Many First-Year Writing Programs pay a lot of attention to the “Rhetorical Modes,” a term used to describe several classical modes of discourse. Essentially, the rhetorical modes describe types and techniques of writing. Although the original four modes included only narration, description, exposition and argument, this list can be expanded to include several other more diverse forms of writing. Our program uses these concepts to describe the various types of writing that different genres may employ; a particular genre may include several types of writing from this list of categories. Examining genres carefully allows us to discuss these types of writing modes, noting the overlap between types, or ways that the type of writing changes when it moves into different genres. For example, persuasive writing may be a mode of writing, but a persuasive documentary film does not use persuasive techniques in exactly the same way a commercial or a brochure for a vacation spot might.

What is important to remember is that any act of writing may combine two or more of the rhetorical strategies outlined in the following list. The way that these strategies fit together and are used in specific situations one of the elements that helps to determine genre. Thus, our list is a launching point to help us begin to think about the techniques we use every day in our writing.

To find out further information about rhetorical modes, visit this website: http://faculty.ccc.edu/khope/The%20rhetorical%20modes.pdf.

**Analysis:** Analytic skills are an important part of many writing acts. They involve looking at an artifact or a text and breaking down its parts. Analysis and other strategies (like argument or classification/division) can be often be found sharing space in a single text.

**Argument:** Argumentation means just that—to argue a position. The key to arguing a position is having a clear stance on what you are arguing about, and then proving that point through the use of evidence. Considering the opposing point of view and offering a rebuttal are also important elements of many genres that use argumentative techniques. The Purdue Owl offers an overview of what they term “the argument essay” which outlines a type of text that is commonly produced in school settings that uses argument as its primary rhetorical strategy (http://owlenglish.purdue.edu/owl/resource/685/05/). However, argumentative strategies and techniques can be found in many, many, different types of genres.

**Cause-Effect:** Cause and effect explores the reason something happens and the consequences of that action. Cause-effect strategies are often connected to analysis and argument as techniques.

**Classification/Division:** To classify is to categorize, and to divide is to break a larger category into smaller pieces. Classification is a process that authors use in all kinds of genres-and it is often used in the service of other rhetorical strategies. For example, one might classify elements of an analysis, or use classification to break down the elements of an opposing argument.

**Comparison/Contrast:** Comparison and contrast explores the ways things are similar and the ways they are different. Often these skills appear in the “school” genre of comparative analyses, but they also can be seen in opinion articles comparing/contrasting political
candidates or reviews about local restaurants.

**Definition:** In writing, to define does not simply mean to provide the dictionary definition of a term. Instead, it means to define how you intend to use the word. Sometimes this can mean defining by explaining what the term is not. In “Making Memoir,” Eileen Wiedbrauk (which can be found in the 2010 ISU Grassroots Writing Research Journal) begins by defining what the term “memoir” can mean and how she intends to use it in this particular situation.

**Description:** Writers often describe physical characteristics and sensory details in order to create a picture with words. Description is widely used as a technique in many genres, but the nature of descriptive text may vary from simple and concise to rich and complex, depending on the expectations that shape the genre in which it is located.

**Entertainment:** Entertaining is the slipperiest of the rhetorical modes we’ve found in our research. It can mean something different depending on the genre you are writing in. Humor, suspense, titillation or horror could all be elements of a text that is meant to entertain. These elements are often used for their own sake (i.e., “I just want to entertain my readers”), to make people feel good, or to help them pass their free time. But entertaining elements can also be used in genres that are designed to inform, argue, persuade, etc. To use the skills of entertainment, the writer must seriously consider the audience and judge how to incorporate entertainment into the genre.

**Exemplification:** Exemplification is the use of example to support or back up a claim. Exemplification is less often the primary technique in a genre. It is more often used as a technique in the service of other techniques, such as persuasion, analysis or argument.

**Narration:** Quite simply, to narrate is to tell a story using details that evoke both time and place. Narration is particularly crucial for personal writing genres, such as the memoir. See Eileen Wiedbrauk’s article, “Making Memoir,” for more detail.

**Persuasion:** Persuasion means convincing the audience of something. This can be through the use of: emotion (indirect persuasion); reason (direct persuasion) or through a knowledge of what the reader wants (personal persuasion). Persuasion can be used in the service of other rhetorical strategies (for example, argument and persuasion can be difficult to tell apart because they are often used to complement each other), but persuasion can also be the primary goal in some genres.

**Process:** Explaining a process offers the reader a step-by-step explanation of how to do something. It is a technique often used in practical genres such as product instructions, cookbooks or manuals.

*Note:* We don’t feel that the current wikipedia.org articles on rhetorical modes are as accurate as they could be, so be careful if using Wikipedia to explore these terms.