
Using Genre Studies and Rhetorical Analysis to Evaluate Student Writing

— Whitney Lew James —
Emerson College

Personal Goals in Evaluation

1. **Transparency.** Evaluating work can often seem opaque. To alleviate this, I try to make terms of evaluation as clear as possible and to recognize that my view of a piece is not the only one that matters.
2. **De-Emphasizing Letter Grade.** Because students often equate letter grades with the value of their work and ideas, de-emphasizing the grade as the ultimate goal in writing and assessment of quality is essential for me.
3. **Valuing Student Voices.** My goal is for students to feel empowered as writers despite grades, rather than because of them.
4. **Writing as a Process.** I try to carry this tenet of writing pedagogy over to instructor comments by focusing on how the writer might revise to accomplish their goals.

Evaluation as a Process of Self-Reflection

One of the major assets of teaching in a writing classroom is that we are constantly evaluating our own practices. This has lead me to explore a range of evaluation strategies:

Percentage Grades with Comments

Grading Contracts

Rubrics

And, most importantly for this presentation, **Genre Studies and Rhetorical Analysis and Letter Grades.**

In many ways, it makes sense that self-reflection would be my preferred method of evaluation since I am constantly engaging in it myself.

Benefits of Genre Studies

- Writing in a specific genre helps students to consider purpose and audience
- Establishing genre conventions and expectations early sets out specific qualities to focus on for writing and evaluation
- Instructor comments focus on the execution of the genre, rather than the general quality of the writing:
 - ◆ “Your deep analysis of the example and connection back to the proposition is a strong example of how to develop a body paragraph.”
 - ◆ “This is a great narrative piece, but does not follow the conventions of a position essay.”
- Highlights writing as situational
 - ◆ What works for one genre/assignment/field may not be appropriate for another, but doesn't mean you are “wrong.”

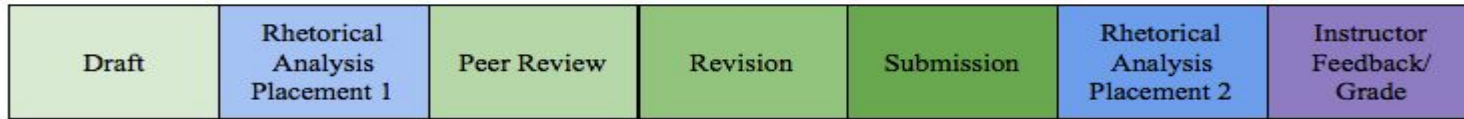
Benefits of Rhetorical Analysis

- Helps students reflect on and evaluate their own work without instructor or peer feedback
- Conducting the rhetorical analysis establishes expectations for the writing assignment and criteria for evaluation
- Instructor comments focus on responding to the rhetorical analysis and how the writer met their goals
 - ◆ “This paragraph that addresses the audience directly accomplishes your goal of engaging readers in an unconventional way.”
 - ◆ “You say that you want to reach a broad audience, but this is targeted to fellow class members.”
- Highlights the rhetorical choices made by the writer
- Treats student writing as a legitimate text

Combined Benefits

- These methods are very complementary and can help to highlight each other
 - ◆ Rhetorical analysis shows the genre conventions used
 - ◆ Genre awareness is further developed by conducting the rhetorical analysis
 - ◆ Ultimate goal is knowledge transfer through metacognition
- Rhetorical agency, both in terms of understanding genre and making choices
- Emphasizes the writer's choices, rather than the instructor's assessment
 - ◆ Comments are focused on writer's choices in light of genre and assignment, not an assessment of their writing in a more general sense
- Together, they provide two very clear frameworks for assessment
 - ◆ Genre studies = external expectations/conventions
 - ◆ Rhetorical analysis = internal goals

Placement of the Rhetorical Analysis



Placement 1: Before Peer Review/Revision

- ❖ Works well early in the semester as students are still learning how to distinguish genres and the expectations of the class
- ❖ Emphasizes the writing process and encourages revision
- ❖ Gives students a chance to reassess their choices
- ❖ Helpful for evaluation in that you can respond to both the assignment and the rhetorical analysis

Placement 2: Following Completion

- ❖ Works best toward the middle of end of the semester
- ❖ Emphasizes the choices that the writer has made
- ❖ Shows the thought-process of creating more complex or multimodal assignments
 - Experimental essays and end of the year projects
- ❖ Helpful for evaluation when you are focused on process, rather than execution

**For more, see the handout provided and visit
[WhitneyLewJames.com/Student-Assessment-
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