

Digital Rhetorical Concept Paper

Due in Canvas

18 points total

How do the rhetorical concepts we discuss in this course apply to the digital texts we come across in our daily lives? To answer this question, write an **1,100-to-1,300-word** paper that analyzes a digital text using **one or two** of the rhetorical concepts we have focused on in class as an analytic framework to help narrow and focus the paper. The paper will use at least **four** sources from this course. For people who want to publish their work, I encourage you to use this final project as a place to develop a project for UCF's peer-reviewed undergraduate journal, [*Convergence Rhetoric*](#)! Please reach out to me if you are interested!

Requirements

- The Digital Rhetorical Concept Paper should have a **clear central argument or claim about digital rhetoric that focuses on a particular piece of digital content**. I suggest using clear language like "I claim..." The claims should be **specific** and **make well-supported arguments** about how a digital text uses one of the rhetorical concepts we talked about in this class. (see Claims Handout in Canvas)
 - Think about the limits of the claims; without asking people about their intentions or motivations, the paper cannot make definitive claims about either. Thus, the arguments will probably be about the rhetorical effect of a text and how it achieves that effect, rather than what a particular person wanted or meant to do. If the claim is about how a digital text has been received by audiences, the paper should cite public news articles about that text or use an autoethnography.
- The paper will also need strong and credible **evidence** to **support** the main claim. The paper should clearly connect the evidence to the argument. This means both using readings from the class (secondary sources) and pointing to specific features of the digital text (primary source). (See Evidence Handout in Canvas). The paper does **not** need to tell the audience what type of evidence is used (e.g. Do not say 'This is testimonial...'), but it can use clear phrasing to signal to the reader why the evidence is important. Phrases like "[this piece of evidence] is important because..." can be helpful. Think about what the reader should be taking away from that piece of evidence as they move forward reading the paper and clearly state that connection.
- To situate the argument within the scope of digital rhetoric and support the claims with evidence, the paper will use **at least four of the course readings**. The paper may use **credible** sources from outside of this class to examine this text. If you are unsure what constitutes a credible source, please ask me. I suggest situating this argument in existing conversations through the [*CARS model*](#) using the sources that you choose to cite.
- The paper should be **unified and focused** on the central claim or argument. All paragraphs should directly relate back to the claims. Pick **one** main framework or idea from this class through which to analyze the digital text. You can **supplement** that framework with others as you see fit. However, choose **one** to keep the paper unified.
- The paper should be **organized** in a way that aids the readers' comprehension. Include definitions where you first introduce key terms, use paragraphs with topic sentences. Headings can also be a useful organizational tool.

(Reciprocal) Steps

1. **Select a digital text that interests you.** As we discussed in class, a variety of digital texts exist. I suggest looking at the examples at the end of this prompt. If the paper focuses on another kind of digital text, please talk to me so that we can make sure it is a viable option for this assignment.

Ethics: We are following AoIR's ethical guidelines for this class. Pick clearly public-facing websites and accounts. We will not be researching individual social media users. Pick obviously public accounts run by people definitely over 18, and that are "verified" with at least 1K followers. Lastly, as we have not gone through IRB training for this course, *you will not be conducting surveys or interviews for this course.*

2. **Ask yourself questions about the text.** I suggest you start by autoethnographically reflecting on your own experiences. You can also alter [these rhetorical questions](#) for digital environments. Think about what aspects of the digital text stand out to you. Ask yourself why.
3. **Think about what rhetorical concepts help you make sense of the digital text.** The paper will need to maintain a narrow focus to engage in enough depth, so select *one main* rhetorical concept/framework that the paper can apply to analyze that digital text. It may be helpful to think about the concept or framework like glasses lenses. The paper can supplement the main concept with other rhetorical concepts (most rhetorical concepts involve the audience, for example), but focus on just one concept for unity and depth. I suggest using the concepts/frameworks covered in class like:

- **Rhetorical appeals** of *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos* and *kairos*. How does the text utilize its writing and design elements to appeal to reason (logos), emotion (pathos), or credibility (ethos)? Is the text timely, or does it capitalize on the opportune moment (kairos)? Can the rhetor plan for meeting opportune moments when they arise, and if so, how? What affordances or constraints make these rhetorical appeals possible or different in digital spaces?
- **The Rhetorical Situation/Rhetorical Ecologies:** Rhetoricians differ on what elements they say make up the rhetorical situation. Look to the authors that we covered in this class and pick at least *three* components of the rhetorical situation to analyze around the digital text. The paper might address the stakes for different audiences, or how affordances and constraints of a particular platform alter the dynamics of the rhetorical situation.
- **Procedural Rhetoric and Games:** How does a digital text exemplify procedural rhetoric as outlined by the authors in this class? What affordances and constraints make this possible? Who is represented in the game and how? What kinds of visual rhetoric does the game use and with what effect?
- **Remix and/or Circulation:** How is a text remixed or recycled? What kind of remix does the author use and what is the rhetorical effect? What different affordances and constraints enable that transformation? What happens when a text circulates to an unintended audience? Are there different audiences who may understand the meme differently? *Why* that is important?
- **Hypermediacy, Transparency, Immediacy, and Remediation.** How does a digital text like a website use these at least three of rhetorical features and with what effect? What affordances and constraints enable it to achieve these rhetorical goals and with what effect on audiences with different stakes?

- **Hypertext and/or Technological Determinism.** Scholars have debated the degree of agency that readers have in reading online texts; is the reader “liberated” since they can click on hyperlinks to move through a text, or does the writer still have the most control since they determine how readers move through texts? Alternatively, do readers still have some agency in how they make sense of texts? Or, does the technology itself determine the relationship and the arguments that can be made? What affordances and constraints affect these dynamics and what are the stakes for different audiences?
 - **Identity.** How do aspects of identity, such as race and gender, influence the digital rhetoric of a text? Consider the author and intended audience as well as the digital text’s cultural context. What constraints and affordances are available here and how does an author express important aspects of their identity? Who is represented on a website? What are the stakes for different audiences?
 - **Communities.** How do websites/games/ etc. help people form communities? What affordances and constraints enable them to reach and connect to different audiences? How do authors and websites negotiate “[collapsed contexts](#)” to negotiate both community building and risk? How do people strategically and tactically compose digital texts for multiple *audiences* who might decode and understand their digital texts/websites differently.
4. **Draft, write, revise, and cite the paper!** This is not a linear step-by-step process. Writers sometimes start with an idea for their claim and then change their minds, or they may write to explore an idea, develop a claim along the way, and then revise the paper to refocus on that claim. Most writers use both processes. The claim will be stronger and more nuanced if it is specific to the digital text and if the paper addresses potential counterclaims.

The paper does not have to answer all of these questions; these are invention questions.

Examples

This paper can analyze things like:

- **The front page of a website (commercial or educational)** (like the [Smithsonian](#))
- **Introduction to an online video game, such as the opening story or tutorial.**
- **An advertisement that uses a digital medium.** If the paper focuses on a TV commercial posted to YouTube, think about how YouTube changes how a television commercial is viewed or who views it.
- **A meme, GIF, or other piece of digital content.**
- **A popular online video from a verified YouTube account.**
- **An interface from any of the websites or applications that have become ubiquitous in our lives either before or after COVID-19 (e.g., Zoom, Discord, even Canvas.)**
- **3-5 public posts from a verified, public social media account operated by a person verifiably over 18 and with more than 1K followers (see ethics guidelines above).**
- **Publicly available code on sites like GitHub and look at things like comments in the code.**

The text should be appropriate. It will not be about things that could hurt people, are unproven, untrue, or things that cannot be backed with evidence. Failure to adhere to these guidelines will

result in a 0 for the assignment. If you are unsure about if something falls within these guidelines, you should ask me.

Format:

- Papers must be **1,100 to 1,300 words**.
- **Use at least 4 readings from the course.**
- Papers should be submitted in Word documents or PDF documents (ends with “doc.” “.docx” or “pdf”). They should **not** be submitted as “Pages” files.
- Adhere to [MLA format](#):
 - This means in-text citations and a Works Cited page; all of the sources discussed in the paper, including the digital text that the paper analyzes should be cited both in-text and in a Works Cited Page. (This means there will be at least five sources).
 - OWL Purdue shows you how to cite online and electronic sources (including social media posts like YouTube videos) and you should follow those guidelines.
 - If your digital text has a link, please include that link with your Works Cited reference for that source so that I can also view the text.
 - Make sure those quotes are necessary, relevant, and formatted correctly. Introduce your quotes with introductory phrases, cite them, and explain why they are relevant (see Quotes Handout in Canvas). Quotes should not take up more than 5 percent of your paper word-count.
 - Double spaced with one-inch margins and 12-point font in Times New Roman or other accessible font.
 - Put your name, course number, course instructor, and due date in the top left corner of the first page
 - All subsequent pages should have a header in the top right corner that includes your last name and the page number
- For the purposes of the Gordon Rule Requirement, writing should follow MLA rules of grammar, punctuation, usage, spelling, and style. If you choose to deviate from academic conventions for rhetorical effect, please talk to me about this choice first.

* Rhetoric is about how context matters and affects the meaning of texts. Thus, for clarity of context, this assignment is written to meet the requirements of this course as outlined in the syllabus and by the university. I (the instructor) am the primary audience, while student peers are the secondary audiences of this text.

*This paper fulfills the one of the [Gordon Rule Requirements](#) for this course. This paper also aligns with course objectives because it also enables students to: (1) demonstrate their understanding of rhetorical conventions in digital genres, (2) demonstrate how they have learned critical theory relevant to the digital realm, (3) demonstrate their understanding of public rhetoric in electronic networks, (4) demonstrate the ability to rhetorically analyze or interpret new media, and (5) demonstrate how they interrogate digital media using classical rhetoric.

ENC 4415 Rhetorical Concept Paper Rubric

Please note: I have included this rubric here for clarity and transparency about my expectations. However, all of these criteria are linked to each other and cannot be separated.

	Excellent	Good	Developing
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Thesis Statement/Claim (3.5 points)	Thesis clearly makes an insightful and well-supported claim that is relevant to digital rhetoric and explains why the argument is significant. Thesis statement is clearly stated. The thesis statement is specific to the analyzed digital text.	Thesis is unclear about the central argument and/or does not clearly explain why the argument is significant. The author may have some support, but the support may be insufficient.	Thesis does not lay out an argument for the paper, has little or no support, or is does not state the importance of the argument.
Use of Rhetorical Concept (4 points)	The paper effectively defines and applies relevant rhetorical concepts to analyze the selected digital text. The rhetorical concept used makes sense to examine the digital text and provides thoughtful insight. The paper focuses on one rhetorical concept and develops that concept in depth.	The paper uses rhetorical concepts fairly well to analyze the selected digital text, and the rhetorical concept used makes sense to examine the digital text. The application of the concept may be weaker though, or the paper may misunderstand some basic components. The paper may try to apply too many rhetorical concepts and not develop any in depth.	The paper does not use rhetorical concepts well to analyze the selected digital text, (i.e. completely misunderstanding a concept), or it does not use a rhetorical concept at all.
Support for Argument (4 points)	The paper effectively uses evidence from the course material and other relevant sources to support its argument. The evidence consists of specific examples from the digital text (quotes, images, descriptions, etc.) and it uses specific examples from our class readings like summaries of authors' arguments and quotes with the appropriate MLA documentation. The evidence is clearly explained in terms of meaning significance to the argument and what the author wants the reader to understand or take away from that evidence.	The paper uses some evidence from the course material and other relevant sources. Some of the evidence may not be as specific, or it may just generally reference the digital text. The evidence may not be clearly documented. Examples and quotes are mostly explained in terms of their meaning and significance, but there may be places where the connection between the evidence and the analysis is unclear.	The paper uses little or no evidence from the course material or other sources. Examples and quotes are either not well explained in terms of their meaning and significance, or they are not examined at all.

Organization (3.5 points)	<p>The paper is logically organized. The paper “flows” from one idea to the next. Key terms are defined where they are first used. Important ideas that the reader needs are introduced and explained before moving into another topic that requires the reader to understand the first topic.</p> <p>The paper uses transitional phrases and paragraphs. Paragraphs have clear topics.</p>	<p>The organization of the paper is somewhat clear, and the paper has some flow.</p> <p>However, the connection between ideas may be less clear.</p> <p>The paper may introduce terms and not define them, or the paper may define terms after the term has been used. The author may introduce an idea much too early before an audience needs it, or after the concept has been discussed in depth.</p> <p>The paper may use paragraphs, but the paragraphs may not have a clear, organizing idea.</p>	<p>The organization of the paper is not apparent. Ideas do not connect.</p> <p>The paper may lack cohesion or connection.</p> <p>The paper either does not use paragraphs, or it does not use them well.</p>
Language (3 points)	<p>The language is clear and adheres to standard academic English writing well, with few issues. Writing is coherent and expresses the writer’s ideas well. Teachers and peers can understand the text with little difficulty.</p> <p>The text is broken up into paragraphs and meets the required word count.</p> <p>Follows MLA format.</p>	<p>There are a few grammatical, word choice, or spelling issues that deviate from standard academic English (and no explanation about rhetorical choices to deviate from standard academic English), or the language is cumbersome or wordy enough to make the ideas unclear for teachers and peers. Paragraphs are very long, or there are transitions that do not make sense.</p> <p>The paper meets the required word count.</p> <p>Mostly follows MLA format.</p>	<p>Writing is confusing and hard to follow for teachers and peers, and there are many issues with grammar and spelling that interfere with readers’ understandings. The paper has few or no paragraphs.</p> <p>The paper is under word count.</p> <p>The paper barely follows MLA format, or the paper does not follow it at all.</p>