**◦ Formative Assessment: Brief Rhetorical Analysis**

Part 1

The main goal of a rhetorical analysis is to employ critical reading skills in order to examine how an author writes, what rhetorical techniques s/he employs, and how the text functions. A rhetorical analysis is an essay that breaks a text into parts and then explains how the parts work together to create a certain effect—whether to persuade, entertain or inform, or some combination of these.

Such an analysis examines the way that a text appeals to the reader in terms of ethos, pathos, and/or logos.

**Ethos (Credibility),** or **ethical appeal**, means convincing by the character of the author.

**Pathos (Emotional)** means persuading by appealing to the reader’s emotions.

**Logos** **(Logical)** means persuading by the use of reasoning.

A rhetorical analysis also looks at the structure of a text in order to examine how the various parts of the text build upon and are shaped by one another.

**In-class practice:**

Consider the following sample passages from several different genres. Read through and discuss the characteristics that you think identify each passage as belonging to its specific genre. Make a list of those characteristics.

A) As we shall discover, McCarthy’s fiction, especially *The Road*, engages a pseudoscientific approach to mythic, often apocalyptic, themes and seeks to efface contemporary understandings of science. The problem with a work of fiction engaging with this relativism lies in its cultural influence—the prizewinning work of a MacArthur “genius” grant holder serves to further popularize such relativistic approaches to science and to obscure traditional science. (Thiess 533) [academic scholarly journal]

B) The fundamental story of climate change is simple. Human behavior provoked a change in the weather, unleashing, among other effects, dangerous storms. This story should sound familiar. It’s one of the oldest narratives in the human repository. The tale of Noah’s ark is just one variation on the ancient flood myth, in which a deity annihilates the human race for its sins.

Of course, to primitive people, fierce weather must have demanded explanation, and human wickedness supplied a readily available answer. Their more enlightened descendants knew better. They identified other causes: pressure systems and cold fronts and the like. They knew that human actions could not influence the weather. (Tuhus-Dubrow 60) [popular trade journal]

C) Beard was not wholly skeptical about climate change. It was one in a list of issues, of looming sorrows, that made up the background to the news, and he read about it, vaguely deplored it, and expected governments to meet and take action. And of course he knew that a molecule of carbon dioxide absorbed energy in the infrared range, and that humankind was putting these molecules into the atmosphere in significant quantities. But he himself had other things to think about. And he was unimpressed by some of the wild commentary that suggested that the world was in peril, that humankind was drifting toward calamity, when coastal cities would disappear under the waves. (McEwan 16-17) [novel]

Part 2

For this rhetorical analysis, instructors will provide students with four different kinds of texts (a blog, an editorial, a scholarly journal article, and a work of fiction, all of which are included in these materials). All students will read all four texts, but will only be required to write an analysis about one text (instructors will divide the class) and students will answer the following questions about their specific text:

1. Identify the type of text (scholarly peer-reviewed article, trade article, work of literature, etc.) from which the passages are taken. How can you tell the type of text?

2. Who is the audience for this text (and how can you tell)?

3. What is the text doing (explaining something, arguing something, describing something)?

4. Discuss the way that the text engages with climate change (cite specific words and phrases for support) and the text’s utilization of ethos, pathos, and logos.