Rhetorical Analysis Exercises
Critical Perspective on Consumption

Rhetoric is traditionally defined as “the art of persuasion.” Analysis can be defined as the ability to explain “how” and “why” a text affects its audience. Analysis is not summary, description, criticism, or praise. Analysis depends on your exploration of the rhetorical situation of the text. In understanding this situation, you should determine the author’s purpose, the anticipated audience, and the strategies that the author uses in order to convey meaning to his/her audience. Think about the context of the text and its purpose. Basically, analysis relies on the interaction between text, audience, and author and on understanding the rhetorical situation of your text (the relationship between audience, purpose, and context). In other words, you will be examining the following: Who is doing What to Whom, How and Why are they doing It?

As you research, you will be analyzing the rhetorical situation of each of your sources in order to gain a fuller understanding about how and why arguments are being made in which contexts and for which audiences. These rhetorical analysis exercises ask you to examine each source’s argument and articulate your analysis for others.

Choose FIVE sources from your research. For each source, you will need to:

1) provide bibliographic information in MLA format (link to the MLA Format site through CUlearn for guidelines)

2) craft a one-paragraph summary detailing the shape and scope of the author’s central argument and the sub-points that advance it. (See handout on “Writing an Effective Summary” for more details).

3) a brief description of the context of the piece (socio-cultural climate, time period, form and forum, ethos of the author) and what this context tells you about the author’s intended audience

4) a synopsis of several rhetorical strategies the author employs. For this final part (part 4) include specific examples from the text and explain the ways each strategy appeals to the readers’ emotions and/or values, establishes the author as knowledgeable and trustworthy, and/or forwards (or reinforces) the author’s argument logically.

5) a brief reaction statement through which you assess the strengths and weaknesses of the essay as a persuasive text. Pay attention to your own context and how this shapes your interpretation.

GRADING
You will be graded primarily on your ability to 1) summarize a text thoroughly, yet concisely in one paragraph 2) discuss specific rhetorical strategies (give examples) and explain how the author uses them to advance his/her argument 3) analyze the rhetorical features of the text and use this analysis to assess the effectiveness of the text.

HELP!
You have several options if you are feeling overwhelmed by any assignments in this class. You can always come to see me in my office during regular office hours or by appointment. Do not wait until the days immediately before an assignment is due! Office time becomes extremely limited because of the number of people who want some guidance on their papers. The sooner you come see me, the more guidance I can give you. Another good resource for assistance is the Writing Center. For more information, see the section on “The Writing Center” in our course syllabus.

GET A BETTER GRADE! Remember, if you visit the Writing Center for each of your major assignments and fill out a Writing Center Reflection (found on CUlearn), I will raise your assignment grade by as much as 5%. You should turn in each Writing Center Reflection with each assignment.

* When was it written, for whom, how are the strategies in the argument designed to influence its audience, how does your context influence your reading of the text?

† What is the central argument, what change is the essay trying to evoke with its central argument? What position/opinion is the writer trying to get his/her readers to adopt?
As you craft your rhetorical analyses, think about the following:

* Analysis involves a **close reading** of the text. ANNOTATE YOUR TEXTS. You should pay attention to the details of the text. What specific types of arguments does the author use? What specific examples/types of support does the author use?

* You are not trying to uncover the “True” meaning of the text. Your perception of a particular text is undoubtedly influenced by your own context—your values, experiences, knowledge, demographic, etc. Keep this in mind as you examine the rhetorical features of the text in terms of their persuasiveness.

* Distinguish and identify facts from opinions. Facts can be verified. They are consistent and quantifiable. They include names, numbers, locations, dates, legal documents, etc. Opinions are individual and collective interpretations of facts.

* Follow threads across sources. Often articles, speeches, and conversations about a specific issue refer to each other. While one writer might ask a rhetorical question, another writer might attempt to offer an answer to this question. By keeping track of who is referencing whom and how they are doing so, you will be able to see agreement/disagreement, and the assumptions behind them, more clearly.

* In will benefit your analysis if you do some additional research about the author and about the context in which your source appears. (see hooks example). If you know who the author is and who s/he usually writes for (popular culture? academic audience? business audience? activist audience?), you will be better able to assess his/her purpose for writing and rhetorical strategies. Also, you may want to do some research on the “location” of your source. Who reads/views/listens to this journal/newspaper/newstation? Who visits this website? What website is your source linked through? Who would go to these locations? Is your source a flyer you found on campus? If so, who is the audience? Go to a meeting. Who attends these meetings?

* So far in this class, you have learned the “language of analysis.” You have learned to identify rhetorical strategies in relation to the way that these strategies appeal to readers. Sometimes these appeals are identified as ethos (the ethical appeal), pathos (the emotional appeal), and logos (the logical appeal). Other times, these appeals have been described as appeals to the heart, to values, to character, and facts and reasons. You have learned about visual arguments, arguments of fact, arguments of definition, arguments of evaluation, and proposal arguments. You have learned the difference between claims and evidence. You have learned about “Persuasive Strategies” and “Logical Fallacies”. **Use this language in your analysis.**

This assignment is worth 25% of your Total Course Grade