Poster analysis and production

Poster Analysis

**DUE:** Wednesday, 16 February.

For this assignment, I want you to find and print out a poster from an online source, and then perform a rhetorical analysis of it. In performing this analysis, I want you to interrogate and explain the decisions that the author made when they created the poster. Naturally, your analysis should do much more than just summarize; although you should discuss the basic features of the poster, you should do this only as it is relevant to the analysis you are performing. The key to successful analysis is supporting your claims. Offer evidence to back up your arguments about the author's strategies, their purpose, their audience, their style, their message, and whether their piece works or not.

I'm providing the following questions as a guide for your thinking; you don't have to answer them all in your analysis. Keep in mind that you can also discuss whether the author fails or succeeds on any of the points listed below, but again, be prepared to back up your claims.

**RHETORICAL SITUATION**
- What is the reason the poster exists?
- What is the author's purpose?
- What is the author talking about? What is their argument? Why?
- Who is the author? Who is speaking in the poster? Why?
- What conversation does the poster come out of or speak to?
- What are the historical and events that surround the poster?

**AUDIENCE**
- Who is the author speaking to? How do you know?
- What assumptions does the author make about his or her audience?
- What does the author assume the audience already knows or believes?
- Does the author make appropriate or inappropriate assumptions about their audience? How do you know?
- What does the audience need to know to understand this piece? To be persuaded by it?
- How does the writer use their assumptions about the audience to shape the piece?
- Is the writer effective in gaining the attention of their audience?
- Does the audience fit the situation?

**THE VISUAL**
- What role does the visual play in your poster?
- How would you describe the visual style of your poster? What other things employ similar visual styles? What associations is the audience supposed to make based on visual style?
- What do the images in your poster “say”? Do they make an argument in and of themselves?
- What do the images say about the author? How do they shape and convey the author's ethos?
- Do the images convey any sort of emotional or pathos appeal?
- How do the visual elements in your ad accomplish what words can't or don't? That is, why did the author choose to use images instead of words?

**THE MESSAGE**
- What is the tone of your piece? Is it serious or playful? Is it formal or informal?
- What mechanisms does your poster use to make its point? Does it employ humor, parody, or irony? Does it use “scare tactics”? Does it present a logical argument?
- How does your poster use pathos, logos, or ethos appeals?
• Ultimately, how do the elements you have discussed above combine to achieve the author's purpose?

• Is the argument that the poster presents effective? (Remember our classroom discussion of what it means to be effective, or successful.) Explain why or why not.

• Are there points of the poster that could use improvement or revision? What revisions could be made? Justify your revisions.

Your audience for this assignment is me, and I'm looking for thoughtful interrogations of the author's purposes and strategies, as well as well-defended critiques of the effectiveness of the posters. Your analysis should be 250–750 words in length, and it must be accompanied by a printout of your poster. The following are some sources you can use for your poster images. Please try to find high-resolution images, and print them out in color if you are able (this is to your advantage—the more you can make out in your poster, the more you can analyze). You can find other sources for posters, if you want, but please make sure that they originated as a print poster, and are more or less noncommercial. [Here followed links to a number of sites where students could see poster samples.]

Visual Argument Assignment
Draft: Monday, 21 February
Final draft, with self-reflexive essay: Monday, 28 February

For this assignment, I want you to create a poster that makes a visual argument about a controversial issue. This poster should be aimed toward a campus audience, and it should be suitable for hanging in locations on campus. The topic it addresses should be an issue that is both timely and relevant to the audience that you are addressing. Although I want your topic to be a controversial one, I also want it to be an issue that there is something left to say about to your audience, and one that there is a decent chance of you succeeding in changing your audience's attitude about. This means that you should avoid polarizing topics that have been well covered (such as religion, euthanasia, the death penalty, abortion, etc.), since most discourse on these topics is rarely productive. Don't let this sway you from taking on ambitious projects that might lead to useful forms of advocacy concerning the issue you have taken on—just make sure that there is at least some room for success.

Although you are allowed to use words to flesh out your argument, the primary mode that your poster should use is the visual. I want you to use the visual as more than just an attention-getting device, or as a mere illustrations to another argument. What I want to see are more powerful images—images that are more or less stand-alone arguments, or that segue smoothly into compelling textual arguments and buttress them throughout. I've outlined the evaluation criteria for the final draft more thoroughly here.

On Monday, bring in a full-color mock-up of your final poster. These mock-ups should be no larger than 8.5" x 11" (a single sheet of letter-sized paper).

Poster Assignment Evaluation
These are the questions that I will ask myself as I give your posters advisory grades. These are the only elements that I will base your grades on:

Rhetorical Appropriateness

☐ Are your message, purpose, forum, and audience ultimately compatible? Does the rhetorical situation you address offer you a reasonable chance of success? Is the purpose of your poster one that is realistic in light of the Michigan Tech audience that you are addressing? Is it realistic in light of the limitations of the poster as a medium?

☐ Have you presented an argument that is timely and relevant to your audience? Have you presented an argument with realistic aims in light of its audience?

☐ Do you pose your argument in a way that is convincing to the audience using modes of persuasion that are familiar and effective to them?

☐ Ultimately, is your argument likely to be effective?

Overall Poster Design

☐ Does your poster present an overall design that is appropriate for its audience and its purpose?

☐ Is your poster likely to be visually appealing to its intended audience? Is the poster readable? Is the poster understandable?

☐ Does it use an overall visual style that augments and accentuates the main visual argument?
Do the design elements combine to lead the reader's eyes in a direction that reveals the information in a logical, compelling order and helps convey your message?

As a whole, does the design of your poster help it to achieve its purpose?

**VISUAL PERSUASIVENESS**

- Does your poster display a sophisticated visual argument?
- Does your poster use the visual as more than just an attention-getting device?
- Does your poster use the visual as more than just an illustration in service to another argument?
- Can your visual argument stand more or less on its own, or does it depend too much on text to make it complete and make its point? Do the visual and the textual compliment and reinforce each other or does one dominate?
- Is your visual argument compelling and effective, without being visually too complex?
- Do you use elements of visual design such as color, alignment, typography, etc. in the service of your overall argument?
- As a whole, is the visual argument likely to be effective toward achieving your purpose?

**SELF-AWARENESS**

- Does your self-reflexive essay indicate that you are aware of the rhetorical choices that you made and the reasoning behind those choices?
- Do you know your audience? Are you able to make and support predictions about how your audience will approach and react to your poster?
- Do you know where to place the poster to reach your intended audience?
- Is the reasoning behind your rhetorical choices sound? Have you acted consistently with this reasoning?
- Are you able to selectively use the suggestions of others to improve your poster? Similarly, are you able to turn a critical eye to your own work and revise accordingly?
- Are you aware of the limitations of the medium of the poster and can you articulate strategies for working with or around them?
- Are you aware of the production limitations of your poster? Have you articulated a vision of what the poster would look like if you had more resources available to you?

For next Monday, in addition to your final poster draft, please bring a 750–1000 word self-reflective essay explaining the rhetorical choices that you made while creating your poster, including a justification of why you made them. The audience that you are addressing in this essay is me. You can use the above outline as a guide for what to look at in this essay, but once again, this is not about jockeying for a grade. Rather, I need you to explain your decisions in order that I can determine how and why they meet the criteria of “appropriateness” that I’ve outlined above.

Do not merely summarize or explain what you did in the poster—you need to show me the reasons why you did what you did, as well as provide support for those reasons. Although you should explain the production shortcomings of the poster (that is, what you would do if you had the resources to make a professional, production-quality poster), do not spend much time in this essay describing the poster itself. Instead, concentrate on the things that will tell me more about the rhetorical appropriateness of your poster and your self-awareness its designer.