

## **DIGITAL TEXTS AND CRITICAL RHETORICS: AN INTERNET SOURCED RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT IN FRESHMAN COMP**

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### **Abstract**

This manuscript attempts to address two major problems in Freshman Composition scholarship: the lack of attention given to *specific* research assignments and exigencies concerning argumentation pedagogy in the Freshman Writing course. Concerning the former area of discussion, the paper suggests entering into public rhetoric and public discourse through local, digital resources. These are the sources for the research assignment. Implied here is the teaching of current issues—whether political or cultural—allows for the reemergence of the public intellectual. This assignment prepares students to function highly in a representative democracy. In order to enter public rhetoric and public discourse, digital texts are primary sources. Theoretical approaches to researching digital texts, and subsequent digital textual pedagogy conclude the first half of the manuscript. The second half of the manuscript discusses argumentation theory and pedagogy. Also included in this section is an original outline—based on the rhetorical stases—which accompanies the assignment. Concluding the essay are screen shots of student essays which opens up a discussion of assessment.

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**Keywords:** Freshman composition pedagogy, argumentation, digital writing and digital research, public rhetoric and public discourse

As the eleventh or twelfth week of the semester rolls around, I initiate a discussion of the research assignment I teach by asking the class something along these lines, “OK, what controversial issues at the city, county or state level have you heard about on the news?” Usually silence follows. I think the silence results from a lack of community awareness and probably a little indifference. After providing examples of local issues such as red-light cameras or medicinal marijuana, a receptive class will collaboratively generate between ten and fifteen topics. Several semesters ago a group of

students in a summer session I taught chose a topic for research unfamiliar to most of the class and myself. The issue involved a debate in a local municipality centered on a construction project. A proposed land development would either result in an Iron-Ore smelter or a recreational complex. After this group's effective oral presentations, I amended my original thoughts on the issue and assented to another position. I shared with members of this group how persuasive I found their in-class presentations. I believe their success was at least partially due to the outline I teach, which is largely based on stasis theory. This class was exceptional and inspiring in many ways. Looking back, I experienced one of my first kairotic moments as an educator. The class was now aware of a local issue, and the corresponding debate.

In a digital-age-meets-*dissoi logoi*, this assignment consists of: a minimum five page paper and accompanying five minute oral presentation; on-line research using specific types of websites; and small group, in-class discussion scaffolding analysis and evaluation of competing arguments surrounding local issues. Popular topics have been:

- Red light cameras at intersections
- Texting and driving in Missouri
- Smoking bans in local establishments and on campus
- Freedom of assembly arguments associated with the Occupy movement
- The introduction of Elk into Missouri for hunting purposes
- Prescription legislation concerning cold medicines
- Proposed public park closings
- Several land development projects

Students usually have merely peripheral, limited awareness of these issues. On the day classes workshop topics, students have often heard about local issues but rarely provide critical insight. Invariably, students are unaware of the histories, policymakers, and debates surrounding these issues. Additionally, students are unfamiliar with locations of sources that will provide facts, statistics, background and expert opinion necessary for successful completion of the assignment. The assignment is primarily internet sourced with the occasional personal interview.

Along with a lack of community awareness I've seen after teaching five years as a community college and university English adjunct, I've also noticed student deficiency in inventing and arranging effective written arguments. I hope to address these exigencies in this essay; furthermore I suggest assessment strategies concerning argument toward the conclusion. Argument theory and pedagogy along with using digital texts to teach community awareness makeup the core of this assignment; therefore to

demonstrate this assignment's capability of generating critical student writing, a discussion of these areas within Comp Studies deserves attention.

**Digital Texts-**Since the sources for this assignment are primarily digital, scholarship on digital texts, digital writing and digital environments needs to be discussed. Digital Compositional scholarship includes subfields as diverse as: classic and emerging rhetorics, epistemology, argumentation, literacy practices, discourse, ethics, power and privilege, visual rhetorics, semiology and multidisciplinary approaches to name a few (Dyehouse, Pennell and Shamoon, 2009; Hocks, 2003; Jackson and Wallin, 2009; McKee and Porter 2008; Sullivan, 2000). Examples of digital writing and digital texts-in and out of the academy-are diverse: computer generated imagery, multi-modal, on-line portfolios composed by students, Tweets, Facebook posts, internet images, icons, youtube videos, advocacy web-sites, electronic newspapers and uploaded news, sports and entertainment television programs. Facebook and Twitter are certainly possible locations for digital arguments. The argumentative research assignment that I teach is in some ways a reaction to the technological prowess displayed by today's student. I'm finding increasingly students are comfortable inserting links into their essays directing their audience to relevant sources. If students are comfortable writing in digital environments, and often prefer tech based pedagogies, then why shouldn't my assignments be supportive?

Michael Dean observes in *Writing Assessment and the Revolution in Digital Texts and Technologies* students at secondary and college levels "...are composing texts in digital environments (e.g., blogs, wikis, digital videos, podcasts, social networking sites, and a variety of Web 2.0 applications" (p.2). Dean's assessment strategies could prove useful as this trend seems to suggest that students are comfortable producing digital texts in digital environments. Comp textbooks such as *Sound Ideas* (Eds. Krasny and Sokolik) include multimodal, visual texts and links to digital supplements while Bedford St. Martins provides web-based tutorials introducing comp students to process oriented digital rhetorics.

A discussion of digital texts and digital environments--including the terms *hypertext*, *hypermedia*, and *materiality*--may help understand how both the writing process and knowledge formation occurs in these environments, and thus within the context of this assignment. Hypertext and hypermedia can be contrasted with material features of digital environments in the same way anthropologists often describe cultural phenomenon. *Emic* and *etic* are terms used by anthropologists in the field that denote perspective. An individual who is inside a culture has an emic perspective on their culture, while an individual outside a culture is said to have an etic perspective. An insider's perspective of digital texts and digital environments (emic) would include inner-workings of networks, such as hypertexts and hypermedia,

while the material, relational, and local features of digital environments, such as writer, writing lab, networked classroom, and community, would constitute an outsider's perspective (etic) of digital environments. I call emic digital environments *inner environments* and etic digital environments *outer environments*.

Definitions of hypertexts and hypermedia function within inner environments and have also been discussed in epistemological terms. Structuralism and Poststructuralism can be helpful in understanding hypertexts for George Landow:

“Like Barthes, Michele Foucault conceives of texts in terms of networks and links. In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, he points out that the ‘frontiers of a book are never clear cut,’ because ‘it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network...(a) network of references’” (1992).

Landow defines hypertext as “text composed of blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality described by the terms **link, node, network, web and path**” and “**Hypermedia** simply extends the notion of the text in hypertext by including visual information, sound, animation, and other forms of data” (1992). Landow uses the terms hypertexts and hypermedia interchangeably, which is problematic for Craig Stroup who believes“...English studies would benefit from revisiting the text/media dichotomy” (2000). Instead of discussing *lexia*-the basic units of hypertext-as an entire network, Stroupe would like to isolate *lexia* for discursive purposes. This is key for Stroupe's text/media split.

Landow's *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, and similar texts exploring theories and pedagogies related to digital writing, digital environments and related technologies have influenced the academy significantly. Several institutions offer hybridized rhet/comp, communications and media studies programs. Scholars are publishing texts in online journals intended exclusively for online audiences using graphic design software. Digital texts and writing in digital environments are having an impact on freshman comp pedagogy-assignments sometimes involve on-line, multimodal writing portfolios and instructors are combining role-playing, computer gaming with written assignments in lab settings.

I suggest a relationship between hyperlinks and hypermedia with links as internal blocks of digital texts that link to other hypertexts and/or hypermedia, while hypermedia extend from hypertext, are often multimodal, and can incorporate more than one media (Dean 2011). For today's student,

capable of negotiating links from one media to another, the digital aspects of my assignment have been no problem. Today's technologically savvy student accustomed to navigating inner (emic) digital environments is capable of networking local, credible websites essential for successful completion of this research assignment. From an emic perspective, students have been able to successfully locate the Foucauldian 'node within a network.' These nodes reveal themselves to students as hypermedia-credible websites-containing arguments on local issues of controversy.

An etic view of digital texts and digital environments begins with Dyehouse, Pennell and Shamoon's suggestion of architectural and ecological metaphors to help describe writing in digital environments. The architectural metaphor, "...retains a critical investment in the writing person, stressing the unique view that expert producers bring to processes of digital and multimedia literacy production" (2009). The architectural metaphor, which sees the writer building and producing texts, contrasts with the ecological metaphor that sees relationships between the writer and the material environment. The ecological metaphor, acknowledging the local aspects of digital environments-including interactions between writer, technologies and texts-is close to the etic, outer digital perspective I notice (Dyehouse, Pennell and Shamoon 2009). The outer digital environments-networked classroom, networked writing labs, libraries and even homes-also play a major role in this assignment. By thinking of digital environments etically and emically, and situating students accordingly, students become participant-observer researchers in this assignment.

The ecological metaphor is important for understanding the writer and digital environments, but ecology is also important in practice. Students have chosen eco-issues such as the pursuit of nuclear power in Missouri, bio-fuels, and the introduction of nonnative species into Missouri for hunting purposes. Prescription law concerning the purchase of over-the-counter medications containing pseudoephedrine has been a topical issue for students due to the use of these cold medicines as precursors for the production of the dangerous drug methamphetamine, and the horrible environmental consequences that follow.

In the St. Louis metropolitan area, the major newspaper and county newspapers have accompanying websites. These digital texts, along with the Missouri Department of Conservation's website, have appeared in works cited pages of students. A specific digital text that has been a valuable teaching tool for me is the online version of a local public TV program. Links appearing on a local TV network's website direct users to an uploaded TV program, which is a weekly roundtable discussion of local issues. Moderating the roundtable is a local radio talk show host. The three other regular participants in this roundtable debate program include two journalists

and another radio talk show host. Previously mentioned local issues are often debated on this program. At times, the program is not much different from other politically charged national news programs. Participants often interrupt each other, voices are raised, and political agendas are explicitly stated and/or implied. The *ad hominem* attacks are kept to a minimum; however I use the program as an example of the agonism described by Deborah Tannen in *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words* (1998).

The angry, violent tide of Tannen's argument culture may be waning a bit because ideology has significantly reduced two hallmarks of argument-discourse and assent. This erosion of argument, or more accurately civil discourse, may leave the door open for rhetoric's usefulness, and provide an opportunity for rhetoric as an alternative to the stranglehold that ideology has on discourse, and therefore argument. While political ideologies often surface in the local roundtable, revealing the aggressive, stereotypical aspects of argument, nonpartisan issues are frequently discussed. It is these nonpartisan, mostly politically benign, local issues involving competing arguments that students explore for essay topics. Some scholars believe what we do in composition classes is largely, if not entirely, political. I feel that avoiding ideologically "hot" political issues is wise mainly because my primary goal with this assignment is to import the critical argumentative rhetorics necessary to elevate student writing, and not to address and debate typically partisan political issues that can often distract and divide a classroom.

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**Critical Argumentative Rhetorics**-Timothy Barnett's preface to *Teaching Argument in the Composition Course: Background Readings* "...note(s) certain theorists-Aristotle, Stephen Toulmin, Chaim Perelman, and Carl Rogers..are the ones most often cited by argument textbooks in general..." (2002). I believe my pedagogical approaches to Aristotle, Stasis theory, and Toulmin have been successful in discovering argumentative rhetorics related to audience, invention, arrangement, analysis, and evaluation. Aided by rhetorics from these areas, students are capable of researching, assessing, inventing and writing arguments concerning local issues. Student compositions often reflect the understanding and application of critical rhetorics within these areas:

**Audience**-Aristotle discusses the three divisions of rhetoric as being determined by three classes of listeners to speeches (Bizzell and Herzberg 2001). The three types of oratory-*political*, *forensic*, and *ceremonial*-extend from three classes of "hearers." In any speech, there are three elements-speaker, subject, and person addressed. "...the hearer..." according to Aristotle, "...determines the speech's end and object" (Bizzell and Herzberg

2001). Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of audience in a speech, and potentially, any rhetorical situation is seen here.

Similar to Aristotle's three elements of a speech, the tripartite in my assignment consists of experts, topic, and student. For example, State Representatives Jane Doe and Joe Smith, red light cameras, and writer would constitute three elements of a rhetorical situation. As audience members, students assume all three classes of Aristotle's listeners. Students as forensic, ceremonial and political listeners research histories, are able to determine the persuasiveness of an experts' argument on a topic, and suggest a future course of action. My emphasis on audience can be seen most clearly at this point. Engaging students as audience members challenges culturally biased student *ethos*. Students may have strong, predetermined feelings about local issues; these biases impede critical understanding. Forensic and ceremonial rhetoric-online research and argumentation rhetorics-compel students to discover causes of topics, and analyze and evaluate competing arguments. Students have related to me that during their online research, arguments have emerged that have challenged their established positions on an issue. Aided by key websites and critical rhetorics, students primarily as audience members are therefore able to position themselves as effective researchers and eventual policymakers.

***Invention and arrangement***-A beneficial heuristic for this assignment is stasis theory. Stasis theory originated with Hermagoras and was later treated extensively by Cicero, Quintilian and others (Bizzell and Herzberg 2001; Carter 1988). Michael Carter's discussion of stasis theory includes his assertion that Hermagoras' entire rhetorical system was based on the stases (1988). Carter's five key features of the stases mostly extend from Hermagoras' use of the stases in legal proceedings:

- The stases originate from the conflict of oppositional forces
- This conflict has the generative power to call a rhetor into action
- Stasis theory is a doctrine of inquiry
- Stasis theory is a means for conflict resolution
- The stases are situational

Along with Carter's third feature, which sees the stases as an epistemological, inventive rhetoric, his discussion of the fifth feature may be the key to understanding why I believe stasis theory is a beneficial, critical argumentative rhetoric for this assignment:

Clearly, *stasis* was a rhetorical principal that was not individualistic and internal; instead it represented a community-oriented rhetoric. Rhetorical discourse found its motivation not in one person who wanted to impose an opinion on another, but in a shared conflict of knowledge. Stasis was a corrective, a way of identifying, controlling, and resolving that conflict within the community.

Rhetoric, then, was an act of bringing the members of a community to knowledge—a resolution of a conflict of knowledge. And language was at the center of that act: both the method of seeking knowledge and the knowledge that emerged from that method defined the community (1988).

Competing arguments involving community issues, and local, digital texts are at the center of this assignment. It is within specific locations that the stases can serve as a conflict resolving, policy making, community-oriented rhetoric. Scholars throughout the history of rhetoric have been able to revise the stases to fit within specific contexts, thus exploiting their malleability. My revision of the stases extends from the work of Fahnestock and Secor (1988).

The outline that I post on my classes webpage acts as both a tool for invention and a map for arrangement. I have included the outline at the end of the essay. The outline guides students through eight stases by engaging the lower stases which involve the descriptive, and definition *topoi*. Stases one and two can also be thought of as general stases because they treat the topic broadly. The third stasis, the thesis statement, informs the audience that the primary purpose of the essay is to argue for a position on the topic. The fourth stasis refines and localizes the topic again revisiting the definition *topos*. Students then progress through the middle stases consisting of the causes of a topic and its effects. When students arrive at these middle stases, causes of an issue and the effects of an issue are discovered. At these stases, competing arguments emerge. Students acknowledge both sides of an issue. This is where student *ethos* is often challenged. The higher stases—six, seven and eight—involve Carter’s notion of language as the center of the rhetorical act. Students are able to determine the probability of conflicting arguments, and develop their own policies by analyzing the language of experts. The way an expert’s argument is structured, an expert’s effective use of Aristotle’s appeals, and whether an expert commits logical fallacies are the three critical analytical and evaluative rhetorics which aid students in determining whether an expert’s argument is probable or improbable. Instead of a student developing an argument influenced by preexisting attitudes or beliefs, theory and practice of the following critical argumentative rhetorics work to establish student *ethos*.

***Analysis and evaluation***—Stephen Toulmin’s “Big 3” as a pattern for analyzing and evaluating arguments has been a beneficial rhetoric. Toulmin uses the terms *claim*, *data* and *warrant*. Claims are concluding statements meriting an argument, data support the claim, and warrants are “...rules, principals, (and) inference licenses...instead of additional items of information” (Barnett). Warrants, differentiated from claims and data, are steps that help establish an appropriate, legitimate claim (Barnett). Toulmin



acknowledges the often trivial aspects of warrants. I can attest to this as students often overlook warrants during class discussion and even in writing. After doing quite a few in-class exercises that involve students finding warrants for existing arguments, I think students often ‘over-think’ warrants. This may explain, in practice, the Toulmanian notion that warrants are often trivial. However, since warrants are implied support for claims developed by students, they can be another tool empowering student *ethos*.

My slight variation on Toulmin’s Big 3 includes substituting the term *backing* for support, and the following enthymeme, with coordinating conjunctions as a way to establish grammar, is an example of a proof:

**Claim 1:** Red Light cameras should be installed at certain intersections in Arnold, MO.

(Because)

**Backing 1:** There are certain intersections in Arnold, MO. where the violation of red light signals has lead to serious accidents

(And)

**Warrant 1:** Serious accidents can cost taxpayers, and the city of Arnold, MO. significantly.

In the classroom, I call this “diagramming an argument.” I have inverted the claim, usually concluding Toulmin’s Big 3, for several reasons. With the claim situated at the top of an enthymeme, it is visually supported by a foundation. The foundation consists of backings, which I define as: data, statistics, reasons or examples that experts use to support a claim. An expert will usually give more than one backing for a claim. Warrants are agreed upon universals, link backings and claims, support a claim, and form the base of an argument. This visual presentation of warrants as the base of an argument is yet another way to establish student *ethos*. Positioning warrants as the base or foundation of an argument is a way to establish voice in student writing. Since students develop warrants and frame them in their own language they bring their own unique voice to the table. I include a student writing example from Sara illustrating this point. Although this particular student is a touch off grammatically in her description of a warrant, I believe her assessment of how the warrant relates to the rest of the expert’s argument is correct.

Because Toulmin’s Big 3 is a tight, succinct, three termed rhetoric, I believe it is useful in practice. Again, audience is key in my approach to teaching argument. Students, as audience members, are required to find several warrants in an expert’s argument. During a discussion designed to teach audience, I partially diagram an argument for the class, and then we break into small groups. These small groups will collaboratively develop two or three warrants to complete an enthymeme. Group volunteers will

approach the whiteboard, and students write grammatically complete sentences describing warrants.

Students evaluate an argument not only through their application of critical rhetorics, but at the level of language. If the enthymeme “flows” grammatically, and if students have little difficulty finding warrants linking claims with backings, then a probable argument exists. If an expert gives more than one backing for a claim, and the backings directly support the claim, then that is another sign an expert’s argument is probable. An arguers’ effective, persuasive use of the appeals needs to be analyzed by students as well. An improbable argument contains insufficient backing, commits logical fallacies, and lacks effective persuasive appeals. Examples of student writing follow in order to demonstrate how students are applying these critical rhetorics.

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**Sarah, Aaron and Hannah-I** obtained permission from three students to use their essays as examples for this article. Out of respect for their anonymity, I will only use their first names. Sarah and Hannah were in a section of second semester comp together, while Aaron was in a separate section of second semester comp. Aaron also took me for first semester comp. He had a quiet way about him, participating in discussion sparingly. He always sat in the back of class with a baseball cap usually tilted sideways. Hannah and Sara both sat on opposite sides of the class in the front row. Sara took a leadership role in her class, and I’ll always be grateful to her for that. Sara and Hanah’s class was one of the few classes I’ve taught that lacked regular participation. The following is an excerpt from an essay Sara wrote on the issue of medicinal marijuana in the state of Missouri:

The screenshot shows a document with a yellow callout box on the left side. The callout box contains the text: "You could re-phrase here. Remember, you discover warrants in an argument, as opposed to an argument 'holding' a warrant. How about, 'A warrant for this argument is...'" A blue arrow points from the callout box to a sentence in the main text: "Representative Flook makes the claim that medicinal marijuana should not be legalized. He backs his claim with another statement saying, 'It's about a party, not about illness' (Swant). He believes that if medicinal marijuana were legal that it would turn into a joke and people would be faking illnesses in order to obtain the drug legally. His argument holds the warrant that the whole purpose of legalizing the medicinal use of marijuana would be compromised by those who do not need the drug to relieve real pains and suffering from true ailments or illnesses. Flook uses the persuasive appeal of pathos, reaching towards the emotions of his audience. If people think that others will start to abuse medicinal marijuana just to get a high, they will feel as though marijuana should stay illegal on all accounts. Representative Flook commits the logical fallacy of having an irrelevant argument. Instead of focusing on abuse that could occur, the argument should focus on whether or not truly sick people should have the option to use medicinal marijuana to relieve them of their symptoms and pains."

As mentioned previously, and noted in her margin, the singular, present tense verb *holds* implies that the argument is doing something. My remark encourages her to think about warrants as an extension of her own thoughts, instead of an expert or an argument ‘holding’ a warrant. Teaching the warrant in this way sees students as audience members, thus encouraging voice. Later in her analysis, she correctly identifies an implied link between Rep. Flook’s quote and her assessment of his position that medicinal marijuana should not be available for Missourians. This link involves her isolation of the pathetic appeal she sees in his argument. An acknowledgement of the fear fallacy implied in Flook’s pathetic appeal may have also strengthened this part of her analysis.

Medicinal marijuana is topical, as evidenced by both Aaron and Hanah’s research. After moving through the lower and middle stases, Aaron

The most practical solution to such a potentially helpful drug would be to legalize medicinal marijuana with the proper requirements and law enforcement. Marijuana should only be used when it is recommended by a doctor and only for medical reasons. This way, this will not impact the youth negatively by having drugs more accessible, but it will help those who truly need it.

arrived at a policy seen in the above excerpt. Below, is Hanah’s policy on the same issue. Both Hanah and Aaron arrive at the same policy claim but give different backings for their claim. Aaron backs his policy claim by reinforcing the potential economic benefits of medicinal marijuana explored earlier in his essay. He contextualizes his backing by appealing to today’s struggling economy and marijuana’s potential to “help.” Hanah discovered websites that she used during the middle “causes and effects of a topic” stases. During these stases, histories and policies of topics are discovered. Arguments before a policy’s institution, and arguments since a policy’s institution are diagrammed and analyzed. These stases can appear in the body of a student’s essay. In Hanah’s essay, she cited websites in the body of her essay which revealed that Missouri has some of the harshest penalties in the nation for individuals who illegally possess marijuana. A particular website mentioned statistics related to the number of individuals incarcerated as the result of either the sale or possession of marijuana. I think it’s important to note Aaron and Hannah had the same policy claim, yet found different backings for their claim. Accordingly, both student’s research

using the stases for invention and arrangement took them in different directions. I think this displays the stases are not just a rote compositional formula yielding homogeneity. When used as a rhetoric of arrangement and invention, the stases are a valuable tool for producing diverse research and writing even when students choose the same topic or the stases aid in arrival at similar policies.

**Assessment-I** believe holistic assessment is a balanced approach generally; for this assignment I focus on student's familiarity with the critical argumentative rhetorics we cover. After all, it's not enough to use the terms. A student's ability to demonstrate the application of these critical argumentative rhetorics is important. For instance, when analyzing a claim, a student must first establish the type of claim an arguer makes (fact, definition, cause, value or policy). Backings for an arguer's claim are analyzed within the context of the type of claim. A specific type of claim calls for corresponding backings. For example, if a student analyzes an expert and determines the expert makes a claim of *fact*, the student will then look for statistics and data to support the factual claim. A claim of *value*, may involve anecdotal backings. Claims of *cause* may involve an arguer's ability to cite historical examples as support. Warrants are then developed by students for an expert's claims/backings. When a student has completed the claims/backings/warrants aspect of analyzing an expert's argument, they have 'diagrammed' an argument. I call this the first set of 'analytical' tools in a student's toolbox.

The second set of analytical tools focuses on the appeals. Students are encouraged to analyze an arguer's persuasiveness based on appeals to speaker credibility, hard data, and not just appeals to the emotions of a specific audience, but the emotions themselves. Is an arguer appealing to fear, anger, frustration, empathy/sympathy, nationalism, etc.?

Logical fallacies make up a student's third set of analytical tools. Although scholarship is divided on whether fallacies should be taught, many Comp. textbooks contain at least seven or eight fallacies. I teach fallacies for two main reasons. First, students are able to recognize the fallacies in examples I use; for instance, stereotyping, generalizing, post hoc reasoning, and red herrings. Second, fallacies are committed so often, by so many of us, that they are almost at the unconscious level. When recognized and exposed, the fallacies can help us in our own reasoning.

After the student has used all three sets of critical tools-in the *analytical* phase-I look for students to widen their focus and *evaluate* an expert's argument. I look to see if, after a student diagrammed an argument, they commented on the argument's plausibility. Second, after noting the type of appeals an arguer makes, are the appeals effective? Why or why not? Finally, if logical fallacies are committed, how and where are they made?

**Conclusion-**Digital texts, writing and researching in digital environments, critical argumentative rhetorics, and local issues all intersect in this assignment. By carefully choosing the proper rhetorics, and research approaches for this assignment, I believe I have aided students in the critical awareness of local issues. As demonstrated by examples of student writing, and after leading class discussions for the last several years, the assignment has seen the understanding and subsequent application of critical argumentative rhetorics in essays. Since this assignment can often involve controversial issues, which can arouse emotion, I try very hard to keep my own personal opinions about these issues to myself. Remaining objective is important for me in this assignment. What is of utmost importance, however, is challenging students to produce critical argumentative writing and encouraging the discussion of local issues at the highest level possible. I feel after teaching and assessing this assignment for the last several years, I have made significant progress toward achieving this primary goal.

### **Endnotes**

The outline appearing below is based on the stases. Ideas located under roman numerals can be placed at certain points in the essay. For instance, questions under roman numerals I and II could be used to generate ideas for the essay's introduction. Roman numeral III could be the thesis statement. Questions under roman numerals IV, V, and VI, could help with the essay's body and roman numerals VII and VIII could be used for a conclusion. The thesis statement should be the last sentence of the first paragraph, and should convey a clear sense of purpose. An example of a thesis statement for this research paper could be, "Topic X will be explored in this essay and current debate among experts associated with this issue will also be considered to suggest a course of action that should be taken concerning topic X."

I Topic (Mention the topic in the *introduction*)

- a. What is my topic?
- b. Have I articulated my topic clearly without grammatical errors?

II Define the Topic (Define the topic in the *introduction*)

- a. Have I started with a general definition?
- b. Could my topic be compared and/or contrasted to another topic?
- c. Have I consulted my textbooks and/or notes for other suggestions on how to define something
- d. If I use a source to help define my issue, have I cited my source?

III Thesis Statement (Have I placed my thesis statement at the end of my *introduction* paragraph?)

a. Have I consulted suggestions at the top of this document and in my texts concerning thesis statements?

IV Develop an Operational Definition the Topic (The operational definition may appear in the *body*)

- a. Have I narrowed my definition?
- b. How is my topic defined locally
- c. Who is effected by my topic?
- d. Is this topic defined different ways in different places?
- e. Have I included plenty of facts concerning my topic that will help my audience understand my definition

V. Causes of the Topic (Include causes of my topic in the *body*)

- a. What is the history of my topic?
- b. Where did my topic originate?
- c. Who or What organization was instrumental in creating this topic?

VI. Effects of the Topic (Include effects of my topic in the *body*)

- a. Since my topic came into being, how has it effected individuals?
- b. Has my topic effected individuals differently in different areas?
- c. Has considerable attention been give to my topic since it began?
- d. Who is qualified to give expert testimony on this topic?
- e. Since this topic appeared, how has it been debated. What is the tone of the debate?
- f. Who are the experts discussing this issue, and what are their arguments?
- g. Have I diagrammed these expert's arguments?
- h. Have I evaluated these experts arguments?
- i. Have I cited expert testimony properly in my essay and in a works cited page?

VII Current Policy on the Topic (This could be the beginning of the *conclusion*)

- a. Review the operational definition here
- b. If my issue is tied to legal statutes, what are laws and consequences for breaking laws associated with my topic?
- c. Who initiated current policy? Was this policy voted on? Who voted on it? Will it be voted on soon?
- d. Who does current policy effect? Who is exempt? Who enforces this policy? Who, if anyone, reviews this policy?

VIII Future Policy on the Topic (This could be the *conclusion*)

- a. Have I reviewed my expert's arguments to help articulate MY position on this topic?
- b. What is my argument. Have I stated a claim, backed my claim, and mentioned warrants?
- Finally, should current policy be continued, eliminated, expanded or reduced? And why?

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