

21W.747 (2) Rhetoric, Assignment A2, Rhetorical Analysis

This essay assignment asks you to perform a rhetorical analysis. Choose a speech given by a U.S. president or candidate for president and analyze it, discussing its rhetorical dimensions, their intended and unintentional functions, and their efficacy.

The greatest challenge of this essay is to find a thesis that will motivate your rhetorical analysis. Your paper should *not be a list* of the rhetorical devices employed in the text under analysis, nor will it be adequate to show that the speech (or other object) has some effective rhetoric and some ineffective rhetoric. Rather, your essay must develop an insight into its topic, a discovery that sheds new light on the rhetorical object and on rhetoric itself. Your essay must teach its readers something about the speech and the nature of rhetoric, something challenging or subtle that they would not have known themselves after looking at the same object. For instance, you might notice that Bush provides much more detail about evil than about good in one of his campaign speeches. Your essay could offer a theory to explain this imbalance in terms of his personality or speech writers or campaign strategy or audience, and then support that theory by analyzing the specific rhetoric of the speech. (Note that my hypothetical example does not specify the thesis of the essay, which would be a claim about Bush's personality or campaign strategy or ... The thesis will depend on the particular evidence available and your means of interpreting it.)

Speeches can be found in newspapers and on the web, in text, video, and audio formats. You may choose any of these formats to analyze. Lots of text speeches are available at the websites listed in the "Links" in the Related Resources section. You are also encouraged to seek out video or audio speeches and to consider the appearance and sound of the speaker. Please make sure that your essay indicates just what object you are analyzing, and provides adequate citation information for your reader to find the same object. You may include the complete text of the speech or other object you choose to analyze as an attachment with your draft, but nevertheless you should not assume that your reader has the text in front of her.

There is no length requirement for this essay, but I imagine an effective rhetorical analysis as being around five pages. For details of formatting, please refer to the syllabus section.

- Your **essay's ideal audience member** is a thoughtful, educated person, familiar with the candidates and the campaign, but not familiar with your particular object of analysis. As such, part of your job is to provide summary, description, or quotations where appropriate, so your reader can see what you are analyzing and check your claims against her own intuitions.
- Your **purpose** is to offer an original and engaging insight into the rhetorical dimension of your object of analysis. While argument is not the main mode of this essay, a claim that is wholly obvious will not carry adequate motive to ensure the relevance and interest of your essay. This primary purpose or central insight suggests three secondary purposes: to demonstrate something original about the nature of rhetoric, to show how this candidate or campaign employs rhetoric, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the rhetoric in promoting the desired message.
- **Features of successful essays** include
 - A clearly stated and provocative insight into your object of analysis,
 - A thesis or problem that guides and motivates the entire essay,
 - Organized and flowing paragraphs that dig progressively deeper into the central insight and the rhetoric under analysis,
 - Appeals to sound logic, critical intuition, and defensible judgment,
 - Original and insightful commentary that defends your position while respecting its complexity,
 - Informative and fair summary or other means of presentation of the object of analysis, well integrated into the essay's flow,
 - Careful selection of specific moments or elements of your object of analysis, such that you make an effective case for your central insight without deliberately ignoring or eliding aspects of the text under study,
 - And clear, concise, accurate, correct prose with some memorable phrasings.
- **Features of unsuccessful essays** include
 - Unclear, inaccurate, wordy, and/or incorrect prose,
 - Dogmatic claims that are not critically examined,
 - A central insight that is not especially insightful,
 - Arguments that may be logical but that do not seem intuitively plausible or ethically conscionable,

- o Choppy, haphazard organization, no organization, or paragraphs that constitute a list of claims without a sense of progression,
- o An essay that could be written for a high school class in terms of sophistication of thought or language.

This essay will be submitted twice, first as a draft then as a revision. The draft is due in class on Thursday, March 10. The revision is due one week later, in class on Thursday, March 17. In both cases, please submit an additional copy as an attachment by e-mail on the due date. While the revision will determine the bulk of the grade for this assignment, the draft should be no less a submissible document. Both draft and revision should be properly formatted, free from typos and from grammatical and spelling errors, thorough, and complete. In short, edit.

Important Note: The feedback on this draft will come primarily from your peers. On Thursday, March 10, please *bring three copies of your draft* to class, one for me, and two for peer editing. We will spend the day in class doing these peer edits. On Friday, March 11, you will send me an e-mail briefly outlining your plans for revising the essay.