

Rhetorical Analysis Memorandum

From: Cody Smith

To: Class of ENGL 361

Dear Class,

We were asked to analyze the rhetoric for a piece of technical writing in our field. As a Computer Engineering student, I often interact with technical documentation such as API (Application Program Interface) documentation, which is necessary for any successful software platform. For my analysis, I have chosen the API documentation for Google's Android mobile phone operating system which can be found here:

<http://developer.android.com/guide/components/fundamentals.html>. This specific document is a sort of landing page for explaining the fundamentals of the platform and I think provides an interesting sample to examine for analysis.

First, we must understand the situation that this document was written for. In this case, it is important to understand a little about Google's Android mobile phone operating system and framework. Android the most popular mobile phone operating system. While it was not the first smartphone operating system and its success may be attributed to many things, one of the most important is the ability of third-party developers to create new software for the platform. So-called 'apps' make or break a mobile platform, and extend the capabilities and lifespan of the device's usability. Without these third-party developers making apps for the phones the platform would surely lose to its competitors. The document I am analyzing is Google introducing the technical details at a high level of their platform to an application developer.

App developers are a very diverse group and come from all walks of life and levels of education. Software developers ranging from seasoned professionals with a lot of experience to teenagers who are just trying to make small projects develop Android apps. Due to this, it is important for the document to both be technically informing while remaining friendly. If it is to be successful it needs to both provide the seasoned professional with the details that they need to allow them to be productive quickly, while simultaneously being friendly to first-time app developers. There is still an expectation of prior knowledge however, and most developers are expected to have a solid understanding of the technical details of how software and operating systems work. Therefore this document operates under this assumption.

Primarily the document aims to provide a technical overview of the platform. The writer of the document is an expert from Google on Android, and is tasked with explaining the fundamentals of Android apps and app development to these potential developers. In all likelihood, the document was actually contributed to by many experts to ensure that it both makes sense and gives correct information. Its motive is two-fold. First it must provide useful information to potential developers to allow them to be productive creating apps. Second it must

make the reader feel like they have an understanding of the platform so that they feel more comfortable with it.

This document is designed to be used a couple of different ways. The first is as a reference. Similar to other reference documents there is a clear distinction of headings and clear visual breaks make it easy to jump around the document and find specific sections pertaining to a topic. Also, where relevant the document links to other pages describing in more details things glossed over in this document, or links to documents which are intended solely for reference.

The second use case is for the document to read to learn about the topic. To facilitate this, the writing reads like a chapter in a textbook. Starting with the end result of a final packaged app, the document breaks down Android apps, explaining the components of the app and how the developer interacts with resources and interfaces with the frameworks. It tells the story of the fundamental workings of the platform and explains how the different reference sections are connected to each other.

This technical information being easy to reference and read is essential to the success of the platform as a whole. If developers don't make apps, the value of Google's platform is diminished. To get the best developers to make software for their platform, they want to make the process of learning about their platform as simple and as easy as possible. This really drives everything about this document and influences how the documentation is presented. Being a webpage, there is a lot of design freedom possible with the document. The author(s) did have to keep in mind however that Google as a company has a certain brand image, and is known for having colorful and simple designs. The clean design of the document fits with the Google design style, and is also conducive to getting their information across. This page has a lot of information to get across, and cluttering it with unnecessary stylistic details could very easily clutter the document and take attention away from the content. Code and graphs are set apart and add to the value of the text that surrounds them. In all, the document layout is very simple to facilitate easy reading and reference.

The code examples spread through the document provide a couple of benefits. The first is that they provide a useful reference and example for the reader. The examples are designed by the authors to be both easy to read, as well mirror common tasks a developer might face to make their job easier. The next is that the code examples confirm or inform the expectations of the developers on how they will be interacting with the platform. Finally, if the fact that the document is written by Google doesn't provide enough validity to the author, the code examples provide a unique way to show, not tell, the reader that the author knows what they are talking about.

In conclusion, Google has a need to teach and provide a reference to developers for their Android mobile operating system. Through careful use of rhetoric and with an understanding of the needs of their audience to be simultaneously walked through and provided with detailed information about the fundamentals of Android apps, this document was

carefully crafted. Everything from its word choice to its design and use of links and visuals show that the author(s) consideration and understanding, and perhaps have met their goals.

(signed)

Cody Smith