**Rhetorical Analysis**

200 Possible Points

Due:

Introduction

Among the most valuable skills you can take with you from college is the ability to think critically. Among the attributes of one who can think critically is the ability to objectively analyze arguments and to identify and assess rhetorical strategies in a variety of mediums, including political speeches, advertisements, sales pitches, or letters to the editor. Identifying rhetorical techniques such as emotional, logical, or ethical appeals doesn’t necessarily discount what you read or hear, but it does enable you to evaluate the effectiveness of their use in given situations and to recognize when an argument is not adequately supported. Some rhetorical strategies are quite subtle. For example, does a political candidate’s roots in Kansas really put him more in touch with the common man or woman than a candidate from Florida? Or, will this or that diet program really make you a happier person as an advertisement implies? Some tactics are more blatantly dubious. For example, should Jews be exterminated to protect the purity of the Aryan race? In short, we are barraged with arguments constantly, some more important than others, but many of which can make a difference in our lives. In other words, when you can separate out what is being said from how it’s presented, you are free to make more informed and objective choices.

This assignment will give you practice in analyzing the rhetoric of an argument from your issues text. Your focus will be on how the writer establishes ethos through language and his/her use of emotional and logical appeals to an intended audience. In this process you will pay close attention to such things as the author’s diction, tone, and use of figurative language, in addition to other rhetorical strategies, in creating the three different types of appeals.

What is Rhetorical Analysis?

Most of the time when we read we are primarily interested in what an author is trying to say; we try to understand the point he or she is putting across. When doing rhetorical analysis, however, we are more interested in how something is being said. That is, we pay special attention to how a writer attempts to achieve some sort of rhetorical effect. We look beyond the message to the strategies and tactics a writer uses in making an argument. In short, “rhetorical analysis” involves breaking an argument into its parts to understand how those parts contribute to the argument as a whole and determining whether the argument is successful.

Preparing to Write

Before writing, it will be necessary to read the article under consideration several times, noting its use of rhetoric in relation to its messages, stated and unstated. The idea here is to tune your mind to how the author uses language, and to note the types of appeals he/she favors—ethical, emotional, or logical. Take note of how language is used, including length and style of sentences, diction, tone of voice, figurative language, etc.

Finally, in your several readings of the text, note where historical and social context may be significant and what areas may require a bit of background research. For example, the optimism of President Kennedy’s inaugural address can best be understood by knowing of the general pessimism of the times, the financial instability of the day, and the tensions surrounding the Cold War.

Once you have gathered this data about your article, locate its most important means of persuasion. When you have identified a few areas that seem most significant, consider what it is that together they accomplish. The answer to this question will move you close to establishing a thesis.