



Overview: This lesson requires students to read five columns by one national columnist. They write a brief summary of each column paying close attention to the rhetorical strategies used by the columnist and the arguments presented. The final assignment is to write a formal argument paper. Students should be familiar with rhetorical analysis and Aristotelian appeals BEFORE starting this lesson. If necessary, you can use the PowerPoint in the 11-12 Reading Information folder, "What is Rhetoric," to introduce Aristotelian appeals. (Lesson Duration: Several days up to several weeks depending on the student's familiarity with rhetorical analysis.)

Lesson Extension: You may extend this lesson by having the students write their OWN article in the style of the columnist they have researched. See the handout in this folder, "How to Write a Column."

Standards:

RI.11-12.6. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

W.11-12.1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Objectives:

- Understand and analyze tone
- Analyze rhetorical strategies
- Understand the language of formal argument
- Write a formal summary
- Write a formal argument paper

Materials:

- Handout "Columnists" (in this folder)
- Handout "How to Structure an Argument" (in this folder)
- Rubric for Precis (in this folder)
- PowerPoint "What is Rhetoric?"

Procedure: *(The following activity is written for the student. You can use it as a handout for your students)*



The Columnist Project

The Assignment: As a means of keeping abreast of public discourse issues, you are required to follow a national columnist in a newspaper or magazine. You must collect **five** columns from your author. The more recent the pieces are- the better. You may choose from the list of columnists I have provided or choose your own.

Your assignment has three parts:

- I. Each article must be annotated for the following:
 - a. Speaker's tone and possible shifts in tone
 - b. Rhetorical strategies
 - c. Organization and arrangement
 - d. Aristotelian appeals

*MARK places in the text that evoke a reaction from you, be it laughter, anger or confusion.

Some good questions to ask yourself as you read:

1. How does s/he open the column?
2. How does s/he close the column?
3. How soon does s/he announce the thesis?
4. How does s/he organize? What are the parts or sections of the column?
5. How much is based on observation? Personal experience? Interviews? Fact?
6. What sort of diction characterizes the column?
7. What sort of syntax characterizes the column?
8. What audience does s/he assume and how do you know?
9. What unstated assumptions (warrants- enthymemes) does the columnist make?

- II. After annotating, write a précis. (See instructions at the bottom of this sheet.)
Your first annotated article and one-page précis are due the day you return to this class after break.
- III. The final task is to compose a final argumentative essay of your own based on the content of the columns you collected. In your essay, consider the following:
 - a. The issues the columnist has addressed in his/her columns
 - b. A tangential issue you might expect your columnist to address
 - c. How the columnist might address your issue
 - d. How would you respond effectively to the columnist's position on the issue?



Do **not** simply address one argument raised in the columns, but **create your own argument** based on your perceptions of the columnist's ideological positions as you have perceived them.

Writing a Précis

Rationale: A précis reveal your understanding of the arguments and points authors make in a specific piece. Composing a précis can be particularly useful when organizing sources for a research project or determining the utility of them.

Directions: When writing your one-page response, objectively summarize the article accurately in your own words by composing a précis. Below the précis, compose your response, noting any questions, objections or enlightenment generated by the column.

NOTE: Before you begin writing your précis, read the column a number of times to make sure you completely understand the writer's rhetorical situation.

Example Précis

The **first sentence** identifies the essay's author and title, provides the article's date in parentheses, uses some form of the verb "says" (claims, asserts, suggests, argues) followed by "that," and the essay's thesis (paraphrased or quoted).

Example: In his "In Defense of Prejudice" (1995), Jonathan Rauch argues that prejudice in society should not be eliminated.

The **second sentence** describes the author's support for the thesis, usually in chronological order.

Example: Rauch supports his position by providing anecdotal and historical evidence culled from segments of society which illustrates the futility and harm associated with attempts to eliminate prejudice.

The **third sentence** analyzes the author's purpose using an "in order to" statement.

Example: Rauch hopes to shift the paradigm away from absolutism, the idea of punitive action against racism and prejudice, in order to move society toward rejection, the idea of societal pressure when grappling with racist and prejudicial attitudes.

The **fourth sentence** describes the essay's intended audiences and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience.

Example: The author uses an erudite, yet defensive tone indicating that he primarily addresses a rather liberal intellectual audience.

Précis Rubric

<p>1. Tone & diction identified and illustrated <u>with quotes</u></p>	<p>Accurate & Complete: _____ Missing or Weak: _____</p>
<p>2. Rhetorical Strategies</p>	<p>Identified: _____ Discussed adequately: _____ Not Identified: _____</p>
<p>3. Organization Evaluated</p>	<p>Precisely _____ Adequately _____ Incorrectly or missing _____</p>
<p>4. Aristotelian Appeals</p>	<p>Identified _____ Discussed adequately _____ Missing _____</p>
<p>5. Source: Column</p>	<p>Author, Title & Date _____ Included and Annotated _____ Missing _____ Weak annotations _____</p>
<p>6. Précis Construction Sentences:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifies the essay's author and title, provides the article's date. 2. Describes the author's support for the thesis. 3. Analyzes the author's purpose using an "in order to" statement. 4. Describes the essay's intended audiences and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience. 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Précis Construction Evaluation</u></p> <p>Sentence 1: 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Sentence 2: 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Sentence 3: 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Sentence 4: 1 2 3 4 5</p>

Comments:

Barry Smith's
Irrelativity

"To Write a Column"

Most people seem to have no idea the amount of toil that goes into writing a column such as this one. For some reason they seem to think that someone (like me) just sits down and spews out a bunch of silly little jokes and obvious puns and calls it a day.

Nothing could be further from the truth - there is a painstaking amount of research, teamwork, and just plain love that goes into each and every word that I write. With one exception: "Gliblefluster." That is the one word I always write without thinking too much about it.

Since you asked - sort of - let me take you through this magical creative process step by step.

STEP ONE - Visualization: This is the most strenuous part of the creative process. In order to write a column, you got to have an idea, right? And ideas do not come easy. You have to work for them. Did I say "work?" I meant slave. Struggle. Fingers to the bone. Like that.

My first step towards generating ideas is through a process called "Visualization." I learned this technique at a weekend retreat where everyone was made to wear white, flowing clothing and forced to eat grubs. I have modified the techniques slightly so I can use them at home, where grubs are a little harder to come by.

First of all, I take some deep breaths, allowing me to go into "quiet mode." Then I light some incense and a few candles, put some comfy pillows on the floor, and sit cross-legged with my eyes closed.

Then in my mind's eye I see it - the exact location of the leftover guacamole.

STEP TWO - Brainstorming: After my attempts at visualization guide me through some binge eating, I generally fall back on the idea-generating method I learned in my high school composition class, brainstorming. The idea is to write down as many column "concepts" as I can in two minutes, without any internal editing or judgment, no matter how totally lame they always end up being.

Here are the results of a recent brainstorming session:

- * SUV names.
- * My left index finger.
- * Why I love Q-Tips.

* The steps of writing a column.

* Why I still love Q-Tips.

* **YOUR** left index finger.

* An interview with the Anti-Christ.

* Why do birds suddenly appear?

STEP THREE - Depression: This step begins immediately after the brainstorming is over, when I look at what I have just written and realize what a loser I am.

STEP FOUR - Unconsciousness: No matter what time of day it is, it is important to take a long, hardy nap as soon as depression sets in.

STEP FIVE - Epiphany: In my groggy, post-nap haze I am often convinced that I might just be able to squeeze 700 words from one of my lame ideas, like maybe the one about sport utility vehicle names. I am saved!

STEP SIX - For obvious reasons, I do not have a Step Six.

STEP SEVEN - The Rough Draft: This is where I actually begin to feel in control of my work again. In this case, I sit down at my computer, crack my knuckles theatrically and type, "Why is it that they call them Range Rovers, anyway? They do not ever really rove the range. Should not they have called them Mall Rovers? Or something?"

STEP EIGHT - Rewrite: Days later I sit down at my computer again. I open up the document and change "Mall Rovers" to "Driveway Rovers."

Whew - where DOES this stuff come from?

STEP NINE - Completion: The rough draft, in this case consisting of 26 words, is quietly left on the desk of my editor with an attached note: "Here is my column. It's a little short, but feel free to pad it out with some ideas of your own, or maybe print it really big."

STEP TEN - Celebration: I bask in the feeling of fulfillment. But it is a temporary high, because in the back of my mind I know that STEP ONE is just around the corner.

Barry Smith's Irrelativity

"Unusual Activity"

While waiting for my flight in the Las Vegas airport last week, I heard the following recorded announcement over the loudspeaker:

"In order to assist with increased airport security measures, please comply with the following guidelines: Know the contents of your luggage. Do not leave your baggage unattended. If someone asks you to carry a bag for him or her, do not accept. If you see any unusual activity, please report it immediately using any airport terminal white courtesy telephone, and thanks for your cooperation."

It was that last part, the part about **unusual activity** that really caught my fancy. Once I started to pay attention, I noticed unusual activity all over the place. I decided I had better make a list, so I would be prepared with a full report when I finally picked up the white courtesy phone.

UNUSUAL ACTIVITY IN THE LAS VEGAS AIRPORT

The airport seems to be littered with these beeping, clanging, ringing, screeching, flashing machines. Rather than cowering in the corner to avoid them, people are actually sitting right in front of them, shoving their money into them. This is not only unusual behavior, but it is just so blatant. You would think security would have noticed this already, but apparently no one has, so I guess I have to make the call.

There is this large Plexiglas-enclosed area off to the side of the main walkway where people are congregating, and they seem to be (near as I could determine without staring) lighting little sticks on fire and inhaling the smoke that is produced. They then exhale this smoke, which I can only assume was in their lungs all that time, and inhale some more. The Plexiglas cubicle is swirling with smoke, yet people appear to be **entering it willingly**. That is a little unusual, is not it?

Sitting across from me (watching me make these notes, perhaps?) is a large woman whom I would say is in her late 60s wearing a most unflattering leopard-skin-print outfit. Seated next to her is a man, early 50s, wearing a Hawaiian-print shirt, white shorts, sandals, and black socks. Why were these people allowed through security?

In the men's restroom, there was this guy standing there who handed me a towel after I washed my hands, then made a subtle gesture indicating that he'd like me to give him some money for doing this. Red alert!

I personally witnessed someone hand over seven U.S. dollar bills in exchange for a small cup

filled with coffee and steamed milk. Sorry, buddy ... **not in MY America!** If necessary, I could easily pick this man out of a lineup.

That announcement about watching my bags and reporting unusual activity repeats about every three minutes. That is a little unusual in itself, is not it? I mean, what is this, preschool?

My traveling companion, Mark, is seriously unusual. Just a few minutes ago, while eating lunch, he complained constantly about how his chicken sandwich was the worst he's ever had, then went into great detail about how it contained all the little joints and ligaments and **bits of the chicken that are unchewable**. All the while I was trying to enjoy my non-chicken sandwich, and found it very difficult to do so, to the point where I had to wrap it up and put it away for later. Maybe someone could give him a robust cavity search while I finish eating.

While passing through the security screening, I watched as a man was instructed to sit down, take off his shoe, hike his pant leg up to his knee, and then lift his leg off the floor so the sole of his foot could be gone over with the detector wand. What was unusual about this was that no one shouted, "Are you all completely insane? Just because some nutcase crudely duct taped a stick of dynamite to his Birkenstocks two years ago now you think everybody has exploding toe-jam? I just cannot play along with this heightened security charade anymore. Arrrhhhh!"



Columnist Project—List of columnists

Select **ONE** columnist from this list to follow and focus your work upon for the Columnist Project.

Andrea Mitchell, NBC.

Bob Woodward, Washington Post.

Brody Mullins, Wall Street Journal.

Candy Crowley, CNN.

Carl Cameron, Fox.

Chris Cillizza, Washington Post.

Chuck Todd, NBC.

Dana Milbank, Washington Post.

Dana Priest, Washington Post.

David Gregory, NBC.

Eugene Robinson, Washington Post.

Gwen Ifill, PBS.

Howard Fineman, Newsweek.

Howard Kurtz, Washington Post.

Jake Tapper, ABC.

Jane Mayer, New Yorker.

Jeanne Cummings, Politico.

Lara Logan, CBS.

Marc Ambinder, Atlantic.

Mark Knoller, CBS.

Michael Isikoff, Newsweek.

Mike Allen, Politico.

Paul Krugman, The New York Times.

Richard E. Cohen, National Journal.

Thomas Friedman, New York Times.



Economic Columnists

Alan Abelson, Barron's.

Caroline Baum, Bloomberg

Charles Gasparino, Fox Business Network.

David Leonhardt, The New York Times.

David Wessel, The Wall Street Journal

Felix Salmon, Reuters.

Holman W. Jenkins Jr., The Wall Street Journal.

James Grant, Grant's Interest Rate Observer.

Martin Wolf, the Financial Times.

MORE OPTIONS

Josh Kraushaar

Cornelius Baker

Ed Kilgore

Howard Jacobson

Thomas L. Friedman

David Brooks

Michael Hastings

Christopher Hitchens

Margaret Dowd

Patrick Buchanon

Thomas Sowell

Larry Elder

Paul Krugman

Rush Limbaugh

Bill O'Reilly

Mort Zuckerman

Mark Taibbi

Steve Sebelius

Arianna Huffington

John L. Smith

Bill Press

Jon Ralston

Michelle Malkin



Mother Jones
Stu Bykofsky
Tom Rademacher
Norris Burkes
Mary Curtis