

# Analyzing *Wikipedia*: Questions for Analysis

Below, you'll find questions to help you introduce digital rhetorical analysis in your classroom. These questions are tailored to analyzing *Wikipedia*, but they can be readily transformed for other forms of visual and digital analysis.

## Questions for Introducing *Wikipedia* in the Classroom:

- What is *Wikipedia*?
- If you have used *Wikipedia* before, how have you used it?
- Have you ever edited a page of *Wikipedia*? (If so: what did you change?)
- What assumptions do people have about *Wikipedia*? What assumptions do you have?
- What are the goals of *Wikipedia*?
- Why/how is *Wikipedia* different from any other type of encyclopedia?

## Questions for Rhetorical Analysis, Aristotelian and otherwise:

- Who authors *Wikipedia*? (How might we define the "authors" of the articles?)
- How do *Wikipedia* articles develop a sense of authorial *ethos*? In other words, how does the site encourage us to trust the accuracy and reliability of the information?
- Under what conditions should we question the reliability, accuracy, or verifiability of an article?
- What do you know about *Wikipedia* users by perusing the site? What are their expectations?
- What is the expressed purpose of *Wikipedia*?
- What other functions does the site serve? For whom?
- In what ways is this site effective for its purpose/function? When does it fail, and how can it be improved?

## Questions for Analyzing Design:

- What does *Wikipedia* look like? Describe its layout, color schemes, organization, font choices, and so on.
- What kinds of images appear in *Wikipedia*? How do these images relate to the text?
- What types of conventions does the design follow?
- In what ways does the design of the site seem similar to print reference resources? In what ways is it more like digital resources?

## Harder Questions Merging Rhetorical Analysis and Design:

- How does the site's design reflect its goals/purpose/function?
- What kind of *ethos* is established by the design? (For example, when does it act more like a website and when does it act more like a print resource? What can we learn about its values based on these design choices?)
- In what ways can a user interact with a *Wikipedia* article?
- What are the implications of this user interaction? (How does the interaction develop power relationships, for example? How does it limit users, and how does it enable them?)



## Essay 1: Rhetorical Analysis English 102

**Due:** February 17  
**Length:** Approx. 4-6 pages  
**Peer Review:** February 10-12

In this essay, you will conduct an in-depth rhetorical analysis of a text. You may choose the text you analyze, but you should study an artifact that presents, reproduces, or advances knowledge. Such texts include, but are not limited to, scholarly articles, documentaries, encyclopedias, biographies, and government reports or studies. Ultimately, your essay should evaluate the effectiveness of the text's strategies given its rhetorical situation. You should explain how the text's appeals meet, or fail to meet, the needs and expectations of its rhetorical situation. Remember that the question of effectiveness is often debatable; a piece might be very effective for one audience and completely ineffectual for another.

Rhetorical analysis involves a focused, specific consideration of a text's speaker, audience, message, purpose, context, design, and rhetorical appeals and strategies. In other words, your analysis should examine what, how, and for whom your text conveys its message or argument. There are many ways of discussing these aspects in any rhetorical situation, and you should engage a variety of analytical techniques. Our class discussions and the assigned reading will help you develop an in-depth, sophisticated argument which considers your chosen piece from multiple angles of rhetorical analysis.

Your essay should be organized around a central thesis which discusses the rhetorical effectiveness of your chosen text. A successful rhetorical analysis will engage a variety of techniques for evaluating a text's rhetorical strategies. Additionally, you should strive to present your ideas in clear, organized, and effective prose directed to an academic audience.

### Writing & Learning Objectives:

- To demonstrate an applied understanding of rhetorical analysis
- To develop an awareness of the role of medium/form in argument developments
- To advance a writing style and tone conducive to critical rhetorical analysis
- To apply an awareness of your essay's rhetorical situation through your writing and revision

### Texts to Consider Analyzing

See D2L for live links to each of these works. You do NOT have to choose from this list; it is simply a sample of texts to give you an idea of the genres available for analysis. I will ask you to write a proposal for your choice of texts early in the unit; you may propose to study any kind of knowledge-building text, so long as you make a strong case for analyzing it.

Websites: *Wikipedia* <<http://www.wikipedia.org/>>  
*Encyclopedia Britannica Online* <<http://www.britannica.com/>>  
*Citizendium.org* <[http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/Welcome\\_to\\_Citizendium](http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/Welcome_to_Citizendium)>

Studies, Reports: *The 9/11 Commission Report*  
<[www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf)>  
*The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*  
<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/reports/katrina-lessons-learned/>>

Scholarly Articles: Naghibi, Nima and Andrew O'Malley. "Estranging the Familiar: 'East' and 'West' in Satrapi's *Persepolis*." *ESC* 31.2-3 (June/Sept. 2005): 223-48.

Trachtenberg, Alan. "Mirror in the Marketplace: American Responses to the Daguerreotype." *The Daguerreotype*. Ed. John Wood. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1989. 60-73.

## Essay 1: Comparative Rhetorical Analysis English 104H

In this essay, you will compare the rhetorical strategies of two texts. You may choose the texts you analyze, but one must be a scholarly source and both must present, reproduce, or advance knowledge dealing with similar subject matters. Such texts include, but are not limited to, scholarly articles, documentaries, encyclopedias, biographies, and government reports or studies. You should choose texts that provide an interesting difference in terms of their rhetorical choices and strategies. Ultimately, your essay should evaluate the role that rhetorical situation plays in the construction and production of texts.

As you construct this essay, you will submit 2 shorter rhetorical analyses, one for each text. Your final essay will shift its focus: you will merge the individual analyses in order to discuss the way context informs rhetorical choices. Rhetorical analysis involves a focused consideration of a text's speaker, audience, message, purpose, context, design, and rhetorical appeals and strategies. In other words, your analysis of each text should examine what, how, and for whom your text conveys its message or argument. Our class discussions and the assigned reading will help you develop an in-depth, sophisticated argument which considers your chosen piece from multiple angles of rhetorical analysis.

Your final essay should be organized around a central thesis that develops a meaningful comparison between your two texts. A successful rhetorical analysis will engage a variety of techniques for evaluating a text's rhetorical strategies. You should strive to present your ideas in clear, organized, and effective prose directed to an academic audience.

### Writing & Learning Objectives:

- To demonstrate an applied understanding of rhetorical analysis
- To distinguish between different types of discourse communities in terms of scholarship expectations and audience awareness
- To develop an awareness of the role of medium/form in argument developments
- To advance a writing style and tone conducive to critical rhetorical analysis
- To apply an awareness of your essay's rhetorical situation through your writing and revision

### Texts to Consider Analyzing

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See D2L for live links to each of these works. You do NOT have to choose from this list; it is simply a sample of texts to give you an idea of the genres available for analysis. You should choose texts that are both similar and different—your work will be easier, say, if both texts discuss a similar subject but do so for different audiences or genres.

Websites:                    *Wikipedia* <<http://www.wikipedia.org/> >  
                                  *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* < <http://www.britannica.com/>>  
                                  *Citizendium.org* <[http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/Welcome\\_to\\_Citizendium](http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/Welcome_to_Citizendium)>

Studies, Reports:        *The 9/11 Commission Report*  
                                  <[www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf)>  
                                  *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*  
                                  < <http://www.whitehouse.gov/reports/katrina-lessons-learned/>>

Scholarly Articles:    Byerly, Carolyn. "After September 11: The Formation of an Oppositional Discourse." *Feminist Media Studies* 5.3 (Nov. 2005): 281-96.

                                  Naghibi, Nima and Andrew O'Malley. "Estranging the Familiar: 'East' and 'West' in Satrapi's *Persepolis*." *ESC* 31.2-3 (June/Sept. 2005): 223-48.

                                  Trachtenberg, Alan. "Mirror in the Marketplace: American Responses to the Daguerreotype." *The Daguerreotype*. Ed. John Wood. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1989. 60-73.

**Essay 1: Comparative Rhetorical Analysis  
English 104H**

**Essay 1 Assignment Schedule**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Due</b>	<b>Grade Weight</b>	<b>Length</b>
<b>Text 1 Analysis:</b>	<b>January 29</b>	<b>4% final grade</b>	<b>2-3 pages</b>
<b>Text 2 Analysis:</b>	<b>February 10</b>	<b>6% final grade</b>	<b>2-3 pages</b>
<b>Rough Draft:</b>	<b>February 19</b>	<b>daily grade/peer review</b>	<b>5-8 pages</b>
<b>Final Draft:</b>	<b>February 26</b>	<b>15% final grade</b>	<b>4-7 pages</b>

## Essay 2

### Researched Essay: *Wikipedia's Most Wanted*

**Due: April 2**

**Peer Review: March 26 & March 21**

#### **Assignment:**

This assignment asks you to develop a researched essay using reliable, academic sources in preparation for your third assignment, which will be to publish your article to *Wikipedia*.<sup>1</sup> Your task is to research a topic that needs expansion in *Wikipedia*. Your essay should present a balanced, reliable, and comprehensive narrative of your chosen topic. You should strive to equitably represent all major existing viewpoints on the issue, a task that requires you to rhetorically assess your sources for their credibility and their goal or purpose.

Rather than developing a more traditional argumentative thesis for this essay, you will need to find a way of organizing your essay as a balanced discussion of available research about your topic. We will discuss methods and view examples of this type of writing throughout this unit.

Begin selecting a topic by looking through *Wikipedia's* lists of article "stubs" and its "Requested Articles" pages. From there, your group should choose a topic for your research. I recommend that each group member tackle a sub-topic of the larger topic that will become Essay 3. We might even choose to publish only one page as a class, with each group adding just one part of the larger amount of research. We will decide how to share the research early in the unit. The most important part of choosing a topic is to be sure that it is *researchable* within our available resources.

#### **Learning & Writing Objectives:**

- To demonstrate scholarly research skills using UA resources
- To balance competing or conflicting sources and voices in a single essay
- To attain the highest standard of academic citation and documentation conventions
- To prepare a reliable, verifiable, and neutral discussion of your chosen topic

#### **Source & Citation Requirements**

Your sources must represent at least four scholars ("scholarly" or "academic" sources). All other sources you use must be reliable and authoritative; we'll discuss what this means as we work through the research unit. A major objective of this assignment is to develop a firm understanding of how to use sources in academic discourse. By the end of this unit, you should feel confident using electronic and print resources available to you through the library, and you should be able to follow a citation style (in our case, MLA) by using a style manual. This means that your paper should demonstrate the ability to correctly cite a variety of kinds of sources, both in-text and in a Works Cited page. (You'll find that other disciplines use different citation styles. The important thing is to learn how to follow the guidelines for citing sources—once you can accurately use MLA style, you'll be able to translate that skill to other citation styles.) In addition, you will summarize, paraphrase, and quote a variety of sources. Your paper should clearly distinguish between your voice and between the voices of all of the sources you incorporate; we'll discuss various strategies for making these distinctions during this writing unit.

#### **Examples of topics that need expansion:**

Descrambling electronic devices, design noir, meat preservation, paralympic cycling, radical criminology...the list is long and varied. You should choose a topic that best suits the academic and personal interests of all of your group members.

#### **Wikipedia's Lists of Requested Articles:**

"Articles for Creation" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Articles\\_for\\_creation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Articles_for_creation)

"Lists of Controversial Articles" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List\\_of\\_controversial\\_issues](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_controversial_issues)

"Requested Articles" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requested\\_articles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requested_articles)

"Requests for Expansion" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requests\\_for\\_expansion/Archive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requests_for_expansion/Archive)

"SkySmith's Lists of Missing Articles"

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Missing\\_encyclopedic\\_articles/Skysmith%27s\\_list\\_of\\_missing\\_articles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Missing_encyclopedic_articles/Skysmith%27s_list_of_missing_articles)

"StubSorting" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Stub\\_sorting/Stub\\_types](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Stub_sorting/Stub_types)

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<sup>1</sup> You will each write your own essay for Essay 2, but you will work and write as a group for Essay 3.

## Essay 3 We, the Wikipedians

**Due: April 28**

**Peer Review: April 23**

**Post-Publication Review (live on *Wikipedia*): April 30**

### **Assignment**

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For your third essay, you will be working in a group to introduce your research from Essay 2 in a public arena. Specifically, I ask that you revise, rewrite, and submit your essay as an article for *Wikipedia* or for *Citizendium*. In addition, you will each write a 2-page reflective essay discussing the rhetorical implications of rewriting your research for this new venue. What changes did you make as you wrote for a new audience? Did your purpose in writing change? How did your rhetorical situation affect your presentation of your ethos?

Performing this task will require that you have a solid understanding of the conventions, guidelines, and objectives of *Wikipedia*. Please review the provided *Wikipedia* articles as you begin to review these requirements. As a class, we will develop an evaluative rubric that determines your article's readiness for publication. Together, this rubric and my evaluation of your reflective essay will constitute your grade for Essay 3.

A cornerstone of *Wikipedia's* editorial policy is that all "articles and other encyclopedic content must be written from a neutral point of view (NPOV), representing fairly, and as far as possible without bias, all significant views that have been published by reliable sources" ("NPOV"). It should be your goal to work within this integral policy as you revise your work for publication. In addition, you should strive to meet *Wikipedia's* other editorial policies, including verifiability, reliability, and respecting intellectual/copyright ownership dictates.

Your final exam will be to present your Wikipedia article at the Writing Program Showcase in May.

### **Learning and Writing Objectives:**

- To prepare a reliable, verifiable, and neutral discussion of your chosen topic
- To reflect a solid understanding of *Wikipedia's* conventions and requirements for publication
- To add to the public knowledge of your chosen topic
- To work collaboratively to develop a high-quality researched document
- To demonstrate a strong awareness of your rhetorical situation through your authorial choices

### **Getting Started: The Conventions of *Wikipedia***

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"About Wikipedia" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Contributing\\_to\\_Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Contributing_to_Wikipedia)

"About Citizendium" <http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/CZ:About>

"Academic Use" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Academic\\_use](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Academic_use)

"Citizendium Fundamental Policies" <http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/CZ:Fundamentals>

"CZ Content Policy" [http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/CZ:Content\\_Policy](http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/CZ:Content_Policy)

"Guidelines for Controversial Articles"

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Guidelines\\_for\\_controversial\\_articles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Guidelines_for_controversial_articles)

"Neutral Point of View" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia\\_talk:Neutral\\_point\\_of\\_view](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Neutral_point_of_view)

"Notability Guidelines" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Your\\_first\\_article](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Your_first_article)

"Wikipedia Naming Conventions"

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Naming\\_conventions\\_\(common\\_names\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Naming_conventions_(common_names))

"WikiProject: Missing Encyclopedic Articles"

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_Missing\\_encyclopedic\\_articles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Missing_encyclopedic_articles)

"Words to Avoid" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Words\\_to\\_avoid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Words_to_avoid)

"Your First Article" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Your\\_first\\_article](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Your_first_article)