

Instructions for the Visual Analysis Essay

Assignment Description

Your next major essay in this course will be a visual analysis. For this paper, you will offer both interpretation and explanation, clarifying for your reader *what* you believe the visual image means and explaining *how* the visual uses certain rhetorical strategies and devices to convey that meaning to an audience. You will have some choice in the visual you select, but it must fall within the parameters detailed below.

Process

Begin by selecting an appropriate visual for analysis. For this essay, you must select one of the following types of visuals:

- A product advertisement—i.e., something designed for the purposes of selling a product or service to consumers.
- A Public Service Announcement (PSA)—often created by non-profit organizations and non-governmental agencies
- A political advertisement—i.e., an endorsement from a political campaign
- A political/editorial cartoon

A few specific criteria for selection:

- Note that product advertisement include still images found in print, on billboards, and on the internet, as well as videos found on television and online.
- Be cautious when searching for advertisements and be sure you have an actual ad and not a parody of one or just some random image. If you are not sure, check with your instructor.
- You will need to offer context by citing where and when the image appeared, so keep track of that info.
- In your essay, you will need to include either the still image (as a scan, a .jpg file, etc) or a hyperlink for online items.
- All visuals must be related to products, people, organizations, events, etc. within the United States. No foreign materials may be use. (There are some possible gray areas here, so check with your instructor).
- The visual should have been produced somewhat recently (within the past 10 years).

Considerations

A good visual analysis will closely examine the rhetorical situation as well as the various rhetorical strategies and methods employed. As a reminder, when analyzing a visual text for meaning, you should consider:

1. the key elements of the rhetorical situation: **audience, purpose, and context.**
2. the use of the traditional rhetorical strategies of **logos, ethos, and pathos.**
3. other rhetorical elements or methods, such as: **color, lighting, word choice, composition, foreground, background, juxtaposition, symbols, allusions, metaphors, hyperbole, irony, imagery, innuendo, shock value, and sound.**

You clearly cannot cover all of this in one brief essay, and not everything would be applicable to a given visual image anyhow. You should write about those aspects that are most appropriate to the interpretive claim you wish to make.

Specific Criteria

Your essay must address a minimum of four rhetorical devices, and this must include elements from all three of the areas noted above. More specifically, at a minimum, you must address:

- one rhetorical situation element (audience, purpose, or context)
- one traditional rhetorical strategy (logos, ethos, or pathos)
- two other rhetorical elements (from among the many options)

Your essay must also have a minimum of three sources. The visual that will you analyze will be a primary source, which means that you need to locate two additional sources. You are expected to incorporate information (in MLA format) from the external sources to help support your interpretation and analysis.

The information you need to locate will depend a lot on the type of visual you choose to analyze and therefore could be of many types--e.g., biographical information about the artist or featured person; background information about a product, service, or company; specialized information about the subject matter being addressed; scholarship on the general influence of advertising or mass media; data or statistics about the topic addressed; news reports that provide historical or cultural context; etc.

The key thing is ensure that the source material you select is relevant to your selected visual and useful in supporting your interpretive thesis.

Required Elements

Be sure that your essay has:

- your name, the date, the course and section number, and the assignment in the upper left corner
- an introductory paragraph—this should provide context for the reader; it should include relevant information about the visual image and related ideas, concerns or issues; it should also include your thesis statement.
- a thesis statement—this sentence should be direct and make clear your interpretive claim; it might also include the specific rhetorical elements to be examined.
- a paragraph offering a detailed description of the visual—this should simply summarize, not analyze, and highlight the important visual and/or aural elements (i.e., paint a picture in words).
- at least four supporting ideas, each connect to a specific rhetorical element.
- focused and well-organized paragraphs, with clear topic sentences—each topic sentence should specifically address a rhetorical element or an idea that functions to support the thesis.
- direct quotes and/or paraphrases, cited in MLA format, from all of the sources used.
- a clear concluding paragraph.
- a Works Cited page, in MLA format, listing a minimum of 3 (three) sources.

Minimum Requirements

The final version should be a minimum of 1000 words (approximately 4 pages, not including Works Cited), typed and double-spaced (standard 12 point font) with one inch margins on all sides. It must also include all of the required elements noted above.

If you do not meet the minimum requirements, you will earn no more than 50% of the allotted points for this assignment.