[i]Guidelines for Analyzing Genres

1. Collect Samples of the Genre

Where to find genre samples depends on what kind of genre you are study—whether it is an academic genre, a public genre, an internet/web genre, or a workplace professional genre. For an academic genre such as a political science research paper, you can get samples from a professor or an experienced student. For a public genre such as petitions, you might find them on websites such as Change.org. For a workplace professional genre such as a business memo, it'd be great if you can get current samples from an organization, but it's still the second best option to use the samples from the internet.

2. Study the rhetorical situation in which the genre is produced and used

Physical and rhetorical space: Where does the genre appear? How is the genre connected to recurrence of the rhetorical situation? Are there other genres you can recognize that this genre interacts with?

For example: In the rhetorical situation of a job application, we can observe that the resume genre interacts with the cover letter. Hence, many advise that you shouldn't merely repeat what you have in your resume on the cover letter.

Participants: Who uses the genre? Who writes and reads the genre?
Writers: What kind of identity/ethos should the writers have in this genre? Is it possible to have co-writers? What roles do the writers perform in genre production? Under what circumstances do writers compose the genre? (example: in teams, on a computer, in a rush)?

Readers: Who is the intended audience of the genre? How would you identify the characteristics of the audience base? What roles do the readers perform in understanding and interpreting the genre? Under what circumstances do readers read the genre? (example: at their leisure, on the run, in waiting rooms)?

Communicative Purpose: What kind of purpose does the rhetorical situation call for? Why do writers write this genre and why do readers read it? What purposes does the genre fulfill for the people who use it?

3. Identify and describe patterns as the genre features.

What recurring features and themes do the genre samples share? For example:
- What **content** is typically included? What excluded? What counts as evidence (personal testimony, facts, etc.)? What kinds of examples are used?
- What **rhetorical appeals** are used? What kinds of logical appeals (logos) and emotional appeals (pathos) can be observed?
- What kind of **structure and organization** can you observe across the genre samples? How are different parts in the text organized into their places?

- **Synatx**: What kinds of sentence structures and sentence types can you observe? Is there a noticeable use of sentence variety? Or do they share a certain style?
- **Diction**: What kind of vocabulary is often used? Is there a type of jargon (specialized vocabulary) used? Does the genre allow colloquial usage or slangs?
- In what **format** are texts of this genre presented? What **layout or appearance** is common? How long is a typical text in this genre?

4. Analyze the social effects or contexts of using the genre

- What can you learn about the actions being performed through the genre by observing its rhetorical patterns?
- What do genre users need to know or believe to appreciate the genre?
- What roles for writers and readers does the genre encourage?
- In terms of power dynamics, social backgrounds and literacy backgrounds, who is invited into the genre? Who has a difficult time accessing and understanding the genre?
- What values, beliefs and assumptions are revealed through the genre patterns?

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i This handout is adapted from *Scenes of Writing.*