

Handout: Genre Analysis

Taken from *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres* by Devitt, Reiff, and Bawarshi (2004), pp. 93–94.

1 Collect Samples of the Genre

If you are studying a genre that is fairly public, such as the wedding announcement, you can look at samples from various newspapers. You can also locate samples of a genre in textbooks and manuals about the genre. If you are studying a less public genre, such as a Patient Medical History Form, you might have to visit different doctors' offices to collect samples. Try to gather samples from more than one place so that you get a more accurate picture of the complexity of the genre. The more samples of the genre you collect, the more you will be able to notice patterns within the genre.

2 Identify the Scene and Describe the Situation in which the Genre is Used

Try to identify the larger scene in which the genre is used. Seek answers to questions about the genre's situation such as the ones below:

Setting Where does the genre appear? How and when is it transmitted and used? With what other genres does this genre interact?

Subject What topics, issues, ideas, questions, etc. does the genre address? When people use this genre, what is it that they are they interacting about?

Participants Who uses the genre?

Writers: Who writes the texts in this genre? Are multiple writers possible? What roles do they perform? What characteristics must writers of this genre possess? Under what circumstances do writers write the genre (e.g., in teams, on a computer, in a rush)?

Readers: Who reads the texts in this genre? Is there more than one type of reader for this genre? What roles do they perform? What characteristics must readers of this genre possess? Under what circumstances do readers read the genre (e.g., at their leisure, on the run, in waiting rooms)?

Purposes Why do writers write this genre and why do readers read it? What purposes does the genre fulfill for the people who use it?

3 Identify and Describe Patterns in the Genre's Features

What recurrent features do the samples share? For example:

- What **content** is typically included? What excluded? How is the content treated? What sorts of examples are used? What counts as evidence (personal testimony, facts, etc.)?
- What **rhetorical appeals** are used? What appeals to logos, pathos, and ethos appear?
- How are texts in the genres **structured**? What are their parts, and how are they organized?
- In what **format** are texts of this genre presented? What layout or appearance is common? How long is a typical text in this genre?
- What types of **sentences** do texts in the genre typically use? How long are they? Are they simple or complex, passive or active? Are the sentences varied? Do they share a certain style?
- What **diction** (types of words) is most common? Is a type of jargon used? Is slang used? How would you describe the writer's voice?

4 Analyze What These Patterns Reveal about the Situation and Scene

What do these rhetorical patterns reveal about the genre, its situation, and the scene in which it is used? Why are these patterns significant? What can you learn about the actions being performed through the genre by observing its language patterns? What arguments can you make about these patterns? As you consider these questions, focus on the following:

- What do participants have to know or believe to understand or appreciate the genre?
- Who is invited into the genre, and who is excluded?
- What roles for writers and readers does it encourage or discourage?
- What values, beliefs, goals, and assumptions are revealed through the genre's patterns?
- How is the subject of the genre treated? What content is considered most important? What content (topics or details) is ignored?
- What actions does the genre help make possible? What actions does the genre make difficult?
- What attitude toward readers is implied in the genre? What attitude toward the world is implied in it?