

Topics in Rhetorical Analysis

ENGL 157

Fall 2025 Section 01 Hybrid 4 Unit(s) 08/20/2025 to 12/08/2025 Modified 08/21/2025

Contact Information

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Office Hours

Tuesday, Thursday, 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM, FOB 108 or on Zoom by appointment

Course Information

Tuesday, Thursday, 1:30 PM to 2:45 PM, Sweeney Hall Room 229

Course Description and Requisites

Focused study of a topic in the theory and practice of rhetoric, such as feminist rhetorics, rhetoric of graphic design, political rhetoric, or rhetorics of new/social media. Check schedule of classes for current offering.

Prerequisite: Upper Division Standing

Letter Graded

Classroom Protocols

Citation

In this course, you may use any recognized citation style, but we'll add one "house rule": include page numbers in each in-text citation. There are two reasons for this house rule. First, rhetoric is deeply concerned with language itself, so it matters that we're engaging with the words of the authors

themselves. Second, AI technologies are often described using vague, hype-based language. For our purposes, we need to be specific not only in how we talk about these technologies themselves, but also in how we engage with their criticisms.

If you're not sure which citation style you'd like to use, here are some brief overviews of the three main choices:

[MLA](#) is maintained by the Modern Language Association and is primarily used in literature. Because this style was specifically designed for textual study, its in-text references follow the format (Author's Last Name, page number), like (Lawson, 5).

[APA](#) is maintained by the American Psychological Association and is widely used across the social sciences. Because recency is important to these fields, its in-text references follow the format (Author's Last Name, year, page number), like (Lawson, 2025, p. 5).

[Chicago Style](#) was developed by the University of Chicago Press and is primarily used in history. While more complex than MLA or APA style, it can more easily accommodate a wide range of sources, including archival materials and other primary sources. There are several variations of Chicago Style, but the notes-and-bibliography style is most common. This standard syllabus format doesn't accommodate endnotes, but you can see examples of the style at the initial link from this section.

AI Use

In this course, we will study AI (primarily Large Language Models or LLMs) through the lens of feminist rhetorics. Because LLMs are our object of study, it would be poor research to attempt to use them to generate analysis of themselves. (On a structural level, LLMs aren't capable of this kind of reflexivity, anyways.) Additionally, this course assesses your rhetorical skills, which means I want to see your own writing and ideas as you yourself compose them. So, these are our AI guidelines:

You may:

- Use LLMs or generative AI technology to create objects of study for the AI Artifact assignment, your Commonplace book, or your Final Project. These uses must be clearly documented, and you may not claim generated writing as your own.
- Use NotebookLM or related technologies to summarize or study readings after you have already read them. This is very important! You need to complete the reading yourself before using an AI study tool—these should be supplemental, not substitutes for the sometimes-hard work of critical reading.

You may not:

- Use LLMs or other generative AI technology to create or edit writing for the Reading Quizzes, Reading Responses, analytical writing in your Final Project, or the discussion prompt component of the AI Artifact assignment. This includes the use of ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, GrammarlyAI, and any related technologies.
- Present an AI study tool's synopsis or takeaways from a reading as your own. Frankly, you're best off bringing your questions to class so we can hash them out together, but if you really want to use these tools, make sure to use them *as a tool*, not a replacement for your own ideas.

I will:

- Clarify appropriate uses of AI technologies as questions occur.
- Assume good-faith effort on your part to adhere to our class parameters.

I will not:

- Use AI to generate learning materials for this course.
- Use any form of AI to evaluate or provide feedback on your work.

Absence Policy

If you will miss class, it is your responsibility to catch up on the work you missed. I recommend exchanging contact information with your classmates who could share notes on class discussion.

If you are sick, do not come to class! I am so serious about this. You will not be penalized for missing class while ill. See the late policy for details on making up any missed assignments.

Late Work Policy

For individual assignments, there is a two-day grace period after the standard deadline. If your project will be later than this grace period, please email Vee directly to set up a new deadline and assess what support you'll need to complete the project.

For group assignments (the AI Artifact project), teams will establish communication and internal timeline. You'll have the opportunity to document your contributions to the project. If a serious event occurs that prevents you from participating in your initial team, you can email Vee to be assigned to a later team presentation.

For the final project, the registrar's deadlines necessitate a timely completion of the course. In the case of emergencies, if you need more time to complete the final project, email Vee about the potential of an Incomplete Agreement.

Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;

- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and explain key concepts in feminist rhetorical theory.
2. Develop and maintain media literacy habits, including a critical reading practice.
3. Analyze the functions of various rhetorical strategies performed by human and non-human rhetors, recognizing their impact on meaning and communication.
4. Critically examine language use through the lens of power and culture, understanding how language can perpetuate or challenge social inequalities.
5. Articulate a feminist rhetorical argument regarding AI technologies' effects—current or anticipated—on human communication.

Course Materials

Recommended Texts

While you may wish to purchase physical copies of some books for your convenience in reading, all required materials are scanned and posted to Canvas.

A physical notebook of your choice

For the Commonplace Book assignment, you'll need a physical notebook. It doesn't need to be fancy or expensive—any notebook will work.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Collection: Commonplace Book

Commonplace Book

"[Rhetoric is] a general art consisting not of knowledge about substantive fields but a flexible system of formal and prudential devices—topics, tropes and figures, inferential schemes, probabilities, prudential rules, and so on. At the same time, however, this general art is functionally implicated in managing and transforming common opinion for persuasive ends." (Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, 1990)

A [commonplace book](#) is a type of journal used to record and organize bits of information across multiple topics. It's distinct from a diary or personal journal, which is used to record your own narrative chronologically, and it differs from typical class notes in that it is used to curate information from multiple sources, rather than simply record information as you encounter it. Commonplace books (as we recognize them now) have been in use since the Early Modern period, and their keepers range from scientists to writers to academics. If you'd like, you can read [Isaac Newton's commonplace book](#) (or "waste book," as he called it) online, or read [W.H. Auden's commonplace book](#) in the SJSU Library. You can also watch a [YouTube video about how to use a commonplace book](#), if you'd like to learn more before getting started.

For our class, the commonplace book will function as a supporting text to help you curate information for use in other assignments, like your reading responses, AI artifact + class discussion, and final project. In your commonplace book, I recommend recording information from your readings (both assigned and in independent research) and class discussions, but I also recommend using it to record your interactions with AI or AI-based information outside of this class. For example, what kinds of AI advertisements do you encounter on a daily basis? How do your other instructors (or even your employer, potentially) and classmates talk about AI? What kinds of messaging do you receive from SJSU as a university?

The organization of this information is left to your discretion, but I'm always happy to provide advice as needed. You will need a physical notebook for this assignment. It can be as simple or fancy as you like—a cheap composition notebook will work just as well as a hardback journal. At various points throughout the semester, I'll specifically ask you to bring your commonplace books to class, but it's a good practice to just bring them each day.

Due: 25 November, 2025

Points: 100 points

Grading criteria: Completion

Class Preparation: Reading "Quizzes"

Reading Quizzes

"Rhetoric is an action human beings perform when they use symbols for the purpose of communicating with one another . . . , [and it] is a perspective humans take that involves focusing on symbolic processes."
(Sonja K. Foss & Cindy L. Griffin, 1999)

Because rhetoric is intimately concerned with language itself, you have the opportunity to read deeply in this course. Similar to reading for literary analysis, reading for rhetorical analysis invites us to pay close attention to the features of a text itself: the structure of the argument, the author's choice of diction and syntax, and the ways in which a particular piece of writing references other texts, among other features, are all important to us. In the first week of class (and throughout the semester), we'll actively develop a critical reading practice to support our rhetorical analyses. This reading is a core part of our work together this semester, so I felt it was only fair to ensure that our grading scheme reflected the effort I'm asking you to give.

To that end, you'll find a reading "quiz" in Canvas for each class period in which you have assigned readings. I put "quiz" in scare-quotes because I'm not actually quizzing you on the readings. (This is just the best way to set up a form with points in Canvas.) Instead, these "quizzes" ask four questions to help guide our in-class discussion of the assigned reading(s). I do ask that you answer all four questions, but there are no wrong answers. These reading "quizzes" are due at 9pm the evening before each class period, which gives me enough time to adjust our class discussion materials based on your questions and ideas. While we have more than ten days with assigned readings, I will only count ten of these "quizzes" towards your final grade. This gives you a bit of flexibility in case you're completing the readings later than 9pm the evening before class.

Due: 9pm the evening before each class period with assigned readings.

Points: 10 points per quiz. I count 10 quizzes total towards your final grade, so you can earn up to 100 points for completing these.

Grading criteria: Completion

Critical Reading: Reading Responses

Reading Responses

"Persuasion is Aphrodite's daughter: it is she who beguiles our mortal hearts."
(Sappho, fragment 90, in *Poems and Fragments*. Trans. Josephine Balmer, 1984.)

This assignment is a bridge between the shorter, curation-based writing you do in your commonplace book + the exploratory, reflective writing you do in your reading “quizzes” and your final project for this course. That is, it’s a chance to further explore specific texts/ideas that you may wish to use in your final project.

Thrice during the semester, you’ll draft a 700-1000 word response that juxtaposes two assigned readings from our course. These readings don’t need to be from the same week; in fact, I really recommend choosing readings from different weeks. In your reading responses, choose one concept/issue/idea that shows up in two assigned texts (Please don’t use more than two!) and compare how it’s handled by each text. You may want to ask yourself the following questions as you write:

- What are the differences between the ways each text handles the concept/issue/idea?
- How do the two visions presented of the concept/issue/idea complement each other?
- Is there one version that you find more compelling, and if so, why?
- Can both versions coexist harmoniously, and if so, what do they add to each other?

As you write your own reading responses, there are a few pitfalls to avoid:

- Don’t bring in outside research. Instead, use the two texts you have selected exclusively. *Save the outside research for your final project.*
- Avoid simply summarizing the texts. The point of the assignment is to analyze how the two texts engage with each other, rhetorically. While this will require some level of summary, try to keep it to a minimum.
- Avoid discussing whether or not you liked a text and why (i.e. giving pure opinion). Your focus is to compare how the texts handle the concept/issue/idea you’ve chosen.

Your reading responses are due no later than one week after the second text has been discussed in class. For example, if you wrote a response using Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford’s “Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism” (discussed Tuesday, September 2) and Royster’s “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own” (discussed Tuesday, October 14), your response would be due no later than the following Tuesday, October 21. For your own sanity and learning, I strongly recommend spacing out your reading responses throughout the semester—don’t save them all for the final three weeks of readings!

A note on revisions: The reading responses are really intended to help support your final project by giving you the space to work through complex ideas in more manageable, shorter pieces of writing (compared to the final project) throughout the semester. To that end, I will provide detailed feedback on your responses, in addition to the rubric score (see below!). If you would like to revise and resubmit a reading response, you’re welcome to do so within two weeks of receiving your returned reading response.

Due: Variable dates, no later than one week after the second reading is discussed in class. Revisions (optional) are due within two weeks of getting your original response back with feedback.

Points: Three reading responses worth 100 points each, for 300 points total.

Grading criteria: Rubric, with potential revisions.

Rhetorical Analysis: AI Artifact + Class Discussion

Artifact + Class Discussion

"Rhetoric is an instrumental use of language.... One person engages another person in an exchange of symbols to accomplish some goal. It is not communication for communication's sake. Rhetoric is communication that attempts to coordinate social action. For this reason, rhetorical communication is explicitly pragmatic. Its goal is to influence human choices on specific matters that require immediate attention." (Hauser, 1986)

Once during the semester, you'll work in a team to identify an AI artifact relevant to that week's theme (check the schedule!), briefly introduce that artifact to the class, and provide discussion questions to guide our conversation.

An "AI artifact" is an object of study that could include:

- A [piece of marketing](#) describing an AI tool
- [Manifestos](#) or other content generated by AI companies or their leaders
- [Recent news](#) about an AI tool or company
- [Industry reports](#) about an AI tool, a specific company, or about the industry as a whole
- A text generated using an AI tool for the purpose of class discussion
- Or, another object of your choice

You'll need to briefly introduce and contextualize this artifact for the class. This can be done informally or through a brief presentation. Some questions to consider include:

- Where did this artifact come from?
- Who wrote it?
- When did they write it?
- To whom did they write it, in what format, and for what purpose?
- What relevant context might shape our understanding of this artifact?

If you generated the artifact yourself,

- What tool did you use?
- Why did you choose this tool?
- What prompt or input did you give the tool?
- Did you refine the original output or use multiple prompts? If so, give us details!

For both found and generated AI artifacts, please briefly describe how your artifact connects to that week's theme and the reading we discussed on Tuesday.

After introducing the artifact, you'll collectively lead the class in discussion. This is difficult to ad-lib, so you'll need some structured discussion prompts. To draft these, I recommend pooling your notes on both the relevant readings and the artifact itself.

- What stood out to you that made you choose or generate this artifact?
- How does this artifact challenge, reinforce, or destabilize some of the topics we've discussed in class?
- Does something excite you about this artifact?
- On the flip side, does something bother or confuse you about this artifact?

These curiosities (or annoyances) can become topics to discuss as a full class!

Logistics

Your classmates will need a little time to read the text before we discuss it in class, so your artifact and its accompanying discussion prompts are due by the class before your discussion. Once everyone has signed up for teams, I'll update your assignments in Canvas to reflect your team deadlines. For example, if you're in the first group and will lead discussion on Thursday, October 2, you need to submit your artifact and prompts to Canvas by Tuesday, September 30. This will be the graded version, but if you want some early feedback or help finalizing your work, you're always welcome to meet with me in office hours or over email.

Due: Variable, on Canvas one class period before your team leads discussion

Points: 100 points

Grading criteria: Rubric

Culminating Assignment: Final Project

Final Project

"The very act of writing then, conjuring/coming to 'see', what has yet to be recorded in history is to bring into consciousness what only the body knows to be true. The body—that site which houses the intuitive, the unspoken, the viscera of our being—this is the revolutionary promise of 'theory in the flesh...'" (Cherríe Moraga, 1981)

Over the course of the semester, you'll work on a final project that presents an argument about feminist rhetorics and AI for a public audience. In this project, you'll draw on your notes from your commonplace book, your reading responses, and our class discussions to ground your argument, then use feminist rhetorical strategies to help your audience understand something new about your topic. The shape of this final project is entirely up to you, but if this seems too open-ended, don't panic yet! We'll develop a project proposal, check in during class to answer questions or resolve problems in your project, and workshop together. To help you get started, I've listed a few potential projects below, based on student work in similar classes.

Individual Options:

- Create a physical zine about feminist responses to/uses of AI. If you'd like to see some example zines (albeit, not specifically about AI), I have a collection of them in my office.
- Create an illustrated essay, like "[The Origin of Clouds](#)" or "[Is my toddler a stochastic parrot?](#)"
- Create a website, like the [Artificial Life Coach](#).
- Record a limited-series podcast, video essay, or social media campaign.

Collaborative Option: Co-write an article for *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy's* [disputatio section](#).

This opportunity is open to everyone in the course, but it does require early commitment. We will need to send an initial query to the editors by the fourth week of the semester, then finish drafting a text together by the end of the semester. Since the academic publishing timeline typically runs longer than our class will be together, I'm happy to take responsibility for submitting the final draft and completing any revisions requested by the editors.

This list isn't exhaustive, and I'm interested in your ideas! If you'd like to talk through a potential project, please feel welcome to email or stop by office hours.

Due: This project is conducted in stages.

- The Project Proposal is due Tuesday, October 16, 2025. Optionally, you may revise and resubmit your proposal within one week of receiving my feedback.
- The Project Workshop will be held during class on Thursday, November 13, 2025.
- You'll informally present your finished Final Project on Tuesday, December 2, or Thursday, December 4, 2025.

Points: You earn points for each stage of the project.

- Final project proposal: 50
- Final project workshop: 50
- Final project deliverable: 300

Grading criteria:

- Final project proposal: Rubric
- Final project workshop: Participation
- Final project deliverable: Rubric

✓ Grading Information

Criteria

Type	Weight	Topic	Notes
Commonplace Book	100 / 1000	Collecting materials for brainstorming and use in other assignments	

Type	Weight	Topic	Notes
Reading "Quizzes" (10)	100 / 1000	Class preparation	There are 17 reading "quizzes," but I only count 10 towards your grade.
Reading Responses (3)	300 / 1000	Critical reading	
AI Artifact + Discussion	100 / 1000	Analyzing real-world descriptions and/or uses of AI technologies	
Final Project	400 / 1000	In lieu of a final paper or exam	The final project has three components: A project proposal (50 points), a workshop (50 points), and a final deliverable (300 points).

Breakdown

Grade	Range	Notes
A	93 - 100	
A-	90 - 93	
B+	87 - 89	
B	83 - 86	
B-	80 - 82	
C+	77 - 79	
C	73 - 76	
C-	70 - 72	
D+	67 - 69	
D	63 - 66	
D-	60 - 62	
0 - 59	F	

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

The course schedule is a living document. Over the course of the semester, we might collectively choose to make alterations to our plans. For this reason, please see the [Google Doc version of the course schedule](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kY4Eiur3AxQwRZeopTJtYUTMT8uaieoDtwXslc5QaDs/edit?usp=sharing) (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kY4Eiur3AxQwRZeopTJtYUTMT8uaieoDtwXslc5QaDs/edit?usp=sharing>).