In-Class Peer Review

Objective

For this exercise you will practice the work of an academic peer reviewer. Your objective is to assess the rhetorical strategies in peer writing, to explain why certain approaches worked or didn’t, and to support your assessment with constructive criticism and suggestions for revision.

Strategies and Features of Good Writing

No set of writing strategies will suit all occasions. Good writers know how to design text to suit their purpose, achieve a desired effect, and serve the needs of a target audience.

Here are some of the claims about good writing from our class readings. Use these as a guide during peer review. Do your peers’ essays use some of these strategies and to what effect? Or do they violate some of these principles strategically and successfully?

- Veteran writers have something to say, say it with conviction, back claims with concrete proof, use confident language, serve the reader and anticipate her reactions (Trimble ch 1)
- Memorable prose “crackles with emotional electricity” (Trimble ch 2)
- Skilled writers may organize their essays like stories. They use the front-door approach (know what they think and why they think it), develop their ideas along a clear narrative line (e.g. rising line of persuasiveness), and end with emotional impact and possibly one last new twist. (Trimble ch 3-5)
- “Good writing starts strong. Not with a cliché…but with a contentful observation that provokes curiosity.” (Pinker ch 1)
- Readable writers have something fresh to say and don’t waste the reader’s time, strive for maximum efficiency of words, and keep the reader in a state of surprise (Trimble ch 6)
- Dr Seuss: “every page is a cliff hanger; force the reader to turn it”
- “Good writing can flip the way the world is perceived.” (Pinker ch 1)
- Joseph Conrad: “my task is to make you see.” Practice visual writing by means of memorable analogies and metaphors.
- The writer of classic prose shows the reader something in the world and engages her in conversation. (Pinker ch 2)
- Good writers avoid imposture of authority, dogma of formalism and phoniness. (Trimble ch 7)
- Use what Porter Perrin calls “General English” or what Steven Pinker calls “Classic Prose,” a conversational but beautifully wrought language that lies between formal and informal.

Two Key Topics for our Peer Review Sessions

Consider writing brief notes during the readings regarding any particular notable aspects of the essay being presented, so as to make the ensuing discussion more specific

1. Comment on the overall effectiveness and/or shortcomings of the essay. You may use the list of features of good writing as a guide, but are encouraged to look for strategies not covered in the list.

2. Who would you say is the target audience of the essay? What more could the writer have done to cater to the needs and expectations of that audience?
- Classic style explains abstract ideas as if they were objects and forces that would be recognizable to anyone standing in a position to see them. (Pinker ch 2)