

Rhetoric of the op-ed page essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Reading selections for this module:

Edlund, John R. “ Three Ways to Persuade.” Expository Reading and Writing Course: Semester One. Long Beach: CA State UP, 2008. 29-32. Edlund, John R. “ Letters to the Editor in Response to ‘ A Change of Heart About Animals.’” Expository Reading and Writing Course: Semester One. Long Beach: CA State UP, 2008. 36. Rifkin, Jeremy. “ A Change of Heart About Animals.” Los Angeles Times 1 Sept. 2003: B15.

In this assignment sequence, you will learn how to use Aristotle’s concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos to analyze editorials and opinion pieces. You will read an opinion piece about scientific studies of animal behavior and learn how to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper.

Reading Rhetorically

Prereading

Activity 1: Getting Ready to Read

This activity focuses on ways to persuade. Your teacher will give you an opportunity to define the term “ persuade.” Then read “ Three Ways to Persuade” by John R. Edlund. When you finish the article, engage in the option assigned by your teacher.

Option 1: Think of something you tried to persuade a parent, teacher, or friend to do or believe. It might have been to buy or pay for something, to change a due date or a grade, to change a rule or decision, to go somewhere, or some other issue. What kinds of arguments did you use? Did you use logic? Did you use evidence to support your request? Did you try to

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present your own character in a way that would make your case more believable? Did you try to engage the emotions of your audience? Write a short description of your efforts to persuade your audience in this case.

Option 2: In a small group, discuss the strategies your friends use when they are trying to borrow a car, go to a concert, buy new clothes, or achieve some other desired result. Pick a situation and write a short skit showing those persuasive strategies in action. Each skit should employ logical, emotional, and ethical persuasion. Rehearse and perform your skit for the class.

After you have completed the option assigned, discuss the following questions: 1. Do people use Aristotle’s concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos every day, without thinking about it? 2. Do these concepts apply to politics and advertising as well as person-to-person persuasion? 3. Are there other means of persuasion that Aristotle did not discuss? Activity 2: Surveying the Text

Look at the article “ A Change of Heart About Animals” by Jeremy Rifkin. Think about the following questions: 1. Where and when was this article published?

2. Who wrote the article? Do you know anything about this writer? (Hint: Look at the end of the article.) How could you find out more? 3. What is the subtitle of the article? What does that tell you about what the article might say? 4. The article was published on the editorial page. What does that mean?

Activity 3: Making Predictions and Asking Questions

As you look at the text of “ A Change of Heart About Animals,” answer and then discuss the following questions: 1. What does it mean to have “ a change of heart”?

2. What are some common ideas or feelings people have about animals? 3. What kinds of things might cause someone to change his or her ideas or feelings about animals? 4. What are some groups of people who have strong feelings about how animals are treated? What do you know about them? What do they usually believe? 5. What is a vegetarian or a vegan? Do you know anyone who is a vegetarian? What does he or she think about eating animals? 6. What do you know about the author? Do you think he might be a vegetarian? 7. The first paragraph mentions breakthroughs in biotechnology and nanotechnology. Do you think this article is about those things? Why or why not? 8. This article appeared in a newspaper. What does that mean about the audience? Is this an article for scientists? 9. What do you think is the purpose of this article? Does the writer want readers to change their minds about something? 10. Will the article be negative or positive in relation to the topic? Why? 11. What argument about the topic might it present? What makes you think so? 12. Turn the title into a question (or questions) to answer after you have read the text.

Activity 4: Introducing Key Vocabulary

When you read “ A Change of Heart About Animals,” you will need to know the following terms to understand the text:

humane and inhumane

cognitive

genetically wired

empathy

Think about words that you know that sound similar to these and may be related. For example, “ humane” is related to “ human,” and “ empathy” is related to the Greek word pathos in “ Three Ways to Persuade.”

Create a word tree based on the root of a word from the text or one listed above. Here is an example of a word tree for “ cognitive

Now you are ready to read Jeremy Rifkin’s “ A Change of Heart About Animals.” For the first time through, you should read to understand the text. Read as if you trust Rifkin, and focus on what he is trying to say. Try to see whether the predictions you have made about the text are true. Is the article about what you thought it would be about? Does Rifkin say what you thought he would say? When you have finished reading, answer the following questions: 1. Which predictions turned out to be true?

2. What surprised you?

3. What does Rifkin want readers to believe?

4. What are some of the things people believe humans can do that animals cannot? How does Rifkin challenge those beliefs? 5. What authorities does Rifkin use to support his case?

6. What action does Rifkin want readers to take?

7. How does Rifkin organize his essay? Is it an effective organization?

Activity 6: Looking Closely at Language

Create a visual representation of “ your” word, study its origin or history, and be prepared to share it (and its synonyms and antonyms) with the class. You might choose to construct a tree, chart, or table from Activity 4.

Activity 7: Rereading the Text

You should question the text in your second reading, “ reading against the grain” and playing the disbelieving (or doubting) game. As you read, look for claims and assertions made by Rifkin. Does he back them up? Do you agree with them?

As you read, do the following:

- Underline (with a double underline) or highlight in one color the thesis and major claims or assertions made in the article.
- Underline (with a single underline) or highlight in a second color the evidence in support of the claims and assertions.
- Write your comments and questions in the margins.

After reading the article again, answer the following questions: 1. What is the thesis of Rifkin’s article?

2. Are there any claims made by Rifkin that you disagree with? What are they?

3. Are there any claims that lack support?

Activity 8: Analyzing Stylistic Choices

Loaded Words: Language that Puts a Slant on Reality

Part A

Reread Rifkin’s article, looking for “ loaded” words—words Rifkin uses to evoke a positive or negative emotional response from the reader. List at

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least five words and explain whether each has a positive or negative connotation. What neutral word might Rifkin have used instead that has the same meaning but not the same emotional impact?

Part B

Answer the following questions about the Rifkin article:

1. How would you describe the style of this article? Is it formal? Informal? Academic? Scientific? Conversational? 2. What is the effect of giving the names of most of the animals involved in the experiments, but not the names of the scientists? 3. Throughout most of the article, Rifkin refers to “researchers” and “scientists.” In paragraph 13, however, he directly quotes Stephen M. Siviyy, whom he refers to as “a behavioral scientist at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania.” What is the effect of this sudden specificity? 4. What is the effect of all the rhetorical questions in paragraph 15, followed by “such questions are being raised” in the next paragraph?

Activity 9: Considering the Structure of the Text

Now that you have read and discussed the content of the Rifkin essay, you are ready to begin analyzing the organizational structure. First, divide the text into sections:

- Draw a line across the page where the introduction ends. Is the line after the first paragraph, or are there more introductory paragraphs?
- Divide the body of the essay into sections on the basis of the topics addressed.
- Draw a line where the conclusion begins. Is it the last paragraph, or does it begin before that?

You are now ready to begin a process called “descriptive outlining”:

- Write brief statements describing the rhetorical function and content of each paragraph or section. –What does each section do for the reader? What is the writer trying to accomplish? –What does each section say? What is the content?

- After making the descriptive outline, ask questions about the article’s organizational structure: –Which section is the most developed? –Which section is the least developed? Does it need more development? –Which section is the most persuasive? The least?

From your work charting the text, what do you think is the essay’s main argument? Is it explicit or is it implicit?

Postreading

Activity 10: Summarizing and Responding

Use the marginal comments you made in the “Considering the Structure of the Text” activity to write a concise summary of the Rifkin article.

Activity 11: Thinking Critically

At this point, the concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos come back into play. From the analysis you have done so far, you should be well-prepared to analyze the logic and support of the arguments, the character and intentions of the author, and the emotional effects on the reader of the language used and the details provided.

Questions about Logic (Logos)

1. Locate major claims and assertions you have identified in your previous analysis and ask yourself: Do I agree with Rifkin's claim that . . . ? 2. Look at support for major claims and ask yourself: Is there any claim that appears to be weak or unsupported? Which one, and why? 3. Can you think of counterarguments that the author does not deal with? 4. Do you think Rifkin has left something out on purpose? Why or why not?

Questions about the Writer (Ethos)

1. Who is Rifkin? If you have not done so already, do an Internet search to find out something about him. What is his profession? What does he usually write about? Does everybody agree with him? Do the facts you find about his life, his credentials, and his interests make him more credible to you? Less credible? 2. Pick one of the studies Rifkin mentions and try to find out more. Is Rifkin's description of the study accurate? 3. Does Rifkin have the right background to speak with authority on this subject? 4. What does the author's style and language tell you about him? 5. Do you trust this author? Do you think this author is deceptive? Why or why not?

Questions about Emotions (Pathos)

1. Rifkin says that Germany is encouraging farmers to give pigs human contact and toys. Does this fact have an emotional impact on the reader? If so, what triggers it? What are some other passages that have an emotional effect? 2. Rifkin calls his essay "A Change of Heart About Animals." Does this imply that the scientific discoveries he summarizes here should change how we feel about animals? 3. Does this piece affect you emotionally? Which parts?

4. Do you think Rifkin is trying to manipulate your emotions? How? 5. Do your emotions conflict with your logical interpretation of the arguments? In what ways?

Connecting Reading to Writing

Activity 12: Using the Words of Others

One of the most important features of academic writing is the use of the words and ideas from written sources to support the writer's own points. There are essentially three ways to incorporate words and ideas from sources:

- Direct quotation. Jeremy Rifkin says, "Studies on pigs' social behavior funded by McDonald's at Purdue University, for example, have found that they crave affection and are easily depressed if isolated or denied playtime with each other" (15).
- Paraphrase. In "A Change of Heart About Animals," Jeremy Rifkin notes that McDonald's has funded studies on pigs that show that they need affection and playtime with one another (15).
- Summary. In "A Change of Heart About Animals," Jeremy Rifkin cites study after study to show that animals and humans are more alike than we think. He shows that animals feel, reason, make and use tools, learn and use language, and mourn their dead. One study even shows that pigs need affection and playtime with one another, and enjoy playing with toys (15).

Documentation. You will also need to learn to take notes with full citation information. For print material, you will need to record, at a minimum, the author, title, city of publication, publisher, date of publication, and page number. The two most common documentation formats used are Modern

Language Association (MLA), which is used mainly by English departments, and the American Psychological Association format (APA).

Books. Here is the Works Cited format for a typical book in MLA style:

Bean, John C., Virginia A. Chappell, and Alice M. Gilliam. *Reading Rhetorically: A Reader for Writers*. New York: Longman, 2002.

Newspapers. Here is the bibliographic information for the article quoted above, in MLA format. The fact that it was published in a newspaper changes the format and the information given somewhat:

Rifkin, Jeremy. "A Change of Heart About Animals." Editorial. *Los Angeles Times*. 1 Sept. 2003: B15.

Web Sites. To document a Web site, you will need to give the name of the author (if known), the title of the site (or a description, such as "Homepage," if no title is available), the date of publication or update (if known), the name of the organization that sponsors the site, the date of access, and the Web address (URL) in angle brackets. For example:

University Writing Center. 26 June 2003. University Writing Center, California Polytechnic State University, Pomona. 26 May 2004 .

The author for the above site is unknown, so no author name is given. This entry would appear in the Works Cited section alphabetized by "university."

In-Text Documentation. The MLA style also requires in-text documentation for every direct quotation, indirect quotation, paraphrase, or summary. Many students are confused about this, believing that documentation is necessary

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only for direct quotations. If the author is given in the text, the page number should be given in parentheses at the end of the sentence containing the material. For example, here is a paraphrase of material from the Rifkin article (because the author is not named in the text, his last name goes in parentheses):

It is well-established that animals can learn to use sign language. A long-term study at the Gorilla Foundation in Northern California shows that Koko, a 300-pound gorilla, can use more than 1, 000 signs to communicate with her keepers and can understand several thousand English words. She also scores between 70 and 95 on human IQ tests (Rifkin 15).

An academic paper is most often a dialogue between the writer and his or her sources. When you learn to quote, paraphrase, summarize, and document sources correctly, you are well on your way to college-level writing.

This short discussion presents only the basic concepts of MLA documentation. You will also need access to the MLA Handbook, which covers the system in detail.

Practice with Sources: Quote, Paraphrase, Respond. Choose three passages from the Rifkin article you might be able to use in an essay. You may want to choose passages you strongly agree or disagree with. • First, write each passage down as a correctly punctuated and cited direct quotation. • Second, paraphrase the material in your own words and provide the correct citation. • Third, respond to the idea expressed in the passage by agreeing or disagreeing with it and explaining why, again with the correct citation.

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Writing Rhetorically

Prewriting

Activity 13: Reading the Assignment

A common way to respond to an editorial is to write a letter to the editor.

Now that you have worked extensively with this text, you are ready to write a well-informed response to Rifkin’s ideas.

Writing Assignment | | After thinking about your reading, discussion, and analysis of Rifkin’s article and the letters in response to it, what do you personally | | think about Rifkin’s point? Do you think it is true, as Rifkin says, that “ many of our fellow creatures are more like us than we had ever | | imagined”? Do you think we need to change the way we treat the animals around us? Or do you think Rifkin is wrong? Write a letter | | expressing your viewpoint to the editor of the newspaper. |

If you like, you may start out with “ Dear Editor:”

Activity 14: Getting Ready to Write

Before you write your own letter in response to Rifkin, look at the two sample letters to the editor written in response to “ A Change of Heart About Animals.” Then discuss the following questions: 1. Bob Stevens disagrees with Rifkin and makes several points. Does Stevens refute Rifkin’s arguments? 2. In his first paragraph, Stevens argues that because a predator (such as a hawk) does not feel empathy for its prey, humans do not need to feel empathy for the animals they eat and that such feelings would be

unnatural. Do you agree? 3. Stevens notes that some animals can mimic human speech but argues that they do not understand what they are saying. What would Rifkin say to this? 4. Stevens implies that it would be a waste of resources to give toys to pigs, especially when some human children do not have them. Do we respond logically or emotionally to this argument? Is this argument fair to Rifkin? 5. Is it true, as Stevens argues, that Rifkin wants animals to have more rights than humans? 6. Lois Frazier says that pet owners know that animals have feelings and abilities not too different from humans. Do some pet owners treat their pets like people? Is this a good thing? Why or why not? 7. Frazier argues that Rifkin needs to take his argument further and promote a vegetarian lifestyle with no animal products. Is this a reasonable conclusion to draw from Rifkin's arguments? Do you agree with him?

Some things to note before writing your letter to the editor are as follows:

- A good letter to the editor is focused and concise. It should make your point, but no words should be wasted. It is sometimes best to write a longer draft, and then cut out everything that is not essential.
- Newspaper editors often cut letters to fit the available space or to make a letter more focused. If your letter is published unedited, you are very lucky.
- Some letters respond to the thesis of the editorial, either in support or disagreement, and provide further arguments or further evidence. Other letters focus on one point made by the original author and support it, question it, or refute it.
- These days, most letters are e-mailed to the newspaper. To get a letter published in a major newspaper, you must write it quickly and send it within a day or two of the publication date of the editorial to which you are responding.
- If the

newspaper wants to publish your letter, you will normally receive a call or an e-mail to get permission and to verify that you really are who you say you are. • Newspapers are interested in a wide range of viewpoints from diverse citizens. If your letter is a good expression of a particular viewpoint, brings up new information or arguments, or has some particularly good phrases, it has a good chance of being published.

Writing

Activity 15: Composing a Draft

Writing the first draft of your letter to the editor is a chance for you to organize your thoughts and get your ideas down on paper. Use any notes you made as you read and discussed the Rifkin article. Consider the suggestions about writing letters to the editor from Activity 14, and write your first draft.

Revising and Editing

Activity 16: Revising the Draft

The most natural way to improve a letter to the editor is to share it with others before you send it. Working with partners or in groups, share your drafts and give each other feedback. Listen to what others say—even those who disagree with you.

Peer Group Work

Break into groups of three or four. Each student will read his or her letter aloud to the other members of the group. Then complete Part I of the

Revising Checklist (page 51) of the Evaluation Form for each member's letter.

Paired Work

Now work in pairs to decide how you want to revise the problems that group members have identified.

Individual Work

Revise the draft on the basis of the feedback you have received and the decisions you have made with your partner. Consider these additional questions for your individual work:

- Have I responded to the assignment?

- What is my purpose for this essay?
- What should I keep? What is the most effective?
- What should I add? Where do I need more details, examples, and other evidence to support my point?
- What could I omit? Do I use irrelevant details? Am I repetitive?
- What should I change? Are parts of my essay confusing or contradictory? Do I need to explain my ideas more fully?
- What should I rethink? Is my position clear? Do I provide enough analysis to convince my readers?
- How is my tone? Am I too overbearing or too firm? Do I need qualifiers?
- Have I addressed differing points of view?
- Does my conclusion show the significance of my essay?

Activity 17: Editing the Draft

Once you are satisfied with the tone and content of your letter, you should proofread it for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. The following guidelines will help you edit your draft.

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Editing Guidelines for Individual Work

- If possible, set your essay aside for 24 hours before rereading it to find errors.
- Read your essay aloud so you can hear errors and rough spots.

At this point, focus on individual words and sentences rather than on overall meaning. Take a sheet of paper and cover everything except the line you are reading. Then touch your pencil to each word as you read.

- With the help of your teacher, figure out your own pattern of errors—the most serious and frequent errors you make.
- Look for only one type of error at a time. Then go back and look for a second type and, if necessary, a third.
- Use the dictionary to check spelling and to confirm that you have chosen the right word for the context.

The scoring guide on the next page may be used to evaluate your final product. Scoring Guide for Letters to the Editor

Categories

- Focus
- Word choice, including the use of text from the article
- Argument and support, including the use of logical, emotional, and/or ethical appeals
- Grammar and mechanics

Scoring

Score of 4—Superior

- The letter is tightly focused on the issue or issues raised in the editorial, article, or opinion piece to which it responds.
- The letter uses words effectively and efficiently and quotes key words and phrases from the article.
- The letter makes a clear point or points and provides convincing support

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for those points, including logical, emotional, and/or ethical appeals. • There are no grammatical or mechanical errors.

Score of 3—Good

- The letter focuses on an issue or issues raised in the editorial, article, or opinion piece to which it responds.
- The letter uses words accurately and effectively.
- The letter makes a clear point or points and provides support for those points.
- Grammatical or mechanical errors, if present, are minor.

Score of 2—Fair

- The letter discusses an issue or issues raised in the editorial, article, or opinion piece to which it responds but may be unclear or vague as to its focus.
- The letter is sometimes repetitive or vague in language.
- The letter does not make a clear point or does not provide support for its points.
- Grammatical or mechanical errors inhibit communication.

Score of 1—Poor

- The letter fails to clearly address an issue raised in the article.
- The letter is vague, repetitive, or confusing.
- The letter fails to make a clear point.
- Grammatical and mechanical errors confuse and distract the reader.

Evaluation Form

Based on the CSU English Placement Test (EPT)

Part I: Revising Checklist – Mark the appropriate categories.