



Teaching Artifact – Assignment, Project Web: Meme Analysis and Composition

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Instructor Commentary

As Cynthia Selfe argued in 2009, “As teachers of rhetoric and composition, our responsibility is to teach students effective, rhetorically based strategies for taking advantage of all available means of communicating effectively and productively as literate citizens” (p. 644). Given the recent emergence and popularity of online multimodal composition practices, and as a response to Selfe’s call, I take advantage of the genre of the “meme” to teach first-year students how to analyze, compose and reflect on a multimodal text that is informed by existing rhetorical situations. As part of our stretch curriculum, I dedicate Project Web, a series of interconnected reading and writing exercises that lead to the process of an essay that encourages students to reflect on and interact with online technologies, to an assignment I title “Meme Analysis and Composition.” Here, students integrate their print writing strategies with visual rhetorics to analyze a meme of their choice as a genre and then join the online discourse by composing their own version of a meme. Along with composing their own version of their meme, they must include a discussion of the rhetorical choices they made as composers. This approach enables students to think critically about how and why they produced their particular version of the meme, and how they might compose future multimodal assignments. Because students choose their own meme, one possible challenge is that they may choose a meme that is too difficult or too easy to analyze or recreate. Another possible challenge is the anxiety that students might experience about creating their own version of the meme. To counter this possibility, I model the process of meme production by introducing my students to a meme generator application that is available online for free. I also scaffold the Project by assigning two shorter exercises that facilitate the students’ research and prewriting processes. Finally, it is necessary that students have previous experience and confidence in analyzing visual rhetoric. Ultimately, my goal for this project is to prepare students to become writers who can analyze rhetorical principles of multimodal writing practices in order to engage in contemporary online networks in today’s increasingly globalized context. The advantages of the internet meme in teaching rhetorical principles indicates an exigency for composition research to consider other online multimodal texts in order to develop effective and engaging pedagogy.

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Project Goals:

To join the online discourse of participatory culture
 To engage with visual rhetoric as a genre and demonstrate your understanding of that genre
 To demonstrate analytical strategies for finding, reading, and evaluating multimodal sources
 To compose with images as a rhetorical act based on purpose, audience, subject, and context
 To emphasize invention, drafting, revision and editing as part of the writing process

Assignments:

- (1) Meme Research (25%)
- (2) Meme Analysis (25%)
- (3) Meme Analysis and Composition Essay (50%)

Readings:

- “Anatomy of a Meme”
- “College Meme Madness”
- “What are Memes?”
- “Are LOL Cats Making Us Smart?”
- “Analysis on Internet Memes Using Semiotics”
- “Do Memes Kill Culture’s Meaning?”

Project Web: Meme Analysis and Composition Essay

Rough draft due: Friday, March 13 (on Moodle by 9 p.m.)

Revised draft due: Wednesday, March 18

Final draft due: Monday, March 23

1. Use an online meme generator such as quickmeme.com or memegenerator.net to create your own version of a meme.
2. Write a 4-5 page essay where you do the following:
 - Make an argument about what you believe this meme tells us about contemporary media or culture
 - Introduce and explain the core characteristics and genre conventions of the meme
 - Provide 3 examples of the meme and rhetorically analyze them
 - Introduce your created meme
 - Explain what you have done and how your execution fits into the genre of the meme. What are the specific formal features of your version of the meme that make it belong to a “family” of memes?

3. You must demonstrate your understanding of the following terms: online discourse, participatory culture, rhetorical situation, genre.

Meme Research

Due: March 4

1. For this assignment, choose a particular internet meme to be the focus of your analysis. You should pick a meme that you are already familiar with and appreciate. You can also review a variety of memes and choose one that captures your interest. Here is where you can look for ideas: <http://memegenerator.net> When choosing your meme, keep in mind how easy or difficult it will be for you to analyze and create your own version of the meme.
2. Next, do some research to track how the meme originated and how it has developed to produce other versions.
3. Then, answer the following questions in 2 pages:
 1. What are the core characteristics and genre conventions of this meme?
 2. What is the history and source of this meme? Where did this meme come from and how has it changed or developed?
 3. What are some examples of various versions of this meme? Is it flexible enough that people are able to create variations of the meme's first appearance?
4. Please include an image of the meme you have researched as well as the various versions you discuss.

Meme Analysis

Due: March 9

1. Please choose **two versions** of the meme you have chosen and write 1-2 pages analyzing **each** rhetorically. This means that you should answer the following questions for each version of the meme:

What is the purpose of this meme?

Who might the intended audience be? Who might appreciate or enjoy this meme? How can you tell?

Who might the author be? What kinds of people might participate in creating this meme? How do you know that?

What rhetorical appeals are being used to make an argument (ethos, logos, pathos)?

What stereotypes or possible conflicts could this meme perpetuate?

What do YOU think this meme tells us about contemporary media and culture? Make an argument about what you believe this meme represents or reveals.

2. Please include images of both memes.

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