Building a Rhetorical Analysis Toolkit

**Definitions:**

1. Rhetoric: the way we use language and images to persuade
2. Rhetorical Situation: any situation in which we feel the call to write
3. Context: often an event or situation that calls for a response. What is happening “around the text?” What is happening in the world that requires response or action?
   1. Context is made of exigence, audience, constraints
4. Exigence/Motivation to Write: circumstance or condition that requires response
5. Audience: intended or unintended recipients. Who can help? Who can learn from the text’s rhetorical message? Who is affected by the situation?
6. Genre: the type, kind, or category of a text
   1. What is the genre of the text?
   2. Why would the author choose this genre in order to respond to the rhetorical situation?
   3. What are the rules of the genre the author has chosen?
   4. How does the author follow these rules or exceed the constraints of these rules?
7. Constraints: limit the way that we communicate
8. Appeals: means of persuasion
   1. Ethos: the credibility of the author. Ethos constructs the author’s persona
   2. Pathos: appeals to the reader’s emotions
   3. Logos: an argument of reason that appeals to the reader’s intellect, often considered the “facts of the matter.”
9. Summary: describes WHAT the text is about and may begin to describe the ways the text is structured
10. Analysis: breaks the text apart in order to see connections between HOW the text is working and WHY it’s working that way
11. Evaluation: comes to a conclusion about the effectiveness of the text. Is it working? Or not?

**First Steps:**

1. Read the text carefully. Then, create an outline of the text, paying attention to not only WHAT the text says, but also paying attention to how the text is organized and structured.
2. Summarize: Read the text again, and review your outline.
   1. Who is the author?
   2. What is the title of the text?
   3. What is the central idea/argument?
   4. Which main ideas support the argument/central idea?
3. Now that you understand WHAT the text is about, consider HOW it’s working.
   1. To which rhetorical situation is the author responding?
   2. How does the author define the rhetorical situation?
   3. How does the author decide to respond?
   4. Does the text and author respond to the problem it claims to address?
   5. Does the text address an audience who has the power to act on the problem/situation?
   6. What are the limitations?
   7. What is the stance of the author?
   8. Does the author provide any definitions or key terms?
   9. How does the author structure the text?
   10. Which genre does the author choose? Why? How does the author use the rules of the genre in order to respond to the call to write?
   11. How does the author use appeals (ethos, pathos, logos)? Are the appeals appropriate for the audience?
   12. What things do you need to understand in order to fully understand the text and central idea?