ENGLISH 309C: CONTEMPORARY RHETORICAL CRITICISM

Instructor: Andrew McMurry  
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Overview
The goal of this course is to equip you to view and critique written and visual texts from a variety of theoretically-informed rhetorical perspectives. You will also learn to modify, refine, and challenge these perspectives as needed in light of their practical application.

Required Texts
Sonya K. Foss, Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice  
309C Course Book

Assignments and Evaluation
1. Every week you will submit
   a) a study sheet that summarizes and comments on the readings
   b) two critically-informed questions on a separate sheet

2. Your grade will be derived from the following:
   a) two tests during the terms (25% and 30%)
   b) a final exam during the examination period (40%)
   c) professionalism (5%)

Each week you’ll submit study sheets that focus on the particular rhetorical approach under consideration. You’ll also submit two questions that apply the ideas and methods of a particular critical approach to an assigned target text. Neither the study sheet nor the questions are graded. However, they do form the basis of the tests and examination: that is, I will draw questions for each student’s test from that student’s study sheets. Specifically, I will include the best THREE of your six submitted questions on the test; you will then answer ONE question of the three possible choices. The target text for the first test will be a Puritan sermon; for the second test, a piece of popular fiction; for the final examination, a 20th century political speech. Only students who have submitted all their study sheets and questions in advance will be allowed to write the tests and examination.

The final exam will deal with ALL the perspectives discussed throughout the course, as well as those approaches discussed in the final three weeks.

Students who consistently complete all their study sheets on time will receive the 5% professionalism mark. One mark is deducted for each study or question sheet handed in late, to a maximum of five marks.
**Course Policies**

All submitted work must be word processed. Students who do not submit their sheets in advance of the tests or final exam will not be allowed to write them. If you must miss a test, please provide documentation specifying your reasons well ahead of time.

**309C Course Schedule** Note: I will likely have to cancel a class in late October or early November, perhaps without notice. We’ll try as best we can to make it up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 12</td>
<td>The nature of rhetorical criticism</td>
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<td>September 14</td>
<td>Doing rhetorical criticism</td>
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<td>September 19</td>
<td>Neo-Aristotelian criticism</td>
<td>Study sheet #1</td>
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<td>September 21</td>
<td>Cluster criticism</td>
<td>Question sheet #1</td>
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<td>September 26</td>
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<td>Study sheet #2</td>
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<td>September 28</td>
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<td>Question sheet #2</td>
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<td>October 3</td>
<td>Fantasy-theme criticism</td>
<td>Study sheet #3</td>
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<td>October 5</td>
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<td>Question sheet #3</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 10</td>
<td>No meeting</td>
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<td>October 12</td>
<td>First in-class test</td>
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<td>October 17</td>
<td>Feminist criticism</td>
<td>Study sheet #4</td>
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<td>October 19</td>
<td>Generic criticism</td>
<td>Question sheet #4</td>
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<td>October 24</td>
<td>Ideological criticism</td>
<td>Study sheet #5</td>
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<td>October 26</td>
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<td>Question sheet #5</td>
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<td>October 31</td>
<td>Metaphoric criticism</td>
<td>Study sheet #6</td>
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<td>November 2</td>
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<td>Question sheet #6</td>
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<td>November 7</td>
<td>Second in-class test</td>
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<td>November 9</td>
<td>No meeting</td>
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<td>November 14</td>
<td>Narrative criticism</td>
<td>Study sheet #7</td>
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<td>November 16</td>
<td>Pentadic criticism</td>
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<td>November 21</td>
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<td>Study sheet #8</td>
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<td>November 23</td>
<td>Metaphoric criticism</td>
<td>Question sheet #8</td>
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<td>November 28</td>
<td>Final examination</td>
<td>Study sheet #9</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 30</td>
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<td>Question sheet #9</td>
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**Study and Question Sheet Guidelines**

*Format:* Study sheets should be one-and-a-half numbered pages, single-spaced, with 1” margins. At the top include your name, the number of the study sheet, and the name of the critical school. (Question sheets will be shorter, but please include the above information as well.) Use MLA parenthetical documentation for any sources you cite.
Organization:
1. Course study sheets are composed of
   a) a main summary of the critical school
   b) summaries of the sample essays
   c) a concluding section with your comments and reflections on the above

2. Critical question sheets include
   a) a first critical question
   b) a second critical question which MUST refer to, draw upon, or otherwise relate to the
      ideas found in the Background Readings to the object under consideration

Content:
1. Course study sheets
   a) Main summaries should select the distinguishing features of the school of criticism,
      identify and define its key terms (you may want to bold or italicize these terms for
      easy reference), explain the relationships among these terms, and outline the school’s
      critical procedures.
   b) Summaries of the Sample Essays should highlight how each essay conforms to (or
      departs from) the distinguishing features of the school of criticism, as well as
      summarize its particular argumentative claims and strategies. Each essay summary
      should be a concise two or three sentences.
   c) Commentary should raise issues about whatever you consider noteworthy. Such
      issues might include, for example, the connection between one school and another, or
      the relative strength of the critical methods. Commentary should run to three or four
      sentences.

2. Critical questions are formed by applying your knowledge of the critical school, sample
   essays, and supplementary readings to the supplied target text or “artifact.” Remember that I
   will be selecting questions from these sheets for your tests and final examination: the more
   focused, knowledgeable, and interesting questions you provide yourself with initially, the
   better chance you will have to write focused, knowledgeable, and interesting answers on the
   tests. Good questions emphasize both the specific textual and contextual dimensions of the
   artifact and, especially, the interaction of these two dimensions (e.g., a question about how
   the text both responds to and is meant to affect a social/rhetorical situation). Remember, too,
   that the second question for each critical perspective must draw on, and make reference to,
   ideas found in the Background Readings to the object text.

Procedures:
1. Make two copies of your study sheets. Submit one; keep the other for your study preparation.
2. Remember to submit your questions separately from your study sheets and to include your
   name on all submitted materials.
3. Please submit your study sheets at the beginning of the class in which they are due.
4. The last date to submit sheets in order to write a test is the class before the in-class test and
   ONE WEEK before the exam.
5. You may bring the assigned target text to the test or examination; however, it must be a
   clean, unmarked copy.