

Examining & Practicing Genre & Rhetoric: Problem One--Joining the Global Union: Instructor Guide

Title

Examining & Practicing Genre & Rhetoric: Problem One--Joining the Global Union

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Discipline

Composition and Rhetoric

Target Audience

Intermediate, non-majors

Keywords

English, composition, genre, rhetoric, writing

Length of Time/Staging

Problem takes about two-and-half weeks to complete.



Abstract

This first problem of three sets up simulations of real-world scenarios and then asks students to think and write about them. In a world of rapidly changing communication methods, college-level writers must not only understand the conventions of traditional academic writing but must learn to think critically and to write about and in various genres. One way to help students learn to do this is via communication problems based on parallels to real-world events. In this first problem, students must develop a written founding document for an emerging democracy; that document, geared to a global audience, must establish and defend the rights of its citizens. To complete their task, students research similar documents as sources for their own and reference these sources in written arguments. Students also must defend their documents orally. The second problem in this set, by Rita Kumar, requires students to defend an important right. The third problem, by Brenda Refaei, encourages students to think about how to use the content of their majors to solve global problems.

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Format of Delivery

The problem is provided to students for the first time as a hard-copy text during a class session. Students read the problem individually and then discuss it with colleagues in pre-formed student groups of no more than three to four students. This discussion is intended to help them use their individual understandings of the problem's components and requirements to arrive at a group understanding of what they must do. Based on a group perception of what the problem entails, the small groups then develop their various work plans of how to develop the necessary communication product—in this case, communication in the genre of a founding document for an emerging new world democracy.

Student Learning Objectives

After completing this problem assignment, students will be able to:

1. Evaluate and analyze sources and rhetoric in different genres.
2. Communicate effectively both orally and in writing in different genres.
3. Assume different voices with different audiences.

Reflect on the connections between writing, critical thinking, and information literacy.

Student Resources

Models for Development of New Democracy's Founding Document United States Bill of Rights

www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext90/bill11h.htm



(This Web address links to Project Gutenberg, producer and disseminator of free eBooks.)

United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

www.un.org/Overview/rights.html

(This web address links directly to the United Nations page outlining this declaration.)

Preamble to the French Constitution: Declaration of the Rights of Man

avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp

(This web address links to The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy at the Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library.)

Group Contract Assignment (available in the problem folder)

Author's Teaching Notes

The English composition course in which this problem is presented is a second-year required course and the last in a sequence of three. Students have in the previous courses of the sequence been introduced to concepts of rhetoric, genre, and text analysis. They begin this course by reading, analyzing, and discussing as a class the rhetoric of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the Papyrus of Ani, the Hammurabi Code, and similar documents. They then write individual rhetorical analyses of real-life documents which they select and which outline the rights and responsibilities of a group of people, a nation, or a profession. This sets up for completion of the problem outlined here, that of development of a written founding document which identifies and argues for rights and responsibilities of an emerging democracy as well as delivery of an oral presentation of that document. This problem proceeds over eight 50-minute class sessions. It is introduced early in the quarter (or semester), while Problem 2 in this set is introduced about the middle of the quarter and Problem 3 later in the quarter.

Day 1

The instructor provides a brief overview of the concept of problem-based learning. Students are organized into groups of three to four members and each group is assigned a task to complete together during the session to demonstrate what it means to work together to solve a problem.

For example, in one such problem-based learning introduction session of this course, each group was given a piece of aluminum foil and asked to create together in a short but set period of time an animal that was recognizable to the entire class. The stipulation for the exercise was that each member had to contribute to creating the "animal" and had to explain to the class his or her contribution to the group. Such an exercise can work well to show rather than simply tell about the idea of problem-based learning.

Day 2

Students receive, read, and reflect on the problem. They come to this first session and join pre-assigned groups of three to four students. Each group develops a contract containing ground rules for how members will work together on the problem (see the "Group Contract Assignment" in the problem folder). Then each group reflects on steps needed to solve the problem and develops a plan naming those steps.



Day 3

Prior to this session, students begin through homework on their own time to identify sources for use in drafting their group documents. They individually review via web links three documents provided as samples (see "Student Resources" in this problem for these web addresses). The sample documents are the U.S. Bill of Rights, the United Nations Declarations of Human Rights, and the Preamble to the French Constitution: The Declaration of the Rights of Man. Then, in this third session, group members compile their individual research notes on resources they've identified; this becomes a collective resource list for development of their group's founding document. Both a college librarian and course instructor provide research support during the session as the groups develop these collective resource lists.

Day 4

Individuals complete via homework prior to this session their search for resources. During Session 4, they add this final material to their group lists, and the groups continue work to refine their collective resource lists; these ultimately develop into the works-cited pages that each group will use in providing source citations for their group documents and oral presentations. Each group begins in this session to draft its written founding document, complete with in-text citations and a works-cited page.

Day 5

Each group finalizes its written draft of its founding document. Groups meet outside of class to polish the document for assignment submission.

Day 6

Each group uses its written founding document to draft its 5-7 minute oral presentation.

Day 7

Each group submits the written founding document and then gives a 5-7 minute oral presentation on it. Each individual student completes and submits as homework following this session a written self-assessment using pre-set questions provided by the instructor (see the problem folder for the document titled "Student Self Assessment").

Day 8

The class as a whole discusses this self-assessment and what students learned by completing this problem.

Assessment Strategies

This problem uses multiple assessments (as do the other two problems in this set) to guide students as they work on mastering course goals. Three major assessments have been included in the problem folder: a rubric for assessing a group written document, a rubric for assessing a group oral presentation, and a questionnaire for student self-assessment of learning following completion of the entire problem.

Because a critical component of problem-based learning is making students responsible for their own learning, the self-assessment in this problem requires students to evaluate how working through the problem has helped them to master learning goals for the course. A major rationale

for our choice in using problem-based learning pedagogy is the meta-cognitive awareness it fosters in students. Upon course completion, students should be able to analyze a writing situation, choose an appropriate genre for response, and communicate effectively in that genre. This first problem accounted for 25% of the course grade, with the founding document receiving 10% of that, the oral presentation another 10%, and the self-evaluation 5%.

Solution Notes

Each of the problems in this three-problem set emphasizes analysis and understanding of genre. In this first problem, students must analyze the genre of a democracy's founding document to be able to create one of their own. Students use their research skills to obtain and cite samples as well as their composition skills to effectively write in this genre. Students must also present oral arguments defending the rights established in their written founding documents; this requires that they understand the genre of oral presentation and use their composition skills to effectively communicate in this genre, too. Thus, to complete this problem, students employ critical thinking and effective communication skills to analyze and compose in two genres.