RWS 100: Terms for Studying the Rhetoric of Written Arguments (Glossary Addenda)

Rhetoric refers to the study, uses, and effects of written, spoken and visual language.

Argument – any piece of written, spoken or visual language designed to bring about some change in a reader's, listener's or hearer's ideas or attitudes. An argument asks us to consider, believe or do something. It is a conclusion or claim based on evidence.

In rhetoric, argument does not refer to a situation in which people are fighting. Rather, it refers to a situation in which people are making a case for a way of seeing things.

Components of argument include:

Claim –

Noun: A claim is an arguable assertion. It is a conclusion based on information or data.

Verb: To make a claim is to assert that something is the case.

Usually it is possible to identify a claim that is the *central* point or conclusion that an argument makes. A claim may appear at the beginning or end of a text, but it may appear at any point in an argument, or it may not appear explicitly anywhere in the argument, in which case the reader must infer it from the evidence in the text. Often arguments make more than one claim. They sometimes also make one or more sub-claims.

Reason (sometimes also called *grounds* or *evidence* or *data*)

A reason is evidence, data or information given to support a claim. To find reasons, ask why the claim can be made. What have you got to go on? What evidence is there to support this claim?

How do you find these elements of an argument? How do you read for them?

One good practice is to map or chart or annotate the kinds of work done by each paragraph or section or subsection of an argument.

Examples of language describing author's *projects*

1. Barbara Ehrenreich is a journalist whose project is to investigate first hand whether it is possible to live on the wages paid to unskilled workers. She went to each of three cities for one month, to see whether she could "match income to expenses, as the truly poor attempt to do every day" (6).

2. Alexander Stille is a journalist whose project in "The Ganges Next Life" is to report on the collaboration between a Hindu religious leader and a Berkeley professor of engineering who both seek to clean up the Ganges River. His account draws on interviews and a visit with these men to the site of a clean-up project.

3. Eric Schlosser is an investigative journalist whose project in "Global Realization" is to report on three years of research into the fast food industry as it extends American values and business practices to other nations. To do the project, Schlosser traveled to various countries that have McDonald's franchises, and interviewed McDonald's employees and customers outside the U.S., as well as people who protest McDonald's presence in their nations. He attended a convention of fast food businesses. In addition to this first-hand research, he also collected data from written history books, science publications and web-sites.

4. Amy Chua is a professor at the Yale Law School, specializing in international business and ethnic conflict and globalization. In "A World on the Edge," her project is to investigate how the spread of free market economy and democracy contributes to ethnic conflicts. The article was originally published in the Autumn 2002 issue of *Wilson Quarterly*, a news magazine about politics and foreign affairs, and was written for a lay audience.

Metadiscourse is language about language. Often, metadiscourse announces what a paper will be about and what it will do. Metadiscourse can be used both to announce the overall project or purpose of the paper and to announce its argument.

Metadiscourse also provides *signposts* along the way, guiding the reader to what will come next and showing how that is connected to what has come before.

Examples from professional articles:

"In this essay, I examine in some detail what we mean by . . . My primary purpose, however, is to create a new, shared discourse for understanding X."

"I want to explore a connection between X & Y . . ., but as I will suggest. . ."

"My essay moves from an analysis of this problem to case studies of [people] wrestling with it. My argument is this: . . . . Such inquiry must start, as I will here, by confronting the conflicts within . . ."

"In what follows, I hope to complicate X by demonstrating the social potential of both Y and Z. I contend that. . . . I show how these attitudes emerge not only in response to A but to B."

"The following discussion sets out an analysis and an illustration. The analysis identifies how several claims cohere. . . . The illustration offers a formulation of what X could be today."

Student work on Chua: students can also use metadiscourse to describe their writing projects. For example:

This paper further investigates Chua's argument by using additional sources about globalization in order to clarify both the problem and implications that she describes.

I begin with a brief description Amy Chua's project and what it asks readers to consider. I then move to a discussion of additional resources that make her work more understandable.

To bring Chua's argument about the "explosive collision" of these forces into sharper focus, I explore two additional sources. The first extends Chua's argument, and the second complicates it by showing another way to look at problems that emerge with globalization.

Additional examples of metadiscourse in our course texts:

Chua, 113
The argument I am making is frequently misunderstood. I do not propose a universal theory. . . . The point, rather, is this:

Kaldor, 270
In this essay, I shall distinguish between the different types of armed forces that are emerging in the post-Col War world. . .

Scott, 522
I shall use the term *public transcript* as a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate.

Scott, 531
Now that the basic idea of public and hidden transcripts has been introduced, I will venture a few observations by way of orienting the subsequent discussion.

Ehrenreich, 196
But the real question is not how well I did at work but how well I did at life in general, which includes eating and having a place to stay. The fact that these are two separate questions needs to be underscored right away.

Ehrenreich, 204
But the resistance of employers only raises a second and ultimately more intractable question: Why isn't this resistance met by more effective counterpressure from the workers themselves?

Examples of language describing authors' arguments:

In *Nickel and Dimed* Ehrenreich argues that America is not truly a democracy, but rather a "culture of extreme inequality" (212), in which the unskilled work for less pay than it is possible to live on.

Or,

Ehrenreich argues against the assumption that poverty is simply a result of unemployment. Rather, her research shows that, for many employed people, poverty results from low ages.

In "A World on the Edge," Amy Chua suggests that democracy, free market economies, and ethnic hatred are "the three most powerful forces operating in the world today" (108). As she investigates the relationship among these three forces, she makes a two-part argument, proposing both a problem and a solution. Challenging accepted notions about democracy and free markets, she argues that the spread of these often fuels ethnic hatreds.

Context: the larger textual and cultural environment in which specific rhetorical acts take place.

Here are some ways in which DRWS instructors may talk about the term *context:*

1. We can think about a source *in the context* of the publication where it appeared.

Publication data: where was a source published? What sort of publication is that? What is its readership? What are the interests/themes/methods of that publication? Does the source text provide any clues to the readership and their interests?

For example, Amy Chua's "A World on the Edge" was originally published in the *Wilson Quarterly*, a journal that many students and instructors aren't familiar with.

A quick Google search turns up this magazine's website, which says, "By presenting the best writing and thinking of academics, specialists, and others to a broad audience, [the Wilson Quarterly] aims to overcome the specialization and information overload that prevent the public from following developments in significant realms of knowledge. The magazine ranges over many subject areas but always with an eye to public questions: issues in politics and policy, culture, religion, science, and other fields that bear upon our public life."
This tells us that the article was written by a specialist, but for a lay audience interested in knowing about a range of topics. We could check the table of contexts of an issue of the magazine to get a better feel for what those topics are.

2. We can think about a source *in the context* of the author's life, persona and work.

Author's life: who wrote the work? Who is that person? When and where does/did that person live? What do we know about his/her other work, activities, methods, public appearances, reputation? Does the source text include any clues about the author's life and works?

For example, Robert Coles, in "The Tradition: Fact and Fiction," provides readers with several anecdotes about his practice as a psychologist and his experiences with other psychologists, authors, and documentarians,

providing clues about his reputation and work.

3. We can think about a source *in the context* of the other work available since rhetorical acts don't happen in a vacuum, but usually respond to and engage with other discussions that are going on about a particular topic. We can ask, does the source text include any references to or clues about the ongoing discussion?

For example, Ronne Hartfield, in her introduction to *Another Way Home: The Tangled Roots of Race in One Chicago Family*, positions her book in relation to contemporary work on mulattoness, naming five recent books that address this topic in ways that are different from her own approach (page xiv).

4. We can think about a source *in the context* of past ideas, discoveries, theories, research, and writing about a topic.

Sometimes writers refer to past work which may be an important antecedent for their arguments. The source text may include references to or clues about this past work. For example, Martin Luther King in "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" refers to Socrates and Ghandi as sources of ideas about non-violent protest.

5. We can think about a source *in the context* of specific events and audiences.

Rhetorical acts address audiences and respond to particular events or situations. Sometimes these audiences are quite specific. For example, Martin Luther King, in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," addresses a specific audience of clergy about the lunch counter protests that were happening in Birmingham.
Mark Hertsgaard, in "The Oblivious Empire," responds to the events of 9/11 and the question "why do they hate us"?

6. We can think about a text *in the context* of its reception.

How did people respond to the work when it was published? Was it well received? Were people shocked?
For example, the reception of Martin Luther King's "Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam" was hostile in some circles, with people calling King a traitor.

7. We can think about a text *in the context* of common assumptions about the topic.

For example, in "Appearances," John Berger begins his argument concerning the meaning of photographs by addressing how most viewers are used to experiencing photography in certain ways.

8. We can think about a source *in the current social context* in which we are reading: our own locale, the events that are present to us, our own experiences.

For example, looking at James Agee and Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, readers may be able to read the images of white Depression-era migrants differently when seen in the context of the current political climate concerning the felonization of immigration.

Context: a useful discussion by rhetoricians Faigley and Selzer:

In *Good Reasons: Designing and Writing Effective Arguments* (Longman 2006), Lester Faigley and Jack Selzer describe *textual* and *contextual* analysis, two approaches to rhetorical analysis that roughly correspond to RWS 100 and 200:

[G]enerally approaches to rhetorical analysis can be placed between two broad extremes—not mutually exclusive categories but extremes along a continuum. At the one end of the continuum are analyses that concentrate more on texts than contexts. They typically use rhetorical concepts to analyze the features of texts. Let's call this approach *textual analysis*. At the other extreme are approaches that emphasize context over text. These emphasize reconstructing the cultural environment . . . that existed when a particular rhetorical event took place, and then depend on that re-creation to produce clues about the persuasive tactics and appeals. Those who undertake *contextual analysis* —as we'll call this second approach—regard particular rhetorical acts as parts of larger communicative chains, or "conversations" (63)

They add:

[*C*]*ontextual rhetorical analysis always proceeds from a description of the* ***rhetorical situation*** that motivated the item in question. . . . It regards communications as anything but self-contained:

9. Each communication is considered as a response to other communications (and to other social practices.)

10. Communications (and social practices) are considered to reflect the attitudes and values of the communities that sustain them.

11. Evidence is sought about how those other communications (and social practices) are reflected in texts.

Rhetorical analysis from a contextualist perspective understands individual pieces as parts of ongoing conversations.
The challenge is to reconstruct the conversation surrounding a specific piece of writing of speaking (69-70).