

Cleve Wiese
RHE 309K
The Rhetoric of Objectivity
Unique # 45005
Fall 2009

Office Hours: PAR 408 – Wednesday, 12-1:45 p.m. & Thursday, 12:30-1:45 p.m.

While accusations of media bias have long been commonplace in American public discourse, their underlying premise – that journalists should adhere to a scientific paradigm of detached, objective fact gathering – is often taken for granted by news consumers. But can reporters actually operate without making personal judgments about the people and events they cover? Is it possible to convert personal experiences into transparent windows on a discrete reality? Is it reasonable (or honest) to try? In this course, you will be asked to examine the notion of journalistic “objectivity” as a rhetorical construct and to dissect and analyze the artificial reconstructions of reality – through selection of details, descriptions, sources, quotes – implicit in every “objective” news story, whether readers are aware of them or not.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Everything’s An Argument* – by Lunsford, et. al
- *easyWriter* – by Andrea Lunsford
- *Course Packet*, available from Jenn’s Copies on Guadalupe at 22nd St. (below the Scientology Center)

Class Website – Accessed through Blackboard Academic Suite

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS:

Paper #1

In this paper you will rhetorically analyze one argument about journalistic bias. In your analysis you will focus on identifying and explaining 1) the “issue(s)” or point(s) of stasis focused on in the article or essay as well as 2) any key interrelated or opposing positions explicitly mentioned or implicitly responded to/rebutted. In the process, you’ll need to be sure to 3) include contextual information about argument’s author, the publication in which it appeared, and its larger “larger conversation.” Most importantly, 4) your overall analysis should be carried out against the backdrop of the ideal of “journalistic objectivity” as explained and argued for by Kovach & Rosentstiel (see course packet, “Truth: The First and Most Confusing Principle”). In other words, you’ll need to analyze/compare/contrast the ways in which the author’s argument adheres to/argues for/departs from/argues against this model of journalistic objectivity. This comparative

analysis should not necessarily constitute a separate part of your paper; instead, it should be integrated into your thesis and woven into all of your main points. Finally, 5) you should use at least one “opposing” argument about objectivity as a point of comparison, focusing particularly on whether/how the two articles really address (or don’t address) the same issue and “achieve stasis.”

Paper #2

In the second paper, you will rhetorically analyze, compare and contrast no fewer than three journalistic accounts of the same event. This “event” may be either small in scope and specific in focus (such as a building fire, violent crime, car crash) or sweeping and thematically connected (Hurricane Katrina, the financial crisis, the war in Iraq). The articles *must* come from different publications and *may* come from different journalistic genres or mediums (newspapers, magazines, reputable websites, etc.); in your paper you will need to explain and analyze this context. You will also need to explain 1) how the three articles engage with the same subject matter (and what that subject matter is), but that 2) they do so in different ways, for example by focusing mainly on different details (who, or what, or when, or where, or why) or emphasizing different aspects of significance (timeliness, proximity, impact, etc.). You will also 3) analyze the articles’ structures/arrangements, styles and tones, and explain the relationship between these rhetorical features and various forms of journalistic ethos. Finally, you will 4) discuss the degree to which the authors maintain traditional, “objective” perspectives in the articles.

Paper #3

Your final paper will consist of a rhetorical analysis of an alternative work of journalism. Feel free to select something other than one of the works of “New Journalism” included your course packet, but all choices must be approved by me. In this analysis (as in paper #2), you should first summarize contextual information about the article’s author, the publication in which it first appeared, and its larger “larger conversation,” then analyze the article’s structure/arrangement, style and tone, focusing especially on the ways in which these rhetorical features reflect/support the journalist’s self-presentation or ethos. You’ll want to be sure to ask: To what extent is the reporter a presence or character in the article? Is the first person used? Is his/her judgment or opinion explicitly brought to bear on the subject *within* the article? Does the article make an explicit or implicit *argument*? If so, what sorts of rhetorical appeals does the author mainly rely on? Finally, you will discuss the specific ways the author maintains/departs from 1) traditional notions of journalistic “objectivity,” and 2) the alternative model of journalism explained in Tom Wolfe’s introduction to *The New Journalism* (see course packet). To do this, you’ll first need to *define* both objectivity and New Journalism; be sure to Cite Wolfe and at least one source (such as Kovach & Rosentiel).

Short Rhetorical Analyses

Analysis #1

In this short, 2-page (double spaced) paper you will analyze the argument Kovach & Rosentiel make about journalistic objectivity (see course packet). You'll probably spend the first page briefly summarizing their argument – *defining* the form of “objective” journalism they are calling for and explaining the main reasons they provide for the *value* of this model (why it is *good* or *desirable*). On the second page, you will use the concepts of stasis theory to identify the “issues” they address in their argument.

Analysis #2

In this short analysis (2-page, double spaced) paper you'll analyze the argument presented in either the Goldberg or Alterman readings (see course packet). As in RA#1, you'll probably spend the first page summarizing the author's argument: What he claims is wrong with journalism or journalists/critics of journalism and the main kinds of evidence he provides in support of this (these) claims. On the second page, use the concepts of stasis theory to identify and analyze the various “issues” addressed in the chapter(s). At some point in (or throughout) the paper, try to compare/contrast the author's argument with the concept of objectivity as explained by Kovach & Rosentiel – to what extent is the author's journalistic “ideal” consistent with Kovach & Rosentiel's? On what points would the authors agree? On what points would they likely “agree to disagree”?

Analysis #3

In this short paper (2-page, double spaced) you will select and analyze a journalistic article (from a newspaper, magazine, reputable website). On the first page, you'll focus particularly on the author's use of style, tone and arrangement using terms and concepts from the course packet readings (the kind of lead, the structure [inverted pyramid, hourglass, focus style, narrative style], the most emphasized kind of relevance, degree of formality, etc.). On the second page, you'll define the author's journalistic ethos and discuss how/the degree to which this ethos adhere to traditional notions of journalistic “objectivity.”

Online Discussion Thread

Over the course of the semester, each member of the class will be required to publish one substantial (no more than 700 words) “opening posts” in response to a particular reading assignment (a signup sheet will be passed at the beginning of the semester). These responses are fairly open-ended: they may, for example, focus on addressing one or several of my handed-out “guided reading questions.” They may analyze the text in terms of stasis theory, style, tone or arrangement. They may compare the reading to another course reading. Or they may approach the text from some other angle. These posts are intended as discussion starters, and every student is required to post at least one shorter response to an opening post per week (during weeks when opening posts are assigned). **Opening posts must be online by 7:00 p.m. the night before the class in which the reading assignment is due.**

Peer Reviews

A two-day workshop/peer review process will precede every major paper due date. The entire class will post their first drafts to the Blackboard web site at least 24 hours before the peer review session. Everyone will read everyone else's paper; half will be workshopped the first day, half the second. **You are required to print out and bring to class copies of all papers the day they are workshopped.** If you are going to be absent on a peer review day, please send me a courtesy email at least 24 hours before class so that I can make other arrangements.

PUNCTUALITY AND ATTENDANCE POLICIES

A mandatory attendance policy has been instituted by the Department of Rhetoric and Writing and I am required to enforce it: **If you miss more than six classes, you will automatically fail the course.** It is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet (found on my desk) before each class. If you are more than five minutes late, you will be considered tardy – three tardies will count as one absence. If you are more than fifteen minutes late, you will be considered absent.

DUE DATES

Unless directed otherwise, all assignments must be **saved in Microsoft Word compatibility mode** and **emailed to me as an attachment (at hcw232@gmail.com)** by the beginning of class on the agreed due date, with the subject line in the following format: **RHE 309k, Your Name – Assignment Name.** And unless an arrangement has been made with me prior to the due date, any late work will be subject to 10-pt. penalty per day until turned in.

GRADING POLICY:

<i>ASSIGNMENT</i>	<i>PERCENT OF FINAL GRADE</i>
Essay 1.1	10 percent
Essay 1.2	15 percent
Essay 2.1	10 percent
Essay 2.2	15 percent
Essay 3.1	10 percent
Essay 3.2	15 percent
Short Rhetorical Analyses, Online Discussion Thread, Peer Review Participation and Other Writing Assignments	25 percent

All assignment grades will be on a 100-point numerical scale. Final (letter) grades will utilize a + - marking system.

Wed, 8/26

In Class: Course overview, policies, major assignments and due dates.

UNIT I

Friday, 8/28

Reading: *Everything's an Argument*, Chap.1, pg. 20-32. Kovach & Rosentstiel, "Introduction"; Chap. 2: "Truth: The First and Most Confusing Principle"

In Class: What is objectivity? (Does it exist? How do we define it? Is it desirable?)

WEEK TWO

Monday, 8/31

Reading: Crowley & Hawhee, Chap. 3: "Stasis Theory: Asking the Right Questions"

In Class: Objectivity and Stasis Theory.

Assignment: **Online Discussion Thread on Kovach & Rosenstiel**

Wednesday, 9/2

Reading: *Everything's an Argument*, Chap. 5

In Class: Writing a rhetorical analysis.

Assignments:

Friday, 9/4

In Class: Rhetorical analysis.

Assignment: **1st Short Rhetorical Analysis Due.**

WEEK THREE

Monday, 9/7 **Labor Day Holiday No Class**

Wednesday, 9/9

Reading: Goldberg, Chap. 1, 4: "The News Mafia"; "Identity Politics"

In Class: Analysis of readings using stasis theory.

Assignments: **Online Discussion Thread on Goldberg**

Friday, 9/11

Reading: Alterman, "Introduction," Chap. 7: "What Social Bias?"

In Class: Contextual analysis of readings.

Assignments: **2nd Short Rhetorical Analysis Due (by 11:00 a.m., Sunday 9/13); Online Discussion Thread on Alterman**

WEEK FOUR

Monday, 9/14

Reading: Cunningham: "Re-thinking Objectivity"

In Class: Mapping a controversy

Assignments: **Online Discussion Thread on Cunningham**

Wednesday, 9/16

Reading: *Everything's an Argument*, Chap. 4

In Class: Transitioning to first paper

Friday, 9/18

In Class: Transitioning to first paper.

WEEK FIVE

Monday, 9/21

In Class: Peer Review

Assignments: 1st Drafts posted online by 11:00 a.m. Sunday

Wednesday, 9/23

In Class: Peer Review

Friday, 9/25

In Class: Unit II Overview

Assignments: Paper 1.1 due.

UNIT II

WEEK SIX

Monday, 9/28

*Reading: Bender et. al., Chap. 5: *Selecting and Reporting the News*;*

In Class: The rhetoric of news selection.

Wednesday, 9/30

Reading: Bender et. al, Selections: Leads, Story Structure;

In Class: “Arrangement” in news stories.

Assignments: None.

Friday, 10/2

*Reading: *Everything’s an Argument*, Chap. 12*

In Class: Style/tone in news stories

Assignment: 3rd Short Rhetorical Analysis (first Due Date); Paper 1.2 due

WEEK SEVEN

Monday, 10/5

*Reading: *Kovach and Rosenstiel*, Chap. 8: *Engagement and relevance**

In Class: Making news interesting: Audience consideration and rhetorical strategies in journalism

Assignments: Online Discussion Thread on Kovach and Rosentiel

Wednesday, 10/7

Reading: Usher, “Recovery from Disaster”

In Class: Analysis of ‘Katrina’ articles.

Assignments: Online Discussion Thread on Usher

Friday, 10/9

In Class:

Assignments: 3rd Short Rhetorical Analysis (second Due Date)

WEEK EIGHT

Monday, 10/12

In Class: Transitioning to Second Paper

Assignments: Paper Topic Proposals Due
Wednesday, 10/14

In Class: Group work on projects

Friday, 10/16

In Class: Contd.

WEEK NINE

Monday, 10/19

In Class: Peer Review

Assignments: First drafts posted online by 11:00 a.m. Sunday

Wednesday, 10/21

In Class: Peer Review

Friday, 10/23

In Class: Unit III Overview

Assignments: Paper 2.1 Due.

UNIT III

WEEK TEN

Monday, 10/26

Reading: Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, pgs. 3-22.

In Class: Novel News: The Rhetoric of New Journalism

Assignments: Online Discussion Thread on Wolfe

Wednesday, 10/28

Reading: Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, pgs. 23-37

In Class: Contd.

Assignments: Online Discussion Thread on Wolfe

Friday, 10/30

In Class: Contd.

Assignments: Paper 2.2 Due.

WEEK ELEVEN

Monday, 11/2

Reading: Norman Mailer, from *The Armies of the Night*

In Class: Discussion of reading using Wolfe, rhetorical concepts from Unit II

Assignment: Online Discussion Thread on Mailer

Wednesday, 11/4

Reading: *Everything's an Argument*, Chap. 3

In Class: The Ethos of New Journalism

Friday, 11/6

Reading: *Everything's an Argument*, Chap. 2

In Class: Emotional appeals in New Journalism

WEEK TWELVE

Monday, 11/9

Reading: Joan Didion, *Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream*

In Class: Discussion of reading using concepts of ethos and pathos

Assignments: **Online Discussion Thread on Didion**

Wednesday, 11/11

In Class: Didion contd.

Friday, 11/13

Reading: Timothy Crouse, from *The Boys on the Bus*

In Class: Crouse and the Ethos of meta-Reportage.

Assignments: **Online Discussion Thread on Crouse**

WEEK THIRTEEN

Monday, 11/16

In Class: Peer Review

Assignments: *First Drafts posted on line by 11:00 a.m. Sunday*

Wednesday, 11/18

In Class: Peer Review

Friday, 11/20

In Class: Movie Viewing: "Outfoxed"

Assignments: **Paper 3.1 Due.**

WEEK FOURTEEN

Monday, 11/23

In Class: Movie Viewing, contd.

Wednesday, 11/25

In Class: Discuss "Outfoxed" using rhetorical concepts from previous Units.

Friday, 11/27 **Thanksgiving Holidays No Class**

WEEK FIFTEEN

Monday, 11/30

In Class: Writing a news story

Wednesday, 12/2

In Class: cond.

Friday, 12/4

In Class: Course Evaluations and Final Thoughts

Assignments: **Paper 3.2 Due**

The University of Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), at 471-6259.