Dear Portfolio Reader,

Prior to taking this course, my only experience with writing was an introductory composition class in my senior year of high school at a community college. As a junior now, it is needless to say, it has been a long time since I have had to compose a paper that would be critiqued based on grammar, organization, and other writing skills instead of just based on the content within the paper. At first, I really struggled in this course because it had been such a long time since I had written formal compositions and the concepts in the class such as rhetorical writing and using the Toulmin and Rogerian models to structure an argument were completely foreign to me. After a semester of English 301, however, my writing abilities have been enhanced and I now feel more confident in my writing abilities as I prepare to enter graduate school. The visual rhetorical analysis, Rogerian Argument, and argumentative research papers have been selected for this portfolio because I feel these best demonstrate my acquisition of writing skills throughout the course, which represents my tremendous growth as a writer. What I have learned in this course will carry on throughout my college career and into my future profession.

Previous to this course, I have never had to evaluate anything using rhetoric. When I would look at an image, I would evaluate it for its content, but now I cannot help but also evaluate images for their appeal to pathos, ethos, or logos and determine how effective their appeal is. In the visual rhetorical analysis paper, I chose to evaluate an advertisement poster from the Hawaii Meth Project. When first writing the paper, more of the content focused on the actual details of the image rather than an analysis of these details. After learning more about the different appeals to evoke the attention of a viewer, I was able to revise my papers to include more analysis and determine whether the details in the image worked to make the poster effective in broadcasting it’s message. For example, in the first draft, most of the
body of the paper included a summary of details without following up these details with an analysis. However, after understanding the different appeals, I was able to provide an analysis of why the details were included and how it would appeal to the viewer such as “Black, white, and red are the main colors stressed in the image. This color scheme most likely represents the nightmarish effects and emotions surrounding drug abuse.” (“Attention to Detail” 1). After careful revision, the visual rhetorical analysis paper was selected for this portfolio because my understanding of not only the criteria for which to analyze an image, but also how I analyze an image are demonstrated through my progression in each of the drafts leading up to the final draft. Had I had more time, I would have extended my analysis to include an evaluation of how using different appeals like logos instead of pathos may have enhanced the effectiveness of the advertisement.

Along with visual rhetorical analysis, I had never had any experience with writing models like the Rogerian model before taking this class. When first writing the paper using a Rogerian model, I tried to make the argument sound like a compromise between the two sides, but had put so much emphasis on not taking sides that the entire paper sounded neutral. After further exposure and explanation of the Rogerian argument in class, I revised my paper to make my thesis emphasize my stance on the subject as well as make it obvious throughout the paper that although I was considering both sides, my arguments would prove stronger. For example, when transitioning from the opponent’s views to my views on the subject of homeschooling, I was able to emphasize my position by specific word choice such as “Though there are some benefits from homeschooling, there are many more disadvantages to opting for this alternative.” (“Education from Home” 3).

After much revision, the Rogerian argument paper was chosen for this portfolio because I was able to successfully establish the importance of my topic while also including opposing views and establishing a common ground between the two, which demonstrate the progression of my
understanding of the Rogerian model and can be seen throughout the drafts leading up to the final draft. While I feel that I was very effective in creating an argument between the two views on the subject of homeschooling using the Rogerian model, if I had more time I would have extended my analysis of the drawbacks and limitations of both sides of the arguments rather than focus on their strengths.

With all of the new concepts and writing tools learned throughout the semester, the best indicator of my increase in knowledge on rhetorical writing can be seen in my argumentative research paper. Using the Toulmin model, I was able to create an argument about the harmful effects of allowing children to watch television with the use of enough qualifiers, warrants, and backing so that my argument sounded formal, well-researched, and was applicable to a varying audience. In comparison to my first draft, I was able to include more evidence to explain my claims and provide more connections between my thesis and my claims. For example, when deciding on an age group of children that I felt would be most impacted by watching television, I had not included my evidence in my introduction. After revision, I incorporated the evidence to make my qualifier more understandable as can be seen here: “Studies have found that children between the ages of 2 to 8 years old are “extremely vulnerable” to the content that they are exposed to on television because they are not able to separate fiction from reality (Simmons 149). Therefore children, particularly between the ages of 4 to 9 years old…” (“Harmful Effects” 1). The strongest part of my paper is my use of evidence to provide reasoning and support for my decision to include the qualifiers and claims that I did. If I had more time, I would spend more time researching the opposing side so that I would be able to strengthen the counter-arguments in my paper.

Overall, my knowledge in writing has greatly increased because of this course in rhetorical composition. Previous to this course, I had very basic writing skills, but now I have a better understanding of how to structure arguments using specific models such as the Toulmin and Rogerian
argument, the different types of arguments, and how to use appeals such as pathos, ethos, and logos to make these arguments effective. The visual rhetorical analysis, Rogerian Argument, and argumentative research papers have been selected for this portfolio because I feel that these three papers are best representative of the skills that I have acquired in this course. As I continue to further these skills in preparation for graduate school, I will continue to strengthen my use of specific appeals to be the most effective towards my audience and continue to evaluate and analyze the rhetoric of future arguments and topics that I will be presented with.

Sincerely,
Harmful Effects of Television Watching

Watching television programs is becoming an increasingly popular part of everyday activity within many households across America. The viewing audiences of these households range extensively from adult viewers to a mix of ages to solely adolescent viewers. There is no current way to know exactly who is watching the television programs that are on the air at any given moment. Because the maturity of the viewer is unknown, the content broadcasted on America’s channels undergo some form of censorship. Although there is enough editing by producers to censor what is thought to be unacceptable words and situations, most content being broadcasted is still able to get away with a few unnoticed slips.

Television programs display wide ranges of content, some of which may not be appropriate for young viewers. Currently, the only ways to provide censorship for young viewers is to have a V-chip installed or to request a lockbox from the cable provider (NBC Universal). A V-chip is a device that is installed into the television and reads the broadcasting signal of television programs, while only displaying the programs with ratings that have not been blocked by the parent (NBC Universal). A lockbox is similar to the V-Chip in that the parent controls the settings, but different from a V-chip because it blocks entire networks, rather than specific programs (NBC Universal).

Without a parent who is proactive in activating one of the two options, the freedom of content that children can be exposed to is endless. Studies have found that children between the ages of 2 to 8 years old are “extremely vulnerable” to the content that they are exposed to on television because they are not able to separate fiction from reality (Simmons 149). Therefore children, particularly between the
ages of 4 to 9 years old, should not engage in excessive television viewing without parental supervision because a majority of the television content is for mature viewers, it has a strong influence on their developing behavior, and could lead to negative effects in their physical development. By not watching television, children would be able to maintain a healthy body and strengthen their relationships with others.

Most of the content being broadcasted on the television is aimed towards mature audiences. Reality shows, drama series, and other such television series dominate a lot of the shows being broadcasted these days. When children stumble upon these programs, they are exposed to foreign concepts such as violence, inappropriate language and behavior for their age group such as smoking, drinking, and sexually risky behavior. In 1997 alone, it was found that the average child who has watched 28 hours of television or more has viewed over 8,000 murders before he/she has reached the age of 12 (Simmons 149). With numbers this high back in the '90s, we can only imagine how much higher this horrifying number of violent acts viewed by children must be now.

Networks displaying this content such as E!, Lifetime, TNT, and others also make up the majority of the channels available to viewers. Adult talk shows such as ‘The Maury Show’, ‘The View’, and others are present as well and present subjects that are also unsuitable for young minds. Talk shows like ‘The Maury Show’ often exhibit crude language spoken by the guests and often deal with situations such as domestic violence and paternity issues that result in violent confrontations between the guests (“Is This ‘Woman’ My Dad?”). Such behaviors as these could easily influence children to believe that these are the natural behaviors of adults in society. Talk shows like ‘The View’ do not necessarily exhibit such immature behavior, but they do present hot topics in the media, some of which may be too
mature for young viewers such as celebrity marital affairs and other public scandals. While children may not mimic this behavior, they are being exposed to topics beyond their understanding.

Even the majority of news programs broadcasted are aimed towards adult viewers and rarely seek to engage the mind of a child. Since most news stations report the negative events in the world, children who stumble upon news broadcasts could wind up learning about true emotional events which could in turn lead them to believe that the world is cruel and scary because of the violent and other such acts that are committed in the real world. In addition to the majority of the content available geared towards viewers of a mature age, commercials also have taken on mature views and concepts that children may not be consciously aware of. For example, a child who watched an Old Spice commercial would be exposed to concepts such as the importance of fame and riches as seen in the diamonds that appear in the man’s hand (Old Spice, 2010). The introduction of subconscious concepts and ideas such as the idea of a woman needing material things to be happy with her man, as presented in the Old Spice commercial, could greatly alter the beliefs of children.

Some may argue that there are channels aimed towards young viewers such as the Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, or PBS. While this is a valid point, the ratio of numbers of channels for children versus the number of channels for older audiences is nowhere near 1:1. Instead, there are far more stations for mature audiences than there are available for children. Though there are channels suited just for children, they are naturally curious and one wrong push of a button could send them to an entirely different channel broadcasting an entirely different message unless their parents had previously installed one of the parental control options. Whether it be the types of programs being broadcasted, the number of networks with these programs available, or the maturity of news programs and commercials, most
Americans would be able to agree that there is a lot of mature content on the television that children could potentially be exposed to.

The mature content that vastly makes up the content being broadcasted could have a strong influence on a child’s developing behavior. Children between the ages of 4 to 9 are at a critical stage of development and are learning to become independent, while developing their basic life skills. When children watch television, some of them may believe that the behaviors exhibited on the television are normal and acceptable behaviors of everyone in society because of their inability to separate what they see on the television from reality (Simmons 150). These behaviors and/or actions seen on the television could be translated into how these children interact with others in everyday life. This is particularly true for young children because they are unable to relate certain behaviors and actions with the consequences that follow these behaviors and therefore tend to mimic what they see (Simmons 150). Certain programs that are viewed by children could even lead them to accept and believe the stereotypes and gender roles that are represented on television. One good example of this is from the television series “Family Guy” which often presents crude stereotypes throughout the show in a humorous manner (“Halloween on Spooner Street”). While adults understand that these portrayals of race and gender roles are simply for comedic entertainment, children may believe that the way people are treated on the show is how they ought to be treated in reality.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, adolescents are more likely to engage in sexual activity because of the portrayals of sex and sexual situations being broadcasted on the television (Collins). They have found that about two-thirds of the content being broadcasted on the television contain sex (Collins). With the majority of television programs containing some form of sexual content, it would be hard to keep young children from getting a glimpse of these foreign concepts. If children
continue to watch these types of programs, then they are likely to become part of the statistic because of their naturally curious ways, which could lead to a desire to mimic the behaviors or situations being shown on the television. Not to say that children between the ages of 4 to 9 will likely engage in sexual activity, but they may be more curious and more likely to imitate this behavior as well as the other types of behaviors that they have viewed on television.

It is true that some programs are geared towards educating children in positive ways such as building vocabulary, teaching a new language, and exposing them to the outside world (Eastman). However, these programs are only required to be shown between the hours of 7 AM to 10 AM according to the Children’s Television Act (NBC Universal). Since children do not always watch television between these particular times, it is not always sure that children are watching these particular programs to enhance their learning. Once again, parents would need to be present to make sure that their children are watching these particular programs as opposed to other non-educational programs such as cartoons like SpongeBob Squarepants. While this particular series does not display any negative concepts that could harm the influence of the program on its viewers, this series certainly could not be considered educational because it provides no valuable lessons for children to gain from.

Watching excessive amounts of television could also lead to negative effects in children’s physical development. When children choose to watch television during the day, it takes away from the time that could be spent playing outdoors or playing in general. This could lead to obesity because of the willingness of the child to sit in front of the television for long periods of time. According to a study by Toyran in which 886 second and third grade children were surveyed, the experimental results found that girls that were obese were found to watch television longer than their peers (Toyran). The study also
found that headaches, back pain, vision and trouble sleeping were more prominent among those children who watched television longer (Toyran).

Many children spend at least a few hours sitting in front of the television watching programs at any point during the time they finish school up until their bedtime. Back pain could be the result of too much time spent sitting in front of the television without brief periods of stretching and moving around. Problems in vision probably arise because many children watch television without the proper lighting and possibly sit too close to the television than they really need to which could also affect their vision. Headaches could also arise from watching television without proper lighting and could be the body’s warning of optical strain from the eyes. All of these symptoms, along with obesity, could be avoided by not watching television.

Despite all of these potential problems from watching excessive amounts of television, some parents may argue that there are programs for children that are interactive and could promote active engagement between children and the characters in the particular shows. One good example is from Dora the Explorer, which invites children to mimic the movement of the cartoon character as she goes on her daily adventures. However, as much as these programs are labeled “interactive”, they are nowhere near being equivalent to the amount of physical activity acquired from allowing children to run around and play. Children would find more physical benefits in going to a local playground for an hour than watching an interactive program such as Dora the Explorer for an hour.

In this day and age however, since many parents hold a full-time job, it is typical for parents to allow their children to watch television as a way to occupy them so that parents can get their household duties accomplished. While this is a very acceptable reason, there are alternatives to keep children just as engaged and out of the way of parents. One such alternative is the Wii Fit System in which children
can play games that encourage movement and mental engagement. This way, children are out of the way of parents, while engaging in limited physical and mental exercises of their choosing on the Wii system and not watching mindless television programs or watching programs with content beyond their understanding.

By not watching television, children are much more apt to maintaining a healthy body because they will spend their adolescent energy finding other sources of entertainment. Children naturally have high energy levels and when paired with a lot of curiosity, they are more likely to move around and engage in physical activity to satisfy these voids (Eastman 15). This is not the case when children sit in front of a television however, because the constant change in visual images can capture the attention of the child and cause the child to sit still for long periods of time.

Since children also tend to have an expansive imagination, if they are left without a television, it is more likely that they will come up with their own activities to keep themselves occupied. Children who do not engage in television viewing would be more likely to play made-up games and therefore, stay active, as opposed to those children whose parents allow them to spend their leisure time in front of a television. The physical energy exerted by children who do not engage in television viewing almost always increases when they are in the presence of fellow playmates.

Given the childhood I experienced, I can attest to the concepts above because I was not allowed to watch television and I would play with the neighborhood children who also did not own televisions. I feel that my social skills were much more advanced than those of my peers who spent most of their days in their homes watching television. Without television, I would spend hours playing imaginative games or store-bought games with my younger sibling and/or my neighborhood friends. I also spent more time engaging in physical activities such as going to the pool with my friends who also did not understand the
concept of “Saturday morning cartoons”. I remember growing up that a typical Saturday morning for many of my peers meant sitting in front of the television watching hours of cartoons. For me however, it meant getting out of the house, and I feel that I had a much better childhood experience, especially physically, because of it.

Children who do not engage in television viewing are more likely to develop stronger relationships with their family and friends. By not watching television, children do not have a screen to watch and therefore have more time to interact with others around them. This can include family members as well as friends since many children spend at least some of their free time with other “playmates”, which can include the neighborhood children or “playdates”. Children would create stronger bonds with their family members because they would spend more time communicating and possibly engaging in family activities, rather than sit by themselves watching television. Games such as Candyland, Monopoly, and Pictionary are all family-friendly games that invite interaction and bonding between children and their parents or peers that cannot be obtained through watching television.

Some may argue that children are still able to strengthen the bonds between their family and friends even with a television present. Families who sit down and watch family-friendly movies and television programs could just as well engage in communication and interaction because of the similar interests they share in the programs chosen or the subjects being presented by the programs. Though this is very true, many families nowadays have at least one parent who works full-time and cannot be present to engage in television viewing, but may show interest if a game is chosen.

Overall, children between the ages of 4 to 9 years old should not engage in watching excessive amounts of television without parental supervision because of the mature content they would be exposed to, the negative influence it would have on their developing behavior, and the negative effects it would
have on their physical development. Children in this age group are in their critical stage of development and are learning how to behave independently in society as they mimic from examples observed. Since a majority of the channels available to television viewers contain mature concepts, it would be unwise for children to watch and be exposed to subjects that are way beyond their maturity level. The content being broadcasted could influence the behavior of these young children because they tend to mimic what they see without regard to the consequences of their actions. Without an understanding of what is socially acceptable and unacceptable, children could imitate anything that they had seen on television, which could negatively affect their interactions with others. On top of negatively influencing the behavior of children, excessive television viewing could produce negative effects on the physical development of children because of their willingness to sit in front of the television as opposed to playing outside. Studies have even proven the higher risk of obesity and other health problems associated with excessive television viewing and young children. To counter this, parents should not allow their children to watch television so that they will be much more apt to maintain a healthy body and develop stronger relationships with family and friends.
Works Cited:


http://www.oldspice.com/videos/all/22/The_Man_Your_Man_Could_Smell_Like/