

Formal Assignment 1: Visual Rhetorical Analysis

English 101.091

Workshops: R 9/7, R 9/14

Final Draft Due: T 9/26

Description:

You will demonstrate your grasp of key rhetorical concepts and compositional techniques in a **3-5 page analysis** of a common visual form of argument. Your objective is both to explain how the image uses the elements of rhetoric to try to persuade its audience, **and** to make a judgment about whether (and why or why not) the image is an effective one.

Learning Goals:

The purpose of this assignment is to give you practice and experience with the process of visual analysis and with rhetorical analysis in general; with presenting a persuasive interpretation of an image; with considering elements of rhetoric and compositional techniques in action; and with identifying rhetorical appeals in texts and using them in your own writing.

Process Checklist:

Step 1.

Select your visual argument. I have compiled several useful resources for this assignment on Blackboard (go to Links & Resources, then click on Rhetorical Analysis Resources). These include online databases and web pages for political cartoons, movie posters, book cover art, magazine cover art, and album cover art. Browse through all of these before settling on an image to use in this assignment. Be sure you know a little about the context of the image you select; for example, if you choose a magazine cover to analyze, you should know something about the magazine's general audience and the sort of articles it usually prints. Also be sure to choose a suitably complex and interesting image; otherwise, your paper won't be complex or interesting.

Step 2.

Make a list of concrete observations. Look closely at the components of the cartoon, poster, or cover art you've chosen. What is the dominant image? What colors are most prominent? How is the composition framed or cropped? And so on.

Step 3.

Make a list of inferences you can draw from your observations. Think carefully about what the elements of the image might mean, especially in terms of the rhetorical triangle and composition toolkit. Review pgs. 17-23 and 721-23 in *Seeing & Writing* and the first chapter of *Everyday Use* for more help.

Step 4.

Write a summary of what your observations and inferences can tell you about the rhetorical situation and rhetorical appeals of your image. In other words, how do the images' elements reflect its logos, pathos, and ethos? Is the image rhetorically effective or not?

Step 5.

Bring steps 2, 3, & 4 to class with you on 9/7. You'll work with them in small groups in your first workshop.

Step 6.

After you've received feedback from your peers in your first workshop, compose a complete draft of your rhetorical analysis. Remember that this is an essay that requires an introduction, thesis statement, support, and conclusion. Remember that your purpose is not only to analyze, but to convince your audience that your analysis of your image is the correct one. Your thesis should include a claim about the rhetorical effectiveness of your image.

Step 7.

Bring two copies of your draft to class on 9/14. One will be for your workshop group; the other will be for me. Come to class with questions for your peers about your essay. Make sure you let them know which parts of the essay you're having trouble with, and which parts you think are most effective.

Step 8.

Set up an e-mail conference with me for the week of 9/19. In your initial e-mail, describe the suggestions and critiques you've received from your peers, and send me the answers to your self-assessment sheet. (You can find the self-assessment sheet on Blackboard under Assignments.) Be prepared to both ask and answer questions about your essay.

Step 9.

Revise your essay with your peers' and my suggestions in mind. Turn in your final draft at the beginning of class on 9/26. Also turn in your peers' suggestions, all of your drafts and pre-writing exercises, and your self-assessment sheet. They will all count toward your grade.

Don't forget to give your paper an interesting and descriptive title. (In other words, don't call your paper Visual Rhetorical Analysis; come up with your own unique, creative, intriguing title.)