

Writing Assignments for Unit 1

Visual Literacy

The Seen/Unseen Narratives in Visual Media



Visual literacy is the ability to recognize, explain, analyze, critique, and argue about how visual messages use images and language to persuade us to think and to act in certain ways.

Assignments

- 1 Thesis-Support Essay—Remember, in RC 2, we use APA reference formats.
- 4 Short Writings (hereafter referred to as SWs)
- Oral Presentations (You are to give at least two presentations this semester, volunteering in a specific unit for a formal presentation—five people each unit—and various informal group or individual presentations. ~Actually, you'll draw lots, then trade if you wish.)

Thesis-Support Essay Assignment

Purpose

- To enhance your visual literacy and, hence, your critical thinking about the public sphere
- To demonstrate that you understand rhetorical, narrative, and cultural conventions of visual texts
- To demonstrate that you can develop & sustain an interpretive argument (a critical thinking skill)

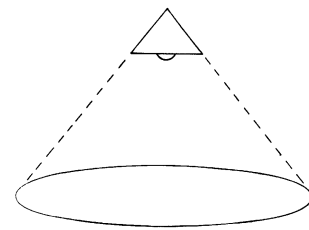
Writer's Task

Examine how visual elements in two still visual texts (e.g., advertisements, billboards, paintings, maps, graphics, posters) work rhetorically to convey narrative and cultural dimensions that engage their audience in an implicit or explicit narrative. By “still” I mean not animated. The two images should have what ABGW calls a “**common denominator**” (p. 307). The images may come from print or the Web, but must be in a context designed to attract readers. **Do not** use images from a Web archive because those images are cut off from their original rhetorical context. Your paper should explain explicitly how analysis of the two visuals together helps us understand the narratives and rhetorical purposes that are either implicit or explicit in each.

Scan the images and attach them at the end of your paper, after the references list. Refer to them in the text as Figure 1 and 2. In a **caption** provide a brief title and an APA style parenthetical citation as in Figure 1 on this page. The citation for Berthoff & Stephens 1988 would look this on an APA references sheet:

Berthoff, A.E., and Stephens, J. (1988). *Forming, Thinking, Writing* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.

Figure 1: Examining A in light of B
(Berthoff & Stephens, 1988, p. 169)



Your goal in this paper is to reveal something about your chosen visual texts that might not be readily apparent if the two were observed independently. Ask yourself how, when you look at Figure 1 in light

of Figure 2, you begin to recognize implicit qualities and stories you might have missed otherwise. For example, let's say you are analyzing a men's cologne ad in a men's magazine. Once you think about it in light of a perfume ad in a women's magazine, it's likely that looking at the way one ad draws readers into an implicit story—perhaps via the expression on a model's face—helps you recognize how the other ad attempts to draw in readers. **Paper length = 4–5 pages, not counting the references list or figures.**

NOTE: This assignment does **not** invite a formulaic comparison/contrast paper that merely describes visuals. (Such a paper would not reach “C” level in grading.) Rather, you are to develop a rhetorical interpretation of your two visual texts by “reading” A in terms of—or in the light of—B, then reading B in terms of, or in light of A. Think of the lamp in **Figure 1** as visual text A, shining light on visual text B down in the pool of light. Then imagine a reversal so that B shines light on A. This two-way interpretation should—will!—bring out elements of the two texts that casual observers would overlook if the texts were examined alone. By explaining your analysis, you will offer readers a deeper understanding of the rhetorical strategies of storytelling and persuasion that are at work in both texts.

Possible Strategies

Think about these questions: (1) What stories do your selected visuals tell, implicitly and explicitly? (2) How do they draw readers in, inviting them to become part of those stories? (3) How do they use images and language to try to persuade readers/viewers/listeners to think and act in certain ways? (2) How effective are they in this goal? (3) For whom would they be more and less effective—and why? (5) What do you want the rest of the class to see that they might otherwise miss? For additional ideas and strategies, see Chapter 11 of ABGW, especially the boxed guidelines on pages 290–292 and the suggestions in the Writing Project box on pages 307–308. (We will discuss these in class.)

Audience

Teacher & classmates, part of our class conversation on implicit and explicit visual narratives, who have read the same articles, but who have not had a chance to examine and interpret YOUR visuals.

Due Date for Peer Review: Thurs., Jan. 29
Due Date for Submission to Instructor and 5 Oral Briefings: Tues., Feb. 3

Unit 1 Grade: 25% of final course grade

The unit grade will be awarded to the final essay; however, SWs must be completed on due dates AND turned in with Portfolio One in order for you to receive full credit for the unit. Exceptionally good performance on the activities leading up to the final paper will boost your final paper grade; poor performance may lower it. (See the syllabus for other grading policies.)



The Road to Success **Short Writes and Oral Presentations**

1. The various short writes will serve as milestones on the road to success. As you work on them, think about how BOTH the critical thinking processes and the content might pertain to your unit paper. These sequenced writings are intended to help you think about your essay topic so that you can revise your ideas as we proceed through the unit. If appropriate for your paper, your **SWs may be incorporated into your final essay.**
2. You will receive credit for doing the SWs and informal OPs if you have complete them by the assigned dates, bring them to class for discussion, and turn them in for my feedback.
3. Use APA parenthetical citations and a References list for all external sources you use in your paper **AND** in your SWs. I will provide models for citing advertisements and other visuals.
4. Grading criteria for the unit paper are listed on the last sheet of this packet and will be discussed in detail in class. A full scoring rubric is posted on D2L.
5. Follow carefully the format guidelines for “Submitting Your Papers” on page 4 of the syllabus.
6. The same page explains what to include in the double-pocket portfolio you turn in on Feb. 3.



Specific SW and OP Assignments

- SW #1: Looking Backward and Forward Reflection. See separate handout. < 2 pp.
Due Thurs., Jan. 15.
- SW #2: Identify two important features of a print advertisement that is primarily visual and explain how those features tell a story. Write a brief version of that story, which may be implicit or explicit (one ¶). Then explain what role the ad offers to a **reader/viewer** within that story (second ¶). If you can, use an idea from Fowles or Hirschberg in the second paragraph to explain more about how the story works. **Turn in** two typed point-to-particulars (P2P) ¶s along with the ad and put your references at the bottom of the page instead of on a separate page. **Due** Tues., Jan. 20.
- SW #3: Choose your favorite still photo from Inauguration news coverage (in print or on the Web), and use ABGW pp. 290–292 along with ideas from the University of Maryland’s Visual Literacy Toolbox (link on D2L) to explain what makes it so appealing. Think in terms of both the literal narrative depicted and the cultural values represented. 1–2 ¶s. **Due** Thurs., Jan. 22. Upload to D2L discussion board along with either the photo or a link to the photo.
- SW #4 OP #1 for volunteers
With a partner, design an ad that has a surprising reversal. That is, **either** design an ad for an unlikely demographic group (see item #5 on ABGW 307) **or** design a counter-ad like those McCannon describes (article on Ares). **Due** Tues., Jan. 27. Volunteers will briefly present their ads to the class.



Oral Presentation of Paper to the Entire Class

5 people for this unit; the rest of you will speak in other units

- 1. Purpose:** To help you become comfortable speaking in front of a group
To give you practice giving brief oral summaries
- 2. Format:** Speak for 10 minutes. You may use notes/outline, but do not simply read your paper.
Hint: 5-min speech equals about 2 double-spaced pages
- 3. Content:** Brief the class on your Essay #1
- 4. Organization:** In a brief summary (1) set up your interpretive task, (2) state your thesis, (3) forecast the structure of your talk, (4) give main points/reasons that support your thesis—hint: Use details sparingly in an oral briefing
Option: Since the Unit One paper’s purpose is interpretation, you may choose to organize the oral briefing (only) with a delayed thesis; nonetheless, be sure to forecast the structure of your talk as part of your introduction.
- 5. Style:** Academic, for an audience with shared interest and background in the area or subject matter (i.e., rhetorical interpretation of narratives evident in visual texts—examining A in terms of B, and B in terms of A)
- 6. Visual aids:** Prepare a way for audience to see your two visual texts.

Unit One Essay Grading Criteria

These questions are derived from the scoring rubric on D2L and are listed on the grade sheet that I will use to grade your paper.

- **Purpose/Audience Negotiation**
 1. How well does the opening of the paper locate its purpose in terms of interpreting the narrative and cultural elements of two visual texts that have a “common denominator”?
 2. How well does the paper show that analyzing the two visuals together reveals more about each than examining them in isolation?
 3. How well does the writer address the class and the teacher as an audience who are part of our class conversation on visual texts and who have read the same articles but who have not had a chance to think in depth about your texts and who are less informed about them than you are?
- **Organization**
 4. How well does the thesis statement state the essay’s purpose, focus the paper, and forecast its organization?
 5. How rhetorically effective is the sequence of the ¶s in the paper?
 6. Does the text organize ideas logically within paragraphs?
 7. Is there an effective conclusion, avoiding mere summary and pointing instead to larger significance?
- **Development**
 8. How well are paragraphs framed around the writer’s own points, which link to thesis?
 9. How well does the text provide evidence for these points with details about the visual texts derived from personal observation, ideas in source texts, and external research?
- **Expert’s *ethos***
 10. To what extent does the writer demonstrate confident, authoritative understanding of the assigned interpretive purpose and content?
 11. To what extent does the writer demonstrate personal engagement with purpose and content?
- **Readability**
 12. How free is the text of spelling, grammar, punctuation errors?
 13. How effectively do sentences use clear subjects and verbs, parallelism, and transitions?
 14. Is there evidence that the writer attended to the old-new contract to enhance readability?
 15. How well chosen is the text’s vocabulary?
- **Information Literacy**
 16. How well does the text integrate reliable and timely outside sources, as needed?
 17. How effectively does the text rhetorically analyze sources?
 18. How well does the text use attributive phrases and internal APA style parenthetical citations?
 19. Does the text present an accurate APA references list?
 20. Does the text present the visual texts under discussion with conventional APA format and captions for visual figures?

Contrasting MLA and APA Style

MLA style, used in English 1, looks like this:

Messaris, Paul. “The Role of Images in Advertising.” Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing. John D. Ramage, John C. Bean, June Johnson. Marquette custom ed. Boston: Pearson, 2009. 311–313.

APA style, which you are to use in English 2, looks like this:

Messaris, P. (2009). The role of images in advertising. In J. Ramage, J. Bean, J. Jordan, *Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing* (Marquette custom ed., pp. 311–313). Boston: Pearson.

You will find lots of APA citation models in ABGW, the Handbook, on the Signpost, and at a number of Web sites listed under Links on our D2L site.