

Iowa Narratives Project: Rhetoric of Space

Weekly Lesson Plans

Week 1: Introduction & Informal Presentations

Week 2: Organizing Voices

Week 3: Interview Skills

Week 4: Final Draft Workshop & Reflection

Introduction

The Rhetoric of a Public Space assignment is a group project asking students to compile a 15 page (minimum) report assessing the arguments put forth by a public space, and requires your students to combine their learned skills in analysis and description with advocacy. The report answers the question: “What determines the ways in which a specific public space is used by individuals and organizations?” The report assignment provides students further experience with research and information literacy, bridges the gap between the analysis and advocacy Rhetoric units, and illustrates contrasts and similarities between visual, spoken, and written rhetoric.

Objectives

The Rhetoric of Space assignment has many potential objectives, and IDEAL will facilitate instructors in articulating their own objectives for each project. Some initial objectives for this assignment are as follows.

- Students encounter and consider course concepts in public contexts
- Students practice collaboration with peers and with community members
- Students learn and practice multifaceted research and information literacy skills
- Students examine multiple perspectives
- Students combine their skills in rhetorical analysis, critical thinking, and persuasion

** All instructors using this assignment should **contact IDEAL** (ideal@uiowa.edu) as soon as possible to receive adequate technical and instructional support. IDEAL is available to assist instructors with each step of the assignment, including preparation and lesson planning, troubleshooting technology issues, and making student work public.*

Suggested Weekly Schedule for Instructors:

This project should span the course of four weeks. The following pages outline suggested component parts that construct the assignment and provide a structure for teaching this project.

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Week 1:

Introduction to the Rhetoric of Space

1. (20 to 25 minutes) Get students thinking about how it is that a space can be rhetorical. One potential assignment to introduce the concept of space as rhetorical is to have students analyze the rhetoric of EPB, or whatever building your class meets in. Send them out in groups to note the visual rhetoric of the building, asking similar questions to the space report: what does the layout suggest about who uses the space? Where are trash cans, offices, bathrooms, doors, elevators, etc., located, and what arguments does the space make in assembling its layout? Students should come back to the classroom and share their findings in a Think-Pair-Share or class-wide discussion. This activity reduces the intimidation that students may feel otherwise when approaching the Rhetoric of Space assignment as a whole.

Introduction to Project/Assigning Groups

1. Divide your students into groups of three prior to introducing the assignment. After presenting an overview introducing the assignment, assign them their groups, and give them five minutes in groups to exchange contact information and set up their first group meeting. Stress the importance of scouting locations quickly, since they will need to have considered three location options by the end of the week.
2. You may want to provide them with a list of locations to avoid, since many places have already been heavily explored by other students in previous semesters. Some of these suggestions are listed on the IDEAL website, but feel free to add your own.
3. Stress to your students the importance of treating their decision seriously, since they will be spending a great deal of time and energy in and thinking about the space they choose. Therefore, they should be careful to consider multiple places, the benefit these places offer as potential focuses for the report, and whether or not each member of the group feels excited about the opportunity to learn more.

Homework: Have students read the assignment sheet individually and bring any questions about the assignment to class the next day. During Week 1, students should draft their Group Collaboration Agreement, and submit the Agreement to the instructor by the specified date. If you have a course blog or website, you may want to have students submit their Agreement there.

Informal Presentation of Three Choices

1. At the end of the week, students should give an informal presentation of their three choices, explaining how each site could serve as a fruitful subject for this project. Presenting their ideas to their peers will allow students to see where their project might fit in with other groups, so these presentations should be followed by a discussion where classmates can offer feedback and suggestions to other groups. Remind them that two groups cannot pick the same location. Students should pick a site by the beginning of Week 2.

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Week 2:

Organizing Voices Module

The Organizing Voices module asks students to explore conversations and communities related to their chosen location through the creation of a visualized annotated bibliography using [Coggle](#). This module will familiarize students with the annotated bibliography structure, help them keep track of their research, and cite their sources. Sources may in some cases include library research (books, scholarly journals, magazines, etc.), but in dealing with local public spaces, often tend to skew towards personal knowledge (interviews), and local publications (newspapers like The Press Citizen and The Daily Iowan). As such, you should stress to your students the variety of resources they might include, and the importance of the bibliography in organizing local voices. They should share their Coggle with the instructor as a log of their research.

Annotated Bibliographies and Coggle (30-40 minutes)

1. Describe annotated bibliographies to your students. Annotated bibliographies are lists of citations to books, articles, interviews, and other information resources. For each citation, students should include a brief—often 150-200 word—description and evaluation of the resource. In this case, it would be useful to have students consider including reflections on each of the following points within each citation:
 - a. Author/authority: Who is the author/speaker? Where do they gain their authority?
 - b. Intended audience: What communities might access this resource? What communities were the intended audience? What other communities might benefit from or have an opinion about your topic(s)/location?
 - c. Coverage and critique: What is the central theme of the document/interview/article? How does the source contribute to the conversation about your topic? Does the source provide new insight or does it confirm what you've learned from other sources and your own time spent in the space?
 - d. Format as process: What process led to the existence of this resource? What do you know of this process that makes you confident that this is a good resource to use for this assignment?
2. Once you have discussed the structure and goals of annotated bibliographies, practice an example. You may want to prepare a Coggle ahead of time using a space previous groups have already covered (or if you've used the project before, use a group's Coggle from a previous semester). As a class, discuss the sample Coggle, allowing students to use the sample visual bibliography as a guide towards crafting their own.

Homework: groups draft their visual bibliographies and bring them to class the next day, or at a later date specified by the instructor.

Critical Analysis of Sources (30 minutes)

1. Once students have drafted their annotated bibliographies, they will use their Coggle as a way to reflect on the characteristics of the resources and the voices represented within

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their bibliographies. What does this suggest about the physical space they're researching? Does it reveal gaps in format (i.e. all information is found in local newspapers, versus journals or books?) Also consider gaps in community coverage (e.g. Are most of the voices represented male? Are there communities not represented who may have a stake in this location/topic?) In doing so, groups may be able to pinpoint gaps in their knowledge, or gaps in public awareness about the space generally. Such gaps can prompt ideas for further research. This conversation may be most fruitful as a workshop session between groups during class time.

Homework: By the end of Week 2, students should turn in or post to the course blog a Process Plan that will detail their plan towards completion of the project. This group activity is explained on the Student Assignment Sheet.

Week 3:

Lessons during Week 3 may focus, broadly, on teaching persuasion and, more narrowly, strengthening skills necessary for successful completion of this major assignment. The following assignments will focus on skills associated with conducting successful interviews, but instructors might want to focus their energy in other directions. You may also consider an informal draft workshop during Week 3 to aid students in moving their projects forward with feedback from you and from their peers.

Interview Skills

Since you will more specifically discuss with students the technical aspects of conducting and recording an interview during the final Iowa Narratives Project, you will want to keep this assignment general, as an informal in-class discussion. What makes a good interview? What makes a bad interview? Write student suggestions on the Whiteboard to assemble a list of positive and negative interview characteristics.

There are multiple ways the Instructor might help students consider the potential impact of the interview format. A couple suggestions include:

1. **Video Interview Analysis** (Free Writing & Discussion, 35 to 40 minutes)
 - a. Show the students one or two short YouTube videos of striking interviews, whether successful, noteworthy, or explosive. Give students ten minutes to complete an analysis of one or two of these videos as an in-class "free writing" assignment, either comparing or contrasting a successful interview against a less successful interview, or focusing on one interview and its strengths and weaknesses.
 - b. Discuss as a class, or in the Think-Pair-Share format, their findings, and ask students to consider how analyzing these interviews helps them consider the format and strategies they will use in conducting their own interviews for this report. This should help them consider who they might interview for the

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assignment, what questions they should ask them, and how they will capitalize on those opportunities.

2. **In-Class Interviews** (Impromptu Speech, 50 minutes)
 - a. If you did not have students conduct interviews of one another as an “Ice Breaker” assignment at the beginning of the semester, this may be a way to continue getting to know one another halfway through the semester, while also strengthening a skill relevant to their current project.
 - b. Either provide students with five interview questions, or have students brainstorm these questions at the beginning of class. Give them fifteen minutes to interview one another using those five questions, and remind them of the importance of keeping track of time.
 - c. Then, give students five minutes to turn the answers their classmate gave them into a brief, organized narrative capable of functioning as a stand-alone 30 second to 1 minute impromptu speech about the classmate they interviewed, complete with a beginning, middle, and end.
 - d. Either in-class that day (if time), or first thing the next class, discuss with your students the takeaway of conducting the interviews, and subsequently turning their findings into a more specific narrative. Ask your students: how does this help your group prepare for conducting your own interviews as part of the Space Report? What narrative strategies did their peers use in crafting their impromptu presentations, and were they efficient and/or successful? How does this activity translate into turning the group’s collected interviews into the written “Voices from the Community” section of the report?

Homework: Remind them that their formal draft workshop will be next week, and that they will be required to have a nearly complete draft of their report at that point.

Week 4:

Final Draft Workshop (50 minutes)

The draft workshop offers students a chance to react to feedback from both the instructor and their peers prior to submitting their work. As suggested in prior assignments, you may consider giving the students a draft worksheet to structure their time, and guide their focus in evaluating the work of their fellow classmates. Many students come to college having had negative previous experiences with workshopping, or seeing this time as an avenue towards casual conversation and surface-level commentary. Giving them specific questions to answer about the reports they are workshopping helps students to capitalize on this stage of the editing process. Also consider your assignment rubric in crafting your own workshop questions. Worksheets will likely look different each semester if the class has a topic-oriented focus (previous semesters have focused on sustainability, for example), but some general questions to consider including are listed below:

1. What is something you really like about this report? Where do the authors succeed most noticeably?

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2. Does the report clearly connect its ideas (within sections) through the use of connective phrases such as “also,” “additionally,” “and,” etc., appropriate use of commas/semicolons, and transition phrases such as “First,” “Not only does,” etc.?
3. Are there any sections that, although interesting, ultimately register as underdeveloped or unnecessary? Would the author be better off removing these sections/sentences, or expanding upon them? What would you like to know more about?
4. Does the report provide specific details to support its claims? Does it avoid overgeneralizations in favor of specific claims with relevant examples, supported by the group’s own research, and external research?
5. Does the report appropriately cite its sources? Consider: are there any places where you found yourself thinking, “Where did they get their information?”

Reflection

Following completion and submission of the report, students should (on their own) complete a 400-word reflection assessing their own work, and the work of their group as a whole. Prompts for this reflection are included on the student assignment sheet.

During the reflection process, and as you start to move towards introducing the Iowa Narratives Project (INP), you should spend some time discussing with students the possibility of continuing to research the same topic for the INP as they used for this report. In an informal discussion, ask students why they either A) would be interested in pursuing the same topic/space (ask them, why would it be valuable to continue on? What would you gain?) or B) would they find it frustrating to continue with the same topic/place? If so, why? No matter their answers, encourage students to go in whatever direction they feel most enthused about, and remind them that their decisions are part of the research process that writers and researchers undergo often. For example, students considering using the same topic may be driven by curiosity, a particularly interesting topic with many new leads, or are simply motivated by ease and simplicity. Students considering switching topics may feel bored with their topic, or may feel that they have exhausted the angles of inquiry for that location. Some may simply be ready to explore something new. The transition from this project to the INP is a wonderful moment to remind students that both choices are characteristic of the research process. You may consider having students include a brief sentence or two in their 400-word reflection indicating, on the individual level, whether they would like to expand their work on the same topic/location, or try something new. If the answer is something new, ask them to suggest possibilities and begin brainstorming new ideas.

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