**Meta-Reflection: Toolbelt of the Digital Rhetorician**

**Digital Portfolio Link:**

[*http://hopesae.wix.com/inquiry5*](http://hopesae.wix.com/inquiry5)

This class began with a focus on understanding rhetoric, specifically digital rhetoric in order to better prepare us for critically thinking and analyzing pieces of digital text throughout the semester. Based on learning through this course, I have come to understand rhetoric as the act of speaking or writing to have a persuasive effect on the audience.  I have come to understand rhetoric and digital rhetoric as a productive art. It helps us to analyze pieces of work to see how the audience perceives a message (or messages) that are being conveyed. This class overall has given me the ability to see a written, visual or audio piece in a new light; being able to break the work apart into its smallest parts to understand it as a whole.

Through this class I learned the importance of the five canons of a digital rhetorician. These five canons are: invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. Understanding of these five canons is critical to being effective in the message delivery of a piece. Invention is the brainstorming element in finding ways to persuade an audience. Arrangement is the process of putting together the structure of a rhetorical piece into a coherent argument. Style is the way in which a rhetorician presents an argument to stir the emotions. Memory is the ability of a rhetorician to speak without having to prepare or memorize a speech, which is also vital to those in the field of public relations like myself. Finally delivery of a piece is making use of voice, gesture, etc. in order to give that final push of persuasion over an audience.

The first concept that we tackled in class was visual and design rhetoric. Visual rhetoric has emphasis on the use of visuals to inform, persuade, to make the audience feel or act in a certain way. Through the focus on visual and design rhetoric I learned that sight is a powerful and influential sense.  Visual rhetoric helps one create pieces and craft discourse based on a certain context.  Knowing how to analyze visual rhetoric helps one see how a message can circulate. I knew an understanding of visual and digital rhetoric would be beneficial for me as a strategic communication major because in many cases I will have to create promotional pieces that will be seen by various audiences.

What I did not understand is how much small changes in a piece of design rhetoric can make a difference in the message conveyed. These small changes are known as the CRAP principles. The CRAP principles are comprised of: contrast, repetition, alignment, proximity and typography.   All of these variables can affect the message in a positive or negative way by changing the look and feel of a design/visual piece.

I used the CRAP principles as well as others involved in visual/design rhetoric my assignments this semester. In project 1, the focus was on design rhetoric, therefore the message relied entirely on the tactics learned in understanding design rhetoric. Project 3 also used the CRAP principles in the text presented within the video. I never really had taken the time to look closely at any signage around campus (or in my daily life) until this class. Now when I see a poster around campus, I tend to look at it and analyze it for the use of CRAP principles as well as if it is an effective poster in the intended message.

Another concept that was focus on was audio rhetoric. Mind you, I had never once thought of audio rhetoric before. Maybe subconsciously, when listening to the audio of a video, but never in terms of a podcast. When I was told we had to listen to several podcasts as homework assignments, I heavily dreaded it. In my mind, when I heard the word podcast I would think of monotone voices talking about a boring subject on NPR. Although, I was proven wrong after listening to the podcast called *Serial*. I never thought that sound elements such as: silence, music, sound effects and vocal delivery could be used so effectively and make a topic so interesting. It was interesting to see how one can tailor a story to interest an audience simply by altering the sound elements.

Needless to say, audio rhetoric is the way of persuading an audience to feel a certain way about a rhetorical situation based on various sound elements as well as kairos and rhetorical appeals. The elements of an ideal audio text should work together to move an audience. Another aspect of audio rhetoric is storytelling principles. These principles include: the antidote, the power of raising a question and the moment of reflection. An example like *Serial* uses these elements very effectively. The story goes in order (the antidote), pauses to raise questions to the audience and takes the time to reflect back on what has happened in the story thus far.

I used audio rhetoric in my second and third assignment. In my second assignment, the sonic essay, the message went in order, paused to raise questions and took time for reflection. I used various sound elements in both assignments to make sure I seemed credible and appropriate in the tone of the assignments. Music played a major part in my third assignment, as there were moments with only text, the music was used to set the mood. Soundscape was used in both the second and third assignment from sorority recruitment so that the audience understands the tone of the piece.

Audio rhetoric is crucial to my major especially when it comes to public speaking. I may not use music or sound effects in a speech, but when presenting a public relations plan to a client I must ensure my tone is appropriate and engaging. I can effectively use pitch of voice and silence, as well as storytelling principles to keep the client interested in my pitch.

The final approach to rhetoric that we focused on this semester was video rhetoric. The elements of video rhetoric are a combination of both visual, design and audio rhetoric. Video rhetoric as understood from examples in class can also have forms of remix, juxtaposition and layering. This approach would not have been understood as well if it were the first concept discussed in class. An understanding of other forms of rhetoric was necessary.

Initially when video rhetoric was explained I thought of documentaries. Again, like audio rhetoric I was proven wrong when examples were shown of entertaining remixes relevant to myself as well as my classmates. Through this course I gained an universal understanding of video rhetoric in being able to critical analyze videos such as those on YouTube for their rhetorical appeals.

This approach was used in the final assignments of this class, the screencast and video assignment. Both of these assignments involved the same focal topic and tone for me. I treated the screencast as a trail run for what I wanted to create my video assignment like. After the screencast, I decided to use a remix for my video assignment. I followed the elements of storytelling, CRAP design principles and sound elements to create an effective rhetorical piece.

I am unsure if I will ever use video rhetoric in my career in pubic relations, but it is important to understand how to piece one together in understanding various forms of effective rhetoric.

I am happy that I chose to take this class as part of my IMS minor courses within the visualization track. I have gained a better understanding of the various forms of rhetoric. I have already applied this knowledge in my other IMS classes as well as communications courses this semester. I know overall the information learned in this class will be helpful down the road in my career.