

Tutorial letter 201/1/2015

GENRES IN LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE: THEORY, STYLE AND POETICS

ENG2602

Semester 1

Department of English Studies

CONTENTS

1. Pre-examination information.
2. Response to the assignment question:
Assignment 1: Persuasive Prose

BAR CODE

Dear students

PRE-EXAMINATION INFORMATION

The exam will be a two hour paper. You will be expected to write two essays. The paper will be divided into two sections: a section on language and a section on literature. You will be expected to answer one question per section.

The section on language will have a question on Persuasive Writing and a question on Conversation Analysis. You will be expected to answer one of these questions.

The section on literature will have a question on Prose Fiction, a question on Poetry, and a question on Drama. You will be expected to answer one of these questions.

Even though you will have some choice in the exam, we suggest that you do at least some preparation on all the sections, and perhaps prepare at least two units per section in detail. If you only prepare two units (one for each section), for example, and then find the question on the unit you prepared to be difficult, it would be helpful if you could switch to answering on a different unit.

The kinds of questions you will be asked will be the following:

Persuasive writing: you will be given a short passage or short passages from an unseen persuasive text (such as a newspaper article, an advertisement, a political speech, etc.). You will have to write an essay in which you analyse the passage: this means that you will have to outline briefly **what** the passage is about, **why** it has been written, and **who** the target audience is, and then to explain in detail **how** it has been written. Your essay should focus on **how** the author **uses language** to convey his/her message or to persuade his/her target audience.

Conversation: you will be asked to write an essay on an aspect or a range of aspects of conversation analysis, such as (but not limited to) turn-taking, pauses, overlaps, fillers, cooperative principles, implicature, politeness, etc. Refer to the 'Conversational analysis additional resource' document under the 'Additional Resources' tab on myUnisa for a survey of the key facets of this section.

Prose fiction: you will be given a short passage or short passages from an unseen prose fiction text. You will have to write an essay in which you analyse the passage, discussing in detail how it uses language, for example, to portray character, shape tone and setting, for thematic and symbolic effects, etc.

Poetry: you will be given a poem from the list of poems provided in the reader. You will have to write an essay in which you analyse the poem, discussing in detail how it uses language to present and explore its main themes and concerns.

Drama: you will be given a short passage or short passages from an unseen play or other dramatic work (such as a film script). You will be expected to write an essay in which you analyse how the passage uses language, for example, to form imagery or reveal the qualities of the characters in relation to the passage's main themes and concerns.

Use the following additional guidelines to help you prepare for the examination:

- Read your study guide and the prescribed book. Make notes of the important features of each genre of writing.
- Read the extracts provided in your Reader. Write notes on each of the extracts, outlining the way they use the strategies that are appropriate to each genre.
- Pay attention to general features of language use, such as point of view, register, diction, tone, irony and all figures of speech as you analyse the extracts in the Reader in preparation for the examination.
- Write sample essays for practice, in which you examine the way each extract in the reader uses the resources of its genre.

Good luck with your preparations!

RESPONSE TO THE ASSIGNMENT QUESTION

Assignment 1 Semester 1: Persuasive Prose

If you had chosen Section B on Persuasive Prose, you would have been required to answer the question on advertising.

Question

Carefully read the passage ‘What’s all the buzz about?’ on page 27 of the prescribed textbook, Critical Reading and Writing by Andrew Goatly. Then write an essay of no more than two pages (approximately 1000 words) in which you critically analyse the text, paying particular attention to the language strategies/techniques used, the meaning and the layout of the text. Your interpretation and discussion should draw on text analysis techniques that you have learnt in this course. Provide relevant evidence to support your answer.

Your answer should have included all the elements of the question, giving due consideration to both the visual and written features of the text, and paying specific attention to analysing **HOW** these features create meaning – or persuade or appeal to the reader. In addition, you were required to provide references to the text to support your position.

Your response had to be structured in the form of an essay, which included an introduction, body and conclusion. While the discussion below serves as a guideline to answering the question, it is not exhaustive, and does not include all of the linguistic and visual elements of the text.

Critical engagement with texts is a skill developed and honed at tertiary level. It requires you to understand, interpret and evaluate what you read. Furthermore, you are required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the module. Hence students who demonstrated an understanding of the skills required and related their discussion to what they learnt in the module were given credit for their responses.

Discussion

This text could have been found in a magazine, as its tone is conversational, and deals with the subject matter in an informal manner; this is clearly demonstrated in the use of colloquial language in terms such as 'fancy-schmancy' and 'go-go'. Through the use of rhetorical questions and a friendly, conversational tone, the author tries to persuade the article's readers to believe and accept her advice, and make an informed decision about drinking coffee. The dialogue and conversational format is demonstrated in the replies to questions like 'Thanks, but no thanks' and the question and answers or True and False segment. The layout and techniques used would be unthreatening to a non-assured reader, since the text does not follow a narrative structure. The article has degrees of visual informativeness allowing readers to read selectively and in any order they choose. By presenting a sequence of facts, arguments and opinions the discussion uses the **stacked** generic structure. However, the non-assured reader can choose to read different categories and need not follow from the beginning to the end. For example, the reader could start with the true or false statements first and move to the other written text.

The word 'buzz' is a pun, or play on words. 'Buzz' could suggest a thrill or the increased energy associated with coffee; it can also mean a popular or important topic of conversation. By asking 'What's all the buzz about?', the author brings together the two senses of the word, questioning why such a fuss or big to-do (buzz in the second sense) is made about coffee, which commonly creates a 'buzz' (in the first sense). The different nature of the two senses perhaps signals the author's intention to expose the fact that too much merit is given to the supposed positive effects of drinking coffee: the playful reference to the caffeine-induced buzz that coffee *does* create, draws our attention to the question about whether we *should* regard coffee as something of particular importance or value.

The layout of the text is very significant, since it uses a magazine style format. In this regard, leading with *the Dish* implies that what follows is spilling the goods on something, which creates a conspiratorial atmosphere. It could also imply that the author or article is revealing insider information to the reader, or letting the reader in on a secret. Since the text serves to debunk popular myths about coffee and raise questions about the effects associated with the beverage, the word *buzz* written in a lighter font could serve to highlight the author's need to emphasize its lack of importance or call into question the importance attached to drinking copious cups of coffee. Various other types of fonts are used to serve other purposes. 'What's' and 'about' in the heading are in darker print. This has the effect of making these words more striking and conspicuous; since these are words related to finding things out, to establishing identities or relationships, their prominence indicates the questioning attitude of the author. They emphasize her need to challenge popular assumptions about coffee. Similarly, in the true and false section of the text the common ideas about coffee are in a lighter font, while the statements about their truth or falseness are in a darker font, demonstrating the author's need to foreground the arguments against popular assumptions.

An important rhetorical technique employed by the author is the use of technical scientific terms like '1,3,7-trimethylxanthine' in opposition to colloquial words like 'fancy-shmancy', (another example is the placement of 'metabolism' close to 'jump start'). The humorous disjuncture caused by positioning terms with such contrasting tones in close proximity could be seen as a technique used to gently tease readers' need to drink coffee; additionally, the scientific-sounding jargon may be included to give substance to claims made by the text.

The word 'junkie' possibly suggests some negative connotations. It foregrounds coffee as an addictive substance, and the reader may not want to be associated with being a slave to the drink. However, in this context it is perhaps part of the author's insistently inclusive tone, and the exaggeratedly colloquial and familiar language she uses; other elements of the article, for example the affectionate nickname that she gives coffee – 'the black brew' – mark the author as a possible coffee drinker herself. Markers of universality include 'In everything' and 'some cardiologists'. These words, by making generalized claims, strengthen and contribute greatly to the author's argument. Modalities like 'would', 'might', 'likely', 'could' and 'can' are markers of probability, and while they help the text to cohere, they could also influence the reader – depending on the type of reader. The writer uses markers of subjectivity when, for example, she says that a recent study '*suggests*', rather than insisting on the validity of the study's claims. Together with the scientific jargon mentioned previously, these allow her to position the reader ideologically to accept that the arguments made are based on research and scientific validations.

A proper conclusion to your essay is necessary to tie up the threads of your argument and point to the main idea of the text: it is likely that you will have suggested that its purpose is to inform, amuse, and possibly persuade. The conclusion should also summarize your main ideas.

With good wishes for your studies
Bernice Badal