

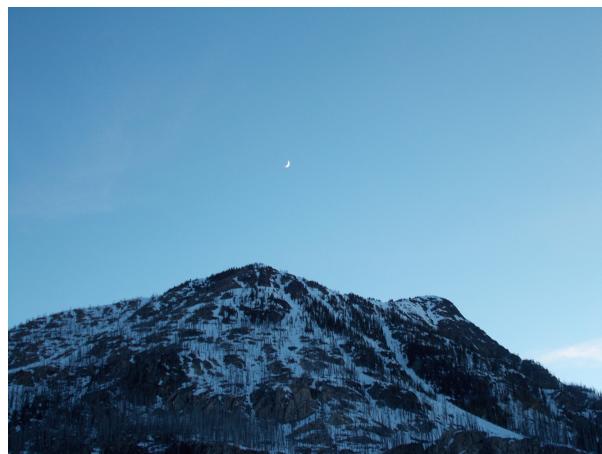
Dear Prospective NOLS Students,

All I can advise is to just do it: take the leap, take the risk, make the investment. You will be so grateful you did; I know I was.

Signing up for my National Outdoor Leadership School course was exhilarating, but it felt nerve-wracking. I didn't know which course was best for me as I decided among mountaineering courses in Washington and sea kayaking courses in the Alaskan panhandle. As someone who had little outdoor experience, I was exploring new territory. Eventually, I enrolled in a Pacific Northwest Backpacking course in the North Cascades of Washington. Giddy with excitement, I began counting the days until I would depart for my course in May.



Enthusiastically counting down the days slowly became fearfully counting down the days. Like I said, I had little outdoor experience. The main impetus for doing the expedition was because I wanted to work for the National Park Service; therefore, I wanted to experience our national parks in a backcountry setting. The disconnect between my prior experiences and future goals was my doing, but all this is to say I was nervous for my expedition. That is completely okay and natural. After all, *I was taking a wilderness education course to learn.*



In hindsight, spinning in trepidation didn't serve me well. It may be hard to believe, but even as someone with no experience backpacking, I did just fine under the exceptional guidance of my course instructors. The first few days of my course were spent at the NOLS branch outside of Seattle. My course mates and I learned fundamental skills such as packing our expedition-sized backpacks and how to use backcountry stoves. After internalizing these lessons, we departed for the field.

I won't say the first few days were easy; they probably were the hardest. Memories of trudging up mountains through waist-deep snow with a sixty-pound backpack illustrate that first week. It was hard. Eventually, to my surprise, it became much easier; I became fitter, grittier, and happier as I adopted my new normal. It was so easy to lose sight of how I'd never done anything like this before, and I became so hard on myself in the beginning. Over time, though, I learned to be kind with myself. Some days I would not be as contributing to the team, or I would accidentally overcook our food at dinner. It happens, and your team is there to support you during those times and vice versa.

All the miles of hiking, climbing, or sailing will be worth it. You'll have that "aha" moment where everything clicks – where the tides of your course turn. Whether it happens the day of a peak ascent or a day where you hike until you watch the sun slip below the horizon, trust me when I say it will come. You'll be surprised with what's possible within yourself, so allow the NOLS experience to happen. Smile with delight on the trail, have a cry when you wish you could just go home, and get off route and work



with your team to find your way back to your destination. Let these informative experiences happen; you won't regret it, and you'll be a better person because of it.

Happy trails,

Student Name



Student Name

Ms. Cecil-Lemkin

ENC 3416

25 September 2018

### Rhetorical Rationale – Project 1

For my letter, I drafted an open letter addressed to prospective National Outdoor Leadership School students. NOLS is a leading wilderness education school offering extended wilderness expeditions. For perspective, courses are backcountry expeditions that can range from two weeks of backpacking in New Mexico to 135 days exploring Patagonia. While exhilarating, the uncertainty and intensity of the courses can create doubt in students leading up to their expedition.

I selected this audience to share my story of the days leading up to my course and how it addressed my expectations. Painfully nervous before my course, I felt dazed in self-doubt about my ability to be successful in the expedition. By writing this letter to prospective students, I hope to normalize the trepidation prospective students may experience. Addressing these specific students as the audience has two main purposes: it invites students undergoing this experience to feel like they are not alone, but it also does not limit others from engaging with the text. Young adults on the fence with NOLS can read this letter and recognize how so many other prospective students experience these concerns. Self-doubt, anxiety, and discouragement are okay to feel. I, a NOLS alumnus, along with countless others have had life-changing expeditions. Collectively reaching out to these students puts into perspective how the readers are not the first students to enroll in a course, and they are also not the last.

Like I mentioned, the audience's purpose is two-fold: it also allows me to write to others and avoid an exclusive atmosphere. This is where the genre of the letter comes to play. As an open letter, all are welcome to read the work both online and in print. Even those who have no intention of enrolling a NOLS course can still understand the content and recognize the issue prospects face. By addressing this subgroup, the students within the larger audience included in the open letter genre, I can spread my message across a broader group of people. While this may seem unnecessary, I believe it can assist my additional rhetorical purpose: conveying why outdoor education programs like NOLS are important. Since so many people are unfamiliar with wilderness education, the abstract and convoluted benefits can seem nonexistent. Too many people do not see how backpacking for a month or mountaineering for an entire semester can bring about personal development, fortify leadership competency, and build tenacity within students; however, the trips do, and I am passionate about sharing how and why they can! While I aim to calm anxious NOLS students, I also hope my story can explain how it is worthwhile to them. At the same time, non-students can read about my experience and translate it into the why this form of education creates positive impact within its participants. Doing so has the potential to not only inspire others to enroll in NOLS courses, but it also raises the esteem they have. When more people hear about the change it instills in participants, NOLS can gather more support for the work it aspires to provide. Essentially, opening the letter to all but tailoring it toward prospective NOLS participants affords more people an understanding of the school and the feelings participants can have before the course.

My rhetorical strategies and visual design aim to create an inviting, supportive space that guides students toward building confidence and excitement before their National Outdoor Leadership School course. I, as the rhetor, am a NOLS alumnus, so sharing my lived experiences fortifies my credibility, especially as one who had little outdoor experience before my course.

The exigence is the uncertainty students face before their NOLS course and void in authentic storytelling of individuals' NOLS experiences. Trying to fill this gap and support prospective students effectively conveys my purpose in hoping to be of service to others. I feel these combined demonstrate sincerity and passion for outdoor education. Few constraints limit my writing except for limiting myself to an appropriate length and focusing more on pathos and personal experience rather than incorporating research in outdoor education.

As I designed my letter, I strived to maintain simplicity. After all, wilderness education demands a simple lifestyle as one travels in the backcountry. I selected Garamond as the font for its basic, elegant, and readable script. I chose to break up my paragraphs into shorter portions of text so readers quickly moved through the narrative, and I signed only my first name to end on an informal and cordial note. Along the sides of the text I incorporated photographs from my NOLS course. While I feel the text can stand on its own, I believe displaying my own images augments the story and can hopefully motivate students toward fulfilling their goals. Additionally, those who are not prospective students can also capture the essence of this form of education and the magnitude of change it can bring. Combined, the friendly, mentor-like narration and pristine landscape photography convey why students should set aside their fears and chase their aspirations, and I hope it does so with heart and authenticity.