Analyzing an Advertisement

Andrea Decker, *Instructional Design Librarian*
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Learning Object: Assignment/Assessment

UCR Information Literacy Outcomes: 3.b, 3.d, 3.e, 4.a, 4.e

Time to teach: N/A (Out of class assignment)

Summary: In this assignment, students are asked to demonstrate their understanding of semiotic theory by applying it to an advertisement, identifying the signs, symbols, and meanings conveyed. This assignment also requires the use of additional outside sources that align with the semiotic analysis.

Note: This Learning Object aligns with an existing ENGL 1C assignment

Objective: Demonstrate your understanding of semiotic theory by applying it to an advertisement, identifying the signs, symbols, and meanings conveyed.

Instructions
Select an advertisement:
- Choose an advertisement (print, digital, or video) that you find intriguing or impactful.
- Make sure the advertisement is accessible, either by including a scan or screenshot in the essay or providing a video link.

Semiotic theory: by now, you're familiar with semiotic analysis as outlined in the introduction and first chapter of *Signs of Life*. Consider each of the following in your argument:
- Denotation: a **simple, literal description** of the advertisement, including signs like **images, colors, words, stories, music**, etc.
- Connotation: locate the advertisement in a system of related signs. Consider other **advertisements of the same era, for similar products, or by the same company**. Is the creator referencing **other fields or genres**, like visual arts, film, fairy tales, or popular music? What genre tropes are used? Who is the **target audience**, and how can you tell? What **assumed knowledge** does the audience need to understand the message? What groups of people might be left out or even harmed by the message? How effective do you think the advertisement is at reaching the intended audience with the desired message?
- Ideology: analyze the **cultural values, myths, and beliefs** invoked by the advertisement.

Argument: after analyzing the advertisement, **make an argument about the overall meaning, intent, or ideology** of the advertisement.
- Use your analysis of the **signs as supporting evidence**.
- Reference **at least three additional sources** besides the advertisements you're analyzing. They can include *Signs of Life*. For example, you might use an academic journal article for information about advertisements from the same period or for similar products, a scholarly book about action films if the ad references the action genre, or advertising statistics or audience demographics from a database like Statista. You may also look for independent analysis of advertisements. Several web sites, such as *Adweek*, regularly discuss and analyze ad campaigns.
- While much of the argument will rely on your own thoughts and analysis, this is not an opinion essay. An emotional response or opinion essay is not the same as semiotic analysis. Use the example essays in *Signs of Life* as models.

Formatting:
- Length: 1500-2000 words.
- Format: MLA format using the UWP template: MLA headings, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, Works Cited page. Review the MLA Handbook for help.
- Citation: Use MLA format for in-text citation and a Works Cited page.
- I encourage you to use images of the advertisement in your essay. Caption each image and reference it in the body of the essay, e.g., "Figure 3 shows…".

Due dates:
- 7/29: Invention 1: Essay 1 Proposal and Worksheet DUE
- 8/3: Invention 2: Peer Review Participation DUE
- **8/4: Final Essay DUE** by 11:59PM.

<u>**Evaluation**</u>: I will assess your essay using the requirements detailed in this prompt in addition to the official 1ABC rubric found in the syllabus.

Criteria

• Accurately **describe** your argument in a clear thesis sentence.

• **Signal** each topic and give a clear indication of how the paper will proceed.
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• **Locate** evidence (directly from the ad) to smoothly integrate into each body paragraph.

• **Analyze** this evidence in order to show how it illustrates your arguments.

• **Present** a strong overall argument and conclusion using active verbs and avoiding vagueness.

• **Use an effective structure** that carefully guides the reader from one idea to the next and is thoroughly edited so that sentences are readable and appropriate for an academic paper.

• **Include** new terms introduced in class, as well as a working knowledge of how to apply them to the text.

• **Use correct MLA format**, including size 12 font, 1" margins, in-text citations (Craig 170) and correct pagination/headers. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with MLA format.

• **Length**: 1,500 words (about 4–5 pages).

• **Outside Research**: 3 outside sources, Works Cited page required.

Assignment Outline Recommendations:

Part 1. Introduction (1–2 paragraphs)

1. Introduce the topic/establish necessity, significance, or advance a "centrality claim."
2. Introduce the context: author, text, purpose.
3. Metadiscourse—explain your project (what your paper will argue). State the direction of your analysis and the steps you will take to get there; i.e., "This project argues [what claim?] through/by [what means/evidence?]." (*This orients the reader but will also be where you reveal your own stance.*)
4. Thesis: The thesis should reveal your main argument, then disclose two or three major claims (aka sub-claims/sub-topics/proofs) that support your argument.

Part 2. The Body, your central analysis

In this section, you will analyze and support each of your major claims laid out in your thesis.

For each claim, you will:

❑ State one of your claims and briefly describe how the text supports the claim.

❑ Give a salient example, possibly with a quote.

❑ Explain the quotation by telling what the text is **doing** (not saying) and delineating the ways it ties back to your argument.

❑ Explain and discuss the significance of the connection.

❑ Include a closing to each paragraph that ties together the topic and the overall point.

Part 3: Your conclusion, which tells us, "So what?"

In this section, discuss issues of significance / effectiveness.

❑ Consider and restate your overall argument.

❑ Consider the strengths/weaknesses and effectiveness of your argument.

❑ Discuss the social, cultural, biological, economic, etc. stakes of your argument and reasoning—why does it matter?

Part 4: All pages must be properly formatted using MLA