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Arguments

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FOURTH EDITION

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# Part I

## ANALYSIS AND ARGUMENT

### CHAPTER 1

Analyzing Texts and Writing  
Thesis Statements

### CHAPTER 2

Understanding Strategies  
of Persuasion

### CHAPTER 3

Composing Arguments





## CHAPTER 1

# Analyzing Texts and Writing Thesis Statements

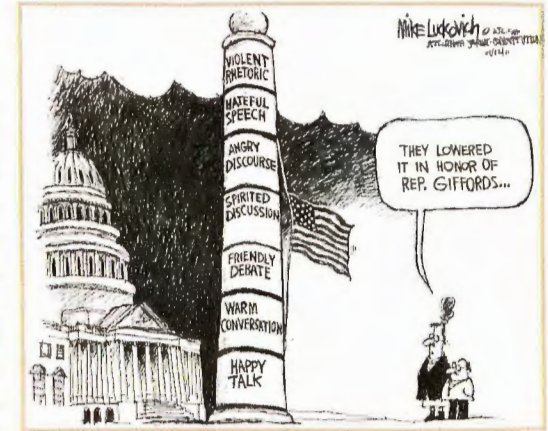
## Chapter Preview Questions

- 1.1 How do we read and analyze texts rhetorically?
- 1.2 How do we define the rhetorical situation?
- 1.3 How do exigence and purpose affect persuasion?
- 1.4 What are effective strategies for analyzing rhetorical texts?
- 1.5 How should I brainstorm parts of an essay, including the thesis statement?

Everywhere around us, words and images try to persuade us to think about the world in certain ways. We can see this persuasive power at every turn: from newspaper articles to television broadcasts, blog posts, advertisements, political campaign posters, Facebook status posts, tweets, and even video footage circulated online. In each case, such texts—whether verbal, visual, or a combination of the two—try to move us, convince us to buy something, shape our opinions, or make us laugh.

Consider the text in Figure 1.1 by Mike Luckovich, a Pulitzer Prize–winning cartoonist who publishes in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. Luckovich created this cartoon after the 2011 assassination attempt on Gabrielle Giffords, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, outside a Safeway store in Tucson, Arizona. Six people were killed, including a 9-year-old girl. Giffords herself was critically injured, along with 12 other people. The incident raised concerns over political speeches and Website images that had used gun metaphors to target Democrats such as Giffords in upcoming elections. Some feared that such language and imagery might have contributed to the attack. In response to the controversy, Luckovich composed a cartoon as a persuasive text indicating his view. How does his text use both words and images to persuade audiences to think a certain way about the top term: “Violent Rhetoric”? Look at the hierarchy of values, beginning with “happy talk” at the bottom, moving through

“warm conversation” and “friendly debate” to a more vigorous “spirited discussion.” Notice how the words then become more negative, including “angry discourse” and “hateful speech.” While we usually consider “hateful speech” to be the worst form of communication, Luckovich places “violent rhetoric” above it, as the very apex of dangerous discourse. The cartoon is ironic since when most people think of *rhetoric*, they often think of political rhetoric, which they perceive as either empty and meaningless (all talk, no action) or worse, as negative: harmful to the reputation of others, fear-mongering, and even hateful. The cartoon emphasizes this common view placing the words “violent rhetoric” at the top.



**FIGURE 1.1** Mike Luckovich’s political cartoon demonstrates through words and images how people commonly view “rhetoric” as a negative and dangerous form of communication.

But understanding this cartoon depends not just on analyzing the words. The location of words in particular places within the visual—and the visual elements themselves—also contribute in crucial ways to the meaning of the text. The lowered flag, for instance, might indicate that Giffords nearly died from her critical injuries, and indeed six people did die. The purposeful lowering of the flag to half-mast is itself a form of visual communication, well understood across America; it represents the nation’s act of honoring a deceased person. The dome of the Capitol Building in the background suggests that the government has lowered the flag and wants people to move from “violent rhetoric” to “spirited discussion.” In this way, the cartoon combines words and visual details to suggest both a tribute to Giffords and the need for calmer, gentler political communication. That is our understanding of the cartoon’s argument when we **analyze the text rhetorically**. As you develop your skills of critical thinking and rhetorical analysis, you will also learn how to interpret and write your own arguments about such texts.

At the same time, you will learn how to apply your skills of analysis across a range of media, including printed or spoken words. With regard to the assassination attempt, many writers commented on the event through newspaper articles, on blogs, via email, and on social media. In a post on the political blog *Daily Kos*, for example, Barbara Morrill used the term *rhetoric*



right in her title: “Violent Rhetoric and the Attempted Assassination of Gabrielle Giffords.” While the title seems objective in tone, the writer draws on very strong language in the opening paragraph in order to connect the two parts of the title:

In the two days since the attempted assassination of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, the debate has been raging over the culpability of the violent rhetoric that is so commonplace in today’s political climate. Which of course has led to the rapid-fire peddling of false equivalencies by the right, where now, saying a congressional district is being targeted is the same as actually putting crosshairs on a district and saying it’s time to “RELOAD.”

By accusing the right of “rapid-fire peddling,” the author frames words through a gun metaphor in a way that creates a vivid image in the reader’s mind. She also refers to the metaphoric language that politicians had used—targeting a district, crosshairs, and “reload”—as evidence for her claim. The details of her written text parallel the elements of the cartoon (Figure 1.1). As you develop your skills of analysis about texts, keep in mind that you can understand them better if you look closely at all the specific elements, whether verbal or visual. Once you recognize how texts function *rhetorically*—that is, how texts try to persuade you and shape your opinion about the world around you—then you can decide whether or not to agree with the many messages you encounter every day. To grasp this concept, let’s follow one hypothetical student—we’ll call her Alex—as she walks across campus and note the rhetorical texts she sees along the way.

### 1.1 How do we read and analyze texts rhetorically?

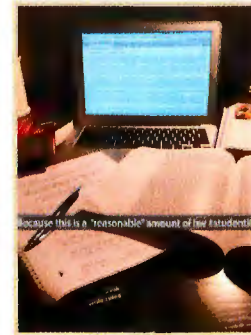
## UNDERSTANDING TEXTS RHETORICALLY

By shadowing Alex and noticing what she notices, you can construct her **personal narrative**, or written account of her journey, about the rhetorical texts she sees along the way.

Let’s begin in her dorm room, which Alex and her roommate have decorated with a concert tour poster, an artsy map of New York City, a poster for the women’s basketball team, and a photo collage of pictures from their spring break cross-country trip. As she prepares to leave, she smiles as she glances at a meme she’s printed and taped over her desk: the black-turtleneck-wearing Hipster Barista, with the caption, “\$120,000 Art Degree ... Draws faces in latte foam.”

As Alex walks down the hall, she pauses when a friend calls her into the lounge to watch a brief clip from a rerun of *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* on his laptop. Oliver is in top form, providing a satirical critique of the militarization of American police forces, and Alex and her friend laugh for a few minutes about the sketch before she heads out. Walking down the stairwell, she glances briefly at the flyers that decorate the walls—for a charity dance for the victims of a recent earthquake, a dorm meeting about a ski trip, and a rally against immigration laws. She does a double-take to look at the clever design of a flyer for the Zen club (see Figure 1.2), making a mental note about the meeting time, and then walks into the cool autumn air.

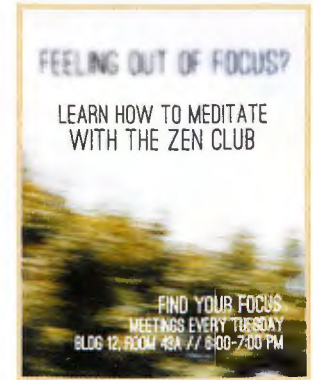
Outside, Alex looks down at her smartphone, scrolling through recent Instagram posts as she walks along. She sees one friend’s updated profile photo, another’s pictures from a recent trip to New Orleans, and a third’s reposting of a link to a parody video of a Taylor Swift song. She stops at the outdoor café and checks her Twitter feed while waiting for her coffee, amused by her favorite celebrity’s posting about the Academy Awards. As her coffee arrives, her phone buzzes, and she opens a funny Snapchat photo from her younger sister, pausing for a moment to send a selfie of her own, which she captions with the phrase, “Must have coffee.” Looking at the time, she realizes she’s running late and hurries off to class.



**FIGURE 1.3** A snapchat from Alex’s younger sister.

Now Alex has only 2 minutes before class starts, so she takes the shortcut through the student union, past a sign advertising the latest Apple laptop, and then heads outside and crosses in front of an administration building where a group of student protestors are chanting and waving signs demanding that the university divest from fossil fuels. She weaves alongside a cluster of gleaming steel buildings that constitute the engineering quad and passes the thin metal sculpture called *Knowledge* that guards the entrance to the library.

Finally she reaches her destination: the Communications department. Walking into the building, she stops to glance at the front page of the school newspaper, stacked by the door; intrigued by the headline, “Greek Life Claims University Targets Them,” she grabs a copy to read later. She



**FIGURE 1.2** A flyer that Alex notices on her way to class.



slips into the classroom for her Com 101 class on Media and Society and realizes that the class has already started. Ducking into the back row, Alex watches the professor advance his PowerPoint slides to one containing key questions for that day's class (see Figure 1.4). As she sits down, the TA passes her a handout, and she opens her laptop to take notes. She's immediately distracted by posts on the social media sites that pop up, calling for her attention: targeted advertisements, viral videos, even BuzzFeed quizzes. Ignoring them, she opens a blank document instead and then turns to examine the handout, which includes an editorial about a tragic shooting at the offices of a French satirical magazine.

With Alex safely at her seat, think about how many texts you noticed along her journey. Flyers, ads, posters, videos, Websites, newspapers, television shows, photographs, memes, sculpture, signs, PowerPoint slides, even architectural design: each is an example of rhetoric. Why? Because each text

offers a specific message to a particular audience. Each one is a persuasive act. Once you begin to look at the world rhetorically, you'll see that just about everywhere you are being persuaded to agree, act, buy, attend, or accept an argument: rhetoric permeates our cultural landscape. Just as we did above, you might pay attention to the rhetorical texts that you find on your way to class and then construct your own personal narrative consisting of words and images. Learning to recognize the persuasive power of texts and read them rhetorically is the first step in thinking critically about the world.

**TODAY'S CASE STUDY:**  
The Charlie Hebdo Shooting and public response

**Questions:**

- What are the limits to free speech in the media?
- What is the balance between cultural sensitivity and free speech? Should hate speech be protected as free speech?
- What are the risks of free speech?
- Can speech be "free" if we self-censor ourselves?



FIGURE 1.4 PowerPoint slide from Alex's class.

### WRITER'S PRACTICE

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Look back at the texts that Alex encountered in Figures 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4. How do they attempt to persuade their audience? For each one, jot down some notes about each text's message and the different ways the texts try to make their arguments. Consider how they use words and images, alone and in combination, to convey their message.

## UNDERSTANDING THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

1.2 How do we define the rhetorical situation?

In one of the earliest definitions, the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle characterized **rhetoric** as *the ability to see the available means of persuasion in any given situation*. While Aristotle's lessons in rhetoric emerged in the fourth century BCE as a form of instruction for oral communication—specifically, to help free men represent themselves in court—today, the term *rhetoric* has expanded to include any verbal, visual, or multimedia text that aims to persuade a specific audience in a certain place and time. More generally, you can understand rhetoric as the strategies people use to convey ideas; in the words of scholar and rhetorician Andrea Lunsford, "Rhetoric is the art, practice, and study of human communication."

To understand how a rhetorical text works, you need to analyze how it targets a specific **audience**, how it has been composed by a specific **author**, and how it conveys a particular **argument**. This dynamic relationship is called the **rhetorical situation**, and we have represented it with a triangle in Figure 1.5.

As a writer, when you compose persuasive texts, you need to determine which strategies will work to convince your audience in a particular situation. There are many different choices to consider, and that is why rhetoric is both a dynamic and a practical art. Imagine, for instance, that you are involved in the following rhetorical situations and have to decide which strategies would be most persuasive for each case.

- **Attend to audience.** If you were a politician writing an editorial for a newspaper or speaking at an interview on CNN about your definition of marriage, you would use strikingly different metaphors and statistics depending on which constituency (or *audience*) you are addressing.
- **Attend to author.** If you wanted to publicize a

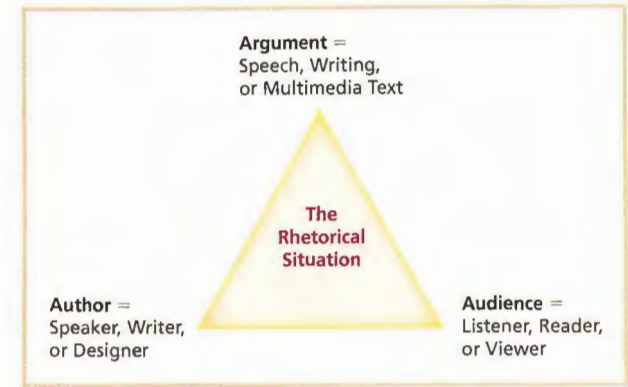


FIGURE 1.5 The rhetorical situation is dynamic and governs all communication, whether oral, written, or multimedia.



message against drug use to local middle school students, you might compose pamphlets, emails, presentations, or posters with information graphics, and each one would be designed based on your position as *author*—teacher or police officer? student or parent?—while trying to reach that teenage audience.

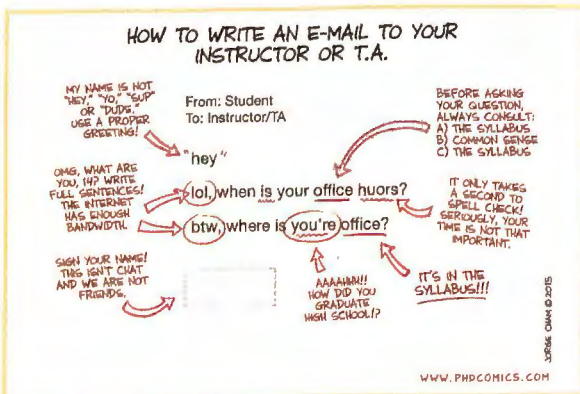
- **Attend to *argument*.** If you were fashion industry intern updating the company’s social media marketing campaign, you would revise the message (or *argument*) of the advertisements to fit the media, whether Facebook posts, tweets, or even Internet videos.

Cartoonist Jorge Cham offers us an example in Figure 1.6 of how the rhetorical situation affects persuasion in relation to a communicative act that might be even more familiar to you: a student’s email to the instructor. In a panel for his series *PhD comics*, he shows how a misunderstanding of the rhetorical situation can sabotage successful communication.

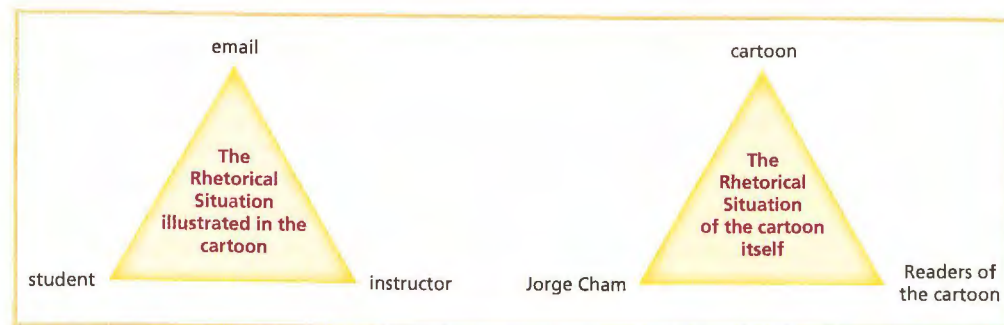
What the comic illustrates is the instructor’s analysis of the student’s communication and his implicit criticism that the student misreads his *audience* and therefore composes an ineffective *argument*. The agitated arrows point us to evidence for this interpretation: misspellings, punctuation mistakes, jargon, and an uninformed message (the answers to the email apparently are all in the syllabus). However, the comic also invites us to critique the instructor’s assessment of the rhetorical situation. On the one hand, the

fictional instructor has treated the email communication like an essay, scoring it with red-inked annotations; on the other, he uses an angry voice that seems inappropriate to the instructor–student relationship (“OMG, what are you, 14?”; “we are not friends”). In both cases, he fails in the same way as his student to create a moment of effective communication.

In fact, there are two layers to this cartoon, two rhetorical situations that we can explore (see Figure 1.7): the fictional situation of the email, where the relationship is between student (writer), instructor (audience), and



**FIGURE 1.6** This comic from *PhD comics* offers a pointed analysis of a hypothetical student’s misjudging of the rhetorical situation in emailing his instructor.



**FIGURE 1.7** The cartoon’s two rhetorical situations.

email (argument), and then the rhetorical situation of the editorial cartoon itself, which triangulates the relationship between Jorge Cham (writer), the cartoon’s readers (audience), and cartoon (argument). Cham encourages us to engage with both levels explicitly by including the asterisk and footnote. In his qualifier, “No offense to those actually called ‘Hey,’ ‘Yo,’ ‘Sup,’ or ‘Dude,’” he differentiates his own voice from that of the fictional instructor, helping us remember there are dual levels at work in the cartoon.

## UNDERSTANDING EXIGENCE AND PURPOSE

As you move toward better understanding rhetoric, another important concept to consider is **exigence**—the *urgent demand* that writers feel to respond to a situation, his or her motive for writing. Have you ever seen a news article or heard about an event on campus that prompted you to respond strongly? When this happens, in rhetoric, we call this the **exigencies of a situation**, or the demands put on a writer to respond immediately and urgently in the attempt to take action or raise a concern about a specific problem or issue.

Think about tweets sent out in response to a sports team winning a championship, a flash of celebrity gossip, a political debate, or a crisis on campus. These are all contemporary instances of exigency. The scholar who gave us the rhetorical situation shown in Figure 1.5, Lloyd Bitzer, emphasized that *rhetorical exigency* happens when change is possible: “An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification *requires* discourse or can be *assisted* by discourse.” That is, rhetorical exigency exists when there is the possibility that discourse (i.e., forms of

**1.3** How do exigence and purpose affect persuasion?



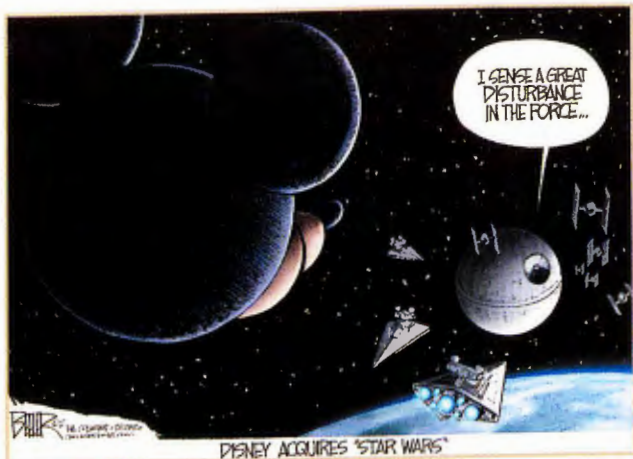
communication) can effect change. For instance, policies regulating parking on campus can potentially be modified through discourse or language, but drought and death cannot.

Understanding exigence can help us likewise understand an author's **purpose**. Whether that purpose be internal and emotional or more objective—for instance, seeking to affirm or reaffirm the status quo—*motive* and *purpose* shape the way authors write texts across media. Many rhetoricians identify three broad types of possible purposes for communication: to entertain, to inform or explain, or to persuade. However, purpose can be more nuanced. An author's purpose might be to describe, to define, to influence, or to call to action, for instance; in fact, an author might have complementary purposes in crafting a text. By examining an author's *motive* or *purpose*—what he wanted to accomplish with the text—we can get a better understanding of the rhetorical choices he made in communicating with his audience.

Let's look at a contemporary example to see how rhetorical exigency combines with purpose to create persuasive texts. When Disney announced its acquisition of the Star Wars enterprise from George Lucas in 2012, people were shocked and even outraged. Many felt the need to respond through discourse—by tweeting, writing blog posts, composing articles in popular online magazines, and even drawing cartoons. In each case, the author felt

prompted to respond urgently and immediately to what was widely viewed as a problem situation.

Consider, for instance, the cartoon in Figure 1.8 by Nate Beeler, an award-winning editorial cartoonist for the *Columbus Dispatch*, which he created in response to the merger. Entitled, “Disney Acquires ‘Star Wars,’” the cartoon demonstrates the exigency that caused so many Americans to speak out or write about this surprising amalgamation between two enormous entertainment companies.



**FIGURE 1.8** Nate Beeler's cartoon uses humor in response to Disney's purchase of Star Wars.

The giant head of Mickey Mouse, floating in space toward the galactic fleet, has an ominous look to it, creating a sense of foreboding. It suggests the *motive* of the cartoonist might have been to criticize this acquisition. In fact, this critique is further amplified by the way Mickey's head has been transformed into a version of the iconic Death Star, threatening to supplant the original space station/super weapon, which seems small and less imposing by comparison. Beeler is clearly presenting Mickey (and, by association, Disney) as the new “bad guy” of the Star Wars universe.

Moreover, the words emerging from the space station, “I sense a great disturbance in the force,” echo Obi-Wan Kenobi's classic line from *Star Wars Episode IV*, “I felt a great disturbance in the force, as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced.” In the original context, Obi-Wan refers to the destruction of an entire planet and the death of its inhabitants; here the fleet makes a similarly ominous pronouncement about the impact of the Disney acquisition on the Star Wars franchise. Putting the visual and the verbal together, we perceive that Beeler exploits the imagery and lexicon of Star Wars fans themselves for a specific *purpose*: to persuade his audience of the negative implications of Disney's acquisition of Star Wars. It is a comic argument, to be sure, but it is an important position that arises from the exigencies of the situation.

Some writers opted for a different mode of editorial commentary, turning to Twitter to offer their perspective on the acquisition. As urgent responses to the deal, the tweets demonstrate how authors react in an attempt to use discourse to voice a personal position or in the hopes of modifying the situation. For instance, writer Andrés de Rojas, who goes by the Twitter handle @aderojas, tweeted the following:

May the Force be with ... Mickey Mouse?

He plays on the iconic phrase, “May the Force be with you,” using ellipses and substituting Mickey Mouse for “you” to create a humorous tone. The final question mark, too, functions rhetorically, to convey his uncertainty over the implications of the acquisition. Raymond Kemp (@RaymondKemp) similarly responded to the exigence of the situation, composing a tweet that, like Nate Beeler's cartoon, adapts Obi-Wan's famous line:

There was a disturbance in the force like the voices of a million nerds were silenced.



His tweet would have greatest resonance with readers familiar with the Star Wars series, but his critique would be evident even to a broader audience. By stating that “the voices of a million nerds were silenced,” he demonstrates his motive or purpose: joining the outcry against the way in which the “nerdy” series of Star Wars might change under the ownership of the more pop culture-oriented vision of Disney.

Clearly, although tweets are brief, they still function as rhetorical acts. Authors who recognize the unique rhetorical situation of the tweet can turn these concise epithets into powerful editorial commentaries. Even the hashtags that writers append to their tweets add a layer of argument. Consider how a tweet about the Disney-Star Wars acquisition becomes more powerful when tagged with a hashtag such as #Depresseddarth, #Darth-goofy, #Don'tpanic, or #awholenewworld. In addition, some authors take advantage of the viral nature of Twitter to punctuate their tweets by attaching pictures, often mash-ups of popular images. For instance, over the first week after the acquisition announcement, scores of images spread through Twitter: photoshopped pictures of Mickey Mouse in Darth Vader's robes, saying, “Luke, I am now your father”; visual remixes of a Disney poster with the caption, “When you wish upon a Deathstar”; a photo of R2D2 wearing mouse ears; a still from *A New Hope* showing the three suns of Luke Skywalker's planet aligned to resemble Mickey Mouse's head. One of the most widely re-tweeted images was originally posted by Eric Alper (@ThatEricAlper): a photoshopped version of a popular image of the Disney princesses with a cartoon version of Princess Leia from Star Wars, wielding her blaster rifle, inserted in the middle. Re-tweeted over 200 times to an ever-broader circle of audiences, the image makes a pointed argument about how it might be the Disney world—not the Star Wars universe—that would change most because of the merger. In each of these examples, the author was responding to the exigence of the situation, using the best available means of persuasion to make his argument to a broad audience.

Considering the concepts of rhetorical exigence and purpose reinforces the fact that rhetoric, since Aristotle, has been linked to *action*. It is far from “empty” but rather can motivate audiences to produce particular outcomes. As Bitzer has argued: “Rhetoric is a mode of altering reality [...] by the creation of discourse which *changes reality* through the mediation of thought and action.”

## STRATEGIES FOR ANALYZING RHETORICAL TEXTS

As we turn to discussing practical strategies for analyzing texts, it's important to understand how these can contribute to helping you develop **critical literacy**—a life skill that entails knowing how to read, analyze, understand, and even create texts that function as powerful arguments about culture and the world around us. In fact, some have argued that writing itself no longer refers just to words on a page, but that writing, redefined for the twenty-first century, invites us to express ourselves and make arguments across media and genres—whether in a book chapter, a podcast, a blog post, a video, or comic. In fact, in many cases, the most powerful arguments are those that combine word and image, the verbal and the visual; such multimedia texts often have greater persuasiveness and reach a broader audience than words alone.

This is the argument made by Scott McCloud in his groundbreaking book, *Understanding Comics*, one of the first texts to use graphic novel form to help readers understand visual rhetoric:

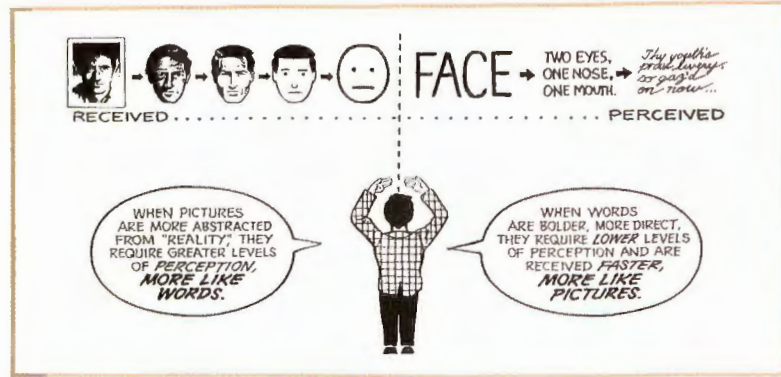
When pictures are more abstracted from “reality,” they require greater levels of perception, more like words. When words are bolder, more direct, they require lower levels of perception and are received faster, more like pictures.

McCloud tells us we need to develop “greater levels of perception,” or *critical literacy*, in order to read with greater levels of perception. In fact, we can look to the brief passage quoted here as an example of persuasive written rhetoric, in which McCloud makes very deliberate choices to strengthen his point. Notice how his words use comparison–contrast (pictures versus words), qualified language (“reality”), and parallel structure (both sentences move from “When” to a final phrase beginning with “more like”) in order to convince his audience that images and words operate in similar ways. Such attention to detail is the first step in *rhetorical analysis*—looking at the way the writer chooses the most effective means of persuasion to make a point.

What is interesting about McCloud's piece is the way in which he uses both words and images to make his point. To fully appreciate McCloud's rhetorical decisions, we need to consider the passage in its original context. As you can see in Figure 1.9, McCloud amplifies his argument about comics by using the form of the graphic novel itself.

**1.4** What are effective strategies for analyzing rhetorical texts?





**FIGURE 1.9** Scott McCloud writes in the medium of cartoons to explain comics.

Source: Courtesy of Scott McCloud

This complex diagram relies on the visual-verbal relationship to map out the complicated nature of how we understand both written text and images. The repetition and echoes that we found in the quoted passage are graphically represented in Figure 1.9; in fact, translated into comic book form, the division between word and image becomes a visual continuum that strongly suggests McCloud's vision of the interrelationship between these rhetorical elements. The power of this argument comes from McCloud's strategic assessment of the rhetorical situation: he, the *author*, recognizes that his *audience* (people interested in visual media) would find an *argument* that relies on both visual and verbal elements to be highly persuasive.

McCloud's example is also instructive for demonstrating the way in which authors can strategically adapt their argument to different media. More than ever, rhetoric operates not just through word choice but also through choice of multimedia elements—images in a commercial, the audio of a viral ad on the Internet, the design choices of a website or flyer, even the layout strategies of your textbook. Therefore, we need to develop skills of analysis for all rhetorical texts. We need to understand argument as *writing across diverse media* and we need, therefore, to develop *critical literacy*, or a careful way of reading, analyzing, and understanding media (visual, verbal, and other rhetorical texts).

Understanding how rhetoric works across different media will give you the ability and confidence to analyze and produce texts of your own. That

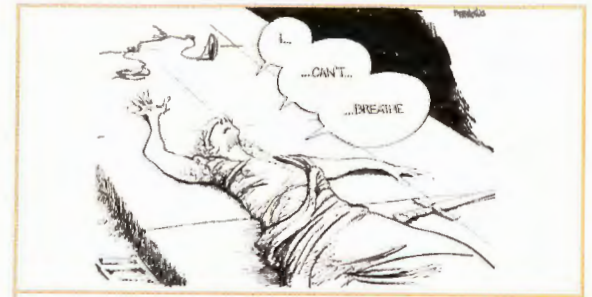
is, these skills of analysis will help you approach other kinds of texts rhetorically: scholarly articles, books, editorials, letters to the editor, political speeches, and—as writing continues to evolve into new forms—blog posts, memes, mash-ups, and more.

## Analyzing Visual Rhetoric

When persuasion—discourse or communication intended to change—happens through visual means, we often look to investigate its *visual rhetoric*. As we saw earlier in the chapter, such visual arguments surround us constantly in our everyday lives. We can use them as a starting point for developing strategies for analysis that we can then transfer to how we approach analysis of written rhetoric.

Editorial cartoons offer a rich resource for this sort of work since, as cultural critic Matthew Diamond asserts, they “provide alternative perspectives at a glance because they are visual and vivid and often seem to communicate a clear or obvious message.” Those messages might be powerful, but they sometimes might offend, as Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonists Doug Marlette has suggested: “[T]he objective of political cartooning ‘is not to soothe and tend sensitive psyches, but to jab and poke in an attempt to get at deeper truths, popular or otherwise.’” Marlette’s words confirm what you probably already know—that cartoons are not just humorous texts but rather, as we have seen, they are rhetorical—they intend to persuade, and sometimes even to provoke.

Let’s begin with the editorial cartoon in Figure 1.10 by Bill Bramhall. Originally published in the *Daily News* on December 4, 2014, the cartoon represents a pointed response to the news that a grand jury declined to bring charges against a New York police officer for the death of Eric Garner, a 43-year-old black man, who died after being put in a chokehold during his arrest. In Bramhall’s cartoon, “I can’t breathe”—Garner’s last words—take on greater resonance when uttered by Lady Justice, shown sprawled on the sidewalk.



**FIGURE 1.10** Bill Bramhall composed this powerful cartoon to comment on the 2014 death of Eric Garner.

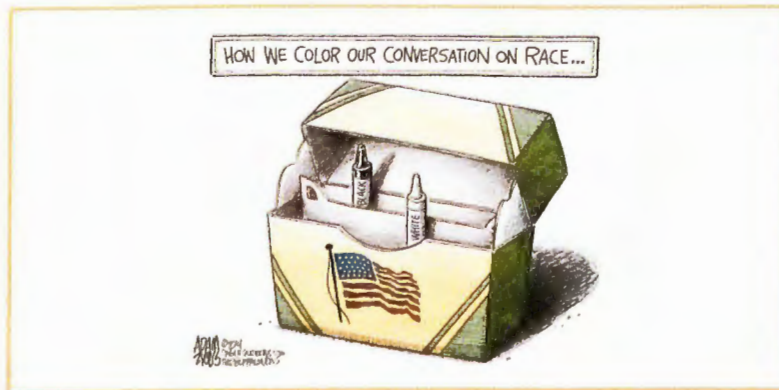


By replacing Garner with the symbol of Justice, Bramhall is making a much stronger argument than just that Garner's death was tragic: his cartoon suggests that justice itself has been laid low by the grand jury decision and that the American people can no longer look to the justice system to defend their rights (with its sword and balancing scales).

Keeping this analysis in mind, consider the different rhetorical effect the cartoon would have had if it had been drawn differently. What if the central figure speaking the words “I can’t breathe” were the Statue of Liberty? What if she were represented as African American? What if instead of being laid out on the sidewalk, she was shown crushed to her pedestal under three police officers, actively trying to restrain her? How would these changes alter the way you understood the cartoon’s argument? This is, in fact, the composition of a different cartoon created by editorial cartoonist Steve Benson. In both Bramhall’s and Benson’s cases, the text was generated out of the same exigence—the grand jury decision—but made different claims about the implications of the event.

Let’s look at another example of how a cartoonist uses visual rhetoric to make a powerful cultural critique on a similar theme.

Appearing days after the Bramhall cartoon we examined above, this cartoon by Adam Zyglis (Figure 1.11) moves beyond the specifics of the Garner case to address the tense U.S. conversations over race prompted by the deaths of Michael Brown (which catalyzed riots in Ferguson, Missouri,



**FIGURE 1.11** Adam Zyglis’s 2014 cartoon addresses larger issues of race relations in America.

in late summer 2014) and Eric Garner. Notice the ways in which Zyglis uses seemingly simple rhetorical elements to convey a multilayered message:

- He heads the cartoon with a powerful title that plays on the word “color” both to refer to how we “fill in” or “shade” our conversations on race (the way a child would color in a picture in a coloring book) and also to allude to the issue of “color” that in itself underlies many discussions of race relations.
- He features an iconic image of a crayon box, replacing the trademark Crayola symbol with an American flag to make the symbolic force of his argument clearer to the audience.
- Instead of filling the box with a multitude of crayon colors, he simply draws one black and one white crayon, underscoring how all other variations, shades, and hues (i.e., racial and cultural identities) are absent from the “conversation.”

Looking at these elements, we can see his message: that conversations about race in America seem limited to a Caucasian-versus-African-American perspective. However, we can push this analysis even further. In choosing a crayon box, Zyglis seems to be indicating that we take a somewhat childish approach to these conversations. Additionally, if we consider the crayon colors to represent argumentative stances rather than symbols of racial identity, he also seems to be arguing against a “black versus white” approach to the issue, that is, an approach to an argument that relies on extreme oppositional stances rather than looking at the complexities or nuances of the issue.

As a final example, let’s turn to a visual argument that responds directly to an event very appropriate to the focus of this chapter: the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings. On January 7, 2015, two Al-Qaeda gunmen entered the offices of the French weekly newspaper, *Charlie Hebdo*, known around the world for its provocative and satirical articles, jokes, and political cartoons. By the time the shooting spree was over, 12 people were dead and 11 injured. *Charlie Hebdo* had long been a target of criticism from many groups, offended by their risqué portrayal of different cultural icons and customs; Muslim readers in particular often expressed displeasure at its irreverent caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed. However, despite the newspaper’s notoriety, the actions of the terrorist extremists were completely unanticipated and sent shock waves across the world.

As might be expected, the editorial cartoonist community in particular responded immediately to this assault on their French colleagues, and





**FIGURE 1.12** Clay Bennett's cartoon response to the Charlie Hebdo shootings centers on the pen as a symbol for Free Expression.

newspaper columns and Internet websites were flooded with editorials—in words and images—reacting to this tragedy. Many of them relied on a central symbol to catalyze their argument: the pen or pencil as a symbol for free speech. One example can be found in Figure 1.12. This image by cartoonist Clay Bennett makes a powerful argument of resilience echoed by many of the other editorial cartoonists who responded to the incident. Notice the way that even with an extremely simplistic design, it articulates a powerful position: the pen, labeled “free expression,” takes center stage on the white background; broken in half and yet mended hastily with string, it suggests that free speech might have been damaged by tragic events, but it has not been destroyed and is ready to be wielded again by the next author who picks up the pen.

Bennett's cartoon was one of many such visual responses to the tragedy. Graphic designer Lucille Cleric circulated a similar image on social media. Her cartoon featured three pencils stacked on top one another: on top, a sharpened pencil (labeled “yesterday”), in the middle, a broken pencil (labeled “today”), and, on the bottom, the broken pencil, resharpened to form two smaller pencils (labeled “tomorrow”). In its original version, Cleric reinforced her visual message with the caption, “Break one, thousand will rise.” She further punctuated her point by circulating it with the hashtag #raiseyourpencilforfreedom.

Her graphic accumulated over 100,000 “likes” almost immediately after its release, demonstrating its resonance with the “Je Suis Charlie” (I am Charlie) movement that swept the world within hours after the attack, as cartoonists, journalists, and citizens offered a hydra-headed expression of solidarity with those who had died in the service of free expression of ideas. In an interview with the website Mashable, Cleric made her motive

for creating the cartoon clear, saying, “I can only hope [the cartoon] will inspire people to use their pencils too and that there will be thousands of drawings like this very soon.” This purpose—to inspire, to move others to action—speaks once again to the power of rhetoric, visual and verbal, not only influence people's ideas but, in some cases, to call them to action.

## WRITER'S PRACTICE

MyWritingLab

Look at this editorial cartoon created by Adam Zyglis (Figure 1.13). Practice your own skills of rhetorical and critical analysis by analyzing the editorial cartoon, taking into account color, composition, characters, and action. Then, try to answer the following questions:

- Who is the audience for the cartoon? How can you tell?
- What is the argument? What elements of cartoon contribute to this message?
- What is the exigency of the cartoon?
- What was the author's motive or purpose for creating the cartoon?



**FIGURE 1.13** by Adam Zyglis

Consider carefully how the artist uses words, images, and elements of composition to convey his message.

## Analyzing Written Rhetoric

As we turn to developing your own analytical skills with regard to written rhetoric, you might find encouragement in Scott McCloud's point from *Understanding Comics* that “Writing is perceived information. It takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language.” The purpose of this book is to help you develop the tools and acquire the knowledge to understand—or decode—the symbols we use to communicate with each other, including visual images but also written rhetoric in all its complexity. The strategies of rhetorical analysis that we discussed above—considering the rhetorical situation, exigency, and the motive and purpose behind a text—will

serve you well as you examine communication in its many different forms. However, while with visual rhetoric we layered in more detailed examination of image, layout, color, and composition, as we move to more conventional written forms, you'll correspondingly need to take into account additional rhetorical elements: word choice, word usage, structure, rhetorical devices (such as symbolism, metaphor, and allusion), and tone, to name just a few.

Let's look at an article that derives from the same exigency as the cartoon in Figure 1.1: the assassination of Gabrielle Gifford. If we return to the blog post by Barbara Morrill that we looked at earlier in the chapter, we can see how the genre of the blog affords her different rhetorical opportunities than those presented to editorial cartoonists. In her piece, Morrill writes:

And while there are many examples of the violent language employed by the right: "Second Amendment remedies," "resorting to the bullet box," calls to be "armed and dangerous," to name just a few, it's more than that. [...]

Because since the election of Barack Obama, the right, both elected Republicans and their minions in the media, have pounded the non-stop drumbeat that Obama/Democrats/liberals want to destroy the country, they want to kill your grandmother, they're shredding the Constitution, they're terrorist sympathizers, they're going to take away your guns, that they're enemies of humanity, that the government is the enemy ...

And that, as much as the obvious examples of violent rhetoric, can appeal to the extremist, the mentally unstable, or the "lone nut," to act. And last Saturday, one of them did.

The same way an editorial cartoonist sketches his argument with different shades, shapes, and strokes, so Morrill as an author powerfully draws her points through language. Consider some of the rhetorical techniques she uses:

- Morrill includes direct quotations of phrases used during the congressional election, listing them in a way that generates intensity and a sense of escalation (similar to the way the hierarchy of words on the flagpole operated in Figure 1.1).
- In the second paragraph, she switches to a set of images that attack the character of elected Republicans through criticizing their "minions in the media" and asserting that they have "pounded the nonstop drumbeat" as if at war with Democrats. This condemning language produces a strong animosity in the writing that might also sway a reader toward condemning the Republicans.

- Morrill uses a strategy called *anaphora*—deliberate repetition for rhetorical effect—by repeating "they're" at the end of the second paragraph to create a powerful rhythm and build emotional energy.
- The list itself relies on hyperbole and exaggeration ("destroy the country," "kill your grandmother," "shredding the Constitution," and so on) to present Morrill's version of what Republicans tend to suggest in their media statements.
- She concludes by reminding the reader of the exigency of the situation—how the "violent rhetoric" she has critiqued produced tragic action: the shooting of Giffords.

As you can see, such details can deeply move an audience. What we learn from reading this blog post rhetorically is that when you analyze written texts, you can apply similar strategies to those you use when reading visual texts: look for the vivid details, which in the case of language might include repetition, concrete metaphors, emotional phrases, and characterization of others that together act as what Aristotle would call "available means of persuasion" in writing. In this way, such written rhetoric, even while it disparages "violent language," is actually also forceful, even violent in its emphasis. It, too, is a form of communication that has as its purpose the goal of persuading audiences.

Let's consider a longer passage of writing. Remember Alex and her walk across campus? When she arrived at her Communication 101 class on "Media and Society," her TA gave her a handout containing an editorial about the *Charlie Hebdo* attack from the news site *Humanosphere*. Back in her dorm room, Alex sits down to read the article, writing annotations in the margins that indicate brief points of analysis or observation about the strategies of persuasion at work in each part of the article. As you read the article and Alex's accompanying commentary, add your own marks on points that you find provocative or interesting. Use the strategies of *critical literacy* that we've been developing throughout this chapter and ask yourself:

- Who is the main *audience*?
- How does David Horsey position himself as *author*?
- What is his *purpose* or  *motive* in response to the  *exigency* of the situation?
- Where and what is his  *argument*?
- What rhetorical strategies does Horsey use to persuade the audience?
- What is your response to the text?



The title captures my attention—what does he mean by *obnoxious freedom*?

Interesting to read an article by an author who usually expresses his opinions in cartoons.

Sets up context right away. Also, the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting clearly is the exigence for this article.

His emphasis here indicates that this is the driving point of his essay. It echoes his title somewhat, too.

"My career of giving offense" and the story at the end of the paragraph seem both blunt and cynical—sounds like the voice of an editorial cartoonist!

Repetition here ("sometimes") is very powerful.

Makes an assumption about his audience here.

## OBNOXIOUS FREEDOM

David Horsey

I have received many messages of solidarity from friends and readers in the couple of days since Islamic terrorists stormed into the Paris office of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and murdered 12 people, including several cartoonists.

One friend—a prominent officeholder who, despite getting his share of barbs from reporters, nevertheless understands the absolute necessity of maintaining an unfettered news media—wrote in an email, "I am thinking of you following the France assault on journalists. It follows the loss of something like 40 journalists in the Mideast. Freedom cannot exist without people willing to ferret out the truth."

I appreciated his words, but I responded with a crucial caveat: "Not only can freedom not exist without truth tellers, freedom cannot exist without obnoxious expressions of opinion, no matter who is offended."

Throughout my career of giving offense, I have received an unending stream of comments from people who disagree with what I draw or write. Sometimes they are rude. Sometimes they are insulting. Sometimes they are seriously angry. And sometimes they are just having fun sparring with me. Only once have I gotten anything like a death threat, which was unsettling, but quickly forgotten. One guy offered to fight me, but he lived 3000 miles away, so the bout never happened.

Love or hate the way I think, though, just about everyone would agree my right to free speech is unassailable. That's what makes America great, of course, and why there is near unanimous shock about the attack on the cartoonists in Paris. But, as people get a closer look at the kinds of images those French satirists were publishing, some are having second thoughts about all this freedom.

Editorial cartoonists in the United States are an essentially tame species. Traditionally part of the establishment media,

American cartoonists mostly poke fun at obvious targets. Even when the cartoons my ink-spewing compatriots and I produce are sharply barbed and a little bold, they stay within fairly tight boundaries of social responsibility and good taste. I do not think that's a terrible thing—even though it encourages too many bland cartoons with elephants and donkeys and labels galore—but it does mean we very seldom really test the limits of what our readers will tolerate.

The martyred cartoonists at *Charlie Hebdo* were different. Unrestrained mockery, not reasoned commentary, was their raison d'être. Page after page, week after week, they turned out scatological, simplistic images attacking not only the political figures everyone picks on, but the cherished images and idols of organized religions. There were cartoons of Christ partaking of three-way sex with God and the Holy Spirit; nasty cartoons of the pope that got the magazine sued numerous times by Catholics; images of Orthodox Jews reminiscent of the anti-Semitic art of Nazi Germany; and, of course, caricatures of Mohammed doing all manner of disgusting things, sometimes with his genitals exposed.

It is those images that outraged the Parisian Muslim community and brought the cartoonists into the extremists' line of fire. The magazine office was firebombed in 2011 and the publication's editor, Stephane Charbonnier, received enough death threats to justify hiring a bodyguard. The editor and the bodyguard are now among the dead.

Even with all our proud proclamations in favor of free speech, would a wildly iconoclastic magazine like *Charlie Hebdo* be tolerated in the United States? Conservative religious people would be deeply offended, of course, but neither would such a publication fare well on liberally minded university campuses. Given the social sensitivities in the academic world, a student cartoonist who drew even one cartoon of the type regularly produced by the *Charlie Hebdo* crew would be pilloried and run off campus.

My take? Most of the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons I have seen are crudely drawn, crass, and juvenile. Giving offense simply for its

Great word choice here! Paragraph topic: state of U.S. editorial cartooning. Interesting that it ends in a critique of American editorial cartoons. Is he asking if these cartoons achieve their rhetorical purpose?

Now he moves to French cartooning practice. Effective comparison/contrast move.

These examples are really important given that many websites and newspapers refused to publish these cartoons.

Sets up background for the attack. So this wasn't the first time that *Charlie Hebdo* suffered for its "unrestrained" cartoons.

Great question. I think he must assume his audience is predominantly American readers.

I'm thinking that this essay is getting at a comparative between U.S. editorial practices and French ones ...



Nice move here—says they're crude, but then praises the principle behind them.

Powerful way to show multiple perspectives.

"Terror" is a charged word. Great ending line; echoes "Je Suis Charlie." He is Charlie, though he says he wouldn't cartoon that way.

own sake has never been my style. Yet, I appreciate the principle on which Charbonnier took a stand. He kept publishing outrageous depictions of Mohammed mostly because people kept insisting he had no right to do it.

Religious fundamentalists may believe limits to free expression are what the Deity demands. College administrators may think it is the politically correct thing to do. Politicians may believe it will keep their constituents calm. But, without the freedom to offend—even in the most outrageous way—freedom is circumscribed and tepid. The French cartoonists were constant offenders and most people would not like their work, but they believed in freedom with a dedication few of us can match. And they died for it.

As Parisians are now saying in response to the terror, "Je suis Charlie."

By annotating the essay, Alex acts as an *active reader* and begins to identify which aspects of the article's written rhetoric interest her most. Her analysis evokes the *rhetorical situation* (see Figure 1.5): she analyzes the way the writer (or *author*) uses language (or *argument*) to persuade the reader (or *audience*) of the article (or *text*). She also noted the rhetorical moves of the author: word choice, structure, style tone, voice. She could then use those points in order to formulate her own argument about Horsey's article.

As you develop your own skills of analyzing written rhetoric, you can also use annotations to help you identify and track your observations on how rhetoric works; these notes, gathered together, will enable you to generate your own interpretation and, ultimately, a persuasive argument. In fact, Sir Francis Bacon, the great philosopher, politician, and scientist from the Age of Enlightenment, developed a system of logical "inductive" reasoning based on the very practice of gathering observations and using them to construct knowledge, a new conclusion, or an argument. Echoing the position of Aristotle, he also saw rhetoric as that which moves others. Bacon asserted: "The duty and office of rhetoric is to apply reason to imagination for the better moving of the will."

The varied ways that you and your classmates might read and respond to this editorial depend on both *audience* and *context*, bringing to light again the importance of the *rhetorical situation*. Differences in your interpretation also reveal the importance of learning effective means of persuading others to see the text through a certain lens or way of reading and analyzing the text. That is, your task as a reader and a writer is both to study a text carefully and to learn how to persuade others to see the text as you see it. In order to learn how to do so, we will turn next to the key elements in writing an argumentative essay about your interpretation of a text, so you, too, can "apply reason to imagination" to persuade others.

## WRITER'S PRACTICE

MyWritingLab

Practice your skills of rhetorical analysis on this 2014 editorial by Chris Baker, also known as "Angry Nerd," who critiques Disney's decision to "destroy" what Star Wars fans call the "Expanded Universe canon"—including comic books, video games, and hundreds of pieces of fan fiction and unauthorized Star Wars-derivative texts—as part of creating continuity in the new Disney version of the Star Wars saga. Annotate like Alex did in the example above, looking for elements of the piece that make it particularly persuasive. Consider how Baker takes into account the rhetorical situation as well as exigency and purpose through style and composition. For added challenge, consider analyzing the video version of this editorial, available through YouTube.

### "IS DARTH DISNEY DESTROYING STAR WARS' EXPANDED UNIVERSE?"

By Chris Baker

Help me, George Lucas, you're my only hope. Darth Disney is destroying the Expanded Universe. Please come back, George Lucas; this is our most desperate hour.

I felt a great disturbance in the force as if thousands of storylines cried out and were suddenly silenced. The Star Wars franchise is committing "canon-icide." The fate of an entire universe



is at stake. You've understand: the Star Wars movies are the bar-est fraction of star war stories out there.

The so-called "Expanded Universe" has existed in comic books and novels and games for decades, and Lucas film is now air-locking it all. The Thrawn trilogy novels; *Shadow of the Empire* for Nintendo 64; the Tatooine manhunt module for the Star Wars RPG; the holiday special: erased from existence. Only a Sith Lord would decree that everything except the Star Wars films and the Clone Wars series did not happen. All future tie-in cartoons and novels—everything—will be forced to march in lockstep with the JJ Abrams sequel films. You know who else marched in lockstep? [The storm troopers.] And a new story group inside Lucasfilm will make sure that all elements in the Star Wars continuity fit together.

Normally I approve of an orderly and cohesive continuity, but this crisis on infinite Endoors is deleting incidents that are more interesting than almost anything that happened in the movies. No Expanded Universe means Boba Fett never escaped from the Sar-lacc Pit, Luke Skywalker never flirted with the dark side, and Han Solo never befriended ... Jackson Starhopper...

Oh, Darth Disney, only you could be so bold! To think that I was cautiously optimistic about your stewardship of Star Wars. I was far too trusting.

The survival of the Expanded Universe is now in the hands of Star Wars fans. Fan fiction kept Star Trek alive through the lean years. We can do with the same for Star Wars. The more you tighten your grip, Darth Disney, the more Expanded Universe stories will slip through your fingers. You may control the canon, but you will never control the Fan-on. Your tightly controlled continuity can't handle the pulse-pounding exploits of Pedanticus Nit-pickser, a bald bespectacled jedi, who lectures the entire galaxy about how lightsabers are scientifically impossible and how you couldn't actually hear explosions in the vacuum of space.

Strong he is in the force ... of logic.

## WRITING A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

We've seen that rhetoric works as a means of persuading an audience to accept the argument of the author. This is also true for the argument you make about a text. When you write an analysis essay for class, you are crafting a rhetorical text in order to persuade your readers (the instructor and your peers) to accept your interpretation. In some cases, your instructor might ask you to select your own text for analysis; in others, you may be assigned a particular text. In either case, ask yourself the following questions:

- What elements stand out that you might analyze in your essay?
- What do you know about the author or the intended audience?
- What do you know about the timing or context of this text?
- What is your interpretation of the meaning or message of this text?

As you work through the questions above, you can see that your task as a writer is to argue convincingly for your audience to see the text the way you yourself see it. In the case of Figure 1.14, what is the cartoon's argument about the NFL's response to recent allegations of domestic violence among the players? What details could you discuss in order to support your interpretation?

**1.5** How should I brainstorm parts of the essay, including the thesis statement?



**FIGURE 1.14** Gary Markstein's comic humorously tackles the sensitive issue of domestic violence in the NFL.



Your challenge as a student of writing and rhetoric is not only to identify the argument contained by a text but also to *craft your own interpretation of that text*. This involves careful assessment of the ways in which the elements of the rhetorical situation work together to produce meaning in a text.

In looking at Markstein's comic, you may notice many details—the uniforms, the hand gestures, the captions, the facial expressions, the shading on the referee's pants, the use of black shadows, and the fact that the lettering on the hats is yellow. However, when crafting your own argument, it's valuable to remember that a successful rhetorical analysis does not need to discuss every component in the source text, only those relevant to supporting your interpretation. In fact, it's also important to tailor your analysis itself to prioritize a particular approach. You might decide to focus on any one of these elements as you shape your overall interpretation:

- **Argument:** What is the text's argument, and is it persuasive? How does the author use evidence to support his interpretation?
- **Audience:** How did the author compose the text to persuade a particular audience? How did he take into account their context and predispositions to try to create a convincing argument?
- **Genre:** How did the author either trade on or depart from the conventions of a particular genre (such as the conventional essay, blogging, twitter, even email as we saw in Figure 1.6)? How did that decision influence the persuasiveness of the argument?
- **Style:** How did the author use style as a persuasive tool? How did he use symbol, metaphor, word choice, voice, and other stylistic devices?
- **Exigence and Purpose:** How does the cartoon respond to a pressing need? What is the author's purpose, and to what extent does he accomplish it?

## AT A GLANCE

### Selecting and Evaluating a Text for Rhetorical Analysis

When choosing a text for analysis, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the text's purpose? To entertain? Educate? Persuade?
- Are there sufficient elements in the text to analyze?
- What do you know about the author, the intended audience, and the context?
- What's your interpretation of this image? Can you develop a strong claim that you can support with evidence from the text?

Ultimately, your analysis might touch on aspects of the different approaches; however, it is important to try to achieve a unified interpretation, so you probably will need to focus on one more than the others. To help you through this process, we recommend writing out your answers to the questions above. Many times it is through writing itself that we can access—and create—our best ideas.

## Developing a Thesis Statement

In brainstorming your essay, you need to determine your interpretation of the meaning or message of a specific text (whether written, visual, or a combination of the two). In writing studies, we call this interpretation your **thesis**, or *the concise statement of your claim or interpretation about a particular text, issue, or event*. A thesis should be more than a statement of observation or a fact. It should also be more than merely your opinion. It needs to combine **observation + evidence** (based on the elements of the text).

To understand how to generate a *thesis statement* using your skills of critical analysis, let's work through an example. Imagine that you want to write an argument about the cartoon in Figure 1.15, a commentary on recent debates about immigration policy. How might you develop a thesis statement that persuasively conveys your interpretation of how this cartoon contributes to the debate surrounding the status of undocumented immigrants?

Start by jotting down what you see; make *close observations* about the text. Then use questions to bring your argument into focus and to make a specific claim. The end product will be a *working thesis*. The process of developing your thesis might look like this:

1. Write down your observations.

*Close observations:* The cartoon focuses on the border between the United



**FIGURE 1.15** This cartoon by Daryl Cagle uses engaging visuals and well-chosen words to make an argument.  
Source: Daryl Cagle, Cagle Cartoons, Inc.



States and Mexico and on the way that we set up fences to keep illegal immigrants out. A key element is the gap in the fence that people are crawling through to get into the United States. The contradictory messages are interesting, too. The big sign says “Keep out,” while the smaller signs are designed to draw people in.

2. Work with your observations to construct a preliminary thesis statement.

*First statement:* The cartoon focuses on the contradiction in American border policy.

3. Refine your argument by asking questions that make your statement less general.

*Ask yourself:* How? What contradiction? To what effect? How do I know this?

4. Revise your preliminary thesis statement to be more specific; perhaps include specific evidence that drives your claim.

*Revised statement:* The cartoon in Figure 1.15 focuses on the contradictions in American border policy by showing that, on the one hand, the American government wants to keep illegal immigrants out, but, on the other hand, economic forces encourage them to enter the United States illegally.

5. Further polish your thesis by refining your language and asking questions about the implications of your working thesis statement.

*Ask yourself:* What do you find interesting about this observation? How does it tap into larger social or cultural issues?

6. Revise your working thesis to include the implications or significance of your claim. Sometimes we call this the “So what?” point.

*Working Thesis:* The political cartoon in Figure 1.15 offers a sharp commentary on the recent immigration debate, suggesting that official government policies against illegal immigration are undermined by economic forces that tolerate, if not welcome, the entry of undocumented workers into the United States. Yet the added detail of the hole in the fence suggests that such entry comes at great cost to immigrants who enter illegally.

In the working thesis, the significance appears as the final point about “great cost”—that is, the cartoon indicates that current immigration policies have

serious consequences for undocumented laborers entering the United States. From this example, you can tell that a strong argumentative thesis does more than state a topic: it makes a claim about that topic that you will develop in the rest of your paper.

Let’s look at one more example to further consider ways to produce sharp, clear, and persuasive thesis statements. For her rhetorical analysis assignment, Alex decided to write about David Horsey’s editorial from earlier in the chapter. As we saw in her annotations, she had already noted several elements that struck her about the text: the comparison between the United States and France, the word choice, and Horsey’s unique position as an editorial cartoonist/author. While drafting her essay, she experimented with a variety of different thesis statements before arriving at a strong claim:

**Thesis 1:** David Horsey’s article offers a powerful perspective on the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting and free speech.

*Assessment:* This thesis statement relies too heavily on subjective opinion: the author offers no criteria for evaluating the cartoon. What does it mean to be “powerful”? Moreover, the author does not include any elements of analysis or use evidence.

**Thesis 2:** David Horsey’s article makes an argument about free speech.

*Assessment:* This thesis statement is too much of a broad generalization and offers no critical interpretation of the meaning of the text. It does not make a claim as to what Horsey’s opinion is, and it relies too heavily on vague language.

**Thesis 3:** According to my analysis, David Horsey, a well-known editorial cartoonist, discusses both American and French approaches to editorial cartoons in this article.

*Assessment:* While this thesis is promising in that it offers some more detail, it nevertheless only describes the content of the essay rather than offering a focused interpretation, despite the writer’s claim to be making an argument.

**Thesis 4:** In the article, Horsey, a well-known editorial cartoonist, uses an underlying compare-and-contrast strategy bolstered by strong word choice to make the argument for solidarity with *Charlie Hebdo* in defense of all levels of free speech.

*Assessment:* While a bit long, this working thesis statement does combine observation and significance. Of the four examples, it provides the most specific and argumentative articulation of Alex’s interpretation of Horsey’s editorial.



As the examples above demonstrate, a strong thesis is characterized by a specific and contestable claim. This central claim in turn functions as the heart and driver of a successful rhetorical analysis essay.

## AT A GLANCE

### Testing Your Thesis

- Does your thesis present an interesting angle on your topic?
- Does it avoid being overly obvious or a commonplace statement? Is it nuanced?
- Does it present a debatable point? That is, could someone argue against it?
- Is it too dense (trying to compact the entire paper into a single sentence)? Conversely, is it overly simplistic or general (neglecting to adequately develop your claim)?
- Does it use concrete and vivid language?
- Does it suggest the significance of your topic?

## Analyzing Student Writing

Let's look at how Alex combines effective strategies of analysis with her carefully crafted thesis statement to compose her rhetorical analysis of the David Horsey article that she read for class. As you read through this selection, consider how she analyzes "Obnoxious Freedom" as well as the ways in which she herself uses rhetorical strategies to make her own argument persuasive.

Alex crafts a title that refers to the article but also hints at her own thesis.

Ramirez 1

Alexandra Ramirez  
Rhetorical Analysis Essay  
Comm 101

"Obnoxious Freedom":

A Cartoonist's Defense of the Freedom to Be Crass

On the morning of January 7, 2015, two brothers entered the Paris office of *Charlie Hebdo*, a weekly satirical newspaper. Armed with assault rifles and other weapons, the pair of brothers

Ramirez 2

killed 12 people in the office that day: cartoonists, writers, maintenance workers, editors, and a bodyguard. The brothers, who identified as members of the Yemeni branch of Al Qaeda, took issue with cartoons published in *Charlie Hebdo* that they considered disrespectful to Mohammed and to Islam as a whole (Smith-Spark et al.).

Following the attack, there was both great mourning for the victims and outrage at a terrorist strike against the freedom of press. In days following the attack, the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting caught the international media by firestorm and sparked a new conversation (and controversy) on freedom of speech. One article contributing to the conversation is David Horsey's "Obnoxious Freedom." In this article, Horsey, a well-known editorial cartoonist, uses an underlying compare-and-contrast strategy bolstered by strong word choice to make the argument for solidarity with *Charlie Hebdo* in defense of all levels of free speech. As he does so, however, Horsey also makes a subtle criticism of the status of American free speech as well, adding another dimension to the debate surrounding the *Charlie Hebdo* tragedy.

At a basic level, Horsey made a very significant choice in choosing to publish an article expressing his opinion about the *Charlie Hebdo* tragedy. Indeed, as a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist speaking about a retaliation to cartoons, it might be expected that Horsey would choose to express himself via a cartoon ("David Horsey"). Yet in this case, Horsey

She designs her opening paragraph to set up context for her essay, drawing on a source that she found through a quick Google search. Note how she makes sure to cite the source from which she got her information, even though she doesn't use a direct quotation here.

Alex places her thesis statement near the end of the introductory section.

In writing her essay, Alex adds a layer of complexity to her preliminary thesis statement (which we saw on p. 31).

Her thesis implies levels of interpretation, so Alex begins her main body by referring to the most basic level, implying that she will engage with the more complex aspects of Horsey's argument later in her essay.



Even from the beginning of her essay, she grounds her analysis in terms of the rhetorical situation—the relation of the audience and author to the argument.

Her transition here demonstrates that she's moving from the "basic" to more nuanced elements of Horsey's essay.

Alex cites specific examples from the text to support her points and also explains their significance.

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chose prose. To some extent, this choice alone sets a tone of seriousness; it is as though the jokester has finally learned to be serious. The effect of this is ultimately that the audience is forced to take the article—and the argument within—more seriously.

Beyond just setting the serious tone for the argument, however, the prose format also allows for Horsey to demonstrate both more nuance and voice, and even include his own credentials as an author. For example, the extensive discussion of both Horsey's own cartoon style and that of the works published in *Charlie Hebdo* allows Horsey to make multilevel arguments such as the idea that although more tame cartoons can sometimes be more effective, the crass ones must be allowed to exist as well in order to not give in to a sliding scale of censorship. Along with this substance, however, Horsey expresses a strong, humorous voice using asides such as a story about a guy that "offered to fight [Horsey], but he lived 3000 miles away, so the bout never happened." Ultimately, the serious arguments in tandem with witty humor are an effective method of capturing the audience's attention while capitalizing on the author's strengths. It is also significant to note that the longer form also allows Horsey to introduce himself more to the reader. In some ways, Horsey relates himself to the cartoonists at *Charlie Hebdo* by, for example, referencing his "career of giving offense." At other points in the article, Horsey chooses to distance himself more, stating that "giving offense simply for its own sake" isn't his

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style. This creates a sense of impartiality on the part of the author, which makes him appear more trustworthy to the reader.

And yet, at the same time that Horsey works to appear impartial in some ways such as his relation to the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists, he also actively plays upon almost nationalistic, patriotic writing he presumes to resonate with his audience. This strategy is first capitalized on by a comparison of French and American culture and cartoons. For example, when describing American cartoons, Horsey paints the pictures of "tame species" that only criticize targets that are well-accepted as targets and can become "bland."

By comparison, Horsey describes the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons as "unrestrained mockery" that go after widely idolized figures. While this might seem to equally criticize both cartoon cultures for their shortcomings, when paired with the rest of the article, Horsey's feelings about both cultures become more clear. First, the buildup to this portion of the article features rather dramatic and even patriotic word choice such as "unassailable" free speech as well as cartoonists that are both "compatriots" and martyrs (Horsey). Evoking these images prime the audience, reminding them how great the foundation of American society (freedom) really is. But through the comparison to French cartoons, Horsey implicitly asks the reader a new question: how free *are* American cartoons?

As he more directly begins his conclusion by asking the rhetorical question ("My take?"), Horsey clearly delineates the

Alex continues her emphasis on how Horsey constructs himself as an *author* in his article and how that relates to the strength of his argument.

In this paragraph, Alex shows her powers of critical thinking and analysis in the way she interprets specific elements of the text.

Alex pauses here to clarify her interpretation of Horsey's argument.



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argument that he builds up to throughout the rest of the piece: Americans need to be supporting *Charlie Hebdo*, and American free speech might not represent pure freedom any more. Indeed, as Horsey lists what he considers to be opposing groups to free speech in America—religious fundamentalists, college administrations, and politicians—he attaches them with somewhat stigmatized or less-than-altruistic goals such as political correctness or just trying to assuage constituents. Further capitalizing on American readers raised hearing the “give me liberty or give me death” battle cry, Horsey praises the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists as having the utmost dedication to freedom, ultimately making the victims into martyrs. As just another subtle touch of preference for the French culture of freedom, Horsey ends his argument with a resounding phrase of solidarity with the French, “Je suis Charlie,” or *I am Charlie*.

Could this support and solidarity with the French be felt without a sense of the author’s giving a warning about American culture? Perhaps, but throughout the piece Horsey leaves subtle indicators that in the very system he publishes in everything isn’t perfect, such as hinting that the fear of offending is creating “bland” cartoons or that politicians pressure media to produce cartoons that will keep people “calm.” These insinuations, in combination with the overall comparison to the French, allow for Horsey to not only stand in solidarity with *Charlie Hebdo* but also make a commentary on the true meaning of free speech. Perhaps Horsey meant his signatory “Je suis Charlie” merely as solidarity with fellow cartoonists. However, perhaps he felt his cautionary piece alerts Americans to guard their

Alex draws attention to how Horsey devises his argument to appeal to his specifically American audience.

Note how Alex includes a translation of the French phrase here for clarity.

Alex uses a question here to translate into her own conclusion, mirroring the question-asking strategy that Horsey used in the original essay.

Alex concedes here that not all might agree, but then reaffirms her own claim.

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freedoms just as the cartoonists of *Charlie Hebdo* remind the people of France to do so with each of their “obnoxious” cartoons.

Alex designs a conclusion that again plays off of Horsey’s, leaving her audience to interpret as they will.

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Alex includes a Works Cited that lists not only the original article that she was analyzing but also the two texts she used for background on the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting.

## THE WRITER’S PROCESS

As you turn now to write your own rhetorical analysis of a text, you’ll be putting into practice all the skills you’ve learned in this chapter. You’ll need to write down your observations of the text, spend time analyzing them in detail, and use these points of analysis as *evidence* to make an argument that will persuade others to see the text the way you see it. In other words, when composing your own rhetorical analysis, you need to use the same process we have worked through when analyzing different texts in this chapter:

- First, look carefully at all the elements in the text. Create a list of your observations to help you analyze the text more closely.



- Then, consider the argument of each element. How does it contribute to the text as a whole?
- Next, complete the rhetorical triangle (see Figure 1.5) for the text, identifying the author, the intended audience, and the argument, based on your observations of the details. In addition, identify the rhetorical exigence and the author's purpose or motive in creating the argument.
- Finally, put all these elements together and develop your thesis statement about the argument and significance of the text.

It's crucial to remember that when you write a rhetorical analysis, you perform a rhetorical act of persuasion yourself. Accordingly, you need to include the key elements of analytical writing: (1) have a point of interpretation to share with your readers, (2) take time to walk readers through concrete details to prove your point, and (3) lead your readers through the essay in an engaging and convincing way. But of all these, the most important is your thesis, your interpretation of or position on the text—your *argument*.

Spend some time working on your thesis before composing the entire draft. Make sure your angle is sharp and your interpretation takes into

## AT A GLANCE

### Composing Rhetorical Analysis Essays

- Do you have a sharp point of interpretation, or *thesis*, to make about the text?
- Have you selected key elements or details to analyze in support of your thesis?
- Do you lead readers through your interpretation of the text by discussing important aspects in sequence? These might include:
  - ▷ Verbal elements in the text (words, font, quotes, dates)
  - ▷ Visual composition, layout, and images
  - ▷ Framing words for the text (article title, cartoon caption)
  - ▷ Color, arrangement, and meaning of items
- Can you include information about the author, intended audience, or context?
- Have you drafted a title for your own essay?
- Does your introduction name the author, date, and rhetorical situation for your text?
- Do your paragraphs build and progress through the essay using transitions?
- Have you offered a summary and a larger point or implication in the conclusion?
- Can you insert the image right into the essay and label it?

account audience, author, and argument as well as concrete points of visual and verbal composition.

Moreover, keep in mind the need to begin with observations, but avoid simply describing the elements you notice. Instead, zoom in on specific details and think hard about their meaning. Make a persuasive argument by using *specific* evidence to support your analysis of how the text succeeds at convincing an audience to perceive an issue in a particular way. These writing strategies will enable you to craft a persuasive and effective rhetorical analysis essay.

### Seeing Connections

See Chapter 7 for more instructions on integrating images in your writing and referring to them correctly.

## SPOTLIGHTED ANALYSIS: EDITORIAL CARTOONS

MyWritingLab

Pick a cartoon to analyze from a news magazine such as *Time*, a newspaper, a Web comic collection such as *xkcd* or *Penny Arcade*, or an online archive such as Daryl Cagle's political cartoon Website. Using the skills of analysis you have learned in this chapter, work through the questions below to guide your analysis.

- **Audience:** Who is the audience for this comic? How does it address this audience? In what country and in what historical moment was the cartoon produced? In what type of text did it first appear? A journal? A newspaper? Online? Is this text conservative? liberal? How does it speak to this audience?
- **Author:** What do you know about the artist? What kinds of cartoons (or other types of texts) does he or she regularly produce? Where does he or she live and publish?
- **Argument:** What issue does the cartoon address, and what is the cartoon's argument about it? Is there irony involved (does the cartoon advocate one point of view, but the cartoonist wants you to take the opposite view)?
- **Composition:** Is this political cartoon a single frame or a series of sequential frames? If the latter, how does the argument evolve over the series? How do elements like color choices, layout, and style shape its impact on the audience?
- **Imagery:** What choices of imagery and content does the artist make? Are the drawings realistic? Do they rely on caricatures? How are character and setting portrayed? Does the artist include allusions or references to past or present events or ideas? How do images and words work together in the cartoon?
- **Tone:** Is the cartoon primarily comic or serious in tone? How does this choice of tone create a powerful rhetorical impact on readers?
- **Cultural resonance:** Does the cartoon implicitly or explicitly refer to any actual people, events, or pop culture icons? What sort of symbolism is used in the cartoon? Would the symbols speak to a broad or narrow audience? How does the cultural resonance function as a rhetorical strategy in making the argument?



## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

MyWritingLab

- Rhetoric Practice:** Experiment with the scenarios below in order to understand the power of rhetoric as a persuasive act. In each case, first write down your ideas. Then, following the directions, write, speak, design, or present your own rhetorical text. Keep in mind that the success of your argument will depend on your choice of media (verbal plea, written email, cover letter, visual poster, etc.) in relation to the specific audience you are addressing (coach, professor, potential employer, or peers).

  - Scenario 1: When you realize that you will never finish an essay on time because of your heavy work schedule, you decide to ask for an extension on the paper's deadline. Craft an argument asking for extra time on the assignment that would appeal to the personality of your teacher; compose it in a way appropriate for an email communication.
  - Scenario 2: Imagine that you have a conflict with your practice schedule for your sport—a midterm, interview, or visit from your parents. Compose an oral argument that persuades your coach to let practice out early. After you write out your ideas, make your case face-to-face through in-class role-playing.
  - Scenario 3: When applying for a summer internship, you are asked to submit a formal résumé in order to indicate your qualifications for the position. As you design your résumé think about how to most persuasively present yourself: What content will you include? How will you describe yourself, your goals, and your duties in past positions? How will you organize it and lay it out? What font will you use? Consider taking your résumé to your Writing Center or Career Center for expert feedback.
  - Scenario 4: As Social Chair for your Greek House, you need to advertise an upcoming charity event: create an effective flyer and also a brief paragraph for email and social media distribution. Consider how you'll need to adapt your rhetorical techniques to adjust to the different media.
- Personal Narrative Essay:** Recall Alex's observations of rhetoric on her way to class; conduct a similar study of the rhetoric in your world. Write your reflections into a *personal narrative essay*. Discuss which types of visual, verbal, bodily, or architectural rhetoric were most evident, which were most subtle, and which you found the most persuasive. Conclude with a statement or argument about these texts—what do they collectively say about your community or culture? How do these texts try to shape the views of audiences through specific messages or arguments?
- Rhetorical Analysis:** Using the At a Glance box on p. 28 as a starting point, develop your analysis of a text of your choice into a full *rhetorical analysis*, complete with a persuasive thesis statement. Make sure that your writing supports a thesis about elements and messages of all the texts you are analyzing.

- Comparative Rhetorical Analysis:** Refer back to the article by David Horsey included in this chapter. Now search online for his editorial cartoon on the same subject, entitled "The Death Cult." Write a comparative rhetorical analysis of these texts that examines the similarities and differences in their arguments and composition. (If you prefer, choose two texts of your own—whether two visual texts, two verbal texts, or a visual and a verbal text—that address the same issue to analyze instead.) What rhetorical strategies does each one use to make an argument? How do their arguments about the issue in question differ, and how is each composed to convey that argument? Include a persuasive thesis statement and specific supporting details about each text. Don't forget to take into account your own rhetorical situation (the relationship between your audience, your argument, and your own identity as a writer) in composing your essay.

MyWritingLab Visit Ch. 1 Analyzing Texts and Writing Thesis Statements in MyWritingLab to complete the Writer's Practices, Spotlights Analyses, and Writing Assignments, and to test your understanding of the chapter objectives.