

Analyzing Political Arguments

purpose of this unit

As we continue our discussion of the arguments around the presidential election, this unit gives you a chance to research a specific argument occurring around the election in more depth. In this unit, you will learn to analyze the kinds of arguments made without expressing your own opinion on the issue.

required products and deadlines

[10/16] choice of topic

[10/21] three sources

[10/23] analyses of three sources

[10/30] draft of rhetorical case study

[11/13] portfolio for rhetorical case study

overall description of this unit and the rhetorical case study essay

Now that you've entered the editorial discussion around the presidential election and had the chance to express your opinions about the issues, your next assignment requires that you study a group of texts that present arguments about a specific issue in the coming election. As you prepare to write this essay, you will identify a specific issue that is important to you as a voter in the presidential election. Then, you will identify a number of primary texts (actual arguments composed in direct and immediate response to the controversy, rather than commentaries or analyses written after the fact) that present arguments about the issue. These arguments can take a number of forms: editorials, cartoons, magazine or newspaper articles, commercials/propaganda, speeches, transcripts of discussions, photos, posters, ads, songs, etc. Because we are in the final weeks leading up to the election, there should be no shortage of issues and related sources available to you.

Within your essay, you'll want to analyze your 'texts,' discuss the broader rhetorical situation surrounding the issue, and put this in the context of your controlling idea about how arguments are developed on the eve of a national election, as evidenced by your case study. Your discussion will cover three to five arguments that take different sides on your chosen issue. These don't have to be limited to the sides taken by the candidates but will likely extend beyond those positions. For each argument, you'll complete a *separate* rhetorical analysis, some of which we'll start in class.

You'll also discuss the broader rhetorical context by considering the following questions:

- What community or communities are involved? Who are the stakeholders? In other words, in addition to the author, whose interests does the argument represent?
- Who is representing the various positions? Whose positions are not being represented?
- What general observations can you make about the ways in which the various authors have put forward their arguments? Are all the arguments equally successful? Are they problematic in interesting or similar ways?
- What enables these arguments to be most persuasive or convincing? What sorts of things tend to undermine the arguments' persuasiveness? Do you have a sense as to how the problems or gaps in the argument might have been overcome or avoided?

To consider more broadly your controlling idea about the place of this issue in the presidential election, you'll want to think about:

- How has your analysis of the issue influenced your own understanding or conclusions regarding the issue? In what way has your understanding been broadened?
- Finally, what do the analyzed arguments suggest about the importance of this issue in the election? Do the arguments seem to be vital to decisions by some (or few or many) voters?

As you have read and blogged about the election and related issues since August, you have probably connected with one or more issues that are especially important to you as a voter. To look for key issues and primary sources, here are a few websites that can help you get started:

- CNN (<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/issues/>)
- New York Times (<http://politics.nytimes.com/election-guide/2008/issues/index.html>)
- On The Issues (<http://www.ontheissues.org/Issues.htm>)
- BBC (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/629/629/7436221.stm)

Throughout the unit, you will also be reading and blogging about arguments that you read or view that discuss this specific issue. Essentially, you'll be following the issue and developments in the argument in the weeks leading up to the election. Some of these arguments we'll discuss in class, considering them as fodder for discussion and analysis; those not discussed in class will be useful for providing additional context for your topic and arguments.

Logistics

[length] 2000-2500 words, 8-10 pages, not including works cited

[sources] 3-5 primary sources, depending on length

[format] standard essay in MLA format, use double spaced 12-point Times New Roman and 1" margins, etc. (see MLA formatting guide on eCollege)