Writing 100: “Mighty Pens”: The Power of Persuasion

Fall 2005
Professor Matthew Blanshei
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Course Theme

This writing course examines how authors in the United States have attempted to use the written word as a means of exercising influence over public opinion and public policy.

After establishing a historical context for the essays we will read together in class, we will study the forms of persuasion different authors present in their works; that is, we will focus upon how a writer uses figurative language, a certain tone, and a particular form of argumentation to make his/her case.

This means that we will be studying classical and modern theories of rhetoric—the art, or science, of using language persuasively—over the course of the semester.

As students study the strengths and weaknesses of these essays, they will also draft and complete papers that will allow them to develop their own persuasive skills by responding to select essays, other student papers, class discussions, and supplementary material the instructor presents to the class.

Toward the end of the semester, we will also analyze three other forms of communication that have been used to shape public opinion and public policy: the advertising image, the documentary film and the “docudrama.”

After comparing and contrasting the forms of persuasion used by the film director with those used by the essayist, we will address the question of whether or not one medium has a tendency to be more persuasive than the other today.

Required Texts

Custom Reading Packet (Editorials, Op-Ed pieces, essays, and articles on the art of rhetoric, to be distributed throughout the semester)

**Class Format**

This course will be primarily discussion-based. Each student is therefore required to complete the reading assignment prior to the beginning of class. This will allow each student to participate in the classroom discussions and workshops that will help him or her develop the ideas and arguments which are necessary for writing insightful and well-organized essays.

**Writing Assignments**

Each student will draft and complete weekly graded papers (between a paragraph to four pages in length, depending on the particular assignment), and an expanded version of a previously written essay (that contains a research component) over the course of the semester.

One of the three 3-4 page essays assigned will be a collaborative work (co-authored with another student).

The short essays and writing exercises turned in each week will serve two primary purposes; they will focus on a particular form of writing (such as commenting on a cited passage from a particular text, using a particular form of argumentation, experimenting with different styles), and they will form the building blocks for three 3-page essays.

Each student will also write a 2-page critical response to another student’s essay. That student will then respond to the response in another 2 page paper.

**Schedule of major writing assignments:**

**August 30 to September 22 (Note: schedule subject to slight change)**

I. First 3-4 page paper: Summary and Preliminary Critique

Each student will write a concise and well-organized summary of an assigned editorial or “op-ed” piece. This assignment is designed to introduce students to the importance of reading comprehension. Students will be asked to “restate” the central idea of the article and the author’s supporting arguments in their own words. They will then offer a preliminary critique of some aspect of the essay.

**September 27 to October 27**
II. Second 3-4 page paper: Persuasive Essay.

In this assignment, students will write an extended “editorial” in response to a theme presented and debated in class.

2 page critical response to another student essay.
2 page response to a student’s response.

November 1 to November 29

III. Third 3-4 page paper: Critique and Comparative Analysis

This essay will allow students to critique certain visual forms of persuasion by way of comparing two films (a documentary and a “docudrama”) that address the same subject from two different standpoints.

IV. Expanded Paper With Research Component (6-8 pages)

This assignment will allow students to conduct independent research, evaluate sources and develop an original argument.

In order to assist the student with this project, there will be several research related assignments due throughout the semester. There will also be a class session conducted by the librarian that is designed to introduce students to various library resources that will assist them with their research projects.

Each student will also meet with the instructor for a research paper conference.

It is the student’s choice which 3-4 page paper is expanded into the research paper.

The final draft is due no later than December 8.

Quizzes

Unannounced quizzes on the reading assignments will be given throughout the semester; announced grammar quizzes will be given if a particular grammatical rule seems to be unclear to a student. These grammar quizzes will therefore be “customized”—that is, they will be tailored to meet individual student concerns.

Grades

Final grades will be determined on the basis of the following percentages:

2 750-word essays: 20%
2-page response to a peer’s essay: 10%
2-page response to a peer’s response: 10%
Weekly Writing Assignments: 10%
Peer Reviews and Collaborative Essay: 15%
Expanded Paper: 25%
Quizzes: 10%

In accordance with the Moravian College grading policy, each letter grade corresponds with numerical “Quality Points”:

A: 4.00.
A-: 3.67
B+: 3.33.
B: 3.00.
B-: 2.77.
C+: 2.33.
C: 2.00.
C-: 1.67.
D+: 1.33.
D: 1.00.
D-: 0.67.
F: no points.

While this grading system is obviously quantitative, the final grade will be determined, in part, by a qualitative consideration; that is, **on the basis of the first essay, each student will meet with the instructor to establish a set of goals for the rest of the semester in order to improve his or her writing in specific ways.** If these goals are met, then the final grade will be adjusted upwards.

**Attendance Policy**

Regular class attendance is of course expected. There is no penalty for unexcused absences. However, please note the following: **there will no make-up quizzes given if you are not present on one of the days that a quiz is given.**

Further, there will be no make-up assignment for missing one of the graded peer-review sessions. And finally, for each day a writing assignment is late, the final grade for that assignment will be lowered by 1/3 grade (exceptions made for documented medical absences).

*(Due to past difficulties arising from electronic mail submissions, all essays are to be handed in during class. No essay is to be turned in via e-mail).*

**Academic honesty policy**

Please consult the Moravian College policy as stipulated in the Student Handbook