

# English 542

## Major Rhetorical Texts, from Nietzsche to the Sophists

Meetings: Tuesday & Thursday, 4:00–5:15, Dane Smith Hall 232

Professor Chuck Paine, cpaine@unm.edu, 277-3528

Office Hours: Tuesdays: 9:30–11:00

Thursdays: 2:30–3:30

...and gladly by appointment

### Aims

This course will focus primarily on ancient (classical) rhetoric, but we won't take the usual chronological journey. Instead, we'll begin with some big-picture stuff—a history of Athenian democracy and selections from Homer's *Iliad* and Thucydides' *History*, and a contemporary speech or two. I want us to raise some fundamental questions about the nature of rhetoric together.

Then, we'll start working backward, beginning with 19<sup>th</sup>-century origins of composition studies, move to Locke, Bacon, and the Enlightenment, then to Augustine. But the majority of the semester we'll spend with the Romans, Aristotle and Plato, and finally the Sophists. We'll crisscross timelines because much of the rhetorical tradition can be seen as reacting against the revolutionary ideas of the 5<sup>th</sup>- and 4<sup>th</sup>-century BCE Sophists, and we'll better understand them—and postmodern thought, which in many ways revives Sophistic rhetoric—if we start with the more familiar. We'll examine all these ideas not merely as historical curiosities, but as ideas that help us think about our own arts of discourse, how they work and how we (ought to) teach them. Throughout the course, we'll discover and forge connections between the rhetorical tradition and contemporary writing instruction.

I want you not only to understand the history of rhetoric and how it has affected who we are and how we think and communicate. But more than anything I want you to consider carefully, throughout the semester, how this history informs your career, what you're passionate about—whether you're a writing teacher in high school or college, a professional writer who does technical writing or marketing, or a writing tutor for ESL students. That's a hard-to-measure outcome, but think it's the point of the course.

### Learning Outcomes

Here are some big-picture outcomes I will do my best to help you attain. Because you're graduate students, I want to work *with* you on the details; we'll do that in large part as we prepare for the midterm essay exams.

By the end of the semester, you will be able to do these things.

- Appreciate and articulate how a deep understanding of the history of rhetorical thought can enhance your work (no matter what career you choose).

- Provide a sketch of the trajectory of rhetorical thought from the Ancient Greek Sophists to Nietzsche.
- Explain the different foci of the various kinds of rhetoric—*ludic*, *protreptic*, *agonistic/eristic*, *irenic*, *elenchic*, and *heuristic*.
- Understand the difference between *rhetorikē* and just speaking well—that is, the difference between rhetoric as *technē* and rhetoric as *emperion*.
- Appreciate, understand, and explain how the Sophistic Movement in 4<sup>th</sup>-century Athens forever changed rhetoric and the West’s views of communication and knowledge.
- Understand and explain how new communication media (starting with the invention of writing and up to text messaging and beyond) alter the nature of rhetoric and the rhetorical skills one needs to succeed; understand that the periodic “literacy crises” most often result from failures to understand technological shifts.
- Give brief definitions of the critical terms list (to be distributed later) and be able “think with them”—that is, use that terminology to help recognize, evaluate, and solve problems in a variety of rhetorical situations.
- Read primary texts in the field and understand how they forward or counter other ideas within the rhetorical tradition.
- Explain the relationship (historical and other) between rhetoric and democracy.
- Explain the nature of rhetorical epistemology—based in the concept of *eikos*, *doxa*, and the *nomos/physis* distinction—and how it differs from “philosophical” (in the Platonic tradition) epistemology.
- Explain what Aristotle meant by *rhetoric*.

## **Assignments and Grades**

You will have new reading to do every class. I will also ask you to do some writing in preparation for every class, though I won’t always collect that work.

Your grade will be determined this way:

Assignment	Percentage
Midterm and Final (essay exams)	30
Seminar Project	30
Presentations and Book Review	15
Class Participation/Readings/Microthemese	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>