**English 250** Spring 2019

**Assignment 3 (A3) : Rhetorical Analysis of a Written Text** (600+ words)

**What is this assignment?**

You will write a 600-word minimum textual rhetorical analysis of one of the essay options provided by your instructor. Your rhetorical analysis should argue *how well the text fulfills its purpose for a particular audience*. That is, how effective is the piece? Does it accomplish what it sets out to accomplish? (What *does* it set out to accomplish?) The piece might accomplish or fail to accomplish its purpose through how its words, visuals, structure, and ideas connect with each other and with the intended audience. Note that a text may *mostly accomplish* or *somewhat accomplish* its purpose—this is not a binary (yes or no) assignment and you should be sure to clearly state *to what degree* the piece accomplishes its purpose in your thesis. The audience you will be writing to is an educated person who has read the piece you are analyzing.

You’ll need to focus your analysis on certain kinds of persuasive strategies the author uses to achieve his or her purpose. To assist your readers in understanding your analysis, be sure to do the following:

* include a clear thesis statement (that should argue how well the text fulfills its purpose for a particular audience)
* use forecasting statements to guide the readers.
* explain the context (historical background, original audience and publication place and date) of the text and its connection to the essay.
* analyze how the author’s specific writing choices help fulfill the author’s purpose.
* use specific quotes rather than vague references and paraphrase portions of the essay.

It's important to realize that **choosing a shorter essay is not a short cut and will not make this assignment any easier**. You will have the same word count minimum regardless of the essay you choose. Each of these essays contains plenty of information for you to analyze and I expect each of you to put in the effort to create a complete paper that is both insightful and interesting to read.

Also note that these essays are very different from one another and will thus lend themselves to different writing experiences. For example: writing about an essay that contains an *implicit* argument will differ greatly from writing about an essay that contains an *explicit* argument.

The best thing to do is to choose an article that you feel you can engage with. Engaging with an essay is not the same as agreeing or disagreeing with an essay. Your views on the topic of the essay are not the focus of A3, but rather your exploration of the rhetorical strategies at play within the essay. That is to say, you could write about an essay that is structurally sound whist not agreeing with the opinions of the author on a personal level; you could write about an essay that you do agree with while also realizing that it contains rhetorical flaws.

Both in your choice of an essay and while writing about the essay, put your personal "agree" and "disagree" on the back burner and look instead to how the author argues. Agreeing and disagreeing are often simple knee jerk reactions, while understanding rhetorical structure is complex and thus requires a completely different set of skills that we're working to build in this class.

You should have at least four body paragraphs. Three should look at the specific target audience you’ve identified for the piece, and you may choose to use the fourth body paragraph to discuss how the piece would or would not be successful for an audience other than the author’s target audience. See note below on fourth body paragraph in the case of slam poems\*\*\*.

**Options for A3:**

* “Re-thinking the way colleges teach critical thinking” by Scott K. Johnson
* “The Danger of a Single Story” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie\*\*\*
* “Death of the Moth” by Virginia Woolf
* “Man vs. Corpse” by Zadie Smith
* “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” by Audre Lorde
* “Like Totally Whatever” by Melissa Lozada-Oliva
* “Less than Human: The Psychology of Cruelty” by David Liningstone Smith
* “*Excerpt from* The American Way of Death, Revisited” by Jessica Mitford
* “Apocalypse” by Junot Díaz
* “History Project” by Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner
* “dinosaurs in the hood” by Danez Smith
* Slam poems from 9/27\*\*\*

\*\*\*If you choose to analyze a video slam poem or speech, you may spend no more than one paragraph focusing on their speaking presence/affect of their performance. You will spend at least three body paragraphs focusing on their argument strategies.

**What is the purpose of this assignment?**

The purpose of this assignment is to help you to analyze professional writing to assess its purpose, audience, and rhetorical strategies. This kind of writing requires you to read actively and to clearly articulate your analysis to an audience, both of which are skills you will use in many ways in the future.

**How do I get started writing this assignment?**

The following sequence of steps is designed to help you plan and organize your ideas before you write. Because not all writers plan their writing in the same way, you may want to modify the sequence to suit your own way of planning an essay.

*Planning*: First, select a text from the choices given to you. Review the text and questions on the Focusing Your Rhetorical Analysis handout to determine which questions best apply to your text. Select two or three persuasive strategies used to carry out the author’s goals; these can be related to substance, organization, and/or style. See the Rhetorical Analysis Overview document for examples.

As you read through your text, be sure to note the text’s context (where/when the text first appeared and how this connects to reader expectations), purpose (the author’s goals for the intended audience), and audience (who the author is writing to and the relationship the author establishes with that audience). What relationships do you note between the text’s context, purpose, and audience and its rhetorical strategies? Answering this question can help you develop your thesis statement.

*Drafting*: Use the notes you developed in the planning stage to draft your rhetorical analysis. Be sure to include a description of the text’s context, purpose, and audience and a thesis statement that covers the entire paper. Also, make sure that you are referring to specific portions of the text that exemplify the strategies you are writing about, and not vaguely referring to parts of the text.

*Revising*: As you revise, consider *your* audience and purpose. Revise to ensure that you are better fulfilling the assignment. Check that you have a thesis that covers the entire paper, that you include the text’s context, purpose, and audience, that you are focusing on how the text you are analyzing fulfills its goals for its particular audience, and that your conclusion effectively wraps up your discussion.

**How will this assignment be evaluated?**

At a minimum, your paper needs to satisfy these criteria. However, the grade is based not just on whether a feature is present or not, but on *how well* it has been integrated into your paper. The rhetorical analysis should

1. Orient the reader to the purpose of the rhetorical analysis
2. Establish the context of the text you are analyzing
3. Present a clear, well-supported thesis
4. Incorporate well-developed substance
5. Focus on two or three rhetorical choices used to carry out the author’s goals (e.g., related to substance, organization, and/or style)
6. Analyze rather than summarize the text (again, assume your reader has already read the essay)
7. Support your claims with evidence from the text
8. Have audience-oriented organization (not writer-oriented organization)
9. Write focused paragraphs
10. Transition smoothly from one point to another with transitions and topic sentences
11. Have appropriate style
12. Use varied sentence structures and word choices
13. Avoid errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling
14. Look professional
15. Properly format the analysis in MLA style.
16. Accurately paraphrase the author's important ideas without using the author’s phrasing

**What if I want more help?**

In addition to peer response, feel free to talk to me during my office hours and/or schedule an appointment at the Writing and Media Center (<http://www.wmc.dso.iastate.edu/>)