

Basic Rhetorical Principles

Or....

“How I learned to stop worrying
and love writing.”

Three Basic Purposes of Writing (**three basic purposes or aims of any document** (including a website):

- To **inform** your audience (sharing data, explaining processes)
- To **express** your thoughts and opinions (a diary is the purest form)
- To **persuade** others to share your opinions (to some degree and in some way, everything anyone writes is persuasive)

Basic Purposes (cont)

- College writing usually touches on all three aims.
- More formal essays will usually emphasize some combination of the informative and the persuasive aims.
- Good writing usually contains a persuasive element. Remember the Romans? That's what rhetoric is, after all.
- That's where critical thinking comes in.

Basic Purpose (cont)

- Why does an informative essay need to be persuasive?
- Why does an expressive or personal paper need to be persuasive?
- One of the most interesting forms of writing (and our readings attest to this) is self-persuasion: the consideration that an author writes to not only chronicle, but to self-clarify, therefore persuade of an event's significance.

Good Support (like underwear)

- So, we already know that good support comes with many effective strategies to prevent rambling off topic. We've already reviewed a number of these through our "active reading" work:
 1. CONCRETE DETAILS! Duh!
 2. Fact/opinion
 3. Statistics
 4. Professional testimonial (DQ)

So what MUST you consider...

- Three things: 1. audience 2. purpose
3. subject (SEE HANDOUT)

Audiences

- Any experienced writer tries to keep his or her audience and its characteristics in mind while writing; a "one-size-fits-all" approach to defining your audience does not work well. The ultimate goal is to be sensitive to their needs and expectations.

Three Types of Audiences

Think of your audience in terms of its receptivity to what you are writing.

1. An approving audience (one which already agrees with you).

1. Easiest audience to write for, obviously. Yet you should never think of yourself as writing for such an audience.
2. Why? Keeps you from persuading
3. Forces you to deliver accurate information (the getting "called out" factor.
4. But what if they really are?

Three types of audiences (cont)

You lose nothing by refusing to assume they do not, but if you do: "cheerleading"

This is the too-common type of writing which takes every opportunity to make fun of the opposing viewpoint and those who hold it, often going so far as to misrepresent that viewpoint or to deliberately omit data which might support it.

A hostile audience is at the other end of the spectrum. Avoid this as well unless in context of assignment

Three types of audiences (cont)

- Why avoid?
- Persuading such an audience of anything at all is very, very difficult, frequently not even possible. For a writer who is perhaps already not too confident of his or her writing ability, this can be very intimidating, even disabling.

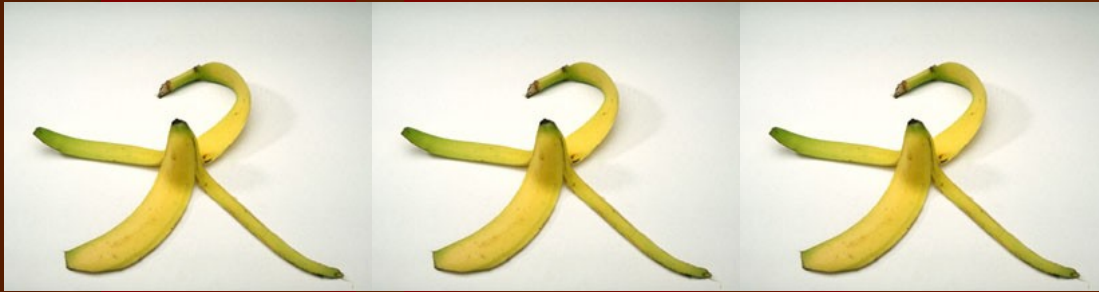
A neutral audience: ideal audience you should imagine (when you can or when given no other context).

Three types of audiences (cont)

Why so good?

1. Audience is willing to grant approval
2. Can elicit the best efforts of the writer
3. Types of neutrality:
 1. neutral but interested
 2. neutral but indifferent: need clear, thorough explanation...tend not to read very far into a document unless the writer "hooks" them (more on this when we learn proper intros)

How to Persuade: 3 Appeals



- The **logical appeal** (*logos*)
- Follows a certain pattern, sometimes called the "if/then/because"
- Begin with some point which you figure your audience will mostly agree to. Next you try to build on that accepted starting point by pointing out some logical conclusion that may be drawn from it:

How to Persuade: 3 Appeals

- "*If you accept point A, then it follows logically that you also should accept point B, because B follows from A.*"
- *If you agree that redheads sunburn easily, then it makes sense for redheads to be extra careful to use sunscreen. because without sunscreen redheads will burn badly. Reasoning between A & B is obvious.*
- Mostly used when you argue using data such as facts or statistics.

How to Persuade: 3 Appeals

- The **emotional appeal** (*pathos*), when you appeal to the audience's feelings rather than to their intellect.
- Often misused so as to conceal logical weaknesses in an argument; in fact, this practice is so commonplace that you may not be aware that there is any other way to argue a point.
- Excellent and honest use: i.e. a detailed story of an incident that actually happened to some individual.

How to Persuade: 3 Appeals

- The more detailed the better, because that is the quality which generates the emotional power that draws your reader into your story
- Lets your story illustrate your argument.
- Encouraging reader to relive the emotions of the person or persons in the story.
- Both logos and ethos work best when used *with each other.*

How to Persuade: 3 Appeals

- The **ethical appeal** (*ethos*), when you cite some other source or better-known authority for support in making your point stick (and not to be confused with the usual meaning of the word "ethics").
- Any quotation is an example of this appeal.
- Will be covered in greater length during discussion on research/documentation.

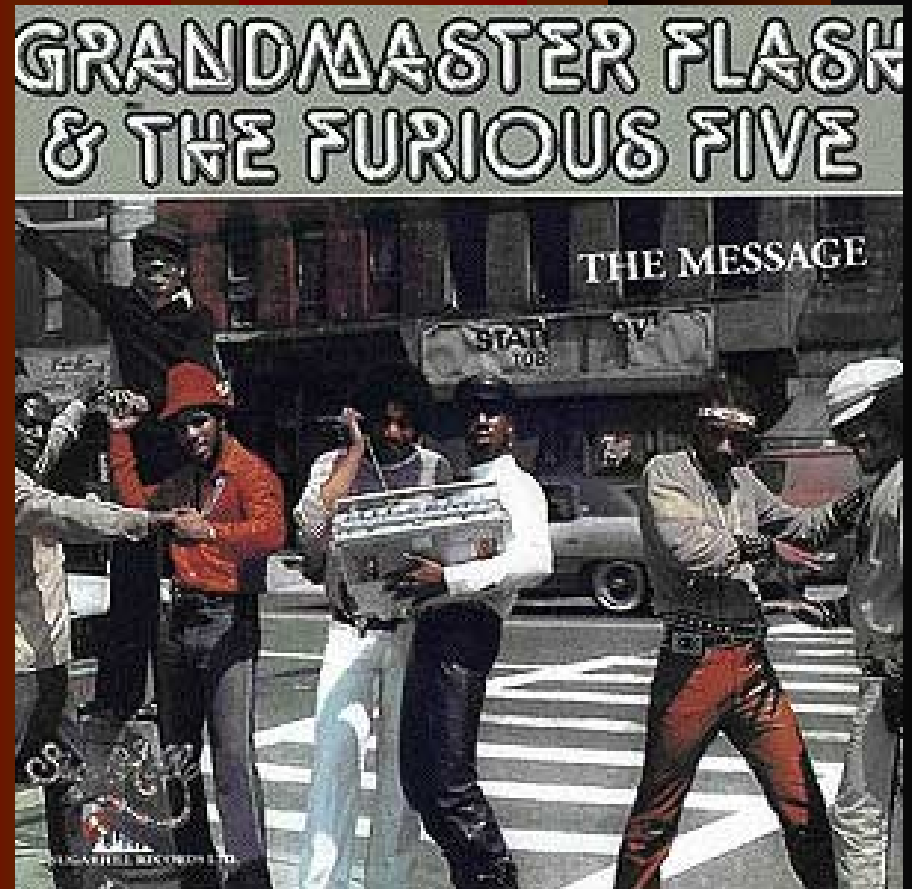
So...Audience, Purpose, Now
subject or...

Content or Ideas

- Heart of the message
- The content, the theme and the supporting details that develop the main idea
- Supporting Details: 1. Interesting
2. Relevant 3. Documented

Ideas

- The Message:
 1. Clear
 2. Concise
 3. Well-supported



How? Thesis...Sillyface!

- Opening serves three functions:
 1. Hook
 2. Preview tone
 3. Establish thesis:
 - a. must be debatable
 - b. must be narrow
 - c. IF YOU STRUGGLE...MAKE IT EXPLICIT!

Debatable

- An argumentative or persuasive piece of writing must begin with a debatable thesis or claim. In other words, the thesis must be something that people could reasonably have differing opinions on.
- **Example of a non-debatable thesis statement:**
- “Pollution is bad for the environment.”

Debatable

- This thesis statement is not debatable. First, the word pollution means that something is bad or negative in some way. Further, all studies agree that pollution is a problem, they simply disagree on the impact it will have or the scope of the problem. No one could reasonably argue that pollution is good.

- **Example of a debatable thesis statement:**
- “At least twenty-five percent of the federal budget should be spent on limiting pollution.”
- Reasonable people could disagree with it. Some people might think that this is how we should spend the nation's money. Others might feel that we should be spending more money on education. Still others could argue that corporations, not the government, should be paying to limit pollution.

- **Another example of a debatable thesis statement:**
- “America's anti-pollution efforts should focus on privately owned cars.”
- In this example there is also room for disagreement between rational individuals. Some citizens might think focusing on recycling programs rather than private automobiles is the most effective strategy.

Narrow Thesis

- Generally the narrower the thesis the more effective your argument. Your thesis or claim must be supported by evidence. The broader your claim is, the more evidence you will need to convince readers that your position is right.
- **Example of a thesis that is too broad:**
- “Drug use is detrimental to society.”

- What is included in the category "drugs"? Is the author talking about illegal drug use, recreational drug use (which might include alcohol and cigarettes), or all uses of medication in general?
- How are drugs detrimental? Is drug use causing deaths (and is the author equating deaths from overdoses and deaths from drug related violence)? Is drug use changing the moral climate or causing the economy to decline?

- Finally, what does the author mean by "society"? Is the author referring only to America or to the global population? Does the author make any distinction between the effects on children and adults?
- **Example of a narrow or focused thesis:**
- "Illegal drug use is detrimental because it encourages gang violence."
- Remember old one: "At least twenty-five percent of the federal budget should be spent on helping upgrade business to clean technologies, researching renewable energy sources, and planting more trees in order to control or eliminate pollution."

- This thesis narrows the scope of the argument by specifying not just the amount of money used but also how the money could actually help to control pollution.
- "America's anti-pollution efforts should focus on privately owned cars because it would allow most citizens to contribute to national efforts and care about the outcome."
- This thesis narrows the scope of the argument by specifying not just what the focus of a national anti-pollution campaign should be but also why this is the appropriate focus.
- Qualifiers such as "typically," "generally," "usually," or "on average" also help to limit the scope of your claim by allowing for the almost inevitable exception to the rule.

Explicit Thesis: 3 Prong Approach



Organization

- The internal structure of the piece
- “thread of central meaning”
- Logical progression
- See handout
- “a sense of anticipation that is ultimately systematically fulfilled”
- Use transition to establish strong connections

Voice

- Two types: 1. Grammatical Voice
(handout)
- 2. Author's Voice
- The writer coming through the words
- The heart & soul of the writing
- The magic, the wit, the feeling, the life and breath
- the personal tone, the "flava"

More Voice

- And I started to play. It was so beautiful. I was so caught up in how lovely I looked that at first I didn't worry how I would sound. So it was a surprise to me when I hit the first wrong note and I realized something didn't sound quite right. And then I hit another and another followed that. A chill started at the top of my head and began to trickle down. Yet I couldn't stop playing, as though my hands were bewitched. I kept thinking my fingers would adjust themselves back, like a train switching to the right track. I played this strange jumble through two repeats, the sour notes staying with me all the way to the end.

From *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan

More Voice

- ... one night we suddenly went mad together again; we went to see Slim Gaillard in a little Frisco nightclub. Slim Gaillard is a tall, thin Negro with big sad eyes who's always saying 'Right-orooni' and 'How 'bout a little bourbon-arooni.' In Frisco great eager crowds of young semi-intellectuals sat at his feet and listened to him on the piano, guitar and bongo drums. When he gets warmed up he takes off his undershirt and really goes. He does and says anything that comes into his head. He'll sing 'Cement Mixer, Put-ti Put-ti' and suddenly slow down the beat and brood over his bongos with fingertips barely tapping the skin as everybody leans forward breathlessly to hear; you think he'll do this for a minute or so, but he goes right on, for as long as an hour, making an imperceptible little noise with the tips of his fingernails, smaller and smaller all the time till you can't hear it any more and sounds of traffic come in the open door. Then he slowly gets up and takes the mike and says, very slowly, 'Great-orooni ... fine-ovauti ... hello-orooni ... bourbon-orooni ... all-orooni ... how are the boys in the front row making out with their girls-orooni ... orooni ... vauti ... oroonirooni ...' He keeps this up for fifteen minutes, his voice getting softer and softer till you can't hear. His great sad eyes scan the audience.

-- Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

Yet, More Voice

- I am writing this before the election, so I cannot know whether George W. Bush or John F. Kerry will be our President, God willing, for the next four years. These two Nordic, aristocratic multi-millionaires are virtually twins, and as unlike most of the rest of us as a couple of cross-eyed albinos. But this much I find timely: Both candidates were and still are members of the exclusive secret society at Yale, called "Skull and Bones." That means that, no matter which one wins, we will have a Skull and Bones President at a time when entire vertebrate species, because of how we have poisoned the topsoil, the waters and the atmosphere, are becoming, *hey presto*, nothing but skulls and bones.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *The End is Near*

Word Choice

- Use of rich, colorful, precise language
- Should be imaginative and image-inducing in exposition, descriptive or creative writing
- Should be clear, concise and relatable in persuasion
- Avoid the thesaurus trap

Sentence Fluency

- Rhythm and flow of the language
- Sentences control the sound of the word patterns
- Poorly constructed sentences impede reader progress
- So, now we take it back to the “*Old School*”