

Major Paper 1 - Genre Critique

This assignment asks you to develop a complex claim about the function of a genre in a discourse community to which you belong, using your analysis of that genre and your understandings of the concepts of genre and discourse community. As you move from analysis to critique, you will be examining the social and rhetorical effects of your discourse community's use of the genre, and you will make an argument about these effects. The critique will be determined by your choice of audience: the kind of claim you make and evidence you would use for an audience of fellow discourse community members could be different from the claim and evidence you would use for an audience of outsiders.

Getting Started: Strong academic claims begin with inquiry that is informed by careful analysis. As you work toward developing a complex claim, review your genre analysis and begin by answering these questions for critiquing genres (from *Scenes of Writing*, by Amy Devitt, Mary Jo Reiff, and Anis Bawarshi):

- What does the genre allow its users to do and what does it not allow them to do?
- Whose needs are most served by the genre? Whose needs are least served?
- In what ways does the genre succeed the most? In what ways does it fail?
- Does the genre enable its users to represent themselves fully?
- Does the genre effectively accomplish what its users intend it to do?
- Does the genre create inequalities among its users that lead to imbalances of power?
- Do the assumptions that the genre reflects privilege certain ways of doing things?
- Do those privileged ways of doing things run counter to the supposed objectives of those who use it and the scene in which it is used?
- Does the genre allow its users to do certain things at the expense of others? And if so, at what cost?

From these questions, you'll want to identify an idea that you can develop into a complex claim that is strategically pitched to a specific audience. Your argument might focus on bringing attention to unintended or unnoticed effects, consequences, or opportunities afforded by the community's use of the genre. Or you might focus on proposing changes to the genre—or the use of another genre—to better suit your community's needs and purposes. You should also draw on the theory we have covered—Bazerman's concepts of speech acts and genres in genre/activity systems might be useful for looking at (in the words of his title) "how texts organize activity and people," while Swales' concept of discourse community to think about the ways in which the genre is functioning to delimit membership. Whatever you focus on, your complex claim should have the following features (see the chart on CFI p 329):

- **Stakes:** the genre-related issue should matter to your community
- **Nuance:** the genre-related issue you're addressing should be complicated—it should not be something that is already obvious to or agreed upon by the community
- **Persuasiveness:** you should be attempting to get your readers to see something, believe something, or do (or not do) something about the genre in question

Putting It Together: Once you have developed a complex claim, you can develop a structure for the rest of your essay. Instead of simply following the structure of the Steps for Genre Analysis, as you may have done in your early draft material, you will want to make strategic choices about how you group and present your evidence from the analysis—in support of your claim. You may also find that you need additional samples or more specific evidence from your samples. Your claim development should be built on direct quotations from your genre samples and careful analysis of those quotations. You may also find it useful to include quantitative data (counting the instances of a particular word or phrase across the samples, for example). Charts, tables, graphs, and images (including screenshots) can help support your argument.

The audience and purpose you envision for this paper should inform your decisions about how to contextualize your claim, how to organize and present your evidence, and how you position yourself (the formality of your tone, whether or not you use personal pronouns like “we,” etc.).

Format: Your paper should be 5-7 pages (typed, double spaced, 12-point font, one-inch margins). All secondary sources—including references to Swales’ and/or Bazerman’s theories—please follow MLA or APA citation guidelines for both in-text and end citations, and include a works cited/reference page. You do not need to cite your primary sources (the genre samples) in your works cited/reference page; just make sure it’s clear in the paper when and where they were originally published. Please do, however, include your genre samples as an appendix (we will discuss formatting options in class). If you’re interested in multimodal options for your paper, I will be happy to discuss these with you.

Outcomes Practiced:

Due Date:

Assignment Rubric:

Key concepts:	Outstanding	Strong	Good	Acceptable	Unacceptable

Prior knowledge:

Most immediately, you will be drawing on your genre analysis from our in-class work, but you will also be deploying the concepts of speech acts, genres, genre systems, activity systems, and discourse communities from SA 1 and SA 2.

Future knowledge:

Both the understanding that genres are purposeful practices in a discourse community and the practice of critically examining the ways in which a genre functions in a community will be foundational for our work, in the second sequence, of critically examining the ways in which genre functions as a boundary ritual in communities, as a way of distinguishing between insiders and outsiders.