

UWC2101B: Writing and Critical Thinking
Civic Discourse in a Fractious World

Instructor: Mark Brantner
Section: B
Day/Time: Tuesday and Friday 10.00 am-12.00 p.m.
Classroom Location: TR1
Email: mbrantner@nus.edu.sg
Office and Office Hours: Tuesday 12-1; Thursday 4-5 and by appointment

Topical Introduction

The word *politics* comes from the ancient Greek word *polis*. While *polis* referred specifically to the city-state, *politics* came to mean, more generally, the ways in which individual people form themselves into a group. *Politics* is equally tied to the Greek word *logos*, which can be translated as *logic* OR *language*. That is, when we describe a political group or movement, we are asking what *logic* structures many individual people into a *political* group. But we could--and should—ask a different question of *logos*: How does *language* link many individual people into a political group?

This question has been brought to the forefront of politics as hate speech proliferates and political debates take more violent forms. But it is a question that has been at the heart of the discipline of rhetoric since its inception 2500 years ago in ancient Greece. This class will introduce you to ancient rhetoric and two competing theories about how language shapes a city's values and politics. It will then demonstrate the influence of these two ideas in contemporary understandings of political debates. To what extent is our understanding of our surroundings subject to the language we use? In which ways is the world 'out there' connected with the language we use to describe it? What is the relation between language and the body? Are there eternal truths that ground a society? Or is society based on contingent and contextual values and laws? How do we convince other people of our ideas? What role should/does education play in the relation between the individual and the polis? We will investigate these and other questions by reading arguments by, among others, ancient Greeks (the Sophists and Plato) and modern philosophers.

Organization

The module is divided into three units. In the first, we will look at some seminal philosophical and rhetorical arguments in the debates about education, language, and persuasion. In the second unit, we will turn to contemporary thinkers who have taken up the questions posed by these essays. The third unit will give you the opportunity to develop your own research project on a research topic related to the content of the module. On many days this semester, the class will be conducted in seminar format, which means we will engage in discussions about reading, writing, and speaking assignments and examine the rhetorical strategies used to persuade audiences. As a class, we will raise questions, pose problems, interpret readings, challenge each others' ideas, and develop strategies for successfully completing assignments. There will also be many sessions in which we perform workshop-style activities, including peer review, conferencing, drafting, and editing. Although there will be mini-lectures on a variety of writing-related topics, we will spend the majority of class time engaging in collaborative discussions and activities.

Rhetorical Introduction and Course Objectives

This module is designed to offer you structured, sustained practice in critical reading, analysis and composing. During the semester, you will read a range of challenging, linguistically rich texts in a variety of genres – which could include academic, literary, rhetorical, cultural, and multimedia works – and write analytical and argumentative essays in response to them. Through

these reading and writing assignments, you will explore the interconnectedness of reading and writing, and you will learn how to use both reading and writing as venues for inquiry, learning, thinking, interpretation, and communication. The course will provide instruction and individualized feedback to help you advance as a careful, thoughtful reader and as an effective writer. Throughout the course you will

- Learn and practice strategies for reading carefully, closely, and critically.
- Work through a full range of writing processes – including invention, planning, drafting, revision, and editing – in order to produce effective college-level essays.
- Develop, organize, and produce effective analytical and argumentative essays.
- Become acquainted with conventions for summarizing, paraphrasing, and documenting reading material in accordance with MLA guidelines.
- Develop a clear, effective writing style, free of major errors, and appropriate for academic audiences.
- Encounter a variety of challenging texts representing a range of literary and non-literary genres.

Course Portfolio

This section of WCT uses a portfolio system, which means that throughout the course, you will turn in polished drafts of writing assignments for both peer review and my commentary but you will not receive formal grades until the end of the semester, when you submit a final portfolio showcasing your very best work. The portfolio system ensures that you have plenty of time to get feedback on, re-imagine, revise, and polish your writing. In short, it gives you the opportunity to strive for excellence. My comments on early drafts will include an indication of the grade characteristics a piece of writing reflects, and suggest ways to improve the paper. The portfolio system allows you to identify your strengths and weaknesses, and improve the overall quality of your writing.

Required Texts

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. “They Say, I Say” with Readings: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing. New York: Norton, 2008.

Assignments

Close Reading: The first paper asks you to make an argument about an aspect of rhetorical theory found in a single text by a particular writer. The Greeks did not explain their rhetorical theory as much as they demonstrated it and expected their students to model their own orations on the before them. Your goal, individually and as a class, is to isolate a key term, idea, or theory within a text, examine it closely, and engage your fellow students in a discussion about it.

Lens or Comparative Paper: The second paper asks you to place two texts in conversation. You have two choices. You may use an insight that you, your classmate, or a secondary source has about rhetorical theory to illuminate a particular aspect of a contemporary Singaporean debate; or you may place two Greek texts in discussion to examine what two thinkers share and don’t share in their ideas about an aspect of rhetorical theory.

Researched Argument: Building on the skills practiced in the two previous papers, the Researched Argument asks you to collect different kinds of research on a research question that interests you. In preparation, you will collect a range of perspectives on the issue by performing library research. You will use this research in creating an academic argument, establishing what has already been written and said (“They Say”), and adding your interpretations and perspectives

to the conversation (“I Say”). I will help you identify appropriate issues and develop an academic research question, but in the end, the focus of your research will be up to you. What is important is that you are invested in the issue you research and the argument you make, that you allow your writing to be a genuine form of inquiry.

COURSE POLICIES:

Attendance Requirements

It matters that you come to every class on time. If you are repeatedly late, it will hurt your final grade.

- If you miss more than a week of class, your final grade will be reduced a letter. (That is, more than two classes on a Tuesday/Friday schedule).
- If you miss more than two weeks of class, your final grade will be reduced by two full letter grades.
- You cannot pass the course if you miss more than two weeks of class.

Typically, excessive tardiness, early departure, or lack of preparation will result in your being marked absent. If you know you will be absent, ask me if you can turn in work in advance. If you experience a crisis that prevents you from completing your work, speak to me about it, or ask an appropriate campus official to document your situation. You would be wise to reserve an absence or two for everyday illnesses or other unpredictable events such as failed alarm clocks, transportation problems, unforeseen travel, etc. Missing a conference counts as an absence.

Drafting Requirements, Due Dates, and Deadline Extensions

To pass the course, you must turn in all drafts of all major assignments on the days they are due. This is part of your participation grade. You may not turn in late homework assignments, but you may turn in work in advance. If you anticipate needing a deadline extension for an assignment draft, you may request one *a week in advance of due dates*. I have the right to deny deadline extensions, and/or implement appropriate penalties when you turn in late work.

Classroom Participation

I expect you to be in every class, on time, fully prepared. You are expected to fulfill all homework requirements. Invest yourself in readings and discussions—doing so will pay off in your writing. Because one of the objectives of WCT is to make you comfortable engaging in different forms of public discourse—both written and oral—you should make an effort to add your voice to discussions during *every* class. While joining classroom conversations is difficult for some, not doing so will negatively impact your grade.

Workshop, Peer Critique, and Sharing Your Work

When you meet in workshop groups to get feedback on your writing, it is your responsibility to have a *complete draft* and to bring enough copies for everyone in your group; I may also request an additional copy for record keeping. Students who arrive without multiple copies will be marked absent. Sharing your writing is perhaps our single most important course activity. Take peer review seriously and work hard to establish the kind of climate that will make it successful. Occasionally I may request drafts to share with the entire class or with other instructors of WCT. You may decline such requests. All work shared in public settings is treated with respect, with student names removed.

Staying in Touch

Think of me as someone who is on your side and willing to help, and contact me if you have questions, concerns, or difficulties. Please feel free to drop by my office, especially during office hours. If I’m not in my office, I am often working outside, either at the picnic table near

Cinnamon Hall or at the tables outside Starbucks. Check e-mail daily, so I can stay in touch with you, too. I use the IVLE course page to update students about classroom activities and homework assignments; you should use IVLE as a resource for WCT information.

Plagiarism

A primary goal of this class is to teach you how to use and document sources appropriately. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask. I will follow NUS's and USP's policies regarding plagiarism.

FEEDBACK AND GRADING:

How I Give Feedback in WCT

This module uses a portfolio approach to grade student writing. This means that I not only respond to your writing in various stages of progress throughout the semester, but that you may revise your work until the very last day of class. As a result, you have the opportunity to produce your very best work. You will also have multiple opportunities to get feedback from your classmates and me. In addition, you are encouraged to seek feedback from Writing Center tutors, friends in your residential community, and others. At the end of each assignment unit, you will turn in a polished draft, and I will carefully respond to it, noting what you have done well, possible strategies for improvement, and the grade characteristics your draft currently reflects. This draft grade, however, is neither binding nor recorded. At the end of the semester, you will resubmit your Researched Argument and two other revised assignments in your course portfolio, which constitutes 70% of your course grade.

Assessments

The Grading Assessment breakdown for the module is as follows:

Essay Grades include assessment on all pre-work, drafts, revisions, and conferences:

Essay 1 (3-4 page close reading of a single text):	20%
Essay 2 (5-6 page comparative analysis of two texts):	30%
Essay 3 (7-8 page research paper using multiple texts):	30%

In-Class Participation and Daily Writing:	10%
Presentation:	10%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Paper 1: Close Reading

In class, we are examining a series of ancient Greek texts that made arguments about language, education, persuasion, and politics. These texts developed a vocabulary as well as a set of strategies that orators used to persuade, inform, and entertain their audiences in court cases, public debates, and ceremonies. We could see these texts as precursors to contemporary textbooks. They were written for people who wanted to learn how to speak well in the polis. But these textbooks look very different from the textbooks we use today. What are the concepts and the strategies that these texts attempted to teach?

In this essay, you will perform a short close reading (3-4 pages) of a single text from class. In this essay, you will make an argument about a text's contribution to rhetorical theory. For example, you might develop and answer the research question: How does Plato conceptualize the relation between memory and rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*? Or how does Gorgias conceptualize the relation between memory and rhetoric in *The Encomium of Helen*? You will be making this argument to your fellow students in class. At the end of essay 1, the entire class—as a whole--will have developed a picture of what the Ancients thought about persuasion.

As you invent, arrange, and revise your arguments, you should:

1. Identify a passage or **keyterm** about which there is debate regarding its meaning, its importance, or its relation to other elements. Close read it, using the methods we've discussed in class and that are outlined on the websites below.

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/CloseReading.html>

<http://www.personal.psu.edu/users/s/a/sam50/closeread.htm>

http://academic.reed.edu/writing/paper_help/close-reading.html

<http://www.slate.com/id/2301243/>

2. Develop a **thesis/major claim** that takes a **stance**, and state your **motive/so what?/kairos** for your essay (the importance of your thesis for both your and others' understandings of the text).

3. Support your thesis through **evidence** that is drawn from closely reading the passage and the essay as a whole, and link this evidence to your thesis through **analysis** that breaks down, interprets, and comments on your evidence.

By the end of your paper, your fellow academics should have a different perspective on the passage or **keyterm** and the text as a whole. Your purpose is to persuade other academics in our classroom that your reading of the text is valid and offers them a different way to think about, engage, or use the text.

\

Paper 2, Option One: Lens Paper

In Paper 1, you and your classmates made arguments about ancient Greek rhetorical theory. In this paper, you will see to what extent the Greek theories are relevant to 21st-century Singapore. In this paper, you will draw from the rhetorical theories that you and your fellow students developed in Paper 1 and from the secondary sources that we've read in class to write a rhetorical analysis (4-6 pages) of a Singaporean debate. For instance, you could develop an answer to the research question: How does the concept of ethos work in a particular Lee Kuan Yew speech?

John Ruskiewicz describes the essence of rhetorical analysis in his textbook *How to Write Anything*:

Rhetoric is the art of using language and media to achieve particular goals. A rhetorical analysis is an argument that takes a close look at the strategies of persuasion within a text; it lists and describes specific techniques that a writer, speaker, editor, or advertiser has employed and then assesses their effectiveness. (222)

In the above definition of a rhetorical analysis, Ruskiewicz states that a rhetorical analysis makes an evaluative claim about someone else's argument. While this kind of rhetorical analysis is perfectly fine, push yourself to consider not whether an argument is good or bad, right or wrong but to consider what an argument does, its effects on its readers, community, or, possibly, its author.

Some of the rhetorical terms that we've looked at are:

Ethos: Authority, Shared Beliefs and Values, Sense of Self

Pathos: Enargeia, Honorific and Pejorative Language

Logos: Claim (**Thesis**), Reason, **Evidence**, Warrant, Backing, Commonplace

Rhetorical Situation: Kairos (**Motive**), Audience, Author, Persuade, Inform, Entertain

Stasis: Arrangement (**Structure**), Conjecture, Definition, Quality, Policy, Cause/Effect

Canons: Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, Delivery

Content and Audience

You will write for the NUS USP first-year community. You should consider what you know about your peers (and faculty) as you write. USP students (and faculty) are bright, intellectually adventurous, and sophisticated—they know a lot about many things. But they don't know everything about everything. You will have to explain key concepts and define terms that you think they will be unfamiliar with. You will also have to persuade your readers that you have something valuable to contribute to their intellectual understanding. As you brainstorm and draft your rhetorical analysis, consider the following questions:

- What logic arranges (**structures**) the text?
- How does the author appeal to the reader's feelings, intellect, and sense of self (pathos, logos, ethos)?
- How does formatting influence the presentation of the writer's ideas (delivery)?
- Which rhetorical strategies does the writer use to persuade the audience?

Organization and Format

Your Rhetorical Analysis should include a thesis that suggests the essence of your analysis, and you must refer specifically to the text in your analysis, using summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation as appropriate. You will use one primary source, which should engage a Singaporean public debate and, at least, one secondary source, which could include your (classmate's) paper 1.

Paper 2, Option Two: Comparative Paper

In this paper, you will continue to think about the relationships among invention (content), arrangement (**structure**), and revision, this time by putting two texts in conversation with each other. Furthermore, you will deepen your understanding of the debates surrounding ancient rhetorical theory. One way to begin this essay is by constructing a research question to which two essays respond. For example, you could ask and develop an answer to the question: How do Plato and Gorgias conceptualize the relation between memory and rhetoric? Then, figure out how each text engages your question. What are the similarities, differences, relations between the two ways of answering the question.

Content and Audience

You will write for the NUS USP first-year community. You should consider what you know about your peers (and faculty) as you write. USP students (and faculty) are bright, intellectually adventurous, and sophisticated—they know a lot about many things. But they don't know everything about everything. You will have to explain key concepts and define terms. You will also have to persuade your readers that you have something valuable to contribute to their intellectual understanding. As you brainstorm and draft your comparative essay, consider the following questions:

- How does each other respond to the question you've constructed?
- On what do the authors agree and disagree? Consider the Stasis questions: Do Plato and Gorgias share a definition of "Memory" but differ on its causes and effects? Do they agree on the effects but not the definition?
- Which rhetorical strategies does the writer use to persuade the audience?

Organization and Format

Your comparative essay should include a thesis that suggests the essence of your analysis, and you must refer specifically to the text in your essay, using summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation as appropriate. Your comparative essay should be written in MLA style, and draw on two primary sources.

Paper 3: Research Argument

Papers 1 and 2 taught you many of the skills that academics use to make arguments in university settings. In this paper, you will write a research paper (6-8 pages) in which you develop and answer a viable research question of your own choosing.

All semester, we have been developing the abilities to ask viable and responsible research questions. As you settle on a research question to investigate, consider a few things:

1. You may choose to use the stasis questions to explore an issue about which there is some debate. Develop as many questions as you can; then edit down your choices.
2. Be curious! Choose a question you don't really have an answer for. This is the point of research!

Content and Audience:

You may choose to write on any topic. In your papers, you must perform the rhetorical strategies that we've been examining all semester. How will you demonstrate your ethos? Remember to consider the logic of your arrangement as well as the kinds of evidence and analysis you use to support your claims. How do you want your audience to feel about the subject? How will you make your topic kairotic? These are just a few of the ideas that we've discussed. Be sure that your writing demonstrates that you've considered them all!

You will write for the NUS USP first-year community. You should consider what you know about your peers (and faculty) as you write. USP students (and faculty) are bright, intellectually adventurous, and sophisticated—they know a lot about many things. But they don't know everything about everything. You will have to explain key concepts and define terms that you think they will be unfamiliar with. You will also have to persuade your readers that you have something valuable to contribute to their intellectual understanding.

Organization and Format

Your research argument should include a thesis that suggests the essence of your analysis, and you must refer specifically to primary and secondary texts in your essay, using summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation as appropriate. Your research essay should consistently employ a standard documentation style. It should have one or two primary sources and have between three and five secondary sources. All sources should be appropriate to the academic expectations of a university community.