

# Project 1: Genre Analysis

English 3840j - Writing, Reading, and Rhetoric in the Professions

## Introduction

As we learned in the first week of the course, we can become better writers by becoming more aware of a variety of genres and studying how they function to influence discourse. In our first reading, Anne Beaufort emphasized the importance of not only learning new genres, but also gaining a meta-awareness of what we already know about genres, how they work and what they do. Accordingly, the readings in Unit 1 focus significant attention on the concept of genre in order to get you thinking about how genres emerge as a result of recurring situations, as well as how they are always connected to some kind of “social action” in our everyday lives. Genres are not just textual categories; they are embedded in our speech utterances, daily encounters, even social structures. Furthermore, the more knowledge we can acquire about genre, the more successful we will be at understanding how disciplinary and professional communities construct, maintain, and disseminate both information (discourse) and power relations. Because genre is so important in understanding how texts can structure and govern social communities (esp. professional communities), this assignment asks you to do some genre analysis in order to accomplish a number of goals:

- become more familiar with typical genres in your professional field: their textual features and conventions,
- identify how genres influence rhetorical situations, accomplishing rhetorical goals of an institution or writer, and how they have a direct influence on their audiences,
- gain an understanding of how texts (and the genres they belong to) are always connected to social situations and social actions,
- realize that genres organize material relations, e.g. providing/withholding access to goods, services, etc.

What does this have to do with writing, reading, and rhetoric in your profession? Gaining an understanding of how genre operates will not only improve your chances of being a successful writer in a given genre, it will also allow you to understand the social and material implications of specific genres in your field. In other words, understanding genres will help you realize how texts influence our social realities and change our lives in very real/physical ways.

## Project Processes and Goals

### *Proposal*

To be successful in this project, you'll need to start thinking right away of how you might apply it to your own field or profession. The **Project Proposal**, to be submitted to your blog (9/9), should get you thinking about how you want to define your professional field. What individuals, occupations, institutions, organizations, etc. comprise the field? More importantly, what genres are most significant in this field? Your proposal should seek to answer these questions, but it should also strive to articulate a preliminary goal. That is, what do you hope to find out about how these particular genres influence the social/material conditions of your field? How you might relate that goal to some of the readings you've been exposed to thus far?

### *Gathering Samples*

Next you'll need to start **gathering actual samples of genres in your field**. You can try doing searches online, but this kind of primary research might be more successful if you are able to contact a professional in your field and ask them to direct you toward some specific texts. A great place to start would be professors and graduate students in your major. But you might also visit places and events where professionals in your field work and ask them to help you out. Another great resource might be the subject librarian in your field/profession. Check out this link for a list:

<http://www.library.ohiou.edu/about/staff-directory/subject-librarians/>

As we move on to other projects, you'll be expected to do even more primary research so any contacts you can make now will help you later on in the course as well.

### *Analysis*

Once you've gathered 3-4 examples of genres in your field, you'll begin **analyzing these texts using a set of heuristics**, speculative questions designed to make specific interpretations of primary data. We'll do some in-class group work geared at analysis of your genre samples, but you'll also be expected to do significant work on your own.

### *Making an Argument*

What's important to remember is that your essay is not just a report of your answers to these questions. Rather, your essay also needs to **put forth an original argument about how genre operates in your field** using your primary research and analysis as evidence for this argument. Furthermore, your argument should also attempt to inform and reflect on a concept or idea about genre as defined by the one or more of the authors in this unit. What do we know about genre as it is defined and explored by these authors? And how might we add some new insight about the genres in our profession by extending, questioning or challenging one or more of these authors' theories, concepts or ideas? Ultimately, your essay should demonstrate an understanding of the research on genre and attempt to make a discovery about how genre operates in your field by using one or more of the theories we encounter in that reading. All of this makes the reading and reading responses throughout the unit especially important.

## Possible Genre Analysis Outline

- Introduction to ideas about genre (what you've learned in the readings). Set up a "frame" through which to explain your genre analysis using 1 or more authors
- Original argument/thesis (what you have learned about how genre functions in your community from your primary research)
- Forecast of your analysis and its implications
- Description of the professional field
- Analysis of specific genre texts, uses quotes, summary, etc. to describe these texts and their implications; Also engages with one or more theories about genre from the reading
- Conclusions and implications; references back to thesis/argument
- Works Cited or References
- Appendix that includes genre samples.

## My Criteria for the Genre Analysis

- Articulates an original argument about the function of genre in student's professional community
- Supports that argument with textual evidence and examples from one or more genre samples, using quotes and summary to reproduce selections from samples
- Does not rely too heavily on quotes from genre samples. Paraphrases and summarizes when appropriate
- Employs a frame (a concept, theory or idea from another author) about genre to further an original argument.
- Demonstrates an awareness of how genres are embedded in rhetorical situations and social contexts
- Is well-organized with appropriate forecasting and topic statements
- Uses appropriate academic tone and style
- Follows standard conventions for spelling, punctuation, and grammar

## Reflective Essay

While the audience for your genre analysis is comprised of individuals interested in genre theories and professionals in your field, for the reflective essay you are writing to only two people: yourself and me, the instructor. Think of this essay as a response to this assignment. What did you learn from the course readings in this unit that helped you understand how genres operate and what we might gain from studying genres in our chosen professions? Furthermore, what have you learned about the discourse community of your profession by studying some of its genres? Finally, give me an agenda for feedback. Where did you most struggle and what can I do to help you be more successful in this essay? Try to remember that the final portfolio in this course will ask you to synthesize your three reflective essays (1 for each project) into an argument about what you learned from this course as a whole. In other words, doing a thorough and engaged reflective essay now will help you in Project 4.

## Formal Requirements

Genre Analysis: 1500-1800 words, (5-6 pp.)

Reflective Essay: 300-500 words, (1p.)

## **Important Dates**

Sept. 9: Project Proposals due (on blog); Bring 2-3 Possible Genre Selections to Class

Sept. 13: Bring Final Genre Selections to Class

Sept. 23: Project 1 Drafts due for Peers

Sept. 25: Project 1 due for Instructor