find a visual, a traditional printed argument, a website, or some other type of text that you deem to be interesting and that has a discernable purpose. By “interesting,” I mean that the text in question should have some sophistication about it: it should be tantalizing and potentially effective at reaching its audience. (There is no point in analyzing the obvious; pick something that makes an interesting argument that readers might be resistant to.) By “discernable purpose,” I mean that you can see that the text is attempting to move an audience in some way and for some reason.

Your analysis should not simply paraphrase or summarize what the author says. Assume that your reader has already read or seen the text and knows what it contains. Your purpose is to provide a way of understanding how the text persuades its audience. You should formulate a thesis about the text, an argument about how the text works. Rather than merely identifying parts of the texts, you should zero in on the points that best support your thesis. As you craft an argument about the rhetorical strategies at work within the text, be sure to support those points with evidence from the text. Finally, be sure to make some sort of judgment about the text’s effectiveness. Does it achieve its goal?

The following basic questions may help you as you plan and draft your analysis. These questions are not meant to provide an outline for the paper; rather, they simply help you to think about the rhetorical aspects of the text. It up to you to decide what to focus on in your paper and to arrange and organize your analysis so that readers can follow your argument.

**Note:** Every paper must *at least* identify the author of the text, the method of publication or distribution, the intended audience for the text, and the argument you understand the text to be making.

1. What is the rhetorical situation? Who is the rhetor? Who is the rhetor's audience? What is the rhetor's message? What is s/he responding to or trying to address? What does s/he hope to accomplish? Also, think about the context surrounding the text: *where* and *when* did the item originally appear? What outside factors might have influenced the text’s creation and/or reception? What was the rhetor’s exigence? Was there a particular reason why they needed to write or speak at that moment? What about kairos; was the argument timely? Think of the rhetorical situation as the rhetor’s “problem”: what specific attitudes, beliefs, and values of the audience must the author appeal to or counteract in order to succeed?
2. How could you classify the author’s argument? In terms of its purpose? In terms of its occasion (forensic, epideictic, deliberative)? In terms of stasis theory (arguments of fact, definition, evaluation, proposal)? Why might any of these categorizations be important? Think about how using these systems of classification can help you to better understand and explain the argument and its effectiveness.
3. How does the rhetor establish ethos? That is, what can you apprehend in the text about the rhetor's character, ethics, reliability, and overall credibility?
4. How would you describe the logos of the text? More specifically, think about how the supporting claims and the implied claims of the text reinforce the overall thesis. How are they linked together? Also, how does the rhetor use evidence, data, to support the thesis? Those who use logos to persuade say this: “Believe me because what I say is reasonable.”
5. How would you describe the pathos of the text? How does the rhetor appeal to emotions? Pathos is frequently communicated through vivid descriptions, details, and examples; pathos, like ethos and logos, is also communicated through the style and tone of an essay so pay attention to word choice, metaphors, and other stylistic features.
6. How does the text's structure work? Why are the elements of the text arranged as they are? Could the rhetor have organized things in another way, and if so, why did he or she pick this arrangement?
7. What is the role of style and tone? Style is one of the most important aspects of any rhetorical text. Style speaks to the overall shape, mood, and atmosphere of the text; it has to do with decisions at the sentence and word level, and sometimes is revealed through visual appearance.
8. What seems to be the rhetor's dominant strategy? Each of questions 2-7 addresses a particular kind of rhetorical strategy. All of these aspects are more than likely present in the text at issue, but in most cases, one strategy is dominant. If possible, identify the dominant strategy that the writer uses to solve the rhetorical problem that he or she faces.