

PERSUASIVE PROSE [ADVERTISEMENT] MODEL ANALYSIS

MODEL QUESTION

Please refer to the ‘Own a Modem? Try America Online FREE’ advertisement on page 161 of your prescribed text by Goatly.

Write an essay of no more than 2 pages [approximately 1000 words] in which you critically analyse the advertisement provided. Your analysis should focus on both the visual and written features of the text. Provide relevant textual evidence to support your answer.

You may [be asked to] consider the following questions in your analysis:

- *What type of text is this and what is it about?*
- *What kind of target reader does the advertiser have in mind? How do you know?*
- *What does the advertisement set out to achieve and how does it do that?*
- *What linguistic strategies are employed in this advertisement and how do these strategies influence the message of the text?*
- *How does this text position the reader? What presuppositions or assumptions are evident in the text?*
- *To which aspects of human psychology does this advertisement appeal?*

MODEL ESSAY

The purpose of this essay serves to provide you with a model analysis for how you might approach a question such as the above when analysing an advertisement. The given text, ‘Own a Modem? Try America Online FREE’, falls under the broad genre of non-fiction prose and is a persuasive text in the form of an advertisement. The advertisement is for an online service and software package by a company called America Online and has been taken from *Popular Science*’s June 1996 edition [***Note:** This is the ‘what’ question essentially answered; i.e. I have stated ‘what’ the text is about at the outset of the essay. Your preferred structure and wording for your introduction will differ slightly from mine, your opening sentence will certainly not be the same as mine. For more on constructing an academically sound opening sentence and introduction, please refer to the ‘How to Write a Properly Structured Academic Essay’ topic in the Study Unit 1 forum for full guidance on and examples of how your essay introduction should read].

At the outset you should notice that the advertiser tries to engage the reader by asking the question “Own a Modem?” This question appears right at the top of the advertisement and is printed in a much larger and bolder font than rest of the text, thus we can deduce that the advertiser intends for the question to grab the reader’s attention. Below the question, in a sort of headline-lead format, the phrase “Try America Online FREE” appears. Note

the fact that the brand name of the product is immediately mentioned and that the word “free” is capitalised. What is the effect of this capitalisation? In simplest terms, emphasis is placed on the word “free”. As you may well know, the word “free” is often utilised by advertisers to pique reader interest and to draw potential customers in.

What about the layout and format of the advertisement? Note the clipart near the top of the advertisement that declares America Online to be “AMERICA’S #1 ONLINE SERVICE”. By the placement of the clipart, the advertiser clearly wants the declaration to stand out, and perhaps have it appear to be a ‘stamp of approval’ of sorts. What about the actual statement made? What may the effect of this declaration be on the reader’s perception of America Online? How true do you think the claim is?

Below the above-noted clipart and the ‘invitation’ that America Online extends to the reader, we see a list elaborating on the features of the America Online service. Note how, up until this point, the advertisement has been somewhat vague about what exactly America Online is and what it can do for consumers. This elaborative list is thus quite important and is supplemented by ‘informative’ screenshots of the America Online service.

In addition to the America Online logo, the bottom third of the advertisement contains the form that the reader is to fill out and return in order to try out America Online. Again, as far visual features are concerned, a large arrow clearly draws the reader’s attention to the form and instructs the reader to “Detach & Mail today!”

With the structure of the advertisement more or less analysed, you need to consider the language and grammar usage in the text and comment on the effect that the linguistic devices utilised may have on the reader’s perception of the product being advertised. In looking at the text, you should almost immediately notice that the advertiser has made use of emotive language through using words such as “exciting” and “risk-free”, which as you may know is an age-old advertising technique used to attempt to create a sense of anticipation on the one hand and trust of the product on the other.

In looking at the listed features of the service, and in keeping in mind the fact that the advertisement was published in 1995 when computing and the internet were a relatively new phenomena, you may note that (especially through the use of words such as “computing forums”, “computing support” and “online conferences”) an almost technical sense of professionalism is created. The features listed, which are probably ‘old news’ to a 21st century computer user, may have also been quite intriguing and exciting to a reader in the 1990s. Certainly, a sense of exclusivity is created through the use of the “Own a Modem?” question, which may be quite laughable if posed to the 2016 American reader. In support of the technical professionalism of the listed features, note the mention of “industry experts”, which further adds to this effect.

Other textual features you might like to mention include the use of exclamation marks and the word “today” to create a sense of urgency, the use of “you” to create a sense of intimacy with the reader and the careful manipulation of language that is employed at the top of the return-form to reiterate to the reader that the free trial is risk and obligation-free.

*[*Note: The above paragraphs concisely explore the ‘how’ element of analysis. If you have any additional suggestions for how meaning is created in the advertisement, I would love to hear these].*

Who do you think the target audience for this advertisement might be? Given that this advertisement does not present a clear-cut case for an intended target reader, a number of assertions might be appropriate here, so long as you clearly and thoroughly support your assertion. At its most basic, the advertisement is arguably aimed at the individual computer user, as the service does not appear to target businesses or companies. Other features of the potential target reader you identify may include *age* (Do you think computer users of the 1990s were younger or older?) and *economic situation* (Do you think the poorer masses used computers in the 1990s or was computer and internet use reserved more for the elite that could afford it?)

*[*Note: As far as advertisements are concerned, exploring who the target audience is touches on the ‘who’ element of analysis. If the advertisement involves or mentions other parties, you may mention and comment on these as well].*

In order to determine how the advertisement positions the reader, we need to consider the potential target audience we have identified and explore the presuppositions or assumptions made by the advertiser about that audience. In the advertisement under discussion, the advertiser presupposes and infers that all computer users that own a modem would want to make use of the America Online service. While the declaration that America Online is “America’s #1 Online Service” is included and the features of the America Online service are listed, the advertiser does not take great pains to point out how the America Online service is different from and better than other similar services that might be on the market. This could lead us to deduce that there were not many such services available at the time and that the advertiser assumes that the mere novelty of the America Online service should be enough to convince any computer user with a modem to sign up for the free trial.

As far as the aspect of human psychology the advertisement appeals to is concerned, there are a number of aspects you could mention, but the most prominent is probably the need for association, friendship or belonging. To this point, note the use of words such as “exchange” and “support”, and the fact that the community aspect of the America Online service is quite strongly emphasised.

In conclusion, we need to ask ourselves what this advertisement has set out to achieve and then we need to comment on whether we think it has been successful in achieving its intended purpose. While the purpose of most

advertisements is to attempt to sell a product or service to its target market, you need to try to be more specific when commenting on what the intended purpose for a given advertisement may be. In the America Online advertisement, we can determine that the immediate purpose of the advertisement is to get the reader to fill out and return the included sign-up form. How successful do you think the advertisement may be in achieving this purpose? Your answer here would depend on your judgment of the advertisement. Be careful not to base your answer on whether you 'like' the advertisement or not. Instead, summarise the findings of your analysis by considering and ultimately commenting on if and how the layout, visual features and linguistic strategies you identified combine to effectively achieve what the advertiser had set out to achieve.

NOTES & FURTHER GUIDELINES

The discussion I have provided is an example of how you could have approached an analysis of the given advertisement. As a guideline analysis, it is not exhaustive, as there are other linguistic and visual features and layout aspects of the advertisement that you may have identified. The essay I wrote is also perhaps somewhat more elaborative than your analysis of a given persuasive text would be required to be. This is because I attempted to touch on every one of the potential questions you may be asked to consider, whereas you will not likely be expected to address quite so many questions or points in order to complete a single analysis; I simply wanted to ensure that you are able to address every type of question that may come up. A further note on this point, please ensure that you only address the questions posed in the essay instructions you receive, as you will lose significant marks if your essay is overly extensive or focuses significantly on aspects you were not asked to analyse.

In essence, an analysis such as the above should show a critical engagement with and understanding of the text and should provide evidence from the text to motivate the points made. When analysing a persuasive text, you need to systematically analyse the persuasive techniques utilised in the text as exemplified in the guideline document. Please do not base the body of your analysis on telling the marker how effectively you have been persuaded by the given text. In essence, do not write about how you have been persuaded by the text, analyse how it persuades. You may include a brief mention of how persuasive and/or effective you deem the text to be in your conclusion as a summary on the persuasive techniques you have analysed in the body of your essay.

Please take note of the fact that you need to structure your analysis as a continuous piece of writing. This is the required format for all of your essays for ENG2602 (and for most, if not all, of the other English modules you may complete). Please do not under any circumstances utilise sub-headings or employ a question-answer format in any of your essays. Even if certain questions are posed which you must answer—such as the questions set for

the Advertisement Model Analysis—your paragraphs need to flow from one to the next and the questions need to be answered within these paragraphs.

Lastly, you may notice that a question pertaining to the aspects of human psychology that the advertisement appeals to has cropped up in this model analysis. One of the activities in your prescribed text by Goatly poses such a question, but Goatly does not elaborate on this in any detail. Please do not be alarmed by this question. If this question comes up in, you can answer it in the self-same simple way that I did in the model analysis, you need not go into great detail about human psychology. Simply familiarising yourself with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs should suffice in aiding you to properly identify which need or desire a given text may be appealing to.
