

Templates, Rubrics, and Models - Oh My! Building Confidence in Freshmen Writers with Structured Instructional Methods

Andrea Yelin

DePaul University, Chicago, IL., USA

[Abstract] In this article, the author provides instructors with a concrete strategy to reach the range of students in a first-term college writing course. A model assignment and sample essays to illustrate clear methods to analyze the large-scale organization in an essay are presented in detail. This model is an example of how to sensitize students to small scale writing concerns. The goal of this approach is to guide students in building confidence in their abilities to navigate a college writing assignment, with concrete examples, while walking through all the steps in the process.

[Keywords] freshmen writing, rubrics, models, structured instructional methods

Introduction

The beginning of the term brings together students of varying educational backgrounds and skills. The goal is to engage the experienced, sophisticated writers and to empower the students with challenges. When I started teaching Composition and Rhetoric I in the Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse department, at DePaul University, I was confronted with students who had a huge range of abilities. Mostly freshmen enroll in the course. However, the class also had several adult learners returning to the classroom. I wanted to engage the entire class and to reach the range. I wanted to build the students' confidence too. This article is based on a presentation I gave at The Writing on the Edge Conference at College of DuPage, Fall 2015.

The first time I taught, I presented the class with an article and model rhetorical analysis and said: "this is what I am looking for." The sample was a very good paper, not a perfect paper, designed to motivate and not to intimidate. The intent was to model and guide. However, the students still experienced challenges in completing the assignment.

I then distributed another article on which the students had to write a rhetorical analysis. The results were surprisingly disappointing and I was frustrated. At first, I attributed the poor performance to my background. To alleviate my frustration and to increase the students' mastery, I adopted the use of templates, rubrics, and models to teach freshmen to write the rhetorical analysis just as I used these methods to teach first year law students to write the legal memo. At first glance, you may think that legal education is irrelevant. It is not the substance of legal education that I used here but the deliberate modeling when teaching writing to law students. The structure leaves room for lots of creativity in the rhetorical analysis. The rubrics and structure can be used in online classes too.

The Context

I am an attorney who has taught legal writing at a law school for over a decade. I began at DePaul with an undergraduate legal writing course. The next year, I was asked to teach Composition and Rhetoric I and II. With some thought, many parallels emerged between teaching

new legal writers and new college writers. The similarities are their prewriting skills, lack of desire to revise and edit, and most significantly, both groups require structure to build confidence and mastery. Lastly, in both arenas the students need guidance as to how the finished product should look.

We try to build confidence while developing skills in new legal writers. New legal writers arrive in law school with varying abilities and experiences. Students are of different age groups and many have not been in the classroom for several years. Very rarely are students familiar with the mechanics and structure of legal writing when they start law school. In legal writing, we rely on models, predictable structure, and formulaic composition. (Tracy, 2005, pp. 297- 348.)

Also in legal writing, the creativity lies in the precise word choice, the insights, and the analysis. In legal writing instruction, we use outlines, paragraph labels, and guided assessment questions. We explore the Large and Small Scale organization of the legal writing assignment. (Edwards, 2015). Just as one of the learning goals in freshman composition is revision, in legal writing it is also an essential goal. In both arenas, editing and proofreading are also vital components. The question then became, how to apply these mechanics to freshman composition instruction?

Literature is available on rhetorical concerns in legal writing and "the rhetoric of law." (Tiscione, 2016). However, few resources discuss the application of legal writing instruction methods, and the use of sample papers, to introductory composition and rhetoric. The predictability and the review build confidence. The rubrics provide guidelines and are also very helpful in online courses.

Explanation

In legal writing, it is essential to provide mechanical steps for the students to take when writing so that they can not only create the assignment but feel empowered.

A key distinction between legal writing and freshman composition is the level of critical reading and analysis. There is no reason why the freshmen can't be pushed into deeper critical reading. In legal writing, we carefully read and brief cases and apply the law to a set of facts where we draw parallels and distinctions. A brief is merely a summary of a decision in set categories that allows the reader to easily compare the cases and to apply the cases to the facts. The precis, in freshman composition, also provides the opportunity to critically read and carefully summarize a piece in set categories. Additionally, in legal writing careful review of model assignments allow students to see where the project is going and to understand the work product expected. At the outset of freshman year, a formulaic structure for the first assignment permits students to ensure thoroughness and to create a polished college writing assignment.

The mechanical steps applicable to freshman composition consisted of addressing the Large Scale organization for the assignment. Just as in a legal document, the Purpose, the Audience, the Organization, and Readability are key determinants for the overall structure. (Edwards, 2015).

In law, the purpose determines whether the document is objective or persuasive. In freshman comp the Purpose determines the level of detail, the length, the type of assignment, the format, and the genre. The Audience must be defined in both disciplines. In both arenas, we write for the busy, unfamiliar reader. This forces the writer to value clarity and brevity. Organization is paramount. The reader must see where the writer is going and it helps that there is a predictable nature to the material. Each paragraph or paragraph block has a purpose too. Just as the components of a memo or a brief and the components serve as a checklist to ensure thoroughness,

the structure of the rhetorical analysis can ensure that the writer develops and supports the argument in an organized manner. The template for the rhetorical analysis provides information about each paragraph's role. Just as in an objective legal memo, where there are distinct sections - the Question Presented, the Brief Answer, the Facts, the Discussion, here structure is also very important.

Last, the easiest way to engage a reader and to make your points understood is to make the material readable, regardless of the subject matter. Strong thesis statements and clear topic sentences provide organizational structure in both disciplines. Just as in legal writing, I presented the class with my acronym for the Large Scale organization- PAOR (Purpose- Audience - Organization-Readability). Revisiting the goals for purpose, audience, organization, and readability help the students understand how to fine tune the document or essay on the Large Scale and to revise the material so that it meets the goals.

Additionally, students in both arenas benefit from clear guidance on structuring the actual paragraphs and sentences and on selecting the precise word. Here the acronym POWER guides the student through the Small Scale organization.

The Small Scale organization, POWER, is broken down as follows:

P - Paragraphs should advance the analysis. This means that each paragraph must make a separate point in relation to the thesis, not repeat points, but advance them. The students must think carefully about the premise for each paragraph and the support for the point. Paragraphs should be one-half page in length or shorter.

O- Outline. The outline should be apparent. The strong thesis statement and topic sentences can be pulled from the paper to create an outline. The reader should be able to see the outline.

W - Word choice. Precise word choice is essential for clarity. Additionally, careful work with a thesaurus and a dictionary will allow the writer to find a single word to substitute for a short phrase.

E - Effective sentences. Effective sentences are written in the active voice. The subject of the sentence is clear. Students learn to vary sentence length to create emphasis and to maintain the reader's attention.

R- Review and revise. Students should give themselves the time to review their own work and to revise it so that each component fulfills the goals

Legal writers are often instructed to use the IRAC format for objective writing. IRAC is an acronym which stands for Issue, Rule, Application, Conclusion. The body of the objective memo's discussion section is written in IRAC format. This is the Small Scale organization for the paragraphs in a legal memo. Each sentence has a specific role and contains certain information. The legal reader expects this and IRAC serves as a checklist for legal analysis. (Yelin, & Samborn, 2015).

The individual paragraphs in a memo must advance the analysis so that the concepts are elaborated on and expanded, not merely repeated. The reader actually looks at the parts of each paragraph to make sure that the discussion is thorough and the application of the law is understandable. Objective memos are written in IRAC format where each paragraph or paragraph block starts with the Issue, then the Rule from the case sometimes expanded with the case's facts, holding and reasoning, then the Application of the law to the client's facts, and the conclusion.

This rigid formula ensures that the law is summarized succinctly, with only relevant information, and is applied to the client's facts before drawing a conclusion. (Yelin, & Samborn, 2015).

Freshman Comp is not as rigid and formulaic as legal writing. In subsequent assignments, students will have more latitude when drafting. The intent with the first assignment is build confidence and overcome writer's block. Freshmen can use Small Scale organization to build paragraphs. Just as in legal writing where the writer makes a point rather than describes content in each paragraph (Edwards, 2015), freshmen writers must learn to assert a point, to state the thesis.

Even the most sophisticated college freshman will write in a rhetorical analysis: "this article is about global warming and the economy" rather than "Joe Smith fails to show that global warming is beneficial to the economy."

Freshmen writers are not required to be quite so concise and succinct as law students but must learn to make a point and to pay attention to relevance and precision when writing. Additionally, just as in legal writing, clarity and organization are essential. Providing a template with specific components for each paragraph and paragraph order, focusing on the Small Scale organization, allow the college writers to develop the content, refine a thesis, and draft a polished product with confidence. Last, students should look over their own work to proofread carefully. Sloppy work distracts the reader.

The Process

Assign the rhetorical analysis of an editorial. The students will receive an assignment with an article to read and a template to complete the assignment. (See Appendix.)

Provide the specific editorial to analyze in print format. Use the article to build on class work concerning critical reading and rhetorical analysis. Include stringent word count requirements in the assignment. The sample assignment suggests a maximum of 500 words. Explicitly direct students to include a strong thesis statement concerning whether they think the editorial was effective. Tell students that they must take a position about how the author addresses his argument and achieves its purpose. This is an opportunity to review the rhetorical considerations when analyzing the article. Students will consider:

- Type of argument
- Author's purpose
- Appeals
- Claims
- Audience
- Tone, Stance
- Medium
- Components

The template may appear formulaic at first but it allows the students to focus on their writing mechanics and their analysis. The template's purpose is similar to the Large Scale organization for the objective legal memo. The template provides the skeletal structure to create the outline for the rhetorical analysis. Although the discussion portion's structure is formulaic, the formula allows the writer to think through the content and to focus on the analysis rather than asking: "where do I

begin?" The Template is the Large Scale Organization that guides writer as to what to include and how to set up an outline. Each portion of the template can be a paragraph or a paragraph block.

The template gives students structure that they can use as a check list. Most importantly, the template provides a launching point for the student to begin writing the rhetorical analysis. Students will then be free to focus on their ideas.

The students will then read the article and the assignment, with the template, for the rhetorical analysis of a *Wall Street Journal* article from the print newspaper. The students then receive the three finished assignments, one at a time. I created the model assignments incorporating teaching points from sample papers. The students do not know the grades for the completed assignments but they are, in the following order: 'C-', 'B-', and last 'A-'. An 'A' paper is purposely not used as to not intimidate the students.

The students perform Guided Assessments where they examine the Large Scale organization with set questions for each assignment. They receive peer review questions to guide this process and they review the purpose, audience, organization and readability.

We discuss how to fix to paper. This is an opportunity to discuss revision when applying PAOR (Large Scale organization), editing when applying POWER (Small Scale organization), and proofreading. Students find this discussion very empowering because there are specific areas to examine and there are specific steps to remediate the concerns.

On the Small Scale level we focus on developing strong thesis statements and topic sentences as well as precise word choice. We also discuss creating effective sentences. Students are eager to hear ways to place emphasis within the sentence to keep the reader's attention (Bouchoux, 2005). The Online Writing Lab at Purdue University has the Paramedic Method which presents a mechanical process to revise a sentence to increase its clarity. Paramedic Method: A Lesson in Writing Concisely (Johnson-Sheehan, 2016).

Students see that subtle changes have a huge impact on clarity. The students then grade models. The students love this. They are actually much more stringent in the grading process than the instructor. The students use a careful, objective rubric.

The grade rubric guides the students as to the requirements for the Large, Small and Micro level organization. The peer review questions address global concerns and the audience's experience, writing for the unfamiliar reader.

This process fulfills the goal of engaging students in the process of creating their assignment. The students gain empowerment over their work. The method fosters investment in the writing and revision process. The use of templates and models allow students to think about the work and to critically assess if the assignment has the required components and fulfills the criteria. Students are guided to evaluate where the analysis digresses? Guided questions lead the students through the evaluation process. Students hear the message: "You can do this." Once again, in later assignments students will have more freedom in constructing their writing assignments.

Last, students walk through the grading process with a printed rubric. The students evaluate the paper, with the grade rubric, on the Large, Small, and Micro scale. Students see that grading is carefully calibrated and not arbitrary.

Students will vote on the grades for each sample. This generates class discussion. Some of the students' comments were: For the C- paper - the first sample assignment. Student's comment: "Fail her". B- - Student's comment: "This was written by a college student?" 'A' - Student's comment: "This is confusing." The 'A-' paper used evidence from editorial, with details, that students unfamiliar with the editorial may find confusing.

After this exercise, collect all the samples. Then assign the same exact assignment for the students to complete on their own. The students will have a strong idea about the substance and polish required for a college level rhetorical analysis. The students will understand the role and benefit of a strong thesis and clear supporting points. The students will have the skills to develop an outline, develop the analysis, compose strong paragraphs, and provide support for their ideas. They will have some revision and editing techniques. Most importantly, they will have the confidence and tools to complete the assignment.

Conclusion

Evaluation and remediation foster students' investment in the assignment. Templates, rubrics, and models allow the students to see the full arc of the assignment and to develop confidence as new college writers.

MODEL divided by (Template + Content Analysis + Peer Review + Grade Rubric) = Empowerment

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Appendices: The Assignment

For the Rhetorical Analysis, you will receive an editorial to analyze based on the traditional rhetorical appeals. You will state a clear thesis arguing your position on the effectiveness of the opinion piece, and will use rhetorical strategies, considering audience, context, tone, purpose, genre, and stance to argue your position. Please limit the analysis to 500 words. The Article: Purposely use the article from the print edition



The Template: Include the template with the assignment

Paragraph 1: Summary of the article's argument.

The summary is more than a brief synopsis stating what the article is about.

The first paragraph must have a point, a thesis statement. The thesis is your assertion, premise, or stance about how the article achieves its purpose. Your premise, the thesis statement, takes a position about how the author addresses his argument. The thesis must be clearly and directly stated, apparent, at the end of the first paragraph. The thesis must be debatable where there can be a realistic counterargument.

Consider the following when writing the thesis statement and the summary:

Type of argument - factual, definition, evaluation, proposal, causality?

Author's purpose - to inform or to persuade?

Appeals author relies on - pathos, logos, ethos

Claims - statements of fact or opinion in the article

Audience - who is the author writing for

Author's tone, attitude, and stance deduced from the author's language.

Components of the argument - how does the author build and support his argument?

Paragraphs 2 - 3

Break down the thesis into parts and use separate paragraphs to address the elements, or parts. Use strong topic sentences to guide the reader. Each topic sentence asserts a point that relates to a part of the thesis. Each topic sentence states a point rather than a description of the information that follows.

Use specific examples from the article to support your point.

Paragraph 4

Conclusion paragraph - summarizes your work briefly and makes a statement about the overall effectiveness of the argument. Any fallacies? What was omitted?

Conclusion: Thesis + Why

Sample Papers for Class Discussion

Do not provide the grades for the papers. Use the papers to go through the Large Scale, Small Scale, and Micro level analyses. Start with the "C-" paper and repeat the exercise with the 'B-' paper and the 'A-' paper. After the analyses, have the students consult the rubric and determine a grade for each paper. This generates lively discussion.

C- Paper

Rhetorical Analysis

Matt Riply is the author of "Microchips Are Old Hat. Can Tweets Be Far Behind." The article discusses that once a technology is no longer new, readers are no longer interested in how it works. The author also states that today's news topics of the various merits of the different search engines will one day seem antiquated and hold little interest for the readership. An additional point was made, Ripley also points out, through analogy with that one can use it without having to read how it works.

While I personally believe and understand that the finer points made by Ripley are important for his career as a newspaper reporter, I don't fully believe that people are so uninterested in old technology. People love old things. People love old telephones, typewriters and other things. Why then wouldn't people want to read about how these things work? The article did not discuss this. Historians always like to read about how things were back then. Like an old pair of sneakers, there is comfort in the old. People will not merely crave knowledge of the new technologies, like we crave the next cool computer game, but will appreciate learning about the old just as we explore retro cooking.

B- Paper

Microchips vs. Twitter

Matt Ridley's "Microchips Are Old Hat. Can Tweets Be Far Behind?" fails to address the full picture. The article only discusses that once technology is widely adopted it is no longer interesting and people no longer want to read about it.

This article states that we are no longer interested in technology we use and take for granted as long as we can use it.

Ridley starts the article by talking about how no one has read about gallium arsenide recently. Have you? I certainly haven't. Ridley goes on to talk about how no one still writes about semiconductors and how they work. Articles about them were popular in the 1980s. He incorrectly states that no one wants to modify computers or fix cars. He says in this that we used to be fascinated with it. Ridley reminisces as a science reporter who used to write about semiconductor breakthroughs, now no one cares about them. Ridley relies on his has been career.

Ridley's word choice enhances his writing and presents the contrast between old and current technology. Ridley talks about older formats that are no longer popular to underscore his message that we don't care about older formats but just use them.

Ridley relies on ethos and pathos to convey his point. Ridley's ethos is apparent by his credibility as a long time science writer for the Wall Street Journal. By his experience, he shows us he knows what he is talking about. He adds authority by using a lot of examples about it. He also uses logos to support his points by pointing out a tech thing and then stating that we are no longer interested in it. Then he points out another thing and notes that most of us don't read about it anymore, don't want to, and don't even care and never heard of it - like gallium arsenide. Ridley asks what discussions will we have in the future? Will we compare search engines or social networks? We won't care about it as long as we can use it. I believe this. I like his conclusion that everyone uses pencils but no one knows how they are made.

A- Paper

iPhones, iMacs, and I

Matt Ridley's article about the empathy towards computers provides a view of the discipline in a new and argumentative way. Ridley's experience in the field of technological writing is shown through his memories of old inventions without being an unpalatable mess usually associated with people of his age bracket. With a unique perspective from someone of his age, Ridley makes astute observations of the similarities between both new and old inventions, and accepts the empathy as a sign of progress. This article is accessible to someone who may not understand the current state of technology, and for someone who is familiar with it, but not concerned with the inner-workings. With a calm tone while conveying a strong technological background, Ridley makes a convincing and relatable case that interest in technology never diminishes regardless of age.

Ridley's article doesn't contain an image of a grumpy old man that is typical in editorial pieces relating to technology. Ridley's shows vast respect for the ever fast pace of technological advancement. His stance on the growing ignorance towards technology is shown though his first quote about outdated technologies. Ridley refers to the 1980's boom of self-service computer modification saying, "*Now they send to take them as they are: a sign of maturing technology.*"

This shows that as a technology gets reduced to a single “black box” of function the people who are familiar with it need no longer explain the technology due to its prevalence. The cute pictures support his points. The paper version of the article is important to understanding Ridley’s points.

Ridley appeals to both ethos and logos. Ridley clearly states that “*It would be wrong to bemoan this trend*” in reference to people being upset over changing technological formats, arguing that this dispute is a matter of right and wrong. He challenges the reader’s morals with the idea that to complain about changing technology without embracing the changes is an injustice. He states that he is unconcerned with the format of his own article changing from a newspaper piece to a blog post, showing his acceptance of technology’s advances. Here Ridley appeals to logic by saying that if something is accessible and helpful, it is unimportant for the reader to understand the technology as it is most important to be able to access the information. His final anecdote is of the stubborn professor writing an entire academic essay in pencil tops. With the anecdote, Ridley also dares the reader not to appear as unwilling to embrace technological progress as the man writing the essay.

Ridley’s competent and patient tone make his article more successful than typical technology related pieces written by other people of his age bracket. He may appear to pander to youthful readers, but his clever and poignant discussion of older technology make it a very enjoyable article to read. Ridley bridges the gap between the “old ways” with current technology providing a refreshing point of view. Without insults or platitudes or tired metaphors, this article is believable.

Instructional Pointers

Use each model to review the assignment and address assignment's requirements.

How does the Model depart from the assignment- How does the Model conform with assignment's requirements? Discuss the Large Scale and Small Scale organization.

Discuss how to revise and edit the rhetorical analysis so that it conforms with the assignment's goals. Does the sample contain a strong thesis statement that makes a point? Use Model 1 as a spring board for instruction on organization, thesis statements, and topic sentences.

How does the model depart from the template - how to add components. This is an exploration of Large Scale organizational goals.

For the Small Scale organizational concerns in, review the POWER requirements. How to fix? For instance, in Model 1, adding strong topic sentences, evidence, and analysis will transform the rhetorical analysis so that it fulfills the assignment's goals.

Comparison of Model with Template

Use the model to see where the sample paper conforms and departs from the template. Review the sample paper as a springboard to discuss revision, editing, and proofreading.

Paragraph 1: Talk about the components – Review the template.

Look at the introductory paragraph. Does the first paragraph provide the context, a summary, the thesis?

Paragraphs 2 and 3: Draw the class to look at the topic sentences, support , including evidence and analysis.

Examine the rhetorical analysis's summary of insights, the effectiveness of author's argument, and the fallacies in the author's argument.

Paragraph 4: Does the paragraph summarize the work briefly and make a statement about the overall effectiveness of the argument? Any fallacies? What was omitted?

Conclusion = thesis + why. The conclusion is drawn from the reasoned support for the points.

Review the model – Have the students go back to the model to see where model veers off from template. Use an after the fact to outline and revise the sample. This emphasizes the value of revision.

Large Scale Guided Content Analysis - Checks on Purpose, Audience, Organization, Readability (PAOR) and Peer Review Questions

Students can use these questions later to check their own work and note where they must add information.

Does the piece fulfill the assignment's goals overall?

How to Check if Piece is Suitable for the Audience and Fulfills the Purpose of the Assignment

Ask the class:

- Would the unfamiliar reader be able to follow and understand the piece without having read the original source?
- The student writer's ethos – does the writer stay true to the original piece?
- The student writer's ethos – credibility? Authority? Conveyed in the student's writing through professional tone, and the document lacks grammatical and spelling errors, and typos.
- Does the student engage the reader? Pathos – does the student appeal to the reader's emotions and sentiments – use of adjectives and conveying bias or a position. Is there a hook?
- Logos – is the student's essay logically reasoned – flows logically? Logically ordered?
- Does the student state a thesis regarding the article 's effectiveness?

Peer Review Questions

1. What do you think of the essay – overall?
2. What is the student's point/thesis/premise in the essay?
3. Did the student succeed in conveying and supporting the point? Does the student add a reason as to why the thesis is proven?
4. Ask two classmates to look at a section you had trouble understanding. Ask your classmates if the section or paragraph makes sense to them? Ask what they can do to improve it.

5. Outline the student's essay –this will highlight the organization of the essay and how the reader perceives the organization. Compare the outline with the template.

Remind the students that the large scale organization focuses on the reader's experience. A memo should be:

- readily understandable
- argumentative with an apparent thesis that is identifiable, and debatable
- supported with points from the text
- organized so the reader can see where this analysis is going.

Small Scale Organization - POWER

The Small Scale Organization focuses on the paragraphs and sentences to convey the points of the rhetorical analysis.

Review with each model and ask the class:

- How can you write a thesis for this rhetorical analysis?
- How can you draft topic sentences?
- Does each paragraph advance the analysis?
- Does the student writer use evidence from the editorial to support her points?
- Is the outline of the discussion apparent?
- Is the word choice precise?
- Is each sentence within the paragraph effective

Micro Organization

Proofread carefully and check grammar. Review and Revise word choice and sentence structure for clarity and conciseness.