VISUALIZING 102:  
INCORPORATING VISUAL RHETORIC IN THE FYC CLASSROOM

A TEACHER’S GUIDE

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This guide is intended to be used as a supplement to the University of Arizona Writing Program’s ENGL 102 curriculum.
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Rationale

While many teachers want to incorporate visual texts and other multimodal literacy practices into their classrooms, the question of how to go about doing it and, more importantly, how to assess it, often pose a few challenges. The primary goal of our teacher’s guide and workshop is to create a framework—complete with a sample visual rhetorical schema, rubric, lesson plans, and suggested reading lists—that fits into the University of Arizona (UA) Writing Program’s ENGL 102 curriculum. In particular, we will focus on the pedagogical incorporation of visual literacies into a sample ENGL 102 course design. The term “visual literacy” is defined by Cynthia Selfe in “Toward New Media Texts: Taking Up the Challenges of Visual Literacy,” as:

The ability to read, understand, value, and learn from visual materials (still photographs, videos, films, animations, still images, pictures, drawings, graphics)—especially as these are combined to create a text—as well as the ability to create, combine, and use visual elements (colors, forms, lines, images) and messages for the purposes of communicating. (69)

The UA Writing Program’s ENGL 102 curricular goals emphasize rhetorical analysis, research processes, argument, and reflection. For the purposes of this teacher’s guide and workshop, we will focus on the Rhetorical Analysis and Public Argument units. While we definitely want our students to think critically about the visual culture in which they live and analyze visual texts rhetorically, we also want to foster their own production of visual texts and arguments. We suggest that incorporating visual literacies into the FYC classroom is a fruitful avenue for students to explore communicative systems of meaning beyond print literacy and engage in multimodal ways of learning.
Suggested Reading List for Teachers

For teachers who are new to incorporating visual literacies into writing pedagogy or for those who would like to read more about the scholarship that informs our teacher’s guide and workshop, we’ve compiled the following suggested reading list:


Key Terms*

The following list of terms provide useful vocabulary for both the rhetorical analysis and the public argument units. As such, teachers may find it useful to teach students these terms early in the first unit and refer to them throughout the other units.

*from Cynthia Selfe’s “Toward New Media Texts”

- **The visual** – a focus on visual elements and materials of communication

- **Visual compositions** – texts that individuals or groups design/compose, primarily of visual elements and materials, for the purposes of communicating

*from Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwan’s *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*

- **Visual impact** – the overall effect and appeal that a visual composition has on an audience

- **Visual coherence** – the extent to which visual elements of a composition are tied together with color, shape, image, lines of sight, theme, etc.

- **Visual salience** – Importance or prominence of a visual element

- **Visual organization** – pattern of arrangement that relates visual elements to one another in a way that makes them easier for readers/viewers to comprehend
ENGL 102 - Unit 1: Rhetorical Analysis

A Rhetorical Schema for Analyzing Visual Arguments

The following rhetorical schema is an essential stepping stone to helping students think about visual texts critically. Integrating the schema into whole-class discussions, daily activities, group work, and writing assignments will provide students with the tools to produce their own visual texts later in the semester. Included are also two sample assignment sheets for the rhetorical analysis writing assignment that work with the visual rhetorical schema.

In addition, this schema is intended to be used in conjunction with any of the critical approaches to rhetorical analysis—Aristotelian, Narrative, Metaphor, Ideological, Feminist, Genre—detailed in The University Book: A Teacher's Guide and on the Writing Instructors’ Resources Site (WIRe).

Preparing to Teach

Rhetorical analysis of visual imagery or visual arguments (hereafter referred to as the visual) focuses on the **function** of the visual.

The following rhetorical schema—adapted from Sonja K. Foss’ “A Rhetorical Schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery”—is a three step process and provides a framework for rhetorically analyzing visuals and may be used with any critical lens or approach. Teachers may use this schema as is, though it can be easily adapted to fit various course themes and pedagogical goals.

**Step One**

The viewer/reader/critic (hereafter referred to as the writer) identifies the function of the image and makes an argument supporting her claim regarding the function of the visual.

Some questions the writer might consider in identifying a visual’s function are:

- What is this image doing to viewers?
- What is this image’s role in the larger persuasive effect of its contexts (in the context of the viewer and in the context in which the visual was created)?
• What does this image persuade viewers to think/feel/identify with/do?

As with any rhetorical artifact, a writer’s argument for a particular function of an image is likely only one valid interpretation among many. In addition, the writer may identify more than one function for the visual.

According to Foss, visuals can serve various functions: “A critic may see the function of a painting of Elvis on velvet, for example, as a loving memorial to Elvis; the function of a kitchen painted a sunny yellow as the expression of warmth; and the function of a non-representational painting of maroon, blue, and gold forms as an invitation to viewers to break old patterns and to transcend the limitations they represent” (215).

Step Two

In this step, the writer assesses the posited function of the visual—identifying dimensions of the visual that contribute to or detract from the visual’s success in fulfilling its supposed function. Questions she might address include:

• How well is the function communicated?

• What dimensions of the visual support the writer’s interpretation of function? These dimensions might include subject matter, medium, materials, forms, colors, organization, craftsmanship, and context, as well as genre specific attributes such as those found in film, comics or webpages.

When analyzing a visual that includes both image and text, it is also important to consider how the function of the overall visual is informed by the relationship between the two. Some questions the writer might consider include:

• Do the words function by themselves? How?

• Do the images function by themselves? How?

• Are the words dependent or anchored to the image to convey meaning?

• Or is the image dependent or anchored to the words to convey meaning?

• Are the words and image interdependent in controlling the function?
Writers might also draw comparisons among visuals with the same or similar function as a means of supporting their argument, extending their analyses, and creating connections across multiple texts.

**Step Three**

Here, the writer critiques the function itself. Some questions she might address include the following:

- What are the implications of the function?
- What are the consequences of the function? (These questions are based on the writer’s reason for analyzing the image in the first place).

For instance, consider the image of the visual depicted below. A writer might argue that the function of this visual is to convey complicity on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border in maintaining the “imagined” barrier between the two countries. Does the sculpture actually function to communicate this complicity? In what ways is this complicity conveyed? In what ways does the image actually impede its function?
Sample Writing Assignment 1: Rhetorical Analysis of a Visual Image

*Note: This particular assignment sheet builds from two mini rhetorical analyses which could be presented to the class as a set of two response papers. As the teacher, it is your discretion to choose the kinds of visual texts you want your students to examine (documentaries, advertisements, comics, speeches, etc). After writing the two response papers, students will then choose to focus on one of their analyses and revise it for this assignment.

Percentage of Course Grade: 15%

Due Date:

Length: Most students need 1000-1250 words, not including your Works Cited page, to complete this assignment successfully.

The Project: In class, we have been practicing rhetorical analysis using the rhetorical schema for visual analysis. Now you need to thoroughly analyze a visual and its persuasive strategies within a rhetorical situation. In your paper, you should

1. clearly identify the function of the visual image
2. explain how the designer/author attempts to persuade his/her audience (the rhetorical strategies he/she/the image employs) and
3. assess the effectiveness of those rhetorical strategies*

* In assessing the effectiveness of an author's strategies for persuasion, you need to carefully consider that the intended audience may differ significantly from you. You must try to separate your personal responses to the rhetorical strategies from the likely responses of the text’s intended audience. I am not asking you to ignore your personal responses. Instead, you should note your personal responses and make any differences you see between those responses and the likely responses of the intended audience a part of your analysis.

The Texts: You may choose to revise either RP1 or RP2 for Writing Assignment 1. A more thorough analysis will, for the most part, require you to situate the visual image in its context. Who is the targeted audience? How do you know? What cultural values does it reinforce or undermine? How does the visual image function and speak to the issues that surround it? Be specific and ensure that you do a thorough analysis.

Your Audience: Write your analysis for me, your teacher, to prove that you understand rhetorical analysis and know how to practice it. Consider how this definition of audience will affect the decisions you make as you write your paper, especially in establishing your ethos as a writer, as well as logos and pathos.
Sample Writing Assignment 2: Cultural Identity Collage and Rhetorical Analysis

* Note: This assignment can be used in much the same way as the previous sample and also requires students to produce a visual argument in conjunction with their written text.

Percentage of Course Grade: 15%

Due Date:

Length: Most students need 4-5 pages, not including your Works Cited page, to complete this assignment successfully.

The Project: As we have discussed in class, we all have many stories or narratives that have shaped our own sense of identity and culture. Visual images and photographs are also culturally embedded narratives that often represent aspects of individual or group identity.

First, locate a minimum of five images—at least one of the images must be a photograph—and build a collage (a narrative) of yourself from these images. Organize and arrange them as you see fit.

Now, write an essay that approaches your visual collage/narrative in the following ways:

- First, offer a narrative of what the collage tells about you and why these particular images are important. What cultures or subcultures are represented? (Remember that narratives do not simply list reasons. Your essay should tell a story).
- Then, analyze and evaluate the images you have chosen according to the rhetorical schema discussed in class. How do the images function in relation to your narrative of your identity? How might they conflict with, compromise, or carry out a seamless portrait of you overall. In order to do this, consider the following questions: What is erased, left out, or made invisible in this collage? What is enhanced, illuminated, or emphasized? What might someone else—someone who doesn’t know you at all—interpret about this collage?

The Texts: Because this first writing assignment asks you to consider your own cultural identities, no outside texts or sources are required.

Your Audience: Compose your collage and analysis for our class—this includes me, your instructor, as well as your colleagues. Consider how this definition of audience will affect the decisions you make as you write your paper, especially in establishing your ethos as a writer, as well as logos and pathos.
ENGL 102 - Unit 3: Public Argument

Because we want to encourage our students not only to be critical consumers of visual culture but also active producers, we ask students to create a visual argument for a specified public and a written reflective analysis of their visual arguments in the third unit of the ENGL 102 curriculum. This assignment pointedly incorporates the student reflection component of the 102 curricular goals. We feel that by combining the two assignments, students are allowed the additional time they might need in creating their visual arguments. More importantly, however, asking students to write a reflective analysis of their own work necessarily expands our students’ praxis of rhetorical theory to include both the production and critical consumption of visual rhetoric.

Our assignment is written in such a way as to be easily adaptable to instructor-specific course design of the research and controversy analysis unit. In addition, the final visual product can then be presented and displayed to the class or to the Writing Program’s ENGL 102 Showcase, as demonstrated in the included lesson plan on peer review and showcasing student work.

This section of the guide includes:

- Sample Assignment Sheet
- Grading Rubric
- Visual Showcase Class Activity and Worksheet
- Guidelines for Workshopping Visuals
Public Visual Argument and Written Analysis/Reflection

Percentage of Course Grade: 25%

Due Date:

The Project:

We started this semester by looking at visual images and discussing rhetorical analysis. Much of your work throughout this semester has grown from this, including your research topics and public arguments. This final project asks you to draw from what you have learned in your research by delivering your arguments into a visual form.

Part I: The Visual Argument

Your visual argument can be one of two options: It can either be your perspective on the controversy you researched in the previous unit; or, it can be a rebuttal to a visual argument you analyzed in either Units I or II.

Your visual argument may take the form of a poster, an advertisement, a brochure, a film, a photo essay, a collection of bumper stickers, a commercial, clothing (think of the kinds of things you see on t-shirts, especially), a comic strip, or a form of artwork (painting, drawing, sculpture) etc. The options are limitless. I urge you to be creative.

Regardless of the format your visual argument takes, it must demonstrate a function and display supporting dimensions (i.e. make a claim) about or in response to a specific issue or argument you have examined or researched during this course. Keep in mind that visual arguments are still rhetorical and elements of design have a very specific purpose, for a specific audience.

Note: If your visual argument requires a form of some kind of multimedia, you must save it to a CD and turn in the CD with your written reflective analysis.

Part II: Written Reflective Analysis

In addition to your Visual Argument, you must also turn in a reflective analysis that outlines and situates your Visual Argument. Your reflective analysis must take the form of a cohesive essay and must, above all, address the elements of the rhetorical schema we have been using throughout the semester.

- Your reflective analysis must identify and provide a rationale for your argument.
  - Why are you making this argument? What is your purpose?
  - How does your visual function as your argument?
- Who is your audience? (You must target a specific audience)
- How do you intend the function to affect your specified audience? How do you want them to react?
- What rhetorical appeals did you use to sway your audience?
- How and why did you use specific dimensions (visual coherence, salience, and organization) to convey your argument?
- What would you do differently if you had more time and why?

Think of your reflective analysis as a piece that tells me, your instructor, how to read your argument. As such, this analysis should clearly and specifically provide the context for your argument.
Public Visual Argument and Written Analysis/Reflection - Grading Rubric

Student: _______________________________  Final Score: _____/100

Visual Argument

Does the visual argument display a specific function/claim?  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Does the function/claim of the visual argument fully consider the rhetorical situation (the author/audience/message & purpose, the context)?  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Does the visual argument set the context for the relationship between image and text (anchorage and relay)?  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Does the visual argument utilize supporting evidence/dimensions for its function/claim (i.e. medium, materials, forms, colors, craftsmanship, as well as genre specific attributes such as those found in film, comics or webpages)?  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does the visual argument execute elements of design rhetorically? (Visual coherence, visual salience, visual organization?)  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Are the images displayed documented according to MLA conventions?  
1 2 3 4 5

Written Analysis/Reflection

Does the paper analyze the visual argument according to the visual rhetorical schema? (function, evidence of that function, critique of function)?  
/25
Does the paper provide an analysis that is reflective? Does the writer explain her design choices and provide a rationale for why she does?

Does the paper adequately set up the necessary information for the reader to understand what’s going on? Does the paper clearly explain the relationship between image and text?

Organization & Development

Does the reflective analysis demonstrate strong global organization? Does the paper address all of the questions detailed in the assignment in a logical order using effective transitions between ideas and paragraphs?

Does the paper demonstrate strong local organization? Do the sentences make sense within a paragraph? In each paragraph, does the writer make a point, provide textual evidence, and then explain how that textual evidence supports the point?

Does the paper have an effective introduction and conclusion?

Written Mechanics & Conventions

Are the sentences grammatically correct? (i.e.: How often are there incomplete or run-on sentences? How often are the sentences simply unclear? Does the author correctly use punctuation marks such as commas, semi-colons, colons, and dashes?)
Do the spelling, proofreading, and layout reflect the academic level of the task?

1 2 3 4

Are sources cited with correct MLA formatting? Is the format of the paper correct? Is there a works cited and is it done correctly? (You will have to use your Hacker handbook to verify this information!)

1 2

**Final Comments**

Strengths of visual argument and analysis:

Questions and suggestions for revision about visual argument and analysis:

Suggestions to improve style and mechanics:
Visual Showcase Class Activity and Worksheet

The UA Writing Program hosts an ENGL 102 showcase at the end of every spring semester. One way to try to encourage your students to participate in the showcase is to host a mini showcase in your own classes where your students can present their visual arguments and get written feedback from their peers.

Time Required: One week (either two class periods for TR or three class periods for MWF)

Have students sign up for a day to bring their visual arguments (roughly 8-12 presenters per day). Each student should fill out a visual showcase feedback sheet (sample included below) for each of the visual arguments. Have a whole-class discussion after each presenter and workshop the visual arguments.

Visual Showcase Feedback Sheet*

(Adapted from Cynthia Selfe’s “Toward New Media Texts”)

Writer/designer: ________________________________________________________________

Reviewer: ________________________________________________________________

• Provide a title for this visual argument based on how it is displayed and represented.

• In one sentence, identify the function of this visual argument.

• Identify the dimensions—evidence—for the stated function of this visual argument.

• Rate the visual impact/effectiveness of this visual argument from 1 (least effective) to 5 (most effective). Give a rationale for your rating and provide specific suggestions in reference to rhetorical uses of design.
Visual Argument Workshops

Because visual arguments rely heavily on the creative efforts of the student, we feel that a modified application of the workshopping process is needed for assisting students in reflecting upon and improving their work. Creative writing pedagogy on workshopping student writing lends itself quite well to the composition classroom when focusing on visual arguments.

Drawing from the creative writing classroom, we recommend using the approach of PQP: Praise, Question, Polish. When responding to student work, peers should first note what is worthy of praise, then move on to questions for the writer/creator, and then finish up with concrete suggestions for polishing or improving the visual argument.
Bibliography

