

Prior to declaring my concentration in Rhetoric and Composition (Rhet and Comp), my understanding of the definition of "rhetoric" was nothing more than that of political stigma. My current interpretation, however, has been shaped mostly by Dr. Lopez's Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition course and is one that has been inspired by Aristotle's definition in *Rhetoric*: "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion." After I was introduced to this meaning, I quickly began realizing that rhetoric was everywhere around me. In a way, you could say that I had the reverse effect of the popular saying "I know it when I see it"; that is, "I see it when I know it." Therefore, I define "rhetoric" as anything that provokes critical thought, of all levels, about any given subject in order to produce a certain outcome. My interpretation was supported after engaging in several projects and readings in my Rhet and Comp courses. Initially, I thought to myself, "I know these courses are under the same realm of focus for a reason, but I do not know for what reason or how they are even tied together." After completing two courses that I thought were completely unrelated to each other—Business Writing and Composition Studies—I learned that both classes required and taught the same set of skills in order to interpret texts and construct arguments. In fact, I learned that all of the Rhet and Comp courses that I completed helped me in proficient writing by analyzing texts and forming theses. These are skills that I have come to call critical thinking skills.

In my college career so far, I have gathered my definition of critical thinking from assignments that are mostly from Dr. Harker's ENGL 3100 Composition Studies course. Specifically, I gained these skills from our reading responses, where the subject of the majority of readings were from Norton's Anthology (*I need to look up the official title*). I define critical thinking as the ability to analyze various texts by identifying the main ideas, concepts, and authors' purposes of their works; then, to form our own opinions and critiques about the texts while supporting our claims with sufficient evidence. The reading responses themselves required a level of critical thinking, so I learned and I grew as a student writer and thinker by analyzing several essays. Dr. Harker also made it very clear on the first day of class that students should not simply say that a text was

'good'; rather, students should think about what made the work interesting and for what reasons. Similar to the reading responses, Dr. Wharton's weekly blog assignments also helped me practice and gain critical thinking skills. I completed these during my first semester in ENGL 3110 Technical Communications and during my second semester in ENGL 3090 Exposition. In my first semester, I made sure to follow the rubric in terms of written content, but what I lacked was the use of images and other multimodal tools. Creating blog posts really stressed the importance of using multimodal tools and how it enhances different concepts simply by being creative. By my second semester in Expository Writing, I showed more confidence in my writing from my blog posts through months of practice in Technical Communications.

In addition to the reading response assignments and weekly blog assignments, I discovered that in all of my Rhet and Comp classes I was asked to do peer reviews for my classmates. This concept was unfamiliar to me during my first semester, so it was difficult to decipher good writing from bad writing simply because I never had to apply critical thinking skills in-depth to different articles and essays. Good writing to me, therefore, was writing that most people generally liked and accepted or was writing that came from a textbook. Often times, if I found a piece of work that was popular but I did not like, then I would try to find the reasons that people liked it. Although this did require some level of critical thinking, I felt as if I only did this to conform to what everyone liked instead of asking myself why I did not like the text. I considered myself decent at grammar, but critiquing content and subject matter was new to me. As I was exposed to good writing in my Rhet and Comp courses, it was easier to critique my peers' papers. Instead of only correcting grammar, I made notes on content matter. For instance, I noted whether the writing had sufficient evidence or lack thereof with reasons of my own and suggestions on how to improve. Critiques from both my professors and peers gave me a better understanding of what constitutes good writing, of course, but writing peer reviews helped me in looking for these qualities in my own work. Additionally, rubrics for each assignment gave me guidelines for good writing.

Now, I think that good writing is writing that supports its claims adequately with many details and uses several modes of writing to attract the audience.