

COM 408 – Rhetorical Criticism

“Here is where a critic might count. Putting the pieces together, trying to understand what is novel and adventurous, what is enervated and complacent. . . . Looking back into the corners, we might discover whose America we are living in at any moment, and where it came from” Greil Marcus’s *Mystery Train*

Course description

Together, we will examine how rhetoric can be used as a method (akin to qualitative and quantitative methods) to analyze, illuminate, and reach conclusions about a variety of verbal, visual, and material artifacts. We will read landmark examples of criticism, evaluate the utility of rhetorical methods, and perform rhetorical criticism ourselves about speeches, music videos, campus spaces, etc. From neo-Aristotelianism to material criticism, and from metaphors to storytelling, we will grow the variety of tools available for us to use in our rhetorical toolbox. These tools will be applied to a variety of artifacts and will help us explore what rhetoric produced by speakers, politicians, artists, performers, and media tells us about human nature and our society, why the words and images we use are important, and what the implications and effects of rhetoric are in our everyday lives.

Course objectives

After successfully completing this course, students should be able to satisfy the following learning objectives, in alignment with COM Learning Outcomes and University Undergraduate Learning Objectives of intellectual breadth and lifelong learning, inquiry and critical thinking, communication, and citizenship and ethics:

- **Develop awareness and understanding** of rhetorical criticism’s methods including key theorists and exemplar texts, their **differences, strengths, and weaknesses** when applied to artifacts
- **Critically analyze** artifacts and foundational rhetorical texts
- **Engage with** and **expand on** existing methods of rhetorical criticism
- **Conduct** original research and **produce** a high-quality piece of criticism with a strong thesis, expert use of external research, clear organization, and creative engagement with **both** the artifact and the rhetorical method

Course assignments

More details on all course assignments are available in the “Rubrics” folder on Canvas and in the corresponding Module. The four paper assignments describe and analyze the same rhetorical artifact, selected and approved by your professor early in the semester. Students are encouraged to read the example papers posted on Canvas from previous students, showing the three component papers and the final paper.

Descriptive Artifact Paper 10%

Students will write a 4-page descriptive paper on their rhetorical artifact that explains various aspects of the artifact, its language use/physical appearance, style, tone, characters, plot, etc. This paper will help us explore the rhetorical features of our artifact and find data to be analyzed later. Example artifacts are listed on the rubric available on Canvas.

Historical Context Paper 10%

Students will write a paper about the historical contexts of the artifact. In other words, students will write about everything surrounding, influencing, leading to, and following from the artifact. This is also a 4-page paper, but does not address the content of the artifact itself, only its history, context, influences, author/creator, and effects.

Rhetorical Methods Paper 10%

Students will select two rhetorical methods from the course and analyze them in 4 pages. This paper will analyze the readings from the course, collect and analyze other examples of the methods, and discuss their benefits and limitations in examining their specific artifact. This paper will apply those methods preliminarily to the rhetorical artifact and evaluate which will be most fruitful for analyzing the artifact in the final paper and why.

Final Criticism Paper 25%

Students will integrate the descriptive, historical contexts, and rhetorical methods paper into a seamless 10-12-page paper analyzing the artifact. The paper should make a clear thesis and argument about the importance of the artifact and analyze it using the selected method.

Peer Review Workshop 10%

Students will submit a full draft of their final paper for use in the peer review workshops the last week of class. Students will be graded on the quality of their draft and their preparation/participation in the peer workshop process with their partner.

Discussion Board Posts 20%

Your professor will post a sample artifact for analysis to the Discussion Board on Canvas after each Wednesday class of the 9 methods weeks. Students will respond with 3-4 paragraphs analyzing the artifact using that week's method and reaching a conclusion about the rhetorical implications of the artifact, due that Sunday by 5pm. Students have the option to complete an additional 10th post in response to the "Criticizing Criticism" week to have their lowest post grade dropped.

Participation 15%

Students will be graded for their frequency and quality of participation in course discussion and reading circles. Students missing class, arriving late, or leaving early will have their participation score penalized (having not been fully present to participate). **Students absent from 10 or more classes (excused or unexcused) or failing to complete any of the assignments will not be eligible for a passing grade.**

A = 100-93	A- = 92-90	B+ = 89-87	B = 86-83	B- = 82-80	C+ = 79-77
C = 76-73	C- = 72-70	D+ = 69-67	D = 66-63	D- = 62-60	F = 59-0

Grade breakdown

- 55% - papers
 - 10% - descriptive artifact paper
 - 10% - historical context paper
 - 10% - methods paper
 - 25% - final paper
- 10% - peer review workshop
- 20% - discussion board posts
- 15% - participation

Assignment skills

	Understanding course concepts	Critical thinking and analysis	Oral Communication	Written Communication	Creativity and confidence	Putting theory into practice
Papers	X	X		X		X
Workshop	X	X	X			X
Discussion posts	X	X		X	X	X
Participation	X	X	X	X	X	X

Assignment criteria

All assignments are due by 5pm on the due date unless otherwise noted. All assignments should be submitted electronically **via Canvas**. It is the students' responsibility to confirm receipt and upload the correct file. Students experiencing technical difficulties on Canvas are expecting to email your professor the assignment **prior** to the 5pm deadline. **Without a pre-arranged exception or an official university excuse, no late assignments will be accepted (grade = 0)**. Students are welcome/encouraged to turn in paper prior to deadlines. All assignments have detailed rubrics on Canvas – please read them thoroughly and contact your professor with questions and clarifications. Assignments have been crafted to evaluate course goals and engage students in a variety of different ways. Students should follow **APA citation** format. Don't cite class discussion or PPTs – always cite course readings.

Students can **rewrite** any/all of the 3 component papers turned in on time for an improved grade. After receiving the grade earned and feedback, students should incorporate feedback and submit the previous component paper with the next assignment with Tracked Changes to show the edits made. The final grade for each component paper will be the average of the two grades received.

Grades for assignments are based on how fully and well students execute the requirements for 400-level university work. A student who earns an "A"-range grade will have performed exceptionally well on an assignment, in a manner that meets and exceeds expectations for university-level work. A "B"-level

grade denotes above-average work; “C” denotes satisfactory work that meets minimum requirements; “D” denotes unsatisfactory completion of the minimal requirements; and “F” denotes unacceptable performance, little learning, and/or failure to complete requirements. Students concerned about their earned grade on an assignment are encouraged to open up a dialogue.

Course materials

All readings listed below should be completed prior to that day’s class. Readings may change at your professor’s discretion. Students are required to purchase/rent/borrow/otherwise locate the following text. Other course readings will be posted to Canvas. During class, we will read 670 textbook and scholarly article pages (approximately 50 pages a week). *Students should pay attention to the reading notes and page counts – sometimes students are not required to read the entirety of the uploaded files*

Foss, S. K. (2017). *Rhetorical criticism: Exploration & practice* (5th edition). Waveland Press. ISBN: 978-1478634898.

Students are allowed to use technology for course related activities **only**. Your professor reserves the right to change technology policies at any time.

Course expectations

In taking this class, we all commit to communicating clearly and promptly, making the most of our class time, and putting in effort outside of the classroom. The bulk of the class will be discussion-based, so students are expected to have thought about the material and have opinions to contribute. Students are expected to participate in class activities and reading circles. I welcome visits to my office hours to clarify rubrics, expand on course concepts, brainstorm paper topics, or other course-related questions/issues. It is much better to ask than not know.

Please include the following in email subject lines: student’s last name and course number and the topic of the email (example: **LastName408_Topic**). Give your professor **24 hours** to respond to emails. If you do not receive a response after 24 hours, please email again.

In continuing enrollment in the course, students affirm that they have read this syllabus in its entirety and agree to the specific course policies listed above and university policies listed below.

University policies

Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the Campus community; we all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility, and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Student Academic Misconduct Policy, and are encouraged to always take the ethical path whenever faced with choices. Students enrolling at UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV's educational mission. An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism. Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of another person, from the Internet or any other source without proper citation of the sources. See the [Student Conduct Code](https://www.unlv.edu/studentconduct/student-conduct), <https://www.unlv.edu/studentconduct/student-conduct>.

Auditing Classes

Auditing a course allows a student to continue attending the lectures and/or laboratories and discussion sessions associated with the course, but the student will not earn a grade for any component of the course. Students who audit a course receive the same educational experience as students taking the course for a grade, but will be excused from exams, assessments, and other evaluative measures that serve the primary purpose of assigning a grade.

Classroom Conduct

Students have a responsibility to conduct themselves in class and in the libraries in ways that do not interfere with the rights of other students to learn or of instructors to teach. Use of electronic devices such as pagers, cellular phones, or recording devices, or potentially disruptive devices or activities, are only permitted with the prior explicit consent of the instructor. The instructor may rescind permission at any time during the class. If a student does not comply with established requirements or obstructs the functioning of the class, the instructor may initiate an administrative drop of the student from the course.

Copyright

The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves with, and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. The University will neither protect nor defend you, nor assume any responsibility for employee or student violations of fair use laws. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies. Additional [copyright policy information](http://www.unlv.edu/provost/copyright) is available at <http://www.unlv.edu/provost/copyright>.

Disability Resource Center (DRC)

The [UNLV Disability Resource Center](https://www.unlv.edu/drc) (SSC-A, Room 143, <https://www.unlv.edu/drc>, 702-895-0866) provides resources for students with disabilities. Students who believe that they may need academic accommodations due to injury, disability, or due to pregnancy should contact the DRC as early as possible in the academic term. A Disabilities Specialist will discuss what options may be available to you. If you are registered with the UNLV Disability Resource Center, bring your Academic Accommodation Plan from the DRC to the instructor during office hours, so that you may work together to develop strategies for implementing the accommodations to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. Any information you provide is private and will be treated as such. To maintain the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach the instructor in front of others to discuss your accommodation needs.

Final Examinations

The University requires that final exams given at the end of a course occur on the date and at the time specified in the Final Exam schedule. The general schedule is typically available at the start of the semester, and the classroom locations are available approximately one month before the end of the semester. See the [Final Exam Schedule](https://www.unlv.edu/registrar/calendars), <https://www.unlv.edu/registrar/calendars>.

Identity Verification in Online Courses

All UNLV students must use their Campus-issued ACE ID and password to log in to WebCampus.

UNLV students enrolled in online or hybrid courses are expected to read and adhere to the [Student Academic Misconduct Policy](https://www.unlv.edu/studentconduct/misconduct/policy), <https://www.unlv.edu/studentconduct/misconduct/policy>, which defines, “acting or attempting to act as a substitute for another, or using or attempting to use a substitute, in any academic evaluation or assignment” as a form of academic misconduct. Intentionally sharing ACE login credentials with another person may be considered an attempt to use a substitute and could result in investigation and sanctions, as outlined in the Student Academic Misconduct Policy.

UNLV students enrolled in online courses are also expected to read and adhere to the [Acceptable Use of Computing and Information Technology Resources Policy](https://www.it.unlv.edu/policies/acceptable-use-computing-and-information-technology-resources-policy), <https://www.it.unlv.edu/policies/acceptable-use-computing-and-information-technology-resources-policy>, which prohibits sharing university accounts with other persons without authorization.

To the greatest extent possible, all graded assignments and assessments in UNLV online courses should be hosted in WebCampus or another UNLV-managed platform that requires ACE login credentials for access.

Incomplete Grades

The grade of “I” (Incomplete) may be granted when a student has satisfactorily completed three-fourths of course work for that semester/session, but cannot complete the last part of the course for reason(s) beyond the student’s control and acceptable to the instructor, and the instructor believes that the student can finish the course without repeating it. For undergraduate courses, the incomplete work must be made up before the end of the following regular semester. Graduate students receiving “I”

grades in 500-, 600-, or 700-level courses have up to one calendar year to complete the work, at the discretion of the instructor. If course requirements are not completed within the period indicated, a grade of "F" will be recorded, and the student's GPA will be adjusted accordingly. Students who are fulfilling an Incomplete grade do not register for the course, but make individual arrangements with the instructor who assigned the "I" grade.

Library Resources

Librarians are available to consult with students on research needs, including developing research topics, finding information, and evaluating sources. To make an appointment with a subject expert for this class, please visit the [Libraries' Research Consultation](http://guides.library.unlv.edu/appointments/librarian) website: <http://guides.library.unlv.edu/appointments/librarian>. You can also [ask the library staff](#) questions via chat and text message at: <http://ask.library.unlv.edu/>.

Missed Classwork

Any student missing class, quizzes, examinations, or any other class or laboratory work because of observance of religious holidays will be given an opportunity during that semester to make up the missed work. The make-up opportunity will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor within the first 14 calendar days of the course for Fall and Spring courses (except for modular courses), or within the first 7 calendar days of the course for Summer and modular courses, of their intention to participate in religious holidays which do not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. For additional information, please visit the Policy for Missed Work, under Registration Policies, on the [Academic Policies](https://catalog.unlv.edu/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=531) webpage, <https://catalog.unlv.edu/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=531>

In accordance with the policy approved by the Faculty Senate regarding missed class time and assignments, students who represent UNLV in any official extracurricular activity will also have the opportunity to make up assignments, provided that the student provides official written notification to the instructor no less than one week prior to the missed class(es).

The spirit and intent of the policy for missed classwork is to offer fair and equitable assessment opportunities to all students, including those representing the University in extracurricular activities. Instructors should consider, for example, that in courses which offer a "Drop one" option for the lowest assignment, quiz, or exam, assigning the student a grade of zero for an excused absence for extracurricular activity is both contrary to the intent of the Faculty Senate's policy, and an infringement on the student's right to complete all work for the course.

This policy will not apply in the event that completing the assignment or administering the examination at an alternate time would impose an undue hardship on the instructor or the University that could reasonably have been avoided. There should be a good faith effort by both the instructor and the student to agree to a reasonable resolution. When disagreements regarding this policy arise, decisions can be appealed to the Department Chair/Unit Director, College/School Dean, and/or the Faculty Senate Academic Standards Committee.

For purposes of definition, extracurricular activities may include, but are not limited to: fine arts activities, competitive intercollegiate athletics, science and engineering competitions, liberal arts competitions, academic recruitment activities, and any other event or activity sanctioned by a College/School Dean, and/or by the Executive Vice President and Provost.

Rebelmail

Rebelmail is UNLV's official email system for students, and by University policy, instructors and staff should only send emails to students' Rebelmail accounts. Rebelmail is one of the primary ways students receive official University communications, information about deadlines, major Campus events, and announcements. All UNLV students receive a Rebelmail account after they have been admitted to the University. Emailing within WebCampus is also acceptable.

Tutoring and Coaching

The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides tutoring, academic success coaching, and other academic assistance for all UNLV undergraduate students. For information regarding tutoring subjects, tutoring times, and other ASC programs and services, please visit the [ASC website](https://www.unlv.edu/asc), <https://www.unlv.edu/asc>, or call 702-895-3177. The ASC building is located across from the Student Services Complex (SSC). Academic success coaching is located on the second floor of SSC A, Room 254. Drop-in tutoring is located on the second floor of the Lied Library, and on the second floor of the College of Engineering building (TBE A 207).

UNLV Writing Center

One-on-one or small group assistance with writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the [Writing Center](https://writingcenter.unlv.edu/), <https://writingcenter.unlv.edu/>, located in the Central Desert Complex, Building 3, Room 301 (CDC 3-301). Walk-in consultations are sometimes available, but students with appointments receive priority assistance. Students may make appointments in person or by calling the Center, 702-895-3908. Students are requested to bring to their appointments their Rebel ID Card, a copy of the instructions for their assignment, and two copies of any writing they have completed on their assignment.