Group Assignment: Rhetorical Analysis

Introduction
In this course, you’ll write many arguments. One way to develop your skill at making arguments is to develop the skill of analyzing the arguments of others. In this assignment, you will analyze two arguments, trying to understand their rhetorical elements. This will be both a group and individual effort, in which you will post individual responses to your group’s wiki space, lead a class discussion as a group, and write a final compare-contrast observation as a group. You will work in groups of four, and your group will be responsible for 15 minutes of the class period.

Overview of assignment
Each group will select two political speeches. For the first part of the assignment, each member of the group will use the group’s wiki space to discuss the rhetorical elements of the speeches with other members of the group. The next stage of the assignment is to prepare a group presentation on the speeches. Finally, the group will develop the responses on the wiki into a cohesive essay comparing and contrasting the rhetorical elements of the two speeches.

Basis of Your Analysis
Since a rhetorical analysis requires you to talk in detail about an argument, you’ll need to use certain technical terms to explain how arguments work. Engagements With Rhetoric discusses a variety of terms that we will review in class: the rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos); the canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, delivery, memory); and reasoning, logic, and fallacies. That’s a lot to cover, and your presentations won’t discuss every example of each of these. Part of the challenge of the presentation will be to decide what the most salient elements of the arguments are and what rhetorical terms best describe the argument; learning how to limit the scope of your argument is a skill you will need to develop in your academic career.

Step One, Wiki Responses to Speeches, (add due date)
Each group will select two American political speeches to compare-contrast. Using speeches by the current Presidential candidates is a good place to start, many of which can be found on YouTube. Barack Obama’s speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention is a good option, as is Mitt Romney’s “Faith in America” speech at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library. Another possible source is www.history.com/media.do?action=listing&sortBy=1&sortOrder=A&topic=GREAT%20SPEECHES.

When selecting speeches, be sure that the two have some basis for comparison. For example, your group might choose to compare the speeches of two contemporary candidates from the same party to illustrate party splits, or you might elect to compare the speeches of a candidate from each party. You might also select two speeches of a singular politician, one from the past, one more recent. Or perhaps you wish to compare the strategies of a politician from an earlier era with one more contemporary. Feel free to be creative in this selection.

Once your group selects its speeches, post them to your assigned space on wiki in whatever format available (transcript of text, audio, video, links to websites). Then, each member of the group should post to the wiki some preliminary ideas about the rhetorical effects of the two speeches. At this point, don’t worry about organizing the information or using effective sentence structure, grammar, and diction. The point of this step is brainstorming; simply use this as an opportunity to develop some ideas. These initial responses will form the basis for the group presentation and for the final group essay. Be sure to read and respond to the ideas of your group members, as well as to the speeches themselves.

* Note: Be sure to budget a little time to figure out how to use the wiki, if you’ve never worked with one before. It’s relatively straightforward, but you should feel free to see me during office hours or email
questions if you have any problems. Also, the main page has an online help section, and OIT can offer assistance as well.

**Step Two: Leading Class Discussion, (add due date)**
The audience for this presentation is not the instructor alone. Your classmates will be asked to evaluate each group’s presentation, based on criteria we have discussed in class; this feedback, plus the evaluation of the instructor, will determine the group’s grade for the presentation.

For homework, everyone will be expected to read/watch/listen to the speeches of the other groups. As a result, your audience will have some experience with your material. The goal of the presentation is not simply to showcase your group’s analysis of the speeches, but to solicit the ideas of your peers to help construct your argument for your final compare-contrast essay. During your 15-minute session, you should lead a discussion about the rhetorical strategies of the speeches. You might choose to play a clip or read a section of the speech to highlight certain rhetorical effects. In addition, you should prepare a handout of key points to guide your audience through the presentation. Keep in mind, however, that this is not a report, but a chance to gain insight from your peers.

**Step Three: Group Essay, (add due date)**
The final stage is to compose, as a group, an essay analyzing and comparing the rhetorical strategies of the two speeches. This essay should be at least 1500 words, and it should reflect the ideas and writing of each of the group members. This essay should have a central thesis making a claim about how and why the two speeches are rhetorically similar or different. To support and develop its claim, the essay should adduce evidence through summarizing, quoting, and paraphrasing. This essay should be constructed ON the wiki, not written in word and then pasted to it. Be sure to acknowledge any external sources (including quotes from your peers in class discussion) according to MLA format.

**Group Work**
Group work requires patience and cooperation. You’ll have time in class to work on the presentation, but you’ll also need to get together outside of class to prepare the presentation.

*Some guidelines for group work*
The hardest part of group work is project management and personalities. You should appoint a project leader and assign tasks. The group will need to fully understand the argument and how to analyze it, design the presentation and plan a schedule for getting the work done; the project leader should help each member of the team understand how all these elements fit together. You may elect to work together entirely via email and wiki, or you might meet in person. In either case, be sure to encourage debate, invite everyone to speak, listen to each member, and treat the project as team property not just as individual effort. If you have any issues, attempt to resolve them as a group; however, feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

**Grading**
This project is worth 10% of your grade in 101. The initial wiki posts, the class discussion, and the final essay will make up the grade for this project. The final project grade will be a holistic one based on these three assignments, with the bulk of the score deriving from the presentation and the essay. The presentation/class discussion will be evaluated by your peers according to a rubric that we develop as a class, and the final essay will be evaluated according to the Freshman Writing Grading Standards. The group will be evaluated as a whole, unless there are unusual circumstances.