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### The Influence of Structure In Debate

The manner in which literature is written is affected heavily by the rhetorical elements in the article. These elements are all interdependent of one another, being decided upon through the rhetorical situation the author finds himself in. This is very much the case with literature surrounding debate; especially because of the broad range of topics attributed to this subject. At first glance, one may not think of this as the case because most literature regarding debate are simply argumentative essays with the added element of addressing possible detractors. However, persuasive essays vary in their multitude of rhetorical elements based on the stance the author takes with the topic. Also, a whole set of rhetorical situations are opened up once the author begins makes the subject of literature the debate itself. While literature that engages directly in debate generally have similar rhetorical situations, albeit possibly different topics, there are vast differences in rhetorical situation when the author begins analyzing debate itself. These pieces of literature may still have a persuasive element to them, but they lack the aspect of dialogue and opposition. Rather, they can be read much more as research papers instead of persuasive essays.

The research style is incredibly present within journal articles that discuss the implications of debate itself. An example of this can be found in Jack Tessier's "CLASSROOM DEBATE FORMAT". The journal article analyzes the effects of debate being instilled in the classroom on students in terms of their enthusiasm and depth of knowledge through a study. In

summary, Tessier holds the stance that students had an increase of enthusiasm when engaged in debate, but were somewhat lacking in their depth of the knowledge at hand (Tessier 151). This general idea was supported by various graphs and charts that held statistics showing the students' increased reliance on resource finding, and not contextualizing their sources in the socioeconomic factors surrounding them (Tessier 148). and It can be argued that the author's purpose for writing this article is incredibly similar to the purpose behind assigning this source based essay. Both this assignment and the article attempt to address the ability of students to analyze and contextualize the sources they've been given. However, the audience of the article is focused in towards educators and people who have authority over changing teaching practices. This can be seen from the first sentence, when Tessier discusses modern teaching practices (Tessier 144). Looking deeper into the author, Jack Tessier is a professor who has areas of expertise in ecology and the environment. Such scientific areas of expertise may have had a factor in his approach to writing this paper. Employing a genre of an analytical research study proves effective in conveying this message to teachers, principals, and others in the education field. In this manner, the journal remains as objective as possible, allowing the sources to guide Tessier to his thesis. Also, he was able to take advantage of this genre by using data and statistics that supported his findings. It should be noted that Tessier used the medium of a journal so that it would be easy for the audience to contextualize the raw statistics and data given. In accordance with this style the author uses an academic tone in order to maintain the integrity and credibility of his research. "Students were able to integrate the facts from the debates and apply them to the topic of sustainability. However, students had a simplistic view of sustainability in this case (figure 3), focusing on resource supply and use without as regularly considering economic, social, and ecological requirements of sustainability" (Tessier 151). The relatively formal

verbiage that Tessier maintains through this statement as well as through the journal allows for a sense of authority to be held through his words. Also, Tessier makes regular citations to the graphs constructed based on the study as he did above, allowing his work to be well supported on a scientific level. This is incredibly different from how the news approaches debate.

Contrary to cliché examples, the main function of the genre of news articles is to act as an objective source of information that remains unbiased and focuses on facts first. This is what Marc Lacey attempted in his online New York Times article “Lawmakers Debate Effect of Weapons on Campus”. It has been argued that almost any literature that was written within a rhetorical situation has an element of persuasion to it. This persuasion was minimized as much as possible through the whole article, with Lacey’s purpose as to convey the general public’s opinion of having professors and faculty armed on college campuses. This is evident in the very first sentence of the article. “Along with the meaning of life and the origin of the universe, college students across the country have another existential question to ponder: the wisdom of allowing guns in class”(Lacey). The article then goes on to give as many quotes as possible from the people affected by this legislation, both for and against. This is because the audience that Lacey is attempting to reach is adults aged 18-49, as these age groups are reported to use the internet the most. As such, a priority is to distance the author’s personal opinion from the news, so as to not narrow the scope of the audience. Lacey decided that in order to achieve this task, his only stance would be that there is fierce debate on this issue between the students and faculty, and the law enforcement and gun lobbyists. “Administrators and campus police chiefs at Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona have all expressed opposition to allowing guns. Faculty members are circulating petitions against guns as well. Most, but not all, students also appear opposed”(Lacey). This being virtually the only sentiment

expressed by Marc Lacey himself, the rest of the article is simply as many quotes as he could find in regards to what the people of Arizona think on this issue. In some capacity, the article repeats the same format over and over, naming an individual and their background, and giving their position on the issue along with a direct quote.

“Anthony Daykin, the police chief at the University of Arizona in Tucson, where the shootings occurred, said his officers would be at a loss if they arrived at a shooting scene in a lecture hall holding hundreds of students and found scores of people pointing, and possibly shooting, weapons at one another.”(Lacey)

The little language that was Lacey’s own remained formal, but still easy for the general public to read. This detached tone may not be very compelling, but the article does this in order to give an equal amount of credence to each opinion, angering as few people as possible in such a highly charged political landscape. This does not mean however, that news organizations restrict their writers from ever giving their own opinions.

In fact, NYT has a whole opinion section dedicated to allowing their columnists to share their opinions. These works are written in a much different style than previously mentioned, as shown by David Leonhardt’s “So Who Won the Third Debate?” The genre; an op-ed immediately breaks out the article with the opinions.

“Climate change threatens humanity’s future.

Median household wealth is still lower than in the late 1990s.

Gun violence kills almost 40,000 Americans a year.

The president of the United States is a white nationalist.

And all three Democratic debate rounds have devoted long opening segments to an intricate discussion of whether federal health insurance should be expanded”. (Lacey)

“Climate change threatens humanity’s future” and “The president of the United States is a white nationalist” can be considered opinions in the eyes of many people. In the context of a news article, this opening is clearly biased and also unprofessional. However, within the context of an op-ed these opening remarks are engaging while also creating some context for the audience to work with when reading the article. This audience is also most-likely not further narrowed by these opinions either, because the title of the literary work is already tailored towards the interests of left-leaning individuals. The purpose behind writing this op-ed is to analyze the third debate and also ponder upon how to improve it. Leonhardt’s stance is clearly shown at the beginning of the piece when he stated how all of the debates featured healthcare as a main point of contention as opposed to all of the other problems in the country. In order to convince the audience of this idea, Leonhardt attempts to appeal to the audience instead of presenting a well-crafted argument with a plethora of statistics and data. “Don’t get me wrong: Health insurance is deeply important. I’m personally fascinated by it. But the balance here is off” (Leonhardt). In this genre, this is crucial because it is explicitly understood by the reader that this is an opinion by the columnist. As such, its important to disarm the reader and allow them to connect to the author. Leonhardt immediately talks of the importance of healthcare in order to appease the readers who personally gave it much priority. It should also be noted that Leonhardt’s language is incredibly informal as compared to the research study or even the previous news article. This is to create a friendly tone that is comfortable and easy for the audience to read. When explicitly giving an opinion, this is perceived as humble and open whereas an academic tone such as found in Tessier’s study would’ve turned away many readers

in sounding too “highbrowed”. In order to increase this effect, Leonhardt also made it a point to make sure the op-ed wasn’t too long of an article. David Leonhardt only gives his opinion in approximately 21 lines. This is in part due to the fact that the reader is consuming these op-eds through online media, which prioritize ease of access and low attention spans.

The more accessible the work, generally the more informal and short the piece of writing. This is exemplified when examining websites on the larger internet that aren’t bound by journalistic practice. Susan Verner shows this in her instructional article “Essential Tips for Conducting a Class Debate”. Verner’s purpose of writing this article is to inform teachers on how they can improve their structure in a class debate. “By introducing structured, formal debate to your ESL classroom, your students will benefit with listening, speaking and critical thinking skills” (Verner). The overall website “Busy Teacher” aims to attract an audience of teachers through a relatively relaxed and informal style. This is different from Tessier’s research study in that the article doesn’t aim to delve deep into the psychology behind debate structure, but rather attempts to find fast and easy methods to improve the classroom setting. This is why Verner chose to present this information in a casual tone, as evident through her first sentence, “Your students have better things to debate than whether Justin Bieber is better than Taylor Lautner” (Verner). Specifically mentioning celebrities such as Bieber and Lautner point to the nonchalant language, similar to if friends were discussing this topic. This can be considered similar to what Leonhardt attempted to do in his op-ed. However, Verner

### How to Conduct a Class Debate

#### 1 Introduce the topic

All debates start with a *topic*, or *resolution*. Often, this resolution is a proposed course of action that one team will argue for and another will argue against. Choose a topic to which your students can relate and perhaps one with practical application. You can make the topic less serious (*the cafeteria should include more international dishes on the daily menu*) or more serious (*the U.S. government should reform its visa application process*). In any case, be sure that your students understand the issue and any specialized vocabulary that goes with it.

#### 2 Assign the Affirmative and the Negative

**There are two sides to any debate.** Naturally, one will argue for and another against the resolution. With ESL students, it is best to **group your students into teams to research and argue the issue** rather than expecting one

differs from Leonhardt in that she is attempting to instruct rather than convince, and through this purpose she decided it most effective to make a list. This method allows the reader to move through the clear progressions of improving their classroom debates and also emphasizes structure. This is important, as it coincides with Verner's stance on this topic. Summarily, Verner believes a topic should be introduced, opposing sides should be set, time should be given for research, and a winner should be named, all in a timely fashion. Employing a list allows Verner to put emphasis on these five main points and allows the reader to retain the most important information more easily.

It can be said that when looking at any writing, there is a specific rhetorical situation attached to that writing. This situation affects all of the elements simultaneously. When discussing the structure of debate, the broad range of topics allow for many different rhetorical situations. A whole set of rhetorical situations are opened up once the author begins makes the subject of literature the debate itself, because debate is so widely used in so many situations. While literature that engages directly in debate generally have similar rhetorical situations, albeit possibly different topics, there are vast differences in rhetorical situation when the author begins analyzing debate itself. These pieces of literature may still have a persuasive element to them, but they may lack the aspect of dialogue and opposition. Also, it is very relevant to mention that the media and genre employed has a huge effect on what and how the author is trying to convey. Keeping all of these factors in mind allow for the most effective possible writing, regardless of the rhetorical situation.

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