Technology

Anwar F. Accawi, “The Telephone,” p. 504

Tags: essay, writing to narrate, writing to describe, writing to inform

Anwar F. Accawi’s essay “The Telephone” is a first-person narrative about the introduction of what we might now consider a ubiquitous and even mundane piece of technology—the telephone—into the Lebanese village where he grew up. The essay focuses on how the introduction of a single telephone into the community drastically altered daily life in the village. Thematically, we read the essay as a discussion of how technologies can affect cultures. Given that the telephone is such a familiar artifact in Western life, the essay asks students to think about how even the most familiar technologies can alter cultures and lives. Likewise, given the likelihood that most students in the college classroom take for granted the presence of telephones and have grown up with telephones as a naturalized part of western technological life, the essay helps students consider that what they are familiar with was, at one time, unfamiliar to everyone. Similarly, the essay helps students understand that western technoculture is neither global nor inherent. I have placed this essay as the first reading in the anthology chapter about technology in order to encourage students to think about the devices we rely on as having profound effect on our lives, even when we take them for granted as always already part of our daily lives.


Tags: essay, writing to narrate, writing to inform, writing to evaluate, writing to argue, writing to propose

Nicholas Carr’s essay “Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains” articulates a skepticism about our current reliance on Internet and other digital technologies for transmitting, manipulating, and receiving information. “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” was first published as the cover story for Atlantic Monthly’s Idea Issue in the summer of 2008. The essay attracted a good deal of attention, sparking many other writers to respond to Carr’s claims. In “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” Carr contends that Internet technologies are changing not just the ways we read but the ways we think as well. He worries that human cognitive processes are being altered by the technologies we engage and suggests that such changes are negative. In order to make his claim, Carr weaves together research and personal narrative to form an intriguing argument. Given that most traditional age college students—particularly those from privileged Western backgrounds—have grown up with the ubiquity of digital connection as part of their daily lives and as a standard method for receiving and sharing
information, this essay helps students question that very reliance. Carr’s essay became popular as soon as it was published, as his questions about the connection between the Internet and our mental development drew both support and opposition. As a writer who focuses on technoculture, Carr’s ethos brings strength to this essay. Likewise, when discussing the essay with students, be sure to show them how Carr’s approach moves from a personal narrative into a more research-based informative writing and how that narrative functions to establish connections with the audience and how the research portions of the essay function as evidence in his argument. In these ways, teachers can show students how rhetorical purposes can be synthesized to serve singular purposes. Consider, too, teaching his essay in conjunction with Clay Shirky’s essay “Does the Internet Make You Smarter?” which follows Carr’s in the chapter.

Clay Shirky, “Does the Internet Make You Smarter?,” p. 517

Tags: essay, writing to respond, writing to describe, writing to inform, writing to evaluate, writing to argue

Clay Shirky’s essay “Does the Internet Make You Smarter?” can certainly be read as a response to Nicholas Carr’s “Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains” even though Shirky does not respond directly to Carr. The title clues us to Shirky’s positioning in the same situation in which Carr participates. “Does the Internet Make You Smarter?” was first published in The Wall Street Journal in the summer of 2010. The essay makes a claim for the importance of the evolution of digital information technologies, but at the same time it acknowledges that like other technological advances, digital technologies will also provide an abundance of less-than-useful artifacts. Shirky’s essay is a kind of historical argument about how cultures have responded to various technological innovations over time. The essay serves as a strong example of writing to argue and writing to inform. Consider teaching Shirky’s essay paired with Nicholas Carr’s “Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains” which precedes it in the chapter.

Kate Bolick, “A Death on Facebook: Intimacy and Loss in the Age of Social Media,” p. 520

Tags: essay, writing to narrate, writing to describe, writing to analyze, writing to argue

Kate Bolick’s essay “A Death on Facebook: Intimacy and Loss in the Age of Social Media” asks us to think about the role of friendship and intimacy as it is mediated by social networks like Facebook. The essay is less about technology and media per se than it is about the cultural and social effects of the mass use of such technologies, particularly social media applications. Part of the power of Bolick’s essay is her use of the personal narrative to forge a connection between her and the situation in order to establish ethos. The personal narrative aspect of the essay also serves to help connect the audience with the essay, leaving readers the space to bring their own experiences into the situation. Ultimately, Bolick’s narrative can also be read as an argument, or perhaps more accurately, as the initiation of an argument
about our social media connections. Given the prevalence of social media, this essay is ripe with possibilities for discussion about our interactions with social media. Likewise, from a rhetorical consideration, the first person narrative offers students a good opportunity to think about how the personal can contribute to ethos and to situational positioning. Consider, too, teaching Bolick's essay in conjunction with Malcolm Gladwell’s “Small Change: The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted,” which follows Bolick’s in the chapter. While Bolick addresses personal response to social media events, Gladwell examines larger political activism in social media.

Malcolm Gladwell,  
“Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted,” p. 523

**Tags**: essay, writing to inform, writing to analyze, writing to evaluate, writing to argue

Malcolm Gladwell’s “Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted” was originally published in The New Yorker, and given Gladwell’s reputation as one of the country’s leading commentators on technology and social media, the piece immediately became a central text in ongoing effects of social media on culture. In the essay, Gladwell questions the role of social media in initiating or perpetuating social and political activism. Gladwell compares recent political activist movements like the demonstrations in Moldova and student protests in Teheran to political activist movements of a pre-social media era, like the U.S Civil Rights movement. Ultimately Gladwell contends that while social media can certainly communicate ideas and information more rapidly and across larger segments of the world's population, ultimately it can’t accomplish the same kinds of activist or revolutionary acts as hands-on activism. This essay is powerful, and students will find much to talk about regarding its content. The essay is also rich with opportunity to address Gladwell's rhetorical strategies, ranging from his use of research to his overall argumentative approach.