

Audience Analysis

Each student will locate and analyze audience responses to a media text, using the methods described in the classes and the textbook (Peterson, Chapter 6). They will write a short (5-7 page) paper describing their findings. These will be uploaded to Blackboard Feb. 12. Each student will be assigned a fellow student's paper to download, read and critique. These critiques are due Feb. 14. Students will use this critique to revise their papers and turn their final drafts in Feb. 16.

Objectives:

In this assignment, students will demonstrate an ability to:

- Apply one of the 3 major approaches to audience interpretation of texts.
- Develop an interpretation of the text and its audiences based on this analysis
- Express this interpretation in a clear thesis
- Argue for their interpretation using evidence from the text.

Process:

Over the next two weeks we are going to explore ways of analyzing how audiences receive and understand texts. The first is analysis of sites of reception (pp. 127-137). The second involves interviewing (pp. 137-147). The third involves analyzing audience produced discourses about media (pp. 147-157). These concepts are outlined in Chapter 6 of Peterson, Mark Allen. 2003. *Anthropology and Mass Communication: Media and Myth in the New Millennium*. Berghahn Books.

1. Each member of class will be assigned one of three projects:
 - a. Ethnography of a site of media reception
 - b. Audience Interviews
 - c. Analysis of Consumer Discourse (Metatexts)
2. Carry out the project to gather data for your paper.
3. Discuss your project with the class
4. Interpret the data and make a claim about it, expressed as a thesis.
5. Defend this thesis with illustrations from your data
6. Put your argument into the form of a paper
7. Upload your paper to the Blackboard site by class time Feb. 12
8. Download the student paper you've been assigned and critique it by Feb 14.
9. Revise your paper
10. Upload your paper to the assignments section by Feb. 16

Part 1 Audience Analysis Project.

Each student will be assigned one of the following three projects to carry out.

Project Two: Speaking of the Media

Objectives: Students will demonstrate:

1. an ability to think analytically about discourse
2. a capacity to locate patterns in discourse
3. an ability to argue about meaning
4. Share what they have learned with other learners

Introduction: The purpose of this exercise is to get you thinking about audiences and the difficulty of audience research. Like surveys, interviews are quasi-experimental ways of getting data. The researcher is in control of the questions and hence the situation. This means we must think carefully about what we can assume about the data we derive. Direct questions about feelings, pleasures, desires, identities and tastes rarely elicit interesting information. When it does, it is often less informative about the person and his or her relation to the text than it is reflective of general social rules of how to talk about the mass media. In other words, social scientists can rarely ask directly the things they want to know; they must instead get people talking, then sift the discourse for information that relates to the research question. For more on interview-based analysis, see Peterson pp. 137-147.

Assignment: Interview three people about a mass media text they have read, viewed, or heard, and write a short essay based on these interviews.

Process:

- 1) Watch/listen to a text (presumably the same you will interview your informants about)
- 2) Take half an hour of quiet time and think about the text. Think about what you liked and disliked about the text, what kinds of pleasure you obtained from it, what it made you think about, what it meant to you. Try to find ways to articulate those feelings.
- 3) Generate a series of questions – however many you need – that would, if someone asked you, lead you to say the things you discovered about yourself and your relationship to the text in the previous step. Two important points:
 - a) These should be open-ended questions (you should not be able to answer them yes or no). Your goal is to get people talking; your data is not their answers to the questions but total of everything they say.
 - b) They should also be operational, rather than research questions. That is to say, you cannot ask someone “What did this text mean to you?” and expect a useful answer. You have to ask questions that will get them talking about the text so that you have plenty of discourse to analyze, like “Did you like it?” “What was your favorite part?” “Why” “In what ways was it cool?”
- 4) Ask these questions of three informants – family, friends, coworkers.
- 5) Transcribe the interviews and write a brief description (no real names!) of the person interviewed and the interview setting.
- 6) Analyze these interviews. What can you surmise from their discourse about their identities and subjectivities as they engage media? Are there common patterns in their discourse? Note that recorded discourse of this sort constitutes a text and can be analyzed using the same techniques used on the media texts.
- 7) Write a short essay describing your research results.

Part Three. Discuss your project with the class.

During the first week of February, we will meet to discuss these projects. Students who conducted the specific project assigned will present their projects and describe where their analysis is taking them, sharing their tentative hypotheses about their data. The rest of the students will ask questions and offer thoughts on what they are hearing. Students doing the site analysis project will present Mon., Feb. 5. Students conducting interviews will present their projects Wed., Feb. 7. Students analyzing metatexts will present their projects Fri., Feb. 9.

Part Four. Interpret the data and make a claim about it, expressed as a thesis.

The next step is to find some aspect of this interpretation for which you can make a strong case. This should be stated as a thesis. A thesis is a positive statement of a point you are going to argue with evidence. A phrase like:

“In this paper, I will adopt a micro-approach, examining in detail a single short text, “The Mummy Strikes,” an animated film produced by Max Fleisher studios in 1942, to see what it can tell us about the values expressed by Superman, at least in the WWII America during which the film was produced and seen by movie-going audiences.”

is *not* a thesis statement. It is a topic statement. A thesis would be like this:

“I will argue that this text reveals a great deal about changing gender roles in the WWII era; that it represents both an ideal of American women as competent professionals but also reinscribes the traditional value that every woman needs a man.”

Part Five. Defend this thesis with illustrations from your data

Once you have constructed a thesis, you must present data from the text, as well as any additional contextualizing information, to support this thesis. An “A” paper will also consider reasonable alternative interpretations of the data, and explain why you chose your argument over the alternatives.

Part Six. Put your argument into the form of a paper

A folder in Course Documents labeled “Writing” contains a set of short “how-to” articles from the University of North Carolina Writing Center on college writing that can help you if you feel you need it. It includes articles on thesis formation, argument, writing introductions and conclusions, paragraph formation and transitions.

The classic model for writing from data is as follows:

1. Introduction. This states your thesis and contextualizes it as part of a social question or problem
2. Method. This section briefly explains where, when and how you gathered your data. It pays attention to ways the process of data gathering (observation, interviewing, selecting metatexts) might have influenced the data or the analysis.
3. Argument. Ideally, each paragraph would have the following features:
 - a) A key sentence that states how the idea expressed in this paragraph relates to the larger argument.
 - b) A sentence or two expanding on, contextualizing or explaining the key sentence.
 - c) A segment from your data that illustrates the point you are trying to make.
 - d) A sentence or two explaining how the data you just presented supports the argument. If there is more than one way the data segment might be interpreted, you should include an explanation of why your interpretation is the preferred one.
 - e) A transition linking this segment of the argument to the point of the next paragraph.
4. Conclusion. This should briefly restate your argument and show how it addresses a larger issue, question or problem, hopefully one you raised in your introduction.

This model is formulaic and you are not required to use it. However, you may find it useful to try to structure your paper in this way.