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Doing Rhetorical Criticism

The definitions of the terms *rhetoric* and *rhetorical criticism* in chapter 1 have provided a starting place for understanding rhetorical criticism. Knowledge about what rhetorical criticism *is* does not automatically translate into the ability to *do* criticism, however. This chapter is designed to provide you with an overview of the actual process of producing an essay of criticism.

Because this textbook is a first experience with rhetorical criticism for many of you, you probably will feel more comfortable initially practicing rhetorical criticism using specific methods. Using these methods enables you to begin to develop your critical skills and to learn the language and basic procedures of criticism. This chapter, then, provides you with information about how to do criticism when your starting point is a formal method of criticism. A variety of these methods are presented in chapters 3 through 11. Chapter 12 offers a different way of doing criticism—generative criticism—an approach you probably will want to try as your skills as a critic grow. Using this approach, you will create a method or framework for analyzing an artifact from the data of the artifact itself.

Your starting place, however, in most of the chapters is with a method of criticism—either one you have chosen or one selected for you by your professor. When you begin with a particular method, the process of rhetorical criticism involves four steps and possibly five or six, depending on your preferences or your professor's assignment: (1) selecting an artifact; (2) analyzing the artifact; (3) formulating a research question; (4) reviewing relevant literature (optional); (5) writing the essay; and (6) applying the analysis in activism (optional).

Selecting an Artifact

Your first step is to find an artifact to analyze that is appropriate for the method you will be applying. The artifact is the data for the study—the rhetorical act or artifact you are going to analyze. It may be any instance of symbol use that is of interest to you and seems capable of generating insights about

rhetorical processes—a song, a poem, a speech, a YouTube video, a webcam drama, a video game, a series of Tweets, a podcast, a work of art, or a building, for example.

An artifact is appropriate for a method if it meets two criteria. It first must contain the kinds of data that are the focus of the units of analysis of the method. Units of analysis focus attention on certain dimensions of an artifact and not others. A critic cannot possibly examine all of the features of an artifact, so units of analysis serve as a vehicle or lens for you to use to examine the artifact. They are scanning devices for picking up particular kinds of information about an artifact, directing and narrowing the analysis in particular ways, revealing some things and concealing others. Units of analysis are things like strategies, types of evidence, values, fantasy themes, and metaphors. If you are using the narrative method, for example, you will need an artifact that is a narrative or that includes a story within it. If you are using metaphoric criticism, you will need an artifact that contains some obvious metaphors.

The artifact you choose also should be something you really like or really dislike, something that puzzles or baffles you, or something that you cannot explain. We have such responses to the artifacts around us all the time—we love a particular song, we cannot understand why a political candidate has the appeal that he does, we marvel at the artistry involved in a quilt, or we cannot figure out what the message of a building is supposed to be. Let your daily encounters with the symbols around you guide you in your selection of an artifact. Your interest in, passion for, and curiosity about an artifact are important initial ingredients for writing an essay of criticism.

Analyzing the Artifact

The second step in the process of criticism is to code or analyze your artifact using the procedures of the method. Each method of criticism has its own procedures for analyzing an artifact, and at this step, you apply the units of analysis provided by the method. If you are applying metaphoric analysis, for example, you will be involved in coding your artifact for metaphors and their tenors and vehicles, the two parts of metaphors. If you are applying the cluster method, you will be identifying key terms in the artifact and finding the terms that cluster around them. This is the step at which you engage in a close and systematic analysis of the artifact and become thoroughly familiar with the dimensions highlighted by your method.

An easy way to do the coding of your artifact is to write or type your notes about the artifact in a list, leaving some space between each "code." Physically cut the observations you have made apart so that each idea or observation is on a separate strip of paper. Then group the strips that are about the same thing and put them in one pile. Group the strips that are about something else and put them in another pile. What is in these piles will depend on the method of criticism you are using—perhaps different fantasy themes, different metaphors, or different elements of narratives. Play around with different ways to organize your piles. The strips of paper allow you to group and regroup your codes into different categories and encourage you to experiment with multiple ways of conceptualizing the data of your artifact.

Formulating a Research Question

The research question is what you want to find out about rhetoric by studying an artifact. It suggests what your study contributes to our understanding of how rhetorical processes work—your contribution, in other words, to rhetorical theory. In contrast to much qualitative research, the research question in rhetorical criticism is typically generated after you do your analysis because the analysis shows you what you have learned that can constitute a contribution to our understanding of rhetoric. This contribution is captured in your research question. Although you may choose to state your research question as a thesis statement instead of an actual question in your essay, you want to be able to articulate what your research question is in your mind because it encourages you to be very clear about your objective in your analysis. Research questions are questions such as: "How does an ambiguous artifact persuade?," "What strategies can help people regain credibility after they have been discredited?," "What strategies do marginalized groups use to challenge a dominant perspective?," or "How does a political leader construct a nation as an enemy?"

To create a research question, use the principle behind *Jeopardy* and create a question for which the analysis you have just completed is the answer. Use your findings to discover what is most significant, useful, or insightful about your artifact and make that focus into a research question. If your analysis reveals, for example, that an artifact is making a highly controversial topic seem normal, your research question might be something like, "What rhetorical strategies facilitate the normalization of a controversial perspective?"

Research questions tend to be about four basic components of the communication process—the rhetor, the audience, the situation, and the message. If you are having trouble developing a research question, identifying the arena in which your study belongs might help you formulate your question.

- *Rhetor.* Some research questions deal with the relationship between rhetors and their rhetoric. Questions that focus on the rhetor might be concerned with the motive of the rhetor, the worldview of the rhetor, or how the rhetoric functions for the rhetor. "What is the meaning of the term *compassion* in the homilies of religious leaders?" is a research question that has the rhetor as a focus.
- *Audience.* Some research questions are concerned with the relationship between an artifact and an audience. Although rhetorical criticism does not allow you to answer questions about the actual effects of rhetoric on an audience, you can ask questions about the kind of audience an artifact constructs as its preferred audience or how an artifact functions to facilitate the development of certain values or beliefs in an audience. A sample research question centered on an audience is: "What is the ideal audience constructed by reality television?"
- *Situation.* Other research questions deal with the relationship between an artifact and the situation or context in which the artifact is embedded. Such questions might deal with the impact of a situation on an artifact, the rhetor's definition of a situation in an artifact, or whether the

artifact adequately addresses an exigency in a particular situation. Research questions in which a situation is central are: "How do political leaders define exigencies following a national crisis?" and "What is the impact of those definitions on perceptions of the crisis?"

- *Message.* Most research questions in rhetorical criticism deal with the message. The focus is on the specific features of the artifact that enable it to function in particular ways. Such questions might deal with the kinds of arguments constructed, the types of metaphors used, the key terms used, or a combination of rhetorical strategies and characteristics that create a particular kind of artifact. Research questions that focus on a message are questions such as: "What are the features of effective apologies?," "How does rhetoric generate support for propositions that are contrary to cultural norms?," or "What rhetorical strategies do individuals subjected to involuntary confinement use to create families?"

When you formulate your research question, try to avoid three mistakes that beginning critics sometimes make as they create research questions. One is to make the question too broad and generic. A question such as "How does political rhetoric about war function?" is too broad and unfocused to answer through the rhetorical analysis of one or even several artifacts. Try to narrow the scope of the question by paying attention to the specific features of the artifact that are most interesting to you. You might narrow the question to one such as "What rhetorical strategies do political leaders use to justify unpopular wars?"

A second problem that can occur with research questions is that the wording of the questions does not allow for the exploration and explanation of anything interesting. Yes-or-no questions, which typically begin with *do*, are one example. "Do political leaders justify unpopular wars?" is this kind of question. Not only do these kinds of questions require simple yes-or-no answers, but the answers to them are usually obvious—of course political leaders try to justify unpopular wars. To make sure your research question is one that takes advantage of the interesting and useful insights your analysis has produced, you might want to use the following questions as models. These are templates for typical research questions in essays of rhetorical criticism:

- What rhetorical strategies are used to . . . ?
- How do . . . function in the rhetoric of . . . ?
- What are the rhetorical processes that characterize the rhetoric of . . . ?
- What are the mechanisms by which . . . ?
- How do rhetors construct . . . ?
- How is the rhetoric of . . . constructed?
- What rhetorical strategies are available to . . . ?
- What is the nature and function of rhetoric designed to . . . ?
- What is the nature of the worldview constructed to . . . ?
- What are the features of . . . ?
- What are the characteristics of . . . ?
- What strategies are used to construct worldviews that function to . . . ?
- What perceptions result from the rhetorical construction of . . . ?

There is one more thing to avoid as you develop your research question. Do not include your specific artifact or data in your research question. Although there are exceptions with some methods of criticism (such as the ideological approach), the question usually should be larger than the artifact you are analyzing. You should be able to use any number of artifacts to answer the question rather than being limited to the one you chose to study. Turn the question that fits the analysis of your artifact into a more general one by making the elements of the question more abstract. Instead of a question such as, "How did George W. Bush reassure citizens after the terrorist attacks of September 11?," your question could be, "What rhetorical strategies do political leaders use to reassure citizens after catastrophic events?" You have made the name of the rhetor of the artifact you are studying into the more abstract term of *political leaders* and *the terrorist attacks of September 11* into *catastrophic events*. Instead of a question such as, "How does the National Rifle Association make its ideology palatable to resistant audiences?," your question could be, "How do organizations with strong ideologies construct messages that appeal to normally resistant audiences?"

Reviewing Relevant Literature

The next step in the process of rhetorical criticism is an optional one. You will want to engage in this step if your professor requires that your essays of criticism include a literature review or if you are preparing an essay for convention presentation or possible publication in a journal. In this case, the literature review is designed to familiarize the readers of your essay with key findings from previous studies. It is designed to provide contextual knowledge the reader will need in order to understand your findings and their significance. The literature review allows you to enter the conversation about a topic in your field by acquainting yourself with what others are saying so you can extend the conversation they have begun.

Identifying the Literature to Review

How do you figure out what literature to review? Let's take a research question and develop the categories of literature that you would include in your literature review. Assume that you did a metaphoric analysis for your essay and that the research question you came up with, as a result of your analysis, is, "What are the metaphors used by state legislators in argumentation about children's issues?" You are interested in seeing how the metaphors create particular realities around children's issues and encourage legislators to perceive and deal with such issues in particular ways. As you search for literature on the topic, you might be tempted to search for all studies that have to do with state legislators, children's issues, argumentation, and metaphors. But these topics are too large—you can't possibly include in your literature review all of the studies on even one of these topics, nor would you want to. Such a literature review would be unfocused and would get your readers off track from the narrative you want to tell about the current state of the literature and how it relates to the findings of your analysis.

Working out the categories of literature to cover in your literature review is not hard to do because the relevant studies come directly from your research question. Begin by searching for studies that answer your exact research question. For example, with the research question about legislators' use of metaphors in their arguments related to children's issues, you first would search for studies about the metaphors used by state legislators in argumentation about children's issues. Type into your search box "metaphors + state legislators + argumentation + children's issues." Let's assume there are no studies that directly answer your research question. Then you want to select one of the key terms in the question and move up one level of abstraction and search again, using that more abstract term in your question. As S. I. Hayakawa explained in *Language in Thought and Action*, the same concept can be labeled with terms that are more or less concrete, and you can move up and down the ladder of abstraction to talk about the concept in more specific or more general terms.

We can see how the ladder of abstraction works by borrowing an example from Hayakawa about a cow named *Bessie*. When you talk about this animal as *Bessie*, she is the only thing in the category of Bessie. Moving up the ladder of abstraction, you could refer to her as a *cow*. Notice that, as you talk about Bessie in more general, abstract terms, the category has been expanded, and there are now more items in it—all cows fit into the category, whereas only one particular cow did when the category was Bessie. To move up another level, you could label Bessie a *farm animal*, which now includes not only cows but chickens, goats, pigs, and horses. You can continue up the ladder of abstraction and call her a *possession*, and now you are including not only farm animals but houses, tractors, cars, and clothing, for example. Again, this greater abstraction increases the number of objects that fit into the category.

Notice that, when you make similar moves in your literature search, each time you move up the ladder of abstraction, there are more possibilities for studies that fit into the category. By moving up levels of abstraction with the key terms of your research question, you open up the numbers of studies available to you. For example, in the research question about legislators and metaphors, *state legislators* could become *politicians*, which means you can now look for studies that deal with how mayors, lieutenant governors, governors, congressional representatives, senators, and presidents argue about children's issues. So now you would be searching for literature that answers the question, "What are the metaphors used by politicians in argumentation about children's issues?," and you would type into your search box "metaphors + politicians + argumentation + children's issues." If there are no studies relevant to this topic, you could move to a higher level of abstraction and turn *politicians* into *policy makers*, which could include people who work in nonprofit organizations, corporations, education, and so on. If you don't find studies that deal with this question, you would want to repeat the process, selecting another term in your original research question and replacing it with a term that is more abstract than the original. So, for example, you could take the key term *children's issues* and make it into *family issues*, a more abstract term.

There's one other source for developing bodies of literature to include in a literature review—your artifact. In addition to looking to your research ques-

tion for clues about what your literature review should contain, also look to your artifact, particularly if it is an artifact that is well known, produced by a prominent person, or significant for other reasons. You want to see if studies of your artifact have been done, how they might inform your own analysis, and whether they shed any light on the research question you are asking. If, for example, you are going to use as your data a work of art by feminist artist Judy Chicago, see if studies have been done on her art in the past and include them in your literature review. If your data are Walt Disney cartoons, see what studies have been done of them and what kinds of findings about what kinds of questions those studies produced. In the case of legislators' discussions about children's issues, you probably aren't going to find many studies that are all that useful to include in your literature review—"argumentation about children's issues" isn't a particularly well-known kind of artifact, and it is not associated with anyone of prominence. In this case, your artifact—a set of speeches by legislators—would not be a source of literature for you.

Coding the Literature

You now have gathered the literature you want to include in your literature review, and you are likely to find yourself facing two common problems when you survey the literature. One is how to keep track of and deal with all the literature. You might remember when you wrote papers in the past and highlighted passages or had Post-it notes stuck on virtually every page of every book and article you collected. A second problem is how to organize and present the literature. Even if you could process all of the material you have efficiently, how do you organize it so that it makes sense to your readers? The following system of coding the literature addresses these problems and enables you to engage the literature in an efficient and manageable fashion.

Coding the literature means gleaning the ideas that are relevant and useful for your project from the literature. Do this coding the first time you read a book or an article instead of reading it first and then going back through it to code. When your literature is gathered and is stacked before you, sit at your computer and take a book from the top of the pile. Review it for ideas that have a direct bearing on your research question and artifact. Use all the clues the book provides to discover what is relevant for the rhetorical process you are investigating—the table of contents, chapter titles, headings, and the index. For each chapter that seems relevant to your research question, ask: "Is this chapter relevant for my study?" If it isn't, do not read it, and do not code it. When you come upon a relevant chapter, review it heading by heading and subheading by subheading. Ask at each heading, "Is this section relevant for me?" If it isn't, skip it. When you find a relevant idea, take notes about it on the computer. Using single spacing, type either a direct quote, a paraphrase, or a summary of the idea you find useful, and include the source and page number for each note you take. Insert a double or triple space between the notes.

Use the same process to code your articles that you use to code the books. Look through each article to see which sections seem relevant to your research question and artifact. When you see a section that might be useful, skim it, seeing if there are excerpts you want to pick up. Be careful when you

are coding articles that you don't get lost in the details of a study. Highlight only the findings of the study. Because you are looking for claims and conclusions that are relevant to your research question, you usually do not need to know anything about how the findings that you are including in the literature review came to be generated—the participants, data, or methods used in the study that produced those findings, for example. You are interested in the findings of the study because the findings are what are contributing to a theoretical discussion about your topic. After you have coded all of the literature, print out a copy of the notes you took during your coding and physically cut the notes apart.

If you are not a fast keyboarder, there is another way to code literature that may work better for you. As you read a book or an article, make a line in the margin beside each passage that is relevant to your analysis (be sure to use a pencil if the book doesn't belong to you so you can erase these lines later). When you have finished reading a book or an article, take it to a copy machine and make a copy of each page where you marked a passage or passages. On the copies of the pages, write the source and page number in the margin by each passage you have marked. Then cut out the passages from each copied page. At the end of this process, then, each note or marked passage is on a separate slip of paper, along with a shorthand reference to the source and page number from which the note or passage came.

The next step of the process is to sort the slips into piles according to subject, putting everything that is about the same topic in the same pile. For example, all the slips of paper in one pile might have to do with power, those in another pile with gender, those in another pile with agency, and those in another pile with the role that material conditions play in rhetoric. Put the piles into envelopes and label the envelopes. Storing the slips in envelopes prevents you from losing track of the piles or having them messed up by unwitting animal or human companions. You now have before you many different envelopes with labels on them containing many excerpts or typed notes from your literature. What you really have is a filing system for the major ideas of your literature review. In the case of literature about metaphors used in argumentation about children's issues, you might find that the literature sorts into piles such as types of arguments used about children's issues, major topics covered in such arguments, the legislative outcomes linked to certain kinds of arguments, and metaphors about children used in advocacy for children in general.

Creating a Conceptual Schema

Your next task is to turn the ideas represented by the envelopes into a conceptual schema or creative synthesis for your literature review. A conceptual schema is a way of organizing your literature review that creates connections among the pieces of your literature and shows how they relate to one another. Another way to think of a conceptual schema is as an explanation for what you are seeing across your piles of slips. It is a framework for presenting your findings that allows you to tell a story about the content of your literature review and features the themes that you want to highlight in the theoretical conversation to which your essay of criticism will contribute.

A conceptual schema is not a chronological description of literature in which you take each study and talk about it in the order in which it was done. These kinds of literature reviews are tedious because they do not make an argument or connect the studies in any way. Your literature review, in contrast, is going to be organized by major topics and not by individual studies. In fact, you may find that the same study appears in more than one of the subareas of your literature review.

You have the mechanism for creating a conceptual schema for your literature right in front of you. Go to your computer and make a list of the labels that are on your envelopes. Leave a couple of spaces between each of the labels as you type the list. Make the font for the list large—perhaps 26 point—and then print it out. Grab your scissors again, and cut the labels apart. Take the labels to your desk, a table, a bed, or the floor, and lay them out in any order in front of you. Begin to play around with the relationships you see among the topics represented in the labels. Maybe you have three different topics that are the major variables that have been studied. Lay out those three labels across the top of your space. Are there other labels or topics that belong under them? If so, position them in that order. Do you have some topics that disagree with a position? Some that agree? If so, group them together. Perhaps you discover that the literature can be organized by influences, components, functions, outcomes, models, different ways of doing something, steps in a process, perspectives on a phenomenon, or comparison and contrast. You can try out different ways of organizing the literature just by moving the labels into different patterns. Keep trying alternatives until you come up with a conceptual schema that encompasses all or most of the major labels and that seems to you to be the most effective way to tell the story of your literature.

There is no right or wrong conceptual schema for a body of literature. Someone else could review, code, and sort the same literature you did and come up with a very different conceptual schema from what you did. That is not a problem. You want to organize the literature in a way that makes sense to you, connects the major subjects covered in the literature, and helps you engage the theoretical conversation related to your research question in a coherent way. Developing your conceptual schema from the labels enables you to accomplish all of these objectives in a way that is grounded in your unique interpretation of the literature.

Writing the Literature Review

Let's assume that you now have your conceptual schema for your literature review. In other words, you have in front of you the labels that represent your envelopes arranged in this schema on the desk or floor in front of you. This layout is a visual representation of your conceptual schema. Take a picture of it with your phone so you won't forget it.

Choose a section of the literature review that you want to write. You can begin with any section because you know exactly what your sections are, how they relate to each other, and the order in which you want to discuss them. Find the envelope with the slips related to that topic, take them out of that envelope, and lay them out in front of you. Move them around and play with

different ways of arranging them to create a miniconceptual schema that presents the literature about that subarea. In other words, do the same thing you did with the whole literature review on a smaller scale, and arrange the excerpts or typed notes about that topic so that they make the argument you want to make about what the literature says in that subarea. As you review the slips, you undoubtedly will discover that some slips say the same thing. Group them together and then choose the one that says the idea best or the one that comes from the most credible source. If several sources make the same point, you can cite them in one parenthetical citation or a footnote following your discussion of that idea, alleviating the need to repeat the same idea multiple times. You'll also discover that some excerpts are not as relevant as you thought they would be to the topic and that you can leave them out.

What is left is a layout in front of you of the literature on a particular subarea you want to talk about in the order in which you want to talk about the ideas of that subarea. The excerpt or note you want to talk about first is at the top of your workspace, the second one next, and on down through all of the excerpts that remain from the envelope. Now comes the magical part because the literature review almost writes itself. Start with the first slip and type its content into your computer. Then type in what is on the second slip, the third slip, the fourth slip, and all the way through your layout. You are literally writing your way through your slips. Of course, you have to add introductions, overviews, your argument about the ideas on the slips, and transitions between them, but those are easy to write because you see your argument and know exactly where you are going. As a result, you are easily able to create the context necessary so that your essay of criticism can contribute to a theoretical conversation in the communication discipline.[1]

Writing the Essay

After you have analyzed your artifact, you are ready to write your essay of criticism. Think of doing the analysis and writing the essay as two separate processes. All of the thinking you have done and the steps you have gone through to conduct your analysis are not included in your essay. What you want to put on paper is the end result of your analysis so that you produce a coherent, well-argued essay that reports your insights. An essay of criticism includes five major components: (1) an introduction, in which you discuss the research question, its contribution to rhetorical theory, and its significance (this also includes your literature review if you are including one in your essay); (2) a description of your artifact and its context; (3) a description of your method of analysis; (4) a report of the findings of the analysis; and (5) a discussion of the contribution your analysis makes to rhetorical theory. These components do not need to be discussed in separate sections or identified with headings, but you want to include these topics in your essay in some way.

Introduction

Your task in the introduction to the essay is the task of the introduction of any paper. You want to orient the reader to the topic and present a clear state-

ment of purpose that organizes the essay. In the introduction, identify the research question the analysis answers. You don't have to state the question as an actual question in your essay—it often is stated as the purpose or thesis statement in your essay, using words such as "I will argue," "I will suggest," or "I will explore." If the research question you have formulated, for example, is "What are the functions of reality television for audiences?," you may want to state it in this way: "In this essay, I will explore how reality-television shows function for audiences to try to discover the appeal of such programs."

A major purpose of the introduction is to generate interest so that your readers will want to read your essay, even if they have no initial curiosity about your artifact. One way to invite them into the essay is by suggesting that they will learn something of importance to them. If possible, think of some real life examples of rhetorical processes with which your readers have had experience that relate to your analysis. If you are analyzing a speech by a member of the National Rifle Association to gun-control supporters, you might provide examples of individuals who have attempted to persuade those who hold views that are hostile to theirs. If you are analyzing a speech in which a rhetor attempts to synthesize two polarized positions, you might argue that this artifact is a model of how rhetors can create identification between opposing positions. Knowledge about how to do this, you can suggest, is important for managing conflict effectively between other opposing factions.

Another way to generate interest is by providing information about other studies that have been done on the artifact you are analyzing that are incomplete, inadequate, or do not provide a satisfactory explanation for it. If you are including a literature review in your essay, this is a logical way for you to generate interest. You can suggest that your study is important because it extends, elaborates on, builds on, challenges, or in some way adds to knowledge that already exists concerning a particular rhetorical process. When you discuss why the knowledge about the rhetorical process to which you are contributing is important, you are addressing the "so what?" question in research. This question asks you to consider why the reader should care about the topic and continue to read the essay.

Description of the Artifact

If the readers of your essay are to understand your analysis of an artifact, they must be somewhat familiar with the artifact itself. To acquaint readers with the artifact, provide a brief overview or summary of the artifact near the beginning of the essay. Give readers whatever information they need to understand the artifact and to be able to follow your analysis. If you are analyzing a film, for example, tell when the film was released and who directed it and provide an overview of the film's plot, major characters, and significant technical features. If you are analyzing a speech, include in the description of the artifact who gave the speech, on what occasion, and the date and place of the speech. You also want to provide the context for the artifact, locating it within the social, political, and economic arrangements of which it is a part. If, for example, you are analyzing a Harry Potter book or movie, give a brief explanation of the Harry Potter phenomenon—tell who the author of the books is, the number of books in

the series, the number of books sold, the amount of money generated at the box office by the films, and the controversies the phenomenon generated.

Your description of the artifact is, to some extent, an interpretation of the artifact. You cannot tell the reader everything about the artifact, so you must make decisions about what to feature in the description. In this process, you want to describe and thus to highlight aspects of the artifact that are most important for and relevant to the analysis that will follow. Do not describe the artifact in too much detail here. You will reveal a great deal about the artifact as you present the findings of your analysis, so details that will emerge later in your analysis do not need to be included in your overview. This is the place to provide a broad overview of the artifact, knowing that readers will become much more familiar with the details of your artifact later.

In the description of the artifact, also provide a justification for why that artifact is a particularly appropriate or useful one to analyze in order to answer your research question. Many different artifacts can be used for answering the same research question, so provide an explanation as to why analyzing your artifact is a good choice for explaining the specific rhetorical process your research question addresses. Many kinds of reasons can be used to justify your artifact. You might explain that the artifact is historically important or represents a larger set of similar texts that are culturally significant. Perhaps the artifact you are analyzing has won many prestigious awards or has been highly successful in generating money. Maybe the artifact has reached large numbers of people or created an unusual response. Perhaps the rhetorical techniques used in the artifact are highly unusual and warrant exploration to explain their results.

Description of the Method

You need to cover one more topic to complete readers' understanding of what will happen in the essay—a description of the method you used to analyze the artifact. Identify the method you are using, explain who created the method (if one person is identifiable with the method), define its key concepts, and briefly lay out its basic procedures. If you are using the fantasy-theme method of criticism, for example, your description might include mention of its creator, Ernest Bormann; a definition of its basic terms, *fantasy theme* and *rhetorical vision*; and a brief explanation of the major critical processes involved in the method.

Report of the Findings of the Analysis

The report of the findings of your analysis constitutes the bulk of the essay. In this section, lay out for readers the results of your analysis of the artifact. Tell what you discovered from an application of the method of criticism to the artifact and provide support for your discoveries using the data of the artifact. If you used pentadic analysis as your method, for example, you would identify the terms of *act*, *purpose*, *agent*, *agency*, and *scene* for your artifact. If you analyzed the artifact using the fantasy-theme method, this section would be organized around the fantasy themes of settings, characters, and actions evident in your artifact and the rhetorical vision they create.

Bring in relevant literature as you explain your findings to elaborate on or extend your ideas. Be sure that you feature your ideas in your analysis section, though, and make the topic statements of your paragraphs about *your* ideas and not echoes of the ideas of others. Any theories or concepts you believe are relevant to your analysis should be used to support, elaborate on, and extend your ideas. Don't let the ideas of others subsume yours.

If you used the technique of cutting apart your observations on individual strips of paper in the coding step, you have available to you a very easy way to write up your analysis. Organize the piles in the order in which you want to talk about the components of your findings. When you are ready to write a section of your analysis, take the pile relevant to the topic of the section and sort the strips of paper within it, laying out the pieces in the order in which you want to discuss ideas and examples and eliminating those you decide not to include in your essay. As you write, connect the topics of the strips with transitions, previews, summaries, and interpretations.

The approach of cutting apart and organizing your observations makes writing up your essay easy. You have the freedom to write the sections of the analysis in any order—you do not have to begin with the first component of the schema. Each pile contains all of your ideas relevant to a section; you do not need to see what happens in one section to be able to write the next. Another advantage of this system is that you cannot lose track of where you are because the ideas of your schema are clearly organized, and all the content you want to discuss is identified and waiting in the piles.[2]

Contribution to Rhetorical Theory

Your essay ends with a discussion of the contribution your analysis makes to rhetorical theory. This contribution is your answer to your research question. At this point in the essay, move away from your specific artifact and answer your research question more generally and abstractly. Transcend the specific data of your artifact to focus on the rhetorical processes with which you are concerned. Suggest to your readers how your analysis of your artifact contributes to an understanding of the larger rhetorical process with which your essay is concerned, discussing the implications or significance of the contribution you mentioned in the introduction.

Your contribution to rhetorical theory is likely to be made in one of two ways: identifying new concepts or identifying new relationships among concepts. Concepts and relationships are the two basic elements of theories. Concepts are the components, elements, or variables the theory is about. The concepts tell what you are looking at and what you consider important. Statements of relationship are explanations about how the concepts are related to one another. They identify patterns in the relationships among variables or concepts, and they tell how concepts are connected. One rhetorical theory concerning the process of credibility, for example, suggests that, to be credible, a rhetor must demonstrate intelligence, moral character, and good will toward the audience. The concepts of the theory are intelligence, moral character, and good will, and the theory posits that all three of these concepts, interacting together and displayed in an artifact itself, contribute to an audi-

ence's perception that the rhetor is credible; this is a statement of relationships. Your analysis can contribute to rhetorical theory, then, by identifying important concepts in a rhetorical process, by suggesting how concepts relate to one another, or by doing both.

Although you cannot generalize your findings to other artifacts like yours or to artifacts characterized by similar rhetorical processes on the basis of your one essay of criticism, you still can make a contribution to rhetorical theory. David Zarefsky calls this kind of contribution a "theory of the particular case" and suggests that "studying individual cases can yield generalizable insights. The resulting generalizations will have but modest explanatory and predictive power because they abstract out only the common elements of complex individual situations and because the situations to which one might predict are likewise complex and individual."[3] But your analysis allows you to suggest a theory that "more fully encompasses the case than do the alternatives." You are able to provide an initial general understanding of some aspect of rhetoric on the basis of the necessarily limited evidence available in the artifact.[4] Your analysis can provide you with hunches or presumptions about new cases. If you discover that a rhetor who is trying to reassure a group of people uses particular kinds of metaphors to do so, you might guess that other rhetors trying to do the same thing might do so as well. Should you discover, in a follow-up essay of criticism, a different case of reassurance—the rhetor does not use the same kinds of metaphors you identified earlier—you now have something more to figure out in terms of how reassurance works.

The idea that you can and should make a contribution to rhetorical theory in an essay of criticism makes many beginning rhetorical critics uncomfortable. You may feel as though you are not expert enough to develop a theory or to contribute to an understanding of how rhetoric works. Perhaps you feel that you have not yet earned the right to make such contributions because you are still a student. You are an expert, however, in your way of seeing—in the application of your perspective on the world. You have applied a method of criticism and coded your artifact from your unique perspective. This is a perspective that belongs to no one else. You will see things in an artifact that no one else sees, and making a contribution to rhetorical theory is the way by which you can share that unique perspective and offer a new understanding of an artifact. Also remember that the perspective you share with others is not coming out of thin air—you will have the backing of the careful and systematic analysis you have completed as the basis on which to make your contribution to rhetorical theory.

Applying the Analysis in Activism

For some rhetorical critics, there is a final step of criticism that goes beyond writing an essay of criticism that makes a contribution to an understanding of a rhetorical process. They see critics as change agents whose role is to use the criticism they produce to engage in activism. They want critics to use their criticism to transform society in some way. For these critics, the "larger, general public" is an audience for criticism[5] just as much as scholars in the

communication discipline because the critic should not simply try to "understand or explain society but to critique and change it."[6] For critics who choose to be activists, the objective is to challenge the "norms, practices, relations, and structures that underwrite inequality and injustice."[7] They want their criticism to *"make a difference in the world"* by addressing the questions, *"How do we live, and how might we live differently?"*[8] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell summarizes this position by explaining that "criticism plays a crucial role in the processes of testing, questioning, and analyzing by which discourses advocating truth and justice may, in fact, become more powerful than their opposites."[9]

Critics who adopt an activist stance justify this step in the process of criticism by pointing out that "research is never a politically neutral act. The decision to study *this* group rather than some other, to frame the research question *this* way rather than another, and to report the findings to *this group* or in *that journal* rather than in some other forum privilege certain values, institutions, and practices."[10] As a result, whether the authors claim to be doing so or not, they are producing criticism that is either contributing to the transformation of society into a more equitable and humane culture, or they are reinforcing and reifying the status quo. As Samuel L. Becker explains, "The major question most of us face in our lives as scholars is not whether our research should be useful; it is, rather, what it should be useful for and for whom it should be useful."[11] Others justify the activist stance for rhetorical critics by pointing to the fact that communication inherently is a practical discipline that yields useful knowledge. They note that the historical roots of the discipline of communication "were grounded in producing useful knowledge, such as teaching people to become better speakers in their everyday interactions and in the public sphere."[12]

There are a number of ways in which your essay of criticism may function as an instrument of change. Your findings, for example, may help explain and demystify the rhetorical practices that sustain inequality and oppression. By identifying and pointing to these rhetorical practices, you can help others see how inequality is constructed and encourage individuals to create alternative rhetorical practices that create different conditions. If you have analyzed protest rhetoric of some kind, your essay might point to the practices that are effective and ineffective in efforts to create change, and your findings may be used to create more effective campaigns for social change or to elect certain political candidates. If you are analyzing the rhetoric of groups who voices are not often heard, you can help bring those "forgotten or silenced voices"[13] into the dialogue to provide a more comprehensive perspective on an issue and more innovative and workable solutions to it. As Raymie E. McKerrow suggests, you can use what you have learned to "identify the possibilities of future action available."[14]

If you choose to be an activist critic, you have a number of possibilities for disseminating the results of a rhetorical analysis. You can begin by enacting what you have learned from your critical analyses in your own life. If you have learned about strategies for creating a more equitable and humane world from your analysis of certain kinds of rhetoric, you can enact those strategies in your own life. You also have the option of interacting with friends, family, and colleagues about the results of your analyses, encouraging those around you to

consider how the symbolic practices they encounter and their own use of symbols affect their everyday lives. You can share your findings in more formal ways with others—on a website or blog, for example, or by writing an op-ed piece for a newspaper.[15] If you are a teacher, you can make use of your findings in educational settings, teaching best practices about the nature and function of rhetoric and the ways in which rhetoric creates worlds. You may choose to work on a political campaign or on behalf of a movement for some kind of social change. Your knowledge of rhetorical criticism can help you analyze the messages from those who oppose your perspective, analyze those that the campaign is producing, and design more effective messaging for the public audience. If your focus is on an analysis of silenced voices, you can share your findings about the rhetoric of these individuals with policy makers and stakeholders involved in an issue, and you also can share your findings with those who are silenced, encouraging them to understand their own rhetorical choices and to develop their own responses and interventions into discourse that silences them. In various ways, then, as an activist rhetorical critic, you "furnish inspiration and directions toward more promising ways of life."[16]

Assessing the Essay

What makes one essay of criticism better than another? By what standards is an essay of criticism judged? Rhetorical criticism is a different kind of research from quantitative research, so it is not judged by the standards that are used for such research. In quantitative research, the basic standards of evaluation are validity and reliability. Validity is concerned with whether researchers are measuring what they claim they are measuring, and reliability has to do with the replicability of results if the same set of objects is measured repeatedly with the same or comparable measuring instruments. In contrast, the standards of evaluation in rhetorical criticism are justification, reasonable inference, and coherence.

The standards used in rhetorical criticism to judge analyses of artifacts are rooted in two primary assumptions. One assumption is that objective reality does not exist. As discussed in chapter 1, those of us who study rhetoric believe that reality is constituted through the rhetoric we use to talk about it; reality is a symbolic creation. Thus, the artifact you are analyzing does not constitute a reality that can be known and proved. You cannot know what the artifact "really" means or how it "really" works because there are as many realities about the artifact as there are critics and vocabularies from which to conduct inquiry about it.

A second assumption on which the standards of rhetorical criticism are built is very much related to the first: A critic can know an artifact only through a personal interpretation of it. You cannot be objective, impartial, and removed from the data because you bring to the critical task particular values and experiences that are reflected in how you see and write about that artifact. As a result of these assumptions, your task as a critic is to offer one perspective on an artifact—one possible way of viewing it. You are not concerned with finding the true, correct, or right interpretation of an artifact. Consequently,

two critics may analyze the same artifact, ask the same research question, and come up with different conclusions. One might interpret an artifact as the reframing of an issue, another as a visual metaphor of juxtaposition, and another as the creation of a compelling rhetorical vision. As David Zarefsky notes, "These interpretations are different but compatible. Each of them may offer valuable insight on the case, enabling criticism to proceed additively rather than only by substituting one explanation for another."[17] The essays of criticism the two critics write, then, both can be excellent essays of criticism.

Justification

The primary standard used in judging an essay of criticism is justification—the argument made by a critic.[18] You must be able to justify what you say or offer reasons in support of the claims you make in your report of your findings. All of the ways in which we judge arguments, then, apply to judgments about the quality of a critical essay. You must have a claim—the conclusion of the argument you are seeking to justify. The claim is the answer to the question, "Where are we going?" You must provide evidence to support the claim you are making and have sufficient evidence from the artifact to back up your claim. This evidence constitutes the grounds of your argument—the data from the artifact on which the argument is based. Grounds provide the answer to the question, "What do we have to go on?"

The easiest way for an audience to see that the artifact is as you claim it to be is to use ample quotations from a discursive artifact and ample descriptions of the dimensions of a visual or musical one. You also must quote the evidence accurately, and the evidence you cite should be representative of the artifact as a whole. This standard of adequate, accurate documentation requires that what you say exists in an artifact is, in fact, there.

Reasonable Inference

A second standard by which essays of criticism are judged is reasonable inference. What this means is that you must show how you moved from the data of the artifact to the claims you are making. As you write your essay, you must show the reader how the claims you make can reasonably be inferred from your data. If, for example, you suggest that the straight lines on a building suggest rigidity, you would want to explain how you inferred rigidity from straight lines—perhaps because of their "straight-and-narrow" nature or their visual lack of variation and deviation.

What you are doing here is explicating the warrants of your claim in your argument. The warrant authorizes movement from the grounds to the claim and answers the question, "How do we justify the move from these grounds to that claim?"[19] Although your readers must be able to follow you from the data to your claims, they do not have to agree with those claims—they do not have to come up with the same claims that you did to judge your essay to be rigorous or excellent. Each critic brings a unique framework and biases to the process, so complete agreement on the interpretation of an artifact is not likely. Your readers, however, should be able to see and appreciate how you arrived at your claims.

Coherence

A third criterion by which essays of rhetorical criticism are judged is coherence. You must order, arrange, and present your findings so that they form a unified whole, created through clear and logical links among ideas and structure. Coherence requires that a critic do sufficient analysis of the findings to present them in an insightful and useful way. If you are doing a metaphoric analysis, for example, you could report your findings as a list of the metaphors used by the rhetor in the artifact. To satisfy the criterion of coherence, however, you would engage in an additional act of analysis. You would want to organize the metaphors into categories and provide an interpretation of those categories within a coherent framework. The act of presenting your findings in a coherent way usually provides many more insights into your artifact than simply listing the findings.

Parallel constructs and labels for your findings create coherence as well—the labels should be parallel in terms of level of abstraction and language. If your findings include three major strategies, those strategies should be equally concrete or abstract, equally specific or general, and their wording should match one another in length, tone, and type of vocabulary. For example, you would not want as the names for the three rhetorical strategies you discovered as a result of your analysis to be labeled *asks for forgiveness, justification for having committed the crime of murder the past year,* and *individuals making themselves vulnerable.* The strategy of *justification* is much longer and more concrete than the other two strategies, and they all use different verb forms. The third one names someone involved, while the others do not. More parallel labels would be labels such as *requesting forgiveness, justifying the crime,* and *being vulnerable.*

The criteria for evaluating an essay of criticism point to the essence of rhetorical criticism as an art, not a science. In rhetorical criticism, artifacts are dealt with more as the artist deals with experience than as the scientist does. As a rhetorical critic, you are required to bring a variety of creative abilities to bear throughout the process of rhetorical criticism—helping the reader envision and experience an artifact as you do, conveying your interest in and perhaps passion for an artifact, persuading readers to view the artifact's contribution to rhetorical theory as you do, offering a compelling invitation to readers to experience some aspect of the world in a new way, and writing in a way that is not dull.[20]

What Comes Next

The chapters that follow are designed to provide additional guidelines for you to use as a rhetorical critic. They provide formal methods of rhetorical criticism that will give you practice developing your skills in the art of rhetorical criticism. To help you become comfortable with the critical process and to learn to produce excellent criticism, the chapters include four components, each offering a different opportunity for exploring the method and the kinds of insights it can produce for an artifact.

Each chapter begins with a theoretical overview of the critical method, including a discussion of its origins, assumptions, and units of analysis. The second part of the chapter details the procedures or steps for applying the method to an artifact. This is followed by sample essays in which the method has been used. Some of the sample essays were written by students who were just learning about criticism, as you are, and some were written by seasoned rhetorical critics. If you are a beginning critic with no experience in rhetorical criticism, you will find that the essays by the students are shorter, simpler, and more accessible, but all of the essays were selected because they model the application of a method with particular clarity. You also will notice that all but one of the chapters contain as a sample an essay that analyzes the same artifact—the speech given by Jiang Zemin, the president of the People's Republic of China, at the ceremony at which the United Kingdom handed Hong Kong over to China in 1997. All of these were written by Andrew Gilmore to show how the various methods of criticism produce different kinds of insights into the same artifact, revealing some aspects of the artifact and concealing others. Each chapter includes a list of additional samples of essays in which the method of the chapter has been used. This list can be found on the book's webpage at www.waveland.com. It will give you many places to go for inspiration and models when you are writing your own essays of criticism.

Eight of the chapters are organized alphabetically: cluster, fantasy-theme, feminist, generic, ideological, metaphoric, narrative, and pentadic criticism. The steps in the process of rhetorical criticism discussed in this chapter are repeated in each of these eight chapters to provide a basic framework for criticism that remains constant regardless of your method, artifact, or research question. The exceptions to this alphabetic organization are the chapters on neo-Aristotelian criticism and generative criticism. Neo-Aristotelian criticism is presented first because it was the first method of criticism developed in the communication field and was assumed to be the only method of criticism possible for many years. It thus served, in a sense, as an exigency to which the other formal methods responded. It differs from the others in that it dictates a particular end for criticism, and it is rarely used by rhetorical critics today. The chapter on generative criticism concludes the book because it involves a different process for doing criticism than the process presented in the other chapters. In the generative approach, a critic does not begin with particular units of analysis and generates a method or an explanatory schema from the data of the artifact itself. Generative criticism is an advanced approach to criticism that you will be ready to try after you have gained practice in criticism by using some of the formal methods of criticism.

You are about to embark on the exciting adventure that is rhetorical criticism. If you are like most rhetorical critics, you will find yourself engaged, intrigued, inspired, and sometimes frustrated and baffled as you work through critical methods and analyze artifacts. The process of rhetorical criticism is demanding and difficult, but it is also fun. It is a skill that makes you more aware of the communication processes at work in the world, and it will enable you to analyze the worlds others have created. More important, it enables you to choose more deliberately the symbolic worlds that you yourself inhabit as you become more conscious of how you want your own world to be.

Notes

[1] Much of this description of the process of conducting a literature review comes from: Sonja K. Foss and William Waters, *Destination Dissertation: A Traveler's Guide to a Done Dissertation*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), ch. 5. It also provides a much more detailed description of the process.

[2] For a more detailed description of this process of coding your artifact, see Foss and Waters, *Destination Dissertation*, ch. 7.

[3] David Zarefsky, "Knowledge Claims in Rhetorical Criticism," *Journal of Communication* 58 (2008): 635.

[4] David Zarefsky, "The State of the Art in Public Address," in *Texts in Context: Critical Dialogues on Significant Episodes in American Political Rhetoric*, ed. Michael C. Leff and Fred J. Kauffeld (Davis, CA: Hermagoras, 1989), 22–23.

[5] William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary A. Copeland, "Professionalization and the Eclipse of Critical Invention," in *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and the Criticism of Discourse and Media*, ed. William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary A. Copeland (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 43.

[6] Lawrence R. Frey and Kevin M. Carragee, "Introduction: Communication Activism as Engaged Scholarship," in *Communication Activism: Volume 1: Communication for Social Change*, ed. Lawrence R. Frey and Kevin M. Carragee (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2007), 6.

[7] Lawrence R. Frey, W. Barnett Pearce, Mark A. Pollock, Lee Artz, and Bren A. O. Murphy, "Looking for Justice in All the Wrong Places: On a Communication Approach to Social Justice," *Communication Studies* 47 (Spring-Summer 1996): 110.

[8] Stephen John Hartnett, "Communication, Social Justice, and Joyful Commitment," *Western Journal of Communication* 74 (January-February 2010): 69–70.

[9] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "'Conventional Wisdom—Traditional Form': A Rejoinder," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58 (December 1972): 454.

[10] Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz, and Murphy, "Looking for Justice in All the Wrong Places," 114.

[11] Samuel L. Becker, "Response to Conquergood: Don Quixotes in the Academy—Are We Tilting at Windmills?," in *Applied Communication in the 21st Century*, ed. Kenneth N. Cissna (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995), 102.

[12] Frey and Carragee, "Introduction," 2.

[13] Hartnett, "Communication, Social Justice, and Joyful Commitment," 77.

[14] Raymie E. McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989): 92.

[15] These options are suggested by Barry Brummett in *Techniques of Close Reading* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 21–25.

[16] Kenneth J. Gergen, Ruthellen Josselson, and Mark Freeman, "The Promises of Qualitative Inquiry," *American Psychologist* 70 (January 2015): 5.

[17] Zarefsky, "Knowledge Claims in Rhetorical Criticism," 636.

[18] A good discussion of the role of argument in rhetorical criticism is provided by Wayne Brockriede, "Rhetorical Criticism as Argument," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60 (April 1974): 165–74. Barbara A. Larson suggests that Stephen Toulmin's model of argument can be used to connect data and claims in rhetorical criticism in "Method in Rhetorical Criticism: A Pedagogical Approach and Proposal," *Central States Speech Journal* 27 (Winter 1976): 297–301.

[19] Claims, grounds, and warrants are components of the layout of an argument suggested by Stephen Toulmin. For more information about his model of argument, see: Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1958); Stephen Toulmin, Richard Rieke, and Alan Janik, *An Introduction to Reasoning* (New York: Macmillan, 1984); and Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, 4th ed. (30th anniversary edition) (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2014), ch. 5.

[20] For more detailed discussions of standards for judging rhetorical criticism, see: Sonja K. Foss, "Criteria for Adequacy in Rhetorical Criticism," *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 48 (Spring 1983): 283–95; and Philip Wander and Steven Jenkins, "Rhetoric, Society, and the Critical Response," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58 (December 1972): 441–50.