

COMM 331-002: Message Analysis & Criticism

Boise State University
Communication Department

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Course Website: <http://commstudy.com/331-002.html>

Office: Communication Building, C-104

Office Hrs: **M:** 12:00-1:00 pm **W:** 2:00-3:00 pm

F: 12:00-1:00 pm & by appointment

Course Description: This course focuses on the evaluation of methods of analyzing and criticizing messages and their application to making critical appraisals of public communication. We will treat rhetorical criticism as an act of critical invention and consider not only what rhetorical criticism is and can or should be, but also how critics fuse texts, contexts, and theories to produce judgments about rhetoric in the world. We will read about, learn about, and engage in reading, interpreting, and evaluating essays discussing and exemplifying the art of criticism.

Course Objectives: (1) Understand how rhetoric and criticism are related; (2) Understand how rhetorical theories inform analyses of rhetoric and pieces of rhetorical criticism; (3) Engage in rhetorical criticism of different kinds of texts through a variety of approaches; (4) Explain how good criticism can illuminate something interesting and useful about the world we live in.

Course Texts:

Nothstine, William L., Carole Blair, & Gary A. Copeland. *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and the Criticism of Discourse and the Media*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003. [ISBN:0072875232 or older purple book]

Burgchardt, Carl R. *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, 5th edition. State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 2017.

[ISBN-10: 1891136364; ISBN-13: 978-1891136368]

Supplemental Readings (Links Posted on Course Website IF not in either of the Course Texts listed above):

Benson, Thomas W. "The Rhetorical Structure of Frederick Wiseman's *Primate*." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (1985): 204-217.

Blair, Carole, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr. "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 263-288.

Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 1941.

Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 74-86.

Dorsey, Leroy G. and Rachel M. Harlow. "'We Want Americans Pure and Simple': Theodore Roosevelt and the Myth of Americanism." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 55-78.

Ivie, Robert L. "The Metaphor of Force in Prowar Discourse: The Case of 1812." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982): 240-253.

Fisher, Walter R. "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument." *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 1-22.

Leff, Michael C. and Gerald P. Mohrmann. "Lincoln at Cooper Union: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Text." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60 (1974): 346-358.

Mechling, Elizabeth Walker and Jay Mechling. "The Campaign for Civil Defense and the Struggle to Naturalize the Bomb." *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 55 (1991): 105-133.

Osborn, Michael. "Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 53 (1967): 115-126.

Ott, Brian L. and Eric Aoki. "The Politics of Negotiating Public Tragedy: Media Framing of the Matthew Shepard Murder." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5 (2002): 483-505.

Rosenfield, Lawrence W. "The Anatomy of Critical Discourse." *Speech Monographs* 35 (1968): 50-69.

Simons, Herbert W. "Requirements, Problems, and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 1-11.

All readings are to be completed **BEFORE** each class period under which they are listed on the course website. *Be sure to bring the text and all relevant readings to class on the day they are discussed.*

Attendance: Class attendance is important and expected as a vital part of understanding material through class discussion and participation in class activities. If you know you will be missing class in advance, a discussion prior to the absence is strongly suggested. For illness, a sent e-mail no later than the end of class is required to be considered for any make-up work.

At the beginning of some class periods, I will pass around a sheet with your names on it. Be sure to sign next to your name to receive credit for that day. If you come in late, it is your responsibility to sign up with me *after* class. This sheet will be the official attendance document for the course and determine whether or not you receive participation points for that day. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get the notes and any additional information presented on that day *before* you come to office hours. Your participation grade is highly correlated with your attendance – if you are not in class, you cannot participate.

Mobile Devices: Due to the large number of mobile devices in our daily lives, I unfortunately must now include consequences of failing to respect this class as a “disturbance free zone.” You are *always* expected to turn your notification sounds OFF when you are in this classroom (this does not mean it is on vibrate, making noise against your notebook in your bag when someone next to you is trying to concentrate). It also means that you may not read or send texts during class at any time. All personal mobile device use unrelated to what we are immediately doing in class is *prohibited*. If there is a pressing reason for your phone to be on vibrate, please be sure you can answer it as discreetly as possible *outside the classroom*.

When other students are presenting, this is of utmost importance (just like in the “real world,” there is a time and a place to make sure your phone is silenced!). If another student is presenting in front of the class and your device becomes a distraction in any way, you will lose your attendance for the day. If your device becomes a distraction during YOUR presentation, you will lose your attendance for the day and lose points from your presentation grade.

Assignments: All assignments are due during the class period indicated on the course website (NOTE: this syllabus is only listed by week). **Late work is not accepted**, nor are substitute or extra-credit assignments. Make-up work can be arranged for legitimate absences (e.g., verified health condition, participation in university-sponsored activities, serious family emergencies, and religious observances). If the absence is known ahead of time, you *must* make arrangements before the date the assignment is due. You are expected to participate in all class activities with your highest level of integrity, preparation, and effort.

Grades: In this course, you will be required to turn in homework and participate in activities that will be part of your participation grade. You will be responsible for a discussion lead assignment that will be part of a group presentation for the week you sign up in addition to completing a final paper that engages in a particular approach to criticism of a rhetorical text. You will have a midterm examination and a final exam that will test your knowledge about the concepts, theories, strategies and approaches to criticism covered in this class. Please see the descriptions for each major assignment’s details at the end of this syllabus.

Your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Participation: Homework & In-Class Activities (ex. Impromptu writing; oral assessment activities)	100 pts.
Discussion Lead	100 pts.
Midterm Exam	200 pts.
Final Paper Topic Proposal	100 pts
Final Exam	100 pts
Peer Review Workshop	50 pts
Final Paper	100 pts
Total	750 pts.

The letter grade for the course will be assigned as follows:

A+	720-750	B+	645-674	C+	570-599	D+	495-524	F	0-449
A	705-719	B	630-644	C	555-569	D	480-494		
A-	675-704	B-	600-629	C-	525-554	D-	450-479		

Your work is expected to be of high quality, demonstrating a genuine understanding of the subject matter. The following offers insight into how I grade.

A is outstanding. *Such work presents sophisticated, complex, and intellectually challenging argument. Resources are adroitly used to explore the thesis. Papers and presentations are structured and delivered in a way that successfully employs standard form. It takes intellectual risks and succeeds in them, exploring topics thoroughly and within the prescribed time or page limit. The A paper or presentation concludes by exploring the assumptions and implications of the thesis and argumentation (rather than merely summarizing previous points), drawing significant and insightful conclusions out of the analysis that has been presented.*

B is commendable. *Often similar to A work, it may offer slightly less complex or intellectually engaging argument. It is fairly successful in its use of analysis. The B paper or presentation does more than fulfill the assignment by going beyond a routine response and shows evidence of thought and planning; it takes risks and succeeds fairly well, showing originality and intellectual enthusiasm. Oftentimes, the B paper or presentation lacks the polish or sophistication of the A paper or presentation or does not have the same success in organization or argumentation.*

C is acceptable. *This work adequately fulfills the assignment in a routine way. Although it engages the topic and offers a thesis argument, it may not offer a fresh or challenging approach. It needs to delve deeper with analytical questions and approach the topic more imaginatively. The delivery and organization are acceptable but not thoughtfully or carefully constructed. The C paper or presentation often tries to prove rather than explore an argument or interpretation. The supporting materials become merely a means for substantiating a thesis instead of serving as a tool for further exploration of the issues raised in the thesis. Often, supporting materials are not convincingly used in support of the thesis. In addition, the conclusion does not move much beyond the initial thesis.*

D is deficient. *The D paper or presentation may be similar to the C paper or presentation but not as completely argued. The thesis is often bland or does not present a clear argument. Supporting materials are often poorly used or left unexplained. There are often serious organizational flaws or problems with the logic of the arguments and conclusions. In spite of these flaws, however, the D paper or presentation does address the topic and attempts to construct an argument with support.*

F is failing. *Although there can be many reasons for not receiving credit, the most common are: (a) summary without an argument or interpretation of the supporting materials, (b) absence of a thesis argument, (c) serious misreading of the text or absence of supporting materials, and (d) plagiarism of outside materials. Plagiarism, as will be discussed later, will minimally result in an F in the course, with the possibility of formal academic reprimand that can potentially result in expulsion from the university.*

I am always happy to discuss the evaluation of your work. If you believe that I have made an error in grading your paper or presentation, please bring your concerns to my attention. **I will not discuss grades during or after class or via e-mail.** To discuss a grade change I expect you to (a) bring your paper or presentation comments to your meeting with me and (b) have reviewed your feedback and prepared a coherent dissent to the comments provided. I will reevaluate the paper or presentation on the condition that I also may find errors that I did not catch in the initial grading process. Your grade, therefore, is subject to gain *and/or* lose points in this process. Please be aware that any discussion of an assignment that is not contesting a grade is ALWAYS welcome and very much encouraged to help facilitate future improvement.

Academic Misconduct: All students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the Boise State University Student Code of Conduct, available on the following webpage: <http://deanofstudents.boisestate.edu/student-code-of-conduct/>

It specifically reads: “The University upholds the values of honesty, trust, fairness, civility, respect, and responsibility as the foundation for a successful academic environment. As a tool, the Student Code of Conduct will help promote growth and learning as students interact with their environment and accept responsibility for decision-making....”

The term “**academic dishonesty**” may include cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty. All assignments submitted by a student must represent her/his own ideas, concepts, and current understanding or must cite the original source. Attempts to violate the academic integrity of an assignment do not have to be successful to be considered academic dishonesty...[please see website for a list of examples]...

The term “**cheating**” includes any action where an individual or group either carries out or attempts to carry out dishonest work and/or where an individual or group either assists or attempts to assist an individual or group to carry out dishonest work. If students are uncertain whether an action constitutes cheating, they have a responsibility to ask the faculty member for the course for clarification...[please see website for list of examples]...

The term “**plagiarism**” at its most basic level means to steal someone else’s words, composition, research, and/or ideas. Plagiarism is both cheating and theft. Given the seriousness of this offense, students have a responsibility to understand its meaning and implications for the academic community. Plagiarism can be committed in any type of assignment...[please see website for list of examples]...

Any student found to have committed, or attempted to commit, any of the following misconduct is subject to sanctions outlined in the Student Code of Conduct...[see website for specific procedures and sanctions]”

Educational Access Statement: Students with disabilities needing accommodations to fully participate in this class should contact the Educational Access Center (EAC). All accommodations must be approved through the EAC prior to being implemented. To learn more about the accommodation process, visit the EAC’s website at <https://eac.boisestate.edu/new-eac-students/>.

Boise State University Firearm Policy: Idaho law permits concealed carry of firearms on the Boise State University campus by some students, faculty, staff, and visitors. Other than qualified law enforcement officers, only persons who have been issued and are in possession of an Idaho enhanced concealed carry license are permitted to do so. Firearms must remain concealed at all times. If a firearm becomes visible it is a violation of university policy and the person may be removed from campus. Please notify Boise State Campus Security (call 208.426.6911) or the Boise Police Department (call 911) for any reports of firearms on campus. Use of firearms is prohibited on campus.

Course Schedule: The following is a *tentative* course schedule for the next 16 weeks. Each day, we cover a new topic through a combination of lecture and discussion. The items in bold text are readings to be completed before the class period that are assigned (see website for specific daily assignments). *Readings are imperative for effective class discussion and processing. Please make sure that you have all reading completed prior to the start of class.* Please check the class website for the weekly detailed assignments and due dates: <http://commstudy.com/331-002.html>. **Be sure to visit the website before each week to find out the daily reading assignments as well as check for any announcements, notes from your professor, or changes to the general schedule below.**

<u>Week 1</u> <i>What is Criticism?</i> <i>What is Rhetoric?</i>	Aug 28	CH 1 (Nothstine): Invention in Media and Rhetorical Criticism; Rosenfeld (1968) [provided in class]
<u>Week 2</u>	Sept 4	NO CLASS - LABOR DAY
<u>Week 3</u> <i>Maxim 1 of Rhetorical Criticism</i>	Sept 11	(Nothstine) Maxim 1 (p. 10); CH 6: The Campaign for Civil Defense; Mechling & Mechling (1991) [citation listed above] WRITING EXERCISE #1
<u>Week 4</u> <i>Maxim 2 of Rhetorical Criticism</i>	Sept 18	(Nothstine) Maxim 2 (p. 10); CH 8: Rhetorical Structure and <i>Primate</i>; Benson (1985) [citation listed above] WRITING EXERCISE #2
<u>Week 5</u> <i>Maxim 3 of Rhetorical Criticism</i>	Sept 25	(Nothstine) Maxim 3 (p. 11); CH 11: The Metaphor of Force in Prowar Discourse; Ivie (1982) [citation listed above] LIBRARY ACTIVITY

<u>Week 6</u> <i>Maxim 4 of Rhetorical Criticism</i>	Oct 2	Review of Maxim 3; (Nothstine) Maxim 4 (pp. 11-12); CH 15: Public Memorializing in Postmodernity; Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, Jr. (1982) [in Burgchardt] WRITING EXERCISE #3
<u>Week 7</u> <i>Midterm Exam</i>	Oct 9	MIDTERM EXAM
<u>Week 8</u> <i>Traditional Criticism</i>	Oct 16	Part 2: Traditional Criticism [Burgchardt, pp. 147-48]; Leff & Mohrman (1974) [in Burgchardt] DISCUSSION LEAD GROUP PRESENTATION #1
<u>Week 9</u> <i>Dramatistic Criticism</i>	Oct 23	Part 3: Dramatistic Criticism [Burgchardt, pp. 209-210]; Burke (1941 – excerpt from <i>The Philosophy of Literary Form</i>) [in Burgchardt]; Ott & Aoki (2002) [in Burgchardt] DISCUSSION LEAD GROUP PRESENTATION #2
<u>Week 10</u> <i>Narrative Criticism</i>	Oct 30	Part 4: Narrative Criticism [Burgchardt, p. 261-262]; Fisher (1984) [in Burgchardt]; Dorsey & Harlow (2003) [citation listed above] DISCUSSION LEAD GROUP PRESENTATION #3
<u>Week 11</u> <i>Social Movement Criticism</i>	Nov 6	Part 6: Social Movement Criticism [Burgchardt, pp. 395-396]; Simons (1970) [in Burgchardt] DISCUSSION LEAD GROUP PRESENTATION #4
<u>Week 12</u> <i>Gender Criticism</i>	Nov 13	Part 10: Gender & Queer Criticism [Burgchardt, p. 591-592]; Campbell (1973) [citation listed above] DISCUSSION LEAD GROUP PRESENTATION #5 FINAL PAPER TOPIC PROPOSAL DUE
<u>Week 13</u>	Nov 20	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK
<u>Week 14</u> <i>Final Paper Prep & Peer Review</i>	Nov 27	ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS (REQUIRED) PEER-REVIEW WORKSHOP (REQUIRED) FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY
<u>Week 15</u> <i>Final Exam Prep</i>	Dec 4	Final Exam Q&A
<u>Week 16</u>	Dec 11	FINAL EXAM 10:00-12:00

Assignments: There are four major components to this class beyond weekly readings, participation, and homework:

1. **Discussion Lead:** You will be responsible for leading discussion during ONE week of class this semester. This will be a group activity resulting from a sign-up sheet distributed in the beginning of the semester. This discussion should thoughtfully engage your classmates in an attempt to synthesize the major concept(s), theory(s), and strategy(s) for engaging in good criticism discussed the week of your presentation. You should choose a rhetorical text that will serve as a central example for engaging your classmates in analyzing and thoughtfully understand the world. You should be sure to focus on the approach to criticism that served as the focus of our discussion the week of your presentation. You should incorporate an interactive element for the class to engage this strategy and discuss how this text can be analyzed with this approach to criticism. You should then set up discussion questions for your classmates to engage via a Blackboard Discussion Board and *each* group member will be responsible for summarizing/responding to a particular discussion board thread at the end of the open posting time. A more detailed assignment sheet and evaluative rubric for this activity will be provided before the first discussion lead presentation.

2. **Midterm Exam** – Your midterm exam will test your knowledge of important concepts and strategies for engaging in criticism discussed in class, theories applied and analyzed in our readings, and your ability to connect each of the maxims discussed in our Nothstine et. al text to “successful” criticism. The exam will focus on short answer and/or essay questions about the course content and build upon your in-class Writing Activities.

NOTE: Exams will test your abilities in 4 general areas in conjunction with a 300-level course: (1) your objective knowledge from the course texts, articles, and notes (ex. terminology, concept characteristics, etc.); (2) your ability to explain relevant course concepts, theories and strategies of engaging criticism, and terminologies thereof; (3) your ability to apply these concepts and strategies to various “real world” situations (contexts) and texts (specific foci of criticism); and (4) your ability to coherently engage in the specific approaches to message analysis and criticism discussed in the class throughout the semester.

3. **Final Exam** –Your Final Exam will test your knowledge of important concepts and strategies for engaging in specific types of criticism addressed in this class over the course of the semester. It will require you to explain how these approaches work in terms of specific texts and contexts. It will utilize a short answer section but will also focus on your understanding of excerpts and objective information from our course readings and class discussion rather than developing a coherent, researched, and cited piece of rhetorical criticism. This part of your final exam will focus on the objective understandings of course content while your Final Paper is intended to allow you to reflect your own experiences as they intersect the forms of analysis and interpretation we have addressed in this class.

4. **Final Paper:** Your Final Paper in this class will focus on a selected text (piece of rhetoric). You will be expected to appropriately situate your text in its proper context, engage in a particular approach to criticism we cover in class to analyze it, and demonstrate your ability to clearly explain and illustrate the guiding maxims that define “good criticism” in this class. You are required to turn in a topic proposal assignment in Week 12 to articulate how you anticipate focusing and developing your rhetorical criticism such that you can receive feedback about your ideas *before* turning in the final draft for a grade. You are also required to participate in a peer review workshop of your rhetorical criticism in Week 14 (more information forthcoming). ***A detailed assignment sheet for the Final Paper will be handed out in class and discussed after the completion of your Midterm Exam.***

We will discuss the specific format of all exams closer to their scheduled dates.

Remember—explore your interests. Challenge your understandings. Learn new things. Most importantly, have fun making new discoveries as you think about the world around you in new ways!