

Writing with Images

*“Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric.
And wherever there is ‘meaning,’ there is ‘persuasion.’”*

—Kenneth Burk, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 172

“Seeing comes before words.”

—John Berger

As members of a visual culture, we must learn how to navigate, interpret, and analyze the messages conveyed to us via imagery. Many English 134 instructors ask students to study images through a rhetorical lens, which means that students learn how images make rational arguments, how they evoke an emotional response from a viewer, or how (when used effectively) images can enhance a writer’s or speaker’s credibility. Yet focusing on images in a writing course raises certain questions: What do images have to do with writing? What do they have to do with argumentation? In effect, the images permeating students’ day-to-day experiences influence how they formulate arguments.

Visual rhetoric allows us to understand both the explicit and implicit arguments that images make about our culture. Many people wrongly regard the act of examining an image as an effortless process, assuming that only a casual, quick glance is required. The sheer pervasiveness of images seems to place them outside the reach of critical reflection. Writing, on the other hand, is often regarded as something that takes careful planning and decision making to become effective. However, visuals and writing have much in common: they are intricately bound as they seek to entertain, to educate, and to persuade. Better understanding this relationship will enable you to approach the images you encounter – in advertising, in films and television, on YouTube and My Space, and even in video games – with a greater critical eye.

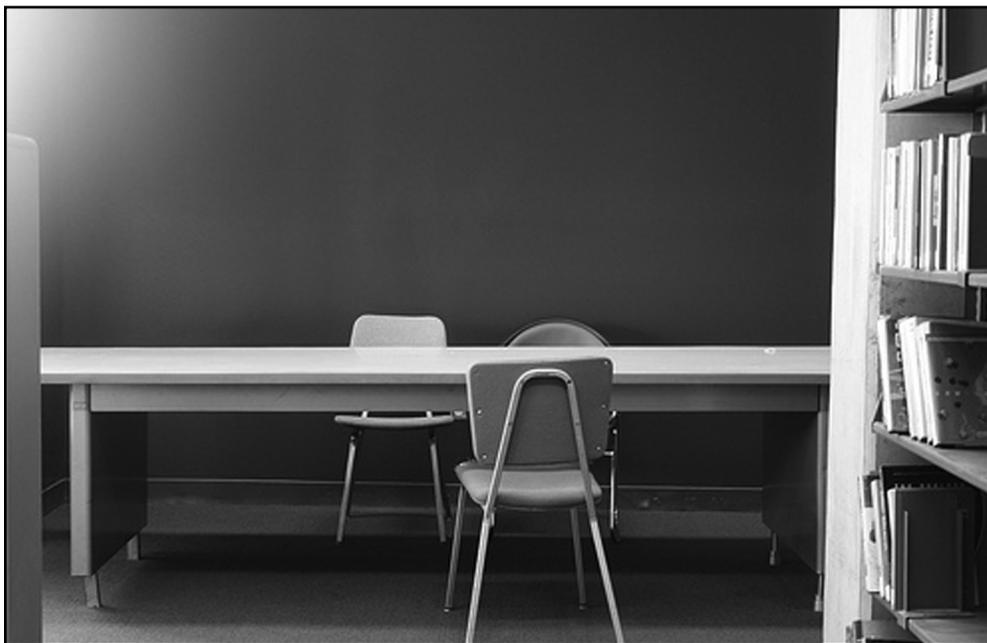
Readers are not persuaded by written arguments alone; thus, when an image is effectively paired with text, the reader can get a fuller understanding of an issue. As you read *Fresh Voices*, focus on the relationship between the images and the writing. For example, Melissa Foucar manipulates the text in her essay “Christians or Christ”

to draw attention to the use of her quotation from Gandhi. Would her use of evidence be as effective in a traditional style? In addition, the personal photo of author Michael Sudolsky in his essay “Confessions of a Chickitarian” adds emotion. Without this image, the audience may not be able to fully engage with his ideas. Examine the other images in this collection. Could the content of any of the other essays be enhanced by a thoughtful integration of images?

Each photograph in this year’s collection has a purpose and an audience in mind—just like an essay, these photos can be read as texts. Examine the photograph below, the photographs matched with each section, and color photographs on the front and back cover. What is the purpose of each image? Who is the audience? How does the placement of each photograph relate to the content of its section?

All of the images used for these sections were generously
contributed by Cal Poly’s own Marya Figueroa.

To see more of her work, visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/emdot>.



Chairs are Social Creatures

What kind of statement does this image make about space on campus? Does this picture evoke any emotion in you? How can chairs be social creatures? How does furniture change the tone of a room? Who might occupy this space?