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# THE INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

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SPECIAL ISSUE ON COMPETENCY ORIENTATION IN PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

## Problem-Based Learning Pedagogy Fosters Students' Critical Thinking About Writing

Rita Kumar and Brenda Refaei (University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College)

### Abstract

Convinced of the power of PBL to promote students' critical thinking as demonstrated by its application across disciplines, we designed a series of problems for students in a second-year writing course. We collected samples of their writing before and after implementation of the problems. We were concerned about whether PBL pedagogy would negatively influence second-year students' writing. However, our preliminary findings suggest that students' critical thinking about writing improved with the use of PBL pedagogy.

*Keywords:* problem-based learning, rhetoric and composition, critical thinking

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### Introduction

A common critique of college writing courses is that students do not have opportunities to write for a variety of audiences that require different types of writing. Some argue that most students will not need to write essays when they graduate, so they should learn how to write a variety of documents. Paretti (2006) suggests that academic writing assignments force students to focus on showing what they know without attending to the needs of the audience. One of the main outcomes of the Intermediate Composition course that we teach our second-year students is to raise students' rhetorical awareness of their writing situation (audience, context, and purpose). A well-crafted problem such as those used in problem-based learning (PBL) pedagogy can present students with the opportunities to write for a variety of audiences using new modes of communication. PBL takes the focus off the instructor in the classroom and empowers students in the learning process who use course concepts to solve problems presented to them. PBL motivates students to learn collaboratively by seeking solutions to real-world problems and in the process encourages both cognitive development and critical thinking. With these characteristics of PBL in mind, we developed a series of problems requiring students to address changing writing situations. These problems

were designed to support students' use of critical thinking in their writing—one of the essential course outcomes. We designed the course so we could explore our question of how PBL influences students' critical thinking as they apply it to their writing. Based upon analysis of our students' writing, it seems PBL pedagogy can advance students' application of critical thinking to their writing.

According to the Council of Writing Program Administrators "Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition" (2014), "*Critical thinking* is the ability to analyze, synthesize, interpret, and evaluate ideas, information, situations, and texts." The ability to apply critical thinking to all phases of a writing project is essential for its success. Students need to be able to analyze the needs of their readers as they compose their texts, to synthesize the information they are presenting to their readers, and they need to be able to adapt to their unique writing situations. One way to foster critical thinking in a variety of content areas is through problem-based learning. Problem-based learning has been shown by some researchers to support development of students' critical thinking. Peach, Mukherjee, and Hornyak (2007, p. 314) summarized Kurfiss's (1988) article saying he "contended that critical thinking was required for solving unstructured problems that had no single correct answer." Such unstructured problems are exactly what writers encounter when they

begin their writing projects. Each writer must determine how best to evaluate the readers' needs and determine an effective means of communicating her ideas to those readers. Although writing projects in general can be considered a type of unstructured problem, students can be provided with scenarios that lead to more realistic applications of writing skills such as assessing the readers' needs.

In addition to anticipating the needs of readers, writers also need to use critical thinking to develop their ideas to share with their readers. A long held assumption in writing studies is that writing can be equated with critical thinking, meaning that writing helps to develop critical thinking and vice versa (Emig, 1977). McLeod (1992) arguing for writing across the curriculum stated "writing is not only a way of showing what one has learned but is itself a mode of learning—that writing can be used as a tool for, as well as a test of, learning (p. 4). This line of argument was used in developing the writing across the curriculum movement. However, as writing researchers delved more deeply into the connections between critical thinking and writing, they discovered that the two were not always synonymous. For instance, Condon and Kelly-Riley (2004) found, writing and critical thinking are not the same. In their analysis of student writing and critical thinking they found an inverse relationship—meaning that students with better writing scores had worse critical thinking scores and students with low writing scores had higher critical thinking scores. They used these findings to produce the *WSU Guide to Rating Critical Thinking*, which when used in the writing context led to both increased writing and critical thinking scores.

The *WSU Guide* identifies seven key areas of critical thinking (Condon & Kelly-Riley, 2004, p. 59):

- Identification of a problem or issue
- Establishment of a clear perspective on the issue
- Recognition of alternative perspectives
- Location of the issue within an appropriate context(s)
- Identification and evaluation of evidence
- Recognition of fundamental assumptions implicit or stated by the representation of an issue
- Assessment and implications and potential conclusions

The WSU description of critical thinking is similar to Lynch and Wolcott's (2001) "Steps for Better Thinking." They illustrate their four-step process to help students think through problems. These steps include:

- Step 1—identify the problem, relevant information, and uncertainties;
- Step 2—explore interpretations and connections;
- Step 3—prioritize alternatives and communicate conclusions; and
- Step 4—integrate, monitor, and refine strategies for readdressing the problem.

Both of these heuristics can help students develop the critical thinking believed to be necessary for good academic writing. Before students can write well, they need to think through the problem or exigence that is causing them to write. They need to examine the possible perspectives on the topic as well as consider their own response to the topic. As part of this process, students need to be able to evaluate the evidence used by the various perspectives to support their positions. Finally, they need to synthesize this information for their readers as they present their own perspective on the topic.

These heuristics echo the characteristics of problem-based learning (PBL) that learners are encouraged to follow as they process ill-structured problems, suggesting that PBL pedagogy can serve as a useful context to help students develop the critical thinking that is relevant to writing. Kamin and colleagues (2001) offer PBL as an ideal approach to practicing critical thinking, because in PBL "ideas are held open to scrutiny by the group, encouraging inquiry-based attitudes that depend on recognizing problems and logically assessing evidence. These skills reflect the construct of critical thinking" (p. 27). Kek and Huijser (2011) propose that as pedagogy, PBL has the potential to not only prompt but also develop students' critical thinking skills as they learn domain-specific knowledge such as writing. They therefore perceive problem-based learning "as an integrated pedagogical approach to teaching critical thinking, rather than a specific teaching activity" (p. 330). PBL as a pedagogical approach seems appropriate for use in writing courses.

The traits of critical thinking as described in the literature are integral to writing students' success as they encounter diverse ideas and process and reflect upon them, which has made PBL an attractive choice in the composition classroom over the last decade, as exemplified by the findings of Sapp (2002), who concluded that the use of PBL in the first-year composition classroom facilitated the development of independent learners who relied less on direct guided instruction. Beckelhimer and colleagues (2007) advocated for the use of PBL in the composition class, based on their use of it and claim that "PBL makes our composition classes more student-centered and more connected to real writing situations, emphasizing as it does critical thinking, problem solving, and process as much as product."(2). Based on the application of PBL in their Business Communication classroom, Pennell and Miles (2009) argued that "PBL moves the classroom situation closer to authentic rhetorical learning, with its emphasis on deriving solutions from the situation itself." All these studies make a strong case for PBL in the composition and communication classroom, yet they do not provide empirical evidence of the influence of PBL pedagogy on student writing. Recently, some work

has been done in composition studies to explore how PBL pedagogy raises students' awareness of audience, context, and purpose in their writing.

Examination by Rosinski and Peeples (2012) of PBL in the writing classroom, prompted mainly by the potential PBL offers to improve student engagement, reinforces its relevancy in the writing classroom. Their use of PBL in first-year composition courses and advanced rhetoric and writing studies courses led them to conclude that an active learning pedagogy like PBL, through the use of ill-structured problems, positions students and teachers, "within open-ended, indeterminate, messy problems spaces requiring active reflection and metacognition," (p. 11). Such contexts are more likely to help develop writers that are rhetorically more aware, who are more attuned to writing as "contextualized praxis" and more prepared to expect and understand the shared, chaotic nature of real-world writing. They found that writers who learn writing in PBL contexts can develop "praxical subjectivities" (p. 14), leading to a heightened sense of the self, and are more capable of responding to different rhetorical situations. Such skills are evidence of critical thinking.

Smart, Hicks, and Melton (2012) also speak to the merits of using PBL in a writing classroom. They propose that the PBL scenario provides for a unique learning experience that replaces the reliance on a generic approach or a rhetorical form with a problematic scenario that motivates students to evaluate their writing context critically and pose questions such as what and why they are writing and their purpose. In doing so, students move "toward more professional, applied writing, complete with a realistic rhetorical framework and the accommodation of audience, context, and purpose" (p. 79).

## The Study

Since few empirical studies of the influence of PBL in writing courses have been done, we sought to conduct an exploratory study of the role PBL pedagogy plays in promoting students' critical thinking, as evidenced in their written products. We designed an Institutional Research Board (IRB) approved research study to collect data from our Intermediate Composition class. The learning goals of the Intermediate Composition class were to help students:

- increase awareness of genre, rhetorical, and/or discourse community analysis;
- build on and extend research and argumentative/analytical skills learned in the first-year writing course;
- include conventions for source integration: paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting; and
- recognize writing as sophisticated series of steps that include generating ideas and text, drafting, revising, and editing.

Although the learning outcomes do not explicitly address critical thinking as a concept in writing, critical thinking is embedded in the goals. In order for students to engage in discourse analysis, they must be able to identify members of the discourse community that will be the audience of their writing. They need to anticipate the needs of their readers in order to ensure that their writing communicates in the way they intend. This anticipation of readers' needs requires students to analyze their writing situation, synthesize information for their readers, and evaluate whether they have achieved their writing goal. The processes of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are the critical thinking skills every writer uses when engaged in the act of writing.

## Research Question

For this research study, we wanted to explore how the problems worked in prompting students to apply critical thinking skills to their writing. To do that we focused on the writing students produced in the course to gather empirical evidence of students' use of critical thinking in their writing. Rubrics designed for specific writing assignments allow writing instructors and researchers to objectively evaluate students' writing (Hassel, 2015). In order to evaluate students' writing, the following research question governed the study and its methodology: Does PBL pedagogy promote students to think critically about their writing, as evidenced in their written products?

## Context

We began the course with a traditional rhetorical analysis assignment to review what students had learned in their first-year composition class. Students were asked to select a text that describes the rights and responsibilities of citizens. This text could describe the responsibilities and rights of citizens in a particular country (such as a constitution), or it could describe the rights and responsibilities of a particular profession (such as the APA guidelines for ethical research). The assignment asked the students to answer specific questions within the rhetorical analysis and provided specific directions on how to construct the analysis. Students were instructed on what a rhetorical analysis is and how it is constructed. After the first three weeks, the students were introduced to PBL through a series of in-class exercises, divided into groups, and given the first problem in a sequence of three problems (Kumar, Refaei, & Skutar, 2011). These problems required students to apply the critical thinking course concepts to their writing. The first problem examined the issue of human rights and asked students to identify human rights they thought were important. The second problem

asked students to select human rights they thought should be defended. The final problem asked students to examine an area of research from the perspective of human rights. The work students completed for the second problem was the focus of analysis for how students' critical thinking is evidenced in their writing. In the second problem scenario students were asked to choose an individual right to defend using sources. Students began the problem by using sources to build an opinion letter to the editor, defending their right. Once students developed their own argument to support the right they had selected, they worked with their group to construct a "white paper" arguing for all of the rights to be protected using sources that all of the group members had collected. The groups worked through these sources together to write the final draft of their "white paper" that built upon the work they had started in their individual letters (Kumar & Refaei 2013).

## Study Participants

Second-year students at our open access (in terms of acceptance), two-year college were asked to participate in our study. Students had completed a required first-year writing course focused on research writing. They were also required to complete thirty hours of college-level course work before they could register for this intermediate writing course. Sixty students enrolled in six classes agreed to share their writing with us. Since this is a required English course for all majors, students represented a variety of majors.

## Research Design

In order to understand the influence of PBL pedagogy on students' critical thinking about their writing, we developed a simple pre- and posttest design. First, students engaged in a writing assignment following a traditional approach to writing that was clearly defined and instructor driven. After that assignment was submitted, students began working on problems as the exigence for their writing assignments. We collected the individual portion, the persuasive opinion letter, of the second assignment so we could see if there were any effects of PBL on students' writing. This research design allowed us to see if there were any changes in students' writing as they worked through the problems.

## Data Collection and Analysis

We examined the writing samples of 60 students who gave us permission to analyze their writing. These 60 students drawn from six sections of Intermediate Composition had completed both the rhetorical analysis assignment and the

persuasive letter from problem two. These writing assignments were analyzed using rubrics. An interrater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was performed to determine consistency among raters on these rubrics.

We only considered the written products completed individually pre- and post-PBL to exclude the influence of group efforts. The same criteria were used pre- and post-PBL implementation to assess whether students' critical thinking skills as exemplified by their writing changed as a result of this pedagogical approach or not. Hassel (2015, p. 84) recommends using rubrics to "assess evidence of student learning" in writing studies. We developed rubrics for each writing assignment. Bean (2011) describes the variety of rubric designs available. We chose to develop an analytic rubric that breaks down writing into component parts using task-specific criteria. We focused our analysis on six criteria that were the same for both assignments. We measured each student's written skills performance on the pre-PBL rhetorical analysis assignment on each of the selected criteria. We then compared these results against their writing skills along the same criteria in the post-PBL persuasive letter to assess if their critical thinking performance as writers was impacted by PBL pedagogy or not.

The rubrics were initially designed using the *Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools* by Paul and Elder (2006), but as we examined critical thinking in our discipline of writing studies, we decided to revise the rubric to more closely align with our understanding of how students' critical thinking could be evidenced in their final drafts of their writing projects. The six major writing and critical thinking criteria against which the assignments were evaluated against were as follows: audience, purpose, content, support, conclusion, and unity and coherence. In the criterion for audience, student writing was assessed on how well it met readers' needs, which is an important function of analysis of discourse community. For instance, if the audience was a formal one, students avoided using "you" and other informal language in their writing. "Audience" provided evidence of the students' ability to analyze the needs of their readers to create an effective document. The criteria "purpose" was used to evaluate how effectively students were able to achieve their goal for the writing task. Writers must constantly employ metacognitive skills to assess whether they are achieving their purpose in writing.

The writing assignments varied in purpose, so the rubric criterion to evaluate "content" was tailored to the assignment. One assignment was an analysis and the other was a persuasive letter so the criteria to evaluate writing "content" were specific to the assignment. In analyzing content, we evaluated how well the evidence students used to support their ideas fit their purpose and audience. We were checking

how well students were able to read a diverse range of texts and to select the texts that would function effectively for their audience. The evidence students provided to explain and illustrate their main points in their assignments was also included in the criteria of "support." In evaluating the category of support, we examined how well students integrated the information they used from other sources. Students had to select appropriate points to develop their analysis and argument. We evaluated support as a way to understand how well students were able to synthesize the information they gained from their sources to create their own response.

The "conclusion" criterion was used to evaluate how effectively students made clear the significance of their topics. Although significance was identified with conclusion, students were expected to make the importance of the issue known to their readers early in the writing assignment and reinforce its importance in the conclusion. Finally, "unity" and "coherence" were assessed as qualities of good writing for second- and third-year university students. Unity refers to the ability of the writer to stay on a single topic, while coherence refers to the writer's ability to connect the different parts of the text. Each of the rubric criteria were rated using a five point scale.

Each instructor completed the rubric for students' writing assignments as part of their regular teaching activities. After the term was over, the instructors exchanged papers and rated the other instructor's students' papers using a new rubric. The final scores for the papers were examined using a statistical test to determine if the PBL pedagogy improved students' critical thinking as writers. The interrater reliability for the raters was found to be Kappa = .91 ( $p < .001$ ), 95% CI (.504, .848). According to Landis and Koch's (1977) guidelines, the agreement between raters is almost perfect.

## Findings

A statistical test was run upon the rubric scores to determine whether PBL pedagogy did indeed promote or advance students' critical thinking, as evidenced in their written products. We conducted a Wilcoxon signed-rank test because the data are at the ordinal level and are not normally distributed. Since the data are at the ordinal level and not normal, a paired-sample t-test may not perform well. For ordered categorical data, like our data, the Wilcoxon signed-rank sum test is more robust and gives more reliable results than the paired-sample t-test.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test results in Table 1 show that students performed better after PBL pedagogy in five of the six writing categories evaluated. Students' writing scored significantly higher on the documents they created for their PBL projects when compared to their writing for a traditional rhetorical analysis assignment. As the results in Table 1 show,

Table 1. Wilcoxon signed-rank test differences in writing factors in traditional instruction and PBL instruction.

Writing Criterion	Z
Audience	5.78***
Purpose	4.18***
Content	2.94***
Support	2.74***
Conclusion	1.19
Unity/Coherence	2.87***

\* $p < .05$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

students were more attentive to the needs of their audience in their PBL project. They also were better able to achieve their purpose for writing. They developed more appropriate content and support. The overall quality of their writing as evidenced by the unity and coherence of their documents improved. The one category that still did not show measurable improvement was in the conclusion, where students were asked to explain the significance of their topic to their readers. These results indicate that PBL pedagogy does help improve students' critical thinking, as evidenced in their writing.

## Discussion

PBL helps student writing by requiring students to attend to audience and purpose in each writing situation. Students developed critical thinking skills relevant to writers when they began evaluating their audience's needs and developing a purpose for their writing projects. Each problem set up different audiences and purposes for writing—often requiring students to write in a new genre. For instance, in problem two, students wrote both a letter and a "white paper" on the same topic. Switching the genre, audience, and purpose forced students to work through how to evaluate the writing situation to create the most appropriate text. Our findings are similar to that of Rosinski and Peebles (2012), who found that "PBL activities did indeed have the advantage of inviting students to behave more like 'real' and what we have come to call 'successful' writers, based on an interactionist model of writing." Their first-year students engaged in meaningful writing activities that helped them develop both rhetorical and praxical subjectivities. They used Sullivan and Porter's (1997, p. 26) definition of praxis as "a kind of thinking that does not start with theoretical knowledge or abstract models, which are then applied to situations, but that begins with immersion in local situations, and then uses epistemic theory as heuristic rather than as explanatory or determining." Likewise, our students

were developing thinking about writing that grew out of their immersion in problems that caused them to examine the rhetorical situation and develop an approach to meet the exigencies of the situation, which led to better writing.

The course began by reviewing and teaching a few skills related to evaluating the writing situation by examining how other writers construct texts to support their purpose with their audiences. We devoted class time to allow the students to fully evaluate the scenario before they began writing. As Condon and Kelly-Riley (2004) and Lynch and Wolcott (2001) suggest, this analysis of the writing situation was an essential starting point in addressing the writing tasks of the course. Students worked with their group members to explore alternative positions to the topics they were writing about. They worked together to synthesize the information they gathered from their sources. Students were encouraged to apply these skills to their own writing throughout the PBL portion of the course. PBL provides realistic writing situations without the instructor providing "how-to" instruction, so students must apply what they know about writing. In the problem where students wrote a "white paper," the instructors did not explain what a "white paper" is or how it is written. When students asked, the instructor responded, "Where can you find out what one is?" The instructors provided some guidance when students stumbled onto unhelpful websites, but for the most part students were able to find the guidance they needed, which is what they will need to do in other writing situations after the course. Through PBL students are made to be responsible for learning what they need to know to accomplish their writing task.

The one area where students need more support in developing their writing according to our results is in establishing the importance of the topic they are writing about. Establishing the significance of a topic is essential to any writer, so we need to explore ways to help students see why it is important and ways to help them show readers the importance of a topic. Smart, Hicks, and Melton (2012, p. 75) suggested that "Fundamental to effective communication, writers must develop an awareness of both the situation and the audience to craft an appropriate message given the context and purpose of the communication to that audience." Although our students were able to "craft an appropriate message," they were not able to more fully articulate why that message should matter to their readers in a way we were hoping to see in their writing.

## Suggestions for Future Research

This study examines the effectiveness of PBL as one writing pedagogy that supports students' critical thinking when approaching writing tasks. Since this study was conducted at one institution, more research is needed in other contexts

to see how other students respond to PBL in composition courses. More research is needed in examining how the problems work to prompt students to think critically about their writing. What specific aspects of the problems such as design, timing, and/or collaboration lead to effective student work?

## Conclusion

Evaluating writing improvement is a challenging task. Rubrics helped us to examine how students' writing evolved as they engaged in PBL activities, but they cannot capture the complexity of written expression. The conclusions we make are tentative. Our work with PBL in intermediate composition suggests that it helps students think more critically about their work as writers. The problem scenarios require students to focus on audience and purpose more than traditional teacher-driven assignments. Students have to analyze who they are writing to and for what purpose in order to successfully complete the assignment. Working in groups helps students to talk through how audience and purpose should shape their writing projects and unity and coherence. For our students, PBL seems to provide an engaging context to practice using the writing concepts of audience, purpose, content, and support. Our initial concern in using PBL pedagogy was that it might not help students to be better writers. However, the results of our study indicate that it does seem to help improve student writing, as they become more adept at critically analyzing their rhetorical context.

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Rita Kumar, PhD, teaches composition and literature in the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College (UCBA) Department of English and Communication. She is the 2014 recipient of the UCBA *Innovative Teaching Award* for her inventive use of problem-based learning (PBL) in the classroom. Her scholarship includes articles on PBL, lesson study, and strategies for developing students' information literacy skills. She currently serves as the co-director of the Learning and Teaching Center at UCBA.

Brenda Refaei is an associate professor of English and the composition coordinator at the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College. Her current research interests include implementing PBL in composition courses, improving students' information literacy skills, and examining the role of eportfolios in documenting student learning.



## Appendix

### Rubric for Rhetorical Analysis

Criteria	A	B	C	D	F
<b>Rhetorical Situation</b>					
<b>Audience</b>	The audience is always clearly considered in the way the text is constructed.	The audience is frequently considered in the way the text is constructed.	The audience is somewhat considered in the way the text is constructed.	The audience is considered little in the way the text is constructed.	The audience is completely ignored in the way the text is constructed.
<b>Purpose</b>	The writer's purpose is clearly explained with examples.	The purpose is explained with examples.	The purpose is mentioned with some explanation.	The purpose is mentioned with no discussion.	The purpose is not described.
<b>Rhetorical Analysis:</b>					
<b>Rhetorical Features: Content</b>	The writer's points for analysis are always well explained and always incorporate examples.	The writer's points for analysis are often well explained and often incorporate examples.	The writer's points for analysis are sometimes explained and sometimes incorporate examples.	The writer's points for analysis are mentioned with little explanation examples given.	The writer's points for analysis are not explained and/or no examples are given.
<b>Rhetorical Features: Support</b>	The description of the document's format, organization, and sentence structure is integrated into the discussion of how it supports the document's message.	The document's format, organization, and sentence structure are fully described, and how it supports the document's message is explained.	The document is described and some mention is made of how it supports the document's message.	The document's format, organization, or sentence structure are described.	The document's format, organization, and sentence structure are not described.
<b>Assignment Rationale</b>					
<b>Conclusion: So What?</b>	The writer details an important idea learned from the analysis and uses the analysis to support and illustrate that idea so its significance is apparent.	The writer details an important idea learned from the analysis and uses the analysis to support that idea so the significance of the topic is clear.	The writer gives an important idea learned from the analysis and relates it to some aspects of the analysis to illustrate the significance of the topic.	The writer gives an important idea learned from the analysis to show the significance of the topic.	The writer does not give an important idea learned from the analysis to examine the significance of the topic.
<b>Writing Format</b>					
<b>Unity &amp; Coherence</b>	All of the ideas developed in the paragraphs and essay further develop the dominant impression. The essay and paragraphs flow together smoothly with good use of transitions.	Most of the ideas developed in the paragraphs and essay further develop the dominant impression. The essay and paragraphs flow together smoothly with the use of transitions.	Some of the ideas developed in the paragraphs and essay further develop the dominant impression. The essay and paragraphs flow together with some use of transitions.	Many ideas do not help develop the thesis. The essay or paragraphs usually do not flow smoothly because lack of connecting words or order of ideas is confusing.	Most ideas do not help develop the thesis. The essay or paragraphs do not flow smoothly because lack of connecting words or order of ideas is confusing.

**Rubric for Individual Letter**

Criteria	A	B	C	D	F
<b>Rhetorical Situation</b>					
<b>Audience</b>	The audience is always clearly considered in the way the text is constructed.	The audience is frequently considered in the way the text is constructed.	The audience is somewhat considered in the way the text is constructed.	The audience is considered little in the way the text is constructed.	The audience is completely ignored in the way the text is constructed.
<b>Purpose</b>	The writer's purpose is clearly explained with examples.	The purpose is explained with examples.	The purpose is mentioned with some explanation.	The purpose is mentioned with no discussion.	The purpose is not described.
<b>Rhetorical Analysis:</b>					
<b>Rhetorical Features: Content</b>	The writer's claim is always well explained and always incorporates examples.	The writer's claim is often well explained and often incorporates examples.	The writer's claim is sometimes explained and sometimes incorporates examples.	The writer's claim is mentioned with little explanation of examples given.	The writer's claim is not explained and/or no examples are given.
<b>Rhetorical Features: Support</b>	The reasons are logical, pertinent, and well explained.	The reasons are logical, pertinent, and explained.	The reasons are described and explained.	The reasons are described with little explanation.	The reasons are not described or explained.
<b>Assignment Rationale</b>					
<b>Conclusion: So What?</b>	The writer details an important idea made in the argument and supports and illustrates that idea so its significance is apparent.	The writer details an important idea developed in the argument and expands upon the idea so the significance of the topic is clear.	The writer gives an important idea in the argument and discusses some aspects of support to illustrate the significance of the topic.	The writer gives an important idea in the argument to show the significance of the topic.	The writer does not expand upon the argument to examine the significance of the topic.
<b>Writing Format</b>					
<b>Unity &amp; Coherence</b>	All of the ideas developed in the paragraphs and essay further develop the dominant impression. The essay and paragraphs flow together smoothly with good use of transitions.	Most of the ideas developed in the paragraphs and essay further develop the dominant impression. The essay and paragraphs flow together smoothly with the use of transitions.	Some of the ideas developed in the paragraphs and essay further develop the dominant impression. The essay and paragraphs flow together with some use of transitions.	Many ideas do not help develop the thesis. The essay or paragraphs usually do not flow smoothly because lack of connecting words or order of ideas is confusing.	Most ideas do not help develop the thesis. The essay or paragraphs do not flow smoothly because lack of connecting words or order of ideas is confusing.