

WP1: ACADEMIC forum analysis

Length: 5 pgs. double spaced

Grade percentage: 20%

Important dates:

Tuesday, September 22, introduce project

Thursday, October 6, peer workshop one

Thursday, October 13, peer workshop two

Tuesday, October 18, submit final version

Description:

This project builds from James Porter's "Forum Analysis" to allow you to investigate an academic journal in which you hope to publish. After identifying a particular forum, you'll describe the communication practices of the discourse community it represents and determine how to enter its conversation. You are seeking answers to questions like: Who is the audience for this journal? How do they expect me to speak? On what topics?

Each forum analysis should:

- Address the prompts outlined below
- Use headings
- Be approximately 5 double-spaced pages
- Specifically detail the issue dates of journals examined
- Support assertions with specific examples from the journal examined
- Consider all aspects of the journal (not just the articles)
- Include a foundation of at least 6 articles from at least three different issues of the same journal (though you should read more than that to get a good sense of the journal)

Prompts:

Background

- Identify the academic forum by name and organizational affiliation.
- Is there an expressed editorial policy, philosophy, or expression of belief? What purpose does the forum serve? Why does it exist?
- What is the disciplinary orientation?
- How large is the forum? Who are its members? Its leaders? Its readership?
- In what manner does the forum assemble (e.g., newsletter, journal, conference, weekly meeting)? How frequently?
- What is the origin of the forum? Why did it come into existence? What is its history? Its political background? Its traditions?
- What reputation does the forum have among its own members? How is it regarded by others?

Discourse Conventions

Who Writes?

- Who is granted status as writer? Who decides who writes in the forum? By what criteria are writers selected?
- What kind of people write in this forum? Credentials? Disciplinary orientation? Academic or professional background?
- Who are the important figures in this forum? Whose work or experience is most frequently cited?
- What are the important sources cited in the forum? What are the key works, events, experiences that its assumed members of the forum know?

To Whom Do They Write?

- Who is addressed in the forum? What are the characteristics of the assumed audience?
- What are the audience's needs assumed to be? To what use(s) is the audience expected to put the information?

- What is the audience's background assumed to be? Level of proficiency, experience, and knowledge of subject matter? Credentials?
- What are the beliefs, attitudes, values, prejudices of the addressed audience?

What Do They Speak/Write About?

- What topics or issues does the forum consider? What are allowable subjects? What topics are valued?
- What methodology or methodologies are accepted? Which theoretical approach is preferred: deduction (theoretical argumentation) or induction (evidence)?
- What constitutes "validity," "evidence," and "proof" in the forum (e.g., personal experience/observation, testing and measurement, theoretical or statistical analysis)?

How Do They Write It?

Form

- What types of discourse does the forum admit (e.g., articles, reviews, speeches, poems)? How long are the discourses?
- What are the dominant modes of organization?
- What formatting conventions are present: headings, tables and graphs, illustrations, abstracts?

Style

- What documentation form(s) is used?
- Syntactic characteristics?
- Technical or specialized jargon? Abbreviations?
- Tone? What stance do writers/speakers take relative to audience?
- Manuscript mechanics?

Other Considerations?

Strategies for Gathering Information:

1) Read editorial guidelines and editorial information

What do they require and ask for? What kinds of institutional and/or organizational affiliation do they have? Who is on the editorial board? How big is it? This should provide information about the editorial policy, philosophy, who is served, why the forum exists, and the conventions followed.

2) Read author biographies

Who are the writers? What credentials do they have?

3) Look at article titles

What words are used? What topics are covered?

4) Look at the article(s)

What do you see—headings? graphics? APA citation? What parts are in the article—a literature review? a recommendation? The use of "I" or "we"? How does the article begin/end? Are footnotes used? How long is the bibliography? Do they quote or mostly summarize?

5) Read at least six articles in three issues of the same journal

What do they write about? How do they write about it? What kind of conversation are they joining? How are they entering this conversation—aligning themselves with names? with studies? with movements? with problems? with concepts? What are they trying to accomplish? What do they use to make their argument? What evidence do they provide? Where is the thesis and how is it stated? Where is the conclusion and how is it stated?

Tips:

- Find a way to respond to the prompts/questions that makes sense to you.
- Make your analysis independent of the prompt so that readers who have no access to the prompt will understand what you're communicating.
- Take the time to examine the six articles closely.