

Preface

This is a most exciting time to be an undergraduate taking a communication course. Compared to 50 years ago, humans now have astonishing access to understanding how humans use language and other symbol systems to communicate to vast numbers of people. This recent knowledge gives you many choices. You can choose to delve into dangerous words that promoted the collapse of a decade of economic prosperity. You can gain the insights necessary to understand what would make anyone pay \$5 million for a story. You can predict with reasonable accuracy the key words on which a Supreme Court case will pivot.

But you can only do those things if you are willing to invest the sweat, work, and energy necessary to understand how various language systems work in human communication. *Rhetorical Criticism and Theory in Practice* is devoted to helping you make that start.

This book began as a series of chapters I wrote for an Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism and Theory class I teach at the University of Portland. I discovered that most available textbooks were written for senior to grad-level students. While students in my classes were bright, they were not equipped to wade through the jargon and perspectives geared toward juniors, seniors, and graduate students. Experiences with students in those classes encouraged worthwhile changes in this book.

Most students in introductory rhetorical criticism and theory classes aim at careers in communication-related occupations, or pursue majors that will make significant use of insights available from quality communication classes. They need a solid foundation of understanding in the types of human communication they will most often encounter and use as working professionals. If you are such a student, this book is written particularly for you.

Plan of the Book

The opening chapters of this book are an introduction to rhetorical criticism as a primary means of accomplishing study of human public communication.

In each chapter, I focus on core ideas that act as a springboard into more sophisticated material. I know that talented teachers and students will build in impressive ways on the core ideas presented.

Chapter 1 sets the focus for the rest of the book by helping you to grasp why we so often ignore the implications of how messages are created. You will discover why the term “rhetoric” is an honored word from an ancient

past that provides the basis for modern-day systematic investigations of the power of messages.

Chapter 2 introduces you to two types of criticism: popular criticism and analytic, academic criticism. While you likely read, hear, or use popular criticism already, the chapters of this book will give you direct access to powerful analytic criticism. Understanding *how* academic critics work and where you can find their insights will give you an intense resource for enhancing your awareness of how human communication works.

Chapter 3 coaches you on how to read an example piece of rhetorical criticism written by an accomplished scholar. Her insights will help you see what American presidents must do with language choices to make powerful public messages. While you will certainly learn some things about leaders and rhetoric, you will also learn an excellent system for quickly recognizing the setup of rhetorical criticism articles. With this awareness, you can find and use the discoveries available from formal, academic, analytic investigation of some of the most important messages to reach vital audiences. Knowing how to read rhetorical criticism will give you access to insights to how speeches, news, TV programs, films, or commercials among various types of messages connect (or fail to hook up) with intended audiences.

Chapter 4 changes the focus and allows you to learn how to approach, develop, and write rhetorical criticism. Geared specifically for undergraduates, this material starts with informal decisions and understandings we all use on a daily basis to gauge the potential and impact of messages. In stages we then move to more formal, systematic analysis that will encourage and enable you to write initial research studies seeking to better understand the power of messages created to produce influence.

Highlights: Chapters 1–4

- Communication, Culture, and Rhetoric (Finding Systematic Insight on Powerful Messages)
- Popular Criticism Contrasted with Analytic, Rhetorical Criticism
- Find the Gold: How to Read a Rhetorical Criticism Article
- How to Initiate, Setup, and Write Undergraduate Rhetorical Criticism
- Chapter Workshops
- Scrutinize Exercises

Chapters 5 through 8 focus on foundational areas of human communication: metaphor, narrative, visual messages, and language and ideology. Each of these chapters provides concentrated focus on important rhetorical criticism and theory discoveries in these key areas of human public communication. Materials you read and understandings you develop through these chapters will open many other doors to quality rhetorical criticism in areas you will pursue in the future.

Highlights: Chapters 5–8

- Metaphoric Rhetorical Analysis: Superior Tools of Analysis for Non-Literal Comparisons
- Narrative Rhetorical Analysis: Discovering How Stories Work
- Visual Rhetorical Analysis: Decoding Powerful Pictures and Images
- Language and Ideology: Finding the Rhetorical Power of Worldviews and Values
- Exemplar Journal Articles for Each Chapter
- Chapter Workshops
- Scrutinize Exercises

Chapters 9 and 10 complete the book by initiating careful consideration of what students and scholars can do with superior rhetorical criticism. Chapter 9, on rhetorical theory, presents you with insights into the purpose and development of rhetorical theories designed to better understand the power of public messages. The chapter also gives a rapid overview of the key theory terms you are most likely to encounter as you begin to use articles and books of rhetorical criticism and theory. Brief examples with each key theory term will help you in an initial understanding of pertinent theories. The chapter ends with an examination of the give and take between two outstanding rhetorical scholars who seek to improve and build superior rhetorical theory. Chapter 10 is devoted to your most likely use of existing rhetorical criticism. Gaining experience and insight through reading and writing rhetorical criticism will allow you to discover how highly talented rhetorical critics can provide you with in-depth insights on how (and more importantly *why*) some messages accomplish the persuasive purpose intended by rhetors (message creators) in our culture.

Highlights: Chapters 9–10

- Purpose of Rhetorical Theory Explained
- Rapid Access to Key Rhetorical Theory Terms and Examples
- Guided Example of Scholarly Exchange on Key Theory Issues
- How to Best Discover and Use Rhetorical Criticism Insights
- Exemplar Journal Articles for Each Chapter
- Chapter Workshops

Chapter Pedagogy

Chapters in this textbook often are interspersed with a variety of quick **exercises** designed to help undergraduates scrutinize the concepts and

key terms under investigation. These exercises have been pre-tested in classes. They are intended to provoke substantial thought on your part as you learn ideas and analytic frameworks that will enhance your ability to create compelling messages.

Workshop sections appear at the end of each chapter. Use each of these areas to put your newfound skills, perspectives, and terms into action. Many of the workshop exercises are keyed to journal articles that accompany Chapters 3 and 5 through 10.

Resources for Instructors and Students

A complete Instructor's Manual and PowerPoint slides are available at the McGraw-Hill Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/pierce.

For students, the Online Learning Center contains interactive Self-Quizzes to reinforce key concepts from each chapter.

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And finally: *eucharisteō to theō*.