

Examining & Practicing Genre & Rhetoric: Problem Two--National Citizens Forum: Instructor Guide

Title

Examining & Practicing Genre & Rhetoric: Problem Two--National Citizens Forum

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Discipline

Composition and Rhetoric

Target Audience

Intermediate, non-majors

Keywords

Composition, genre, rhetoric

Length of Time/Staging

Two weeks in a ten-week quarter



Abstract

This is the second problem in a set of three that 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. The first problem by Claudia Skutar involves students in developing a founding document. This second problem requires students to defend an important right(s) that they have identified earlier in the founding document and argue for it using reliable sources. The second problem is connected to the first problem in content but expects students to develop their writing skills further. The problem encourages students to find sources, evaluate and analyze them as they construct their arguments in defense of a right. The problem design prompts students to explore different genres and voices to meet the rhetorical demands of the scenario presented by the problem. Students are pushed to work collaboratively and think critically as they need to produce both an individual and collective product. For example, students seek ways to incorporate information from their individual products to create a collective document that exemplifies a different genre and voice. The final problem by Brenda Refaei requires students to use their newfound skills to address a social issue. Students adopt roles related to their majors to write about social issues as someone in their desired field would.

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Format of Delivery

Each time students are given a problem in this Intermediate Composition course, they are given time to read through them. They then reflect on what the problem requires them to do using the Personal Reflection Logs (in the handouts and problem folder) each time. As a group, they discuss their reflections on the problem and come to a consensus on how they will approach solving the problem.

Student Learning Objectives

1. Evaluate and analyze sources and rhetoric from different genres.
2. Communicate effectively in oral and written formats in a variety of genres (argument, poster presentations, etc.)
3. To assume different attitudes (voices) to different audiences.
4. Reflect on what you are learning and the connections between, critical thinking, writing and genre.



Student Resources

1. www.article19.org

Article 19 is an organization designed "to combat censorship by promoting freedom of expression and access to official information." The organization has offices in London and South Africa and partner organizations in over 30 countries. Article 19 monitors, researches, publishes, and litigates on behalf of freedom of expression around the world.

Subject: Media and Freedom of Expression; Human Rights

Region: Global

Languages: English; French

This site contains research tools:

- A. Virtual Handbook of Expression - has searchable database on international court decisions.
- B. A number of key documents and reference materials
- C. Information on the organization's programs in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East
- D. Publication archives.

2. mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/popular_requests/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf

Martin Luther King: Letter from a Birmingham Jail

Resources housed at <http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/> include many print speeches of Martin Luther King (some are annotated) and historical background on his work.

3. www.witness.org/

White Paper

1. OWL at Purdue: White Paper and Audience, Organization and other Tips
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/owlprint/546/>
2. www.writerswrite.com/journal/sep02/srikanth.htm
3. White House: New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan
www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/afghanistan_pakistan_white_paper_final.pdf
4. Federal Web Managers Council: Putting Citizens First: Transforming Online Government
http://www.webmasters.ne.gov/Federal_Web_Managers_Council_White_Paper.pdf
5. Institute for National Strategic Studies: Defense White Papers in the Americas: A Comparative Analysis
<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=21115&lng=en>

Guidelines for Analyzing Genre (in the handouts and problem folder)

Freedoms, Arguments, and Roles (in the handouts and problem folder)



Author's Teaching Notes

The first three weeks of mid-collegiate composition, students learn about genre, discuss readings from different genres, and practice genre analysis. As students engage in genre analysis exercises, the instructor discusses critical thinking and its implications for genre analysis and critique. The students complete a rhetorical analysis assignment and a self-reflection on the rhetorical analysis. Problem 1 is introduced after an introduction to Problem Based Learning (PBL) and in-class group exercises to prepare students for group work. Additionally, students participate in a simple sample problem to experience the PBL process. The group exercises require students to first work individually and then together, followed by a discussion on the differences between working individually versus collaboratively and the challenges and benefits involved.

We introduce Problem 2 in the middle of week five of the quarter; however, the problems may be adapted to a semester system. The class meets every MWF for a 50 minute session. Problem 2 spans two weeks from introduction to completion and includes six class meetings. By now students have already worked through Problem 1 and are familiar with the handouts that accompany each problem for facilitating PBL. Prior to initiating the class to Problem 2, we check with them if they would like to remain in the groups they were in for Problem 1. Generally, students prefer to maintain the same groupings unless there have been any significant problems within the group.

Day One

We present a problem package to each group containing copies of the problem statement, appropriate work sheets such as the peer evaluation forms and the personal reflection logs (all are color coded for easier reference when handed out with the problem statement). The contents are also electronically posted on Blackboard (Bb) for ready access in case students lose printed material. After distributing the folders, we remind students about the Student Learning Objectives while reemphasizing the importance of working collaboratively. Students read the problem and follow the PBL process of discussing the problem and reflecting on it individually and collectively. The handout, "Freedoms, Arguments, and Roles" that accompanies Problem 2 helps students to begin the discussion on how they will approach the solution to the problem.

At this time groups also discuss student roles if they choose to use them or to make changes to roles assigned earlier for Problem 1. They may also make changes to their ground rules and group expectations based on their experience working as a group with Problem 1. The group contract serves as a reference if problems arise during the process of working together and is also posted on each group's discussion board.

Since the class is familiar with the PBL process by now, they are able to post for homework their group contract and group reflection online on their group pages by combining their individual reflections on the problem. The discussion forums on the group pages of the Blackboard course site serve as an excellent way to facilitate outside class communication among group members since we are a commuter campus (30-35 minutes).

Besides spending class time discussing Problem 2 and completing the handout "Freedoms, Arguments, and and Roles", groups assign homework to be completed by each member before the next class meeting (10-15 minutes).



We listen in on the individual group discussions and answer questions as they come up during class after the introduction of the problem.

Day Two

Following the PBL process, in the next class session the groups use the, "Guidelines for Analyzing Genres" handout to discuss the demands of the genre. They discuss sources provided and any that they have found individually as homework and how these sources can help them argue for the rights they have chosen to defend in the letter to the editor. Groups discuss their plans for further research and post them on Bb. For homework, they evaluate each other's sources and begin the search for additional sources to inform their individual approach to the problem, which they post on Bb to add to the pool of sources (50 minutes).

Day Three

In this class meeting, the groups evaluate the sources they have found and how they may use them to construct a solution to the problem. Typically by now most groups have figured out a way to identify the most important freedoms and the roles they want to adopt in defending them through discussion and analysis of the problem (25 minutes).

Using the resources provided, groups find samples of the letter genre and use the "Guidelines for Analyzing Genre" handout to analyze the samples. This generates class discussion on how to analyze the genre's critical features and how to use this information (25 minutes). For homework students continue to explore resources that will help them defend the freedom(s) they have chosen from the perspective they have adopted.

Day Four

Group members bring to class the resources they have found to inform their individual perspectives and discuss them within their group (50 minutes). At this class meeting, we consult with each group, and a designated reporter for the group provides us an update on the group progress. We also monitor group progress by visiting the online discussion board of each group on the Blackboard course site. We offer answers to queries and may guide groups if they are floundering by asking them to consider questions they may have overlooked. We do not provide groups with the solution but guide them if they seem to be stalled in the problem solving process. Most of our students are new to the PBL approach and it is important to make sure that just enough support is provided to prevent frustration. For homework, groups post their individual letters.

Day Five

Group members discuss how to create a final collective document based on their individual letters. By now most groups have figured out that their collective document is going to be a White Paper and have been researching the genre and its rhetorical demands. For homework, students continue distilling the individual letter for the purpose of creating a White Paper. We remind them to use the "Guidelines for Analyzing Genre" handout so they can analyze the important features of a White Paper. We continue in our roles as facilitators and observers during the process of problem solving by advising only where required. We solve group-related problems as and when they came up either individually with a group or if it is something all groups are experiencing then with the entire class. Each class meeting is devoted to group time as members work together to share ideas, resources and construct documents. We allow groups



to visit the library together to research sources or to the computer lab to work on documents related to the problem solution unless we are in a computer lab for the quarter, which is ideal for a PBL course.

Day Six

In this class meeting, students continue to work on their documents collectively to prepare for the final submission of the solution at the next class meeting. The class time is important to groups since it reduces the need to meet outside class, which they sometimes have to do if they are unable to meet deadlines or if they need a longer period of time to work together.

Day Seven

In the final class meeting for Problem 2, groups submit their final solution in the form of two documents and peer evaluations before they receive Problem 3. As homework, group members are given a Student Self-Assessment questionnaire (in the handouts and problem folder) for Problem 2 to complete.

Assessment Strategies

We like to use multiple assessments to guide students as they work on mastering the goals of the course. Each problem fosters peer feedback and guidance, but students also have access to the rubrics the instructors use to grade the final projects. One use of these rubrics that students find helpful is to assess the products as they are producing a solution to the given problem. Students are better able to understand what is being evaluated and can clarify any misconceptions they may have. A critical component of PBL is making students responsible for their learning. The self-assessments require students to evaluate how working through the problem helps them master the student learning objectives for the course. A major rationale for our choice in using PBL pedagogy for this course is the metacognitive awareness it fosters in students. After leaving our course, students must be able to fully analyze a writing situation, choose the most appropriate genre, and implement the most effective composing processes to successfully complete the project.

The problem is designed in such a way so that both individual and group effort can be assessed. The successful and timely completion of the individual task forms the foundation of the completion of the group task. Equal participation by all members of the group is required. Peer evaluation makes the need to contribute actively crucial to group success. Peers provide important guidance and feedback as students work through writing the solutions to the problem. Finally, students evaluate their own progress using the self-assessment form.

Problem 2 is worth 25% of the total grade for the course.

Individual Letter

The individual letter is worth 10% of the total grade for the problem. The individual grading of the letter provides an opportunity to assess every group member's contribution and to acknowledge accountability toward the group effort. We use an assessment rubric (see assessments) to evaluate the individual letter. We monitor the group participation by listening in on discussion during the in class sessions, visiting the group pages and checking the nature of the

postings. This process provides valuable insight into the involvement of individual groups' members and the group collectively during the course of problem solving.

White Paper

Each group receives a collective grade for the White Paper, which is the same for all members and is worth 5% of the grade for the problem. We use an assessment rubric for the purpose of evaluating the White Paper. Individual grades are awarded for the letter part of the solution, which then informs the White Paper produced collectively by the group.

Peer Evaluations and Self-Assessment

Students turn in evaluations (in the handouts and problem folder) for each member of the group and for themselves with the final group folder. The evaluation points for each member are added and averaged to account for 5% of the final grade on the group project. Additionally, students write a short paragraph describing their contribution to the group effort. The self-assessment questionnaire is worth 5% of the total grade.

Rubric for individual letter (in the handouts and problem folder)

Rubric for white paper (in the handouts and problem folder)

Student self-assessment (in the handouts and problem folder)

Solution Notes

Students need to produce documents belonging to two specific genres: Letter and a White Paper as the solution to the problem. If the students produce documents that exemplify the characteristics of a typical sample of the genre, they are considered successful. When students are mindful that the letter reflects the voice and attitude of the role or perspective they choose to adopt to defend a right, we know they understand the demands of the rhetorical context.