

Ethical Discourses for Communities

Public Letter

≤500 Words

Peer Review Draft Due: Thursday, 4/26 – 9 p.m.

In-class Peer Review: Friday, 4/27

Dental Draft Due: Monday, 4/30 in class and via email

* Prepare and submit an electronic and a hard copy for the final draft.

Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the art of finding the best available means of persuasion in any situation.” Our next rhetorical task in this class is to “spread the word” about an issue you identified in your research paper. Specifically, you’ll write a public letter (of less than 500 words), addressed to either an editor of a specific newspaper of your choosing or any elected official serving at any level of government (i.e., local, state, or national). Having already identified, researched, and written about a problem associated with a social or political issue at your service site, your task is to craft an appeal to your audience to act on a solution to the problem you have researched. Composing the letter will allow you to practice using each of the rhetorical tools you have amassed throughout this class – articulating claims and offering reasons and evidence for them, understanding your audience, anticipating and addressing possible counterarguments, writing cogently and concisely – all while engaging in ethical discourse with your audience. While this assignment is shorter in length than our previous assignments, its short length makes it all the more challenging. You will want to be specific, thorough, cogent, and concise.

Points to Keep in Mind as You Write Your Research Essay

- In considering the **venue** for your argument – the desk of an elected official or a newspaper editorial page – think about what you want your audience to do. Would you like her/him/them to appropriate public or charitable funds towards a worthy cause, change an existing public policy, or volunteer? Given your aims, who is the most appropriate audience – an elected official or the general public?
- Consider, very carefully, your **audience**. What is your audience likely already thinking about your topic and main claim? Are you writing to an audience that is likely to agree with you or disagree with you? Alternatively, are you writing to an audience that is new to the topic? You should research your audience – who is your elected official, and what does she/he believe or advocate? Who is most likely to read the editorial section of the newspaper you’re writing to?
- Although you are not engaging in an academic conversation per se, you should still frame your argument using the “**They Say/I Say**” template.
- You are not required to use **outside sources**, though you should do so as you judge fit for

your argument. If you use, for example, statistics or claims from others included in your research paper, cite them. If you are worried about in-text citations interrupting the flow of your appeal, use footnotes. Be absolutely sure to give proper credit to the source(s) of all words and ideas that are not your original thoughts. Your citations do not count towards the word limit for this assignment.

- Don't forget about ***ethos***, ***pathos***, and ***logos***. How will you establish your credibility? Do you have experience with the subject? Does your writing style and tone buttress your credibility? Does your past experience with the subject make clear any biases/assumptions that may affect your argument? What can you do to appeal to your audience's emotions, values, or experiences? What reasons and evidence will you provide in support of your basic claim?
- Make sure your essay has a **clear, focused thesis**. Establish for your audience your clear position and the pattern of appeals you plan to provide in your argument. Think of your thesis as offering your audience a roadmap that sets out exactly what to expect in the remainder of your essay. Since this is not an academic conversation you're entering into but rather a personal one, you don't need to explicitly identify your thesis statement as such (e.g., "in this public letter, I will...").
- **What's at stake?** For crying up a tree, justify clearly and explicitly why you're writing on your topic.
- Think carefully about your ***They Say*** in terms of your audience. Who are you writing to? What assumptions and worldviews do they likely already hold, and how will that affect their perceptions of the appeal you make in the letter. In becoming acquainted with your audience, tailor your ***They Say*** appropriately.
- Use the first-person (e.g., "In my experience...", "I believe...")! You're the one with the argument, experience and research, and you're the one who is trying to persuade your audience. Be personable with her/him/them.

Your **first draft** of the public letter is **due to be emailed to your peer and myself by 9:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 26**. You should **bring one copy of your own essay and one copy of each of your peers' essays** to class on Wednesday, November 30 for peer review.

Formatting and Citations

- Use an appropriate 12-point font of your choosing.
- Use 1" margins and single-spacing.
- Include a word count below your name on the first page.
- Cover pages are unnecessary.
- You would not normally send in a list of full bibliographic citations with your letters. However, for the sake of preparing you for further academic writing, include your citations. You can redact them later when you send in your letter if you wish (but think about how including them might support your ethos). Continue using MLA format.