

## **Main Guidelines: Critical Analysis of an Advertisement**

**Length:** 5 pages double-spaced (not including works cited)

**Rough Draft:** [Due Date]

**Final Draft:** [Due Date]

**Purpose:** Transforming Observation into Interpretation via Critical Assessment of an Advertisement

**Audience:** Humanities Enthusiasts

**Citation Style:** MLA, Times New Roman, 12pt. Font

**\*\*PRO TIP!:**

- Definitions of rhetorical appeals are on page 60 of your text *An Insider's Guide*
- Analysis examples AND argument development tips are in pages 70-80 of your text *An Insider's Guide* (including Jack Solomon's analysis "Masters of Desire: The Culture of American Advertising" pages 70-73).

## **Rhetorical Purpose**

Advertisements thrive on visual and textual rhetoric to effectively sell their products and/or ideas. Because of late capitalism and technology, consumers have an abundance of options in what to consume and how to consume it. Thus, many companies strive to differentiate themselves and their products from competitors (essentially selling the same thing) so they may stand out to potential consumers. To gain a deeper understanding of ourselves, our communities, and society at large, it is important to analyze and understand how advertisers sell us their products and ideas. Furthermore, interrogating the seemingly banal messages of advertisers could lend further insight into larger global issues, such as deforestation, climate change, and wealth disparity/income inequality to name a few. For this project, you'll be examining the messages embedded in advertisements, making observations about what you see and analyzing not only what they mean, but also the implications of their meanings.

Keep in mind that advertisements can come in many forms of various media artifacts, including, but not limited to, moving images like commercials, music videos, GIFs, or pop-up ads from your phone. Advertisements may also occur in more traditional forms, like magazine page layouts or newspaper classifieds. Anything that is "selling" a product, idea, emotion, or value is fair game for this project.

**First**, identify who the target audience for your advertisement could be? In other words, who do advertisers hope will see the ad and buy their product? This may come in the form of demographic targeting (age, region, gender, etc.), specific group targeting (athletes, parents, students, etc.), or any other audience you discover that might be targeted by the advertisement.

**Second**, what is the advertiser selling? This may seem obvious at first, but you'll soon find that advertisers are usually selling a *feeling* or an *identity*, not a concrete product.

**Finally**, how are advertisers selling their product? What rhetorical strategies are advertisers using to persuade their target audience? Considering how ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos operate might help get you started on this part of the assignment. For example, are the advertisers creating an urgency for consumers to buy their product? Are the advertisers using emotion to convince you to buy something (this can be any emotion – joy, sadness, excitement, boredom, etc.). Are the advertisers trying to make you feel like consuming their product is the most logical thing to do?

The final draft of your rhetorical analysis will delight and enlighten an audience of scholars in the humanities by beginning to answer some of these critical questions about how advertisements convince/appeal, furthering an understanding of society at large.

## **Research and Evidence**

This project will require you to use both primary and secondary sources to support your argument. This means you will have your advertisement as your primary source and peer-reviewed scholarly articles as well. You must cite both primary and secondary sources.

Your *primary source* will be your chosen advertisement. Evidence (things you'll analyze) from that advertisement might include timing/editing, images, colors, cinematography, sound effects, dialogue, music, target audience, duration (length of time), and size (how big is it and/or how much space it takes up). The sky is the limit in your interpretation as long as you support your argument with evidence by analyzing these things!

You will use at least two *secondary sources*. At least one of these sources must be a peer-reviewed scholarly article. The other source can be anything you choose – a blog post, a popular article, a Ted Talk, music video, or another scholarly source to name a few examples.

**In sum, you will be citing THREE total sources: Your advertisement/media artifact, a peer-reviewed scholarly source, and another source of your choosing.**

All evidence should be cited using MLA citation style. For future reference, you can find details about MLA on the Purdue OWL website here:

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html)

There is also additional MLA information and examples on pages 666-668 of your text *An Insider's Guide*.

## **Logic and Argument**

Your rhetorical analysis should include a clear introduction, a number of body paragraphs that support your argument, and a conclusion that emphasizes the importance of your argument.

Please do not feel obligated to adhere to the “five-paragraph-model” essay. Let your brilliant ideas flow organically and create as many paragraphs as you need to share those ideas. Do, however, keep in mind that the content of each paragraph should relate to its specific topic, and that topic is indicated/introduced by a topic sentence. I have seen examples where students

decide to dedicate each paragraph to a specific rhetorical device, such as ethos, and that's fine. Other students might decide to dedicate a paragraph to the use of color in an advertisement and how that relates to several rhetorical appeals. It is really up to you!

Your introduction should follow organizational conventions in the humanities: First, a *hook* will draw the reader into the conversation; Next, your introduction will provide the necessary context for the reader to understand your argument; Finally, an argumentative thesis statement will provide a roadmap for readers to follow throughout the body of your paper. For tips on making claims and examples of thesis statements, please refer to *An Insider's Guide* pages 61-64.

Your body paragraphs should begin with argumentative topic sentences and end with linking transitional sentences that help your argument flow from one paragraph to the next.

Evidence from your advertisement and secondary source(s) should be paired with your original analysis. Remember, evidence never speaks for itself! Please indulge me by reading my strange description for integrating secondary sources into your work:

When analyzing evidence to support a claim, it might help to think about the whole process like a hamburger-shaped battle plan that feeds your argument:

- 1) use your own words to make a strong claim about what your trying to prove [top bun];
- 2) use your source to provide evidence/quotes that support your claim [patty]; and
- 3) explain/analyze how that specific bit of evidence supports your claim [bottom bun].

**\*\*PRO TIP!: Don't begin or end a sentence or paragraph with a quote or paraphrase; you always want to start the argument with your own words and have the last word. This is why the "quote sandwich" method works so well to situate the evidence in the middle of your own words.**

Finally, your conclusion should restate your main argument and remind your audience why your argument matters. Think about it as the "so what" factor...what do you hope your audience leaves your essay thinking about? What did you possibly tell them that they couldn't find somewhere else?

## **Formal and Stylistic Conventions**

Because you are writing to an audience of scholars in the humanities, it is not necessary to define or explain humanities-specific jargon. However, you should keep a close eye on jargon and acronyms that humanities scholars might not be familiar with.

Scholars in the humanities view *texts as products*, so creative titles, figurative language, and even attempts at humor are encouraged. Overall, though, you should tailor your language to make your argument as clear as possible to your intended audience.

The rhetorical analysis should include an MLA-style works cited page.