

# Project 1: Invitational Rhetoric\*

## Overview

Invitational rhetoric is “an invitation to enter the rhetor’s world and see it as the rhetor does” (Foss). The goal is not to persuade an audience but to share perspectives. To this end, your assignment will have three parts: a personal narrative, a letter exchange, and a reflection. You will be graded for completion and following the assignment rather than for overall writing quality.

The goals of the narrative and letter exchanges in this project are as follows:

- make use of the offering perspective
- promote understanding
- further rather than shut down conversation
- honor differing viewpoints and differing identities and lived experiences
- practice empathetic listening
- further mutual inquiry on a given topic
- respect each other’s epistemic privilege

## Part 1: Critical Personal Narrative (due Feb 19)

The first step to using invitational rhetoric is for you, the rhetor, to share your vision of the world. But that’s a really broad prompt! Instead, I’m asking you to select a public issue that you care deeply about and write about it in an essay that is approximately **5 pages**.

When thinking about *what* to write, consider how your worldview has shaped your stance on the issue and your feelings surrounding it. The following questions can help guide you, but do not all need to be addressed in your essay:

- Describe at least one specific instance/memory in which your belief became solidified.
- What aspects of your background and identities (socioeconomic, geographical, racial, cultural, sexual, gender, religious, etc.) have shaped your belief on the subject?
- How do you feel—what sensations go through your body—when you hear someone challenge your belief?
- What evidence do you give when asked to support your belief to others? How does this evidence help you make sense of the topic?
- How does this belief affect your relationships? For example, are there people it draws you closer to because of a shared belief? People who it draws you away from or who you avoid sharing it with because of how they might react to your belief?

In terms of *how* to write, use the following elements of narrative writing:

- Use concrete descriptions and examples of your big-picture statements. (For example, instead of saying you avoid talking to people about the issue tell about a specific person in your life and how that affects your interaction with them.)
- Connect your personal practices with larger social, economic, political, or cultural structures and influences. (For example, “I tend to be vocal about labor unions because I am from a working-class background, and my father is a union member.”)

- Describe your own feelings with details, using I statements. (For example, “When I heard my friend say that being gay is a lifestyle, I felt like I’d been punched in the gut.”)
- Use evidence to show how *your* beliefs have been shaped rather than trying to convince others. (For example, “I became pro-choice when I took a government class and learned about the reasons for the separation of Church and State.”)
- Avoid anything that might call into question the intrinsic worth of other human beings or their power to make their own decisions.

*Part 1.5: As a peer work grade, you will get a chance to ask your partner a few questions for clarification before engaging in Part 2. This will be listed under that week’s instructions and not count toward the project grade.*

## Part 2: Letter Exchange (due Feb 26)

The second part of invitational rhetoric is where the audience shares their perspectives in response to the initial rhetor’s expression. You will be paired with a classmate who has different lived experiences than you. It is very important that this process follow the principle of safety—receive these ideas with respect and care for your peers.

After reading your peer’s critical narrative, you will write a 2-3 page letter to them addressing the following:

- Acknowledge how your own lived experiences differ from the readers and how that might lead to a different understanding/opinion on this topic.
- What emotions did you feel reading the narrative? How did you sort through these feelings? (It’s okay if these are negative, but be sure that you use “I” statements to describe them. Rather than “the essay made me feel,” say “I felt...”)
- Explain how/if you arrived at any new understandings about this topic after reading their narrative.
- How did reading this narrative complicate, challenge, or reinforce your opinions about the role of emotion in public deliberation and participation?
- Will/how will this exchange alter the way you engage with opposing views or different lived experiences (either on this topic or in general)?

In your letter exchange, be sure to:

- Promote understanding
- Further rather than shut down conversation
- Honor different viewpoints, identities, and experiences
- Practice empathetic listening/reading
- Further mutual inquiry on a topic

Be sure you do NOT:

- Launch personal attacks
- Try to persuade the author to change their view
- Play “devil’s advocate”
- Justify dehumanizing views or question the intrinsic worth of all humans

### Part 3: Reflection (due March 5)

The final part of this assignment is for you to reflect on your experience as a whole. There is no specific page length, but please consider the following points.

Reflect as a letter **writer**:

- What considerations did you have when you were writing your letter?
- How did you feel when writing?
- How did you feel about your partner reading your letter? Why?
- What was challenging about writing the letter?
- What was illuminating while writing the letter?

Reflect as a **reader** of your letter(s):

- How does the letter make you feel and why?
- Write down any thoughts and reactions you have to the letter.
- What do you think was valuable/productive about this letter exchange?
- What did you feel like the exchange was missing or could have been more useful?

Overall:

- How does invitational rhetoric compare to more persuasive forms of rhetoric? Based on your experiences here, what are the advantages and limitations?
- How might you have reacted differently if your partner had taken a persuasive v. narrative approach initially?
- How does this experience change/advance your understanding of rhetoric in general?
- What was the most challenging aspect of the process? Why? How have you tried to overcome it?
- How might you change your approach to someone with a different viewpoint in the future? Would you use storytelling? Persuasion? A combination?

\*Assignment adapted from Yam, S. (2018) *Interrogating the "Deep Story:" Storytelling and Narrative in the Rhetoric Classroom*.

## Grading (20%)

Since this project is all about the exercise not the product, it will be graded on completing the steps rather than the quality of your writing. The rubric below shows what you need to do for each grade level. Plus/Minus grades are for projects that fall between categories.

	<b>Critical Narrative</b>	<b>Letter</b>	<b>Reflection</b>
<b>A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submitted by 2/19</li> <li>Is at least 5 pages</li> <li>Is a narrative not an argument</li> <li>Addresses specific experiences with details</li> <li>Uses “I” statements</li> <li>Connects your views to larger social/economic/cultural structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submitted by 2/26</li> <li>Is 2-3 pages</li> <li>Shares reaction rather than an argument</li> <li>Uses “I” statements</li> <li>Addresses the long-term impact of the narrative on your opinions/feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submitted by 3/5</li> <li>Reflects on role as writer</li> <li>Reflects on role as an audience</li> <li>Addresses invitation rhetoric v. persuasive rhetoric</li> </ul>
<b>B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submitted by 2/22</li> <li>Is 4-5 pages</li> <li>Is a narrative not an argument</li> <li>Addresses specific experiences with details</li> <li>Uses “I” statements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submitted by 3/1</li> <li>Is at least 2 pages</li> <li>Shares reaction rather than an argument</li> <li>Uses “I” statements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflects on role as writer</li> <li>Reflects on role as audience</li> <li>Addresses rhetoric, but not specific approaches</li> </ul>
<b>C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submitted by 2/24 for peer response</li> <li>Is at least 3 pages</li> <li>Is mostly narrative but may slip into argument</li> <li>Lacks specific details</li> <li>Uses “I” but also makes more general statements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submitted by 3/3</li> <li>Is at least 1 full page</li> <li>Shares reaction but may slip into argument</li> <li>Uses “I” statements but also makes overly general statements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflects on role as writer</li> <li>Reflects on role as audience</li> </ul>
<b>D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not submitted in time for peer response (after 2/24)</li> <li>Is at least 2 pages</li> <li>Is an argument/rant not a narrative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not submitted in time for peer’s reflection (after 3/3)</li> <li>Less than a page</li> <li>Is mostly argument/rant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Argument/rant about the project</li> <li>Not a reflection</li> </ul>

**Automatic F: Narrative, essay, or reflection dehumanizes others or makes personal attacks**