

Genre and Rhetorical Analysis of Government Documentation

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### Abstract

This is a genre analysis of three reports made by the Virginia Senate Finance Committee (SFC) in 2013. According to Allison & Williams (2008), “Genres help readers grasp information quickly and effectively” (p. 20). This paper’s aim is to give examples of which genre conventions the SFC and its subcommittees utilize to be effective in their readability. Additionally, examples of the rhetorical devices, ethos (ethical appeal), logos (message), and pathos (pathetic appeal) are outlined and examples of each are given. Furthermore, priority and constituency of the Virginia SFC (2013) are significant rationale for this report as it will be addressing how this genre considers budget, taxation and accessibility.

Government entities and documents vary in features, purpose, delivery and audience. Additionally, they share common genres effective across several communities and audiences. According to Allison & Williams (2008), “Genres are categories or forms into which documents and websites are grouped together based on written and visual characteristics they have in common, and which reader associate with them” (p. 20). This paper will explore three different genres from the State of Virginia; identify common features; and conduct a rhetorical analysis, which includes identifying logos (message), ethos (ethical appeal), and pathos (pathetic/emotional appeal) of each document. Audience and the communication purpose of each document will be identified.

Virginia’s legislative website is a dedicated resource to State Bills, budget, amendments, and reports. In regards to genre, it well organized and provides links to documentation which can be downloaded by anyone. Searchable links provide web pages that, in turn, can be downloaded as a Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) document. This delivery is inherently part of the genre, because it provides online documentation in the same file format. Since this report is about the genre of the documentation itself, three Senate Finance Subcommittee reports were selected for the genre analysis. Education (SFC—Education Subcommittee, 2013.), Health & Human Resources (SFC—Health & Human Resources Subcommittee, 2013.), and Public Safety (SFC—Public Safety Subcommittee, 2013) reports provide a good basis for analyzing genre because they share a similar format and purpose so readers can quickly connect to the information presented. According to Allison & Williams (2008), “Genres help readers grasp information quickly and effectively “ (p. 20). Though each subcommittee is its own entity, tackling various subjects, they all utilize the same genre for their reports to ensure the readability is suitable for their audience.

The Senate Finance Subcommittee reports share several genre-identifying features. Perhaps the most obvious visual example in the Finance Subcommittee reports is the cover page. The cover page lists which subcommittee report it is for. In this example, Education, Health & Human Resources, and Public Safety (SFC—Subcommittee Reports, 2013, [cover]). The cover page also states its origination is from the Senate Finance Committee (2013) Virginia General Assembly and displays the committee's seal in the upper, left corner ([sfc.virginia.gov](http://sfc.virginia.gov). p. 1). This is an effective use of genre, because readers can quickly identify the report is from the SFC, which Subcommittee the document is about, and view how current the information is. Rhetorically, the cover page conveys a strong ethical appeal (ethos). It effectively conveys via text and a visual symbol, the document's authority and that its origination is from the SFC of Virginia. It is no surprise then, to see the same visual rhetoric (its seal), show up on the SFC website and in the upper, left-hand corner ([sfc.virginia.gov](http://sfc.virginia.gov)., 2013, p. 1). Additionally, the cover page states the purpose of the document as well as the genre (Allison & Williams, 2008, p. 20).

Another example of genre in the Virginia Senate Finance Subcommittee reports is found immediately after the cover page: the Chairman's address. On page one of the Subcommittee on Education (2013), for example, the reader is presented with an address directly by the chairman of that committee (p. 1). This address outlines to the public and other government agencies the intent, budget items, challenges, and goals the committee has for the current year and how they're to be addressed. This is the logos of the document and rhetorically accomplishes stating the overall message of the document in words. Additionally, there is a strong pathetic appeal (pathos), which is no surprise, because there is a significant human side the subject of education and how it impacts entire communities. From the Chairman's address (2013) to the committee on education, "Higher education continues to be

a priority for the Commonwealth. Access to higher education is imperative to improve the quality of life for our citizens and to ensure our economic prosperity” (p. 2). This is important to the reader because even though these subjects highly depend on the bottom line (money), it shows the committee’s commitment and determination to do right for the community. As with the subcommittee on education, the other reports (Health & Human Resources and Public Safety) follow the same genre identifying format that is either an address by the chairman of the committee itself or directly to the chairman. Regardless of who’s being addressed, the genre outlines a concise message (logos) and clear pathetic appeal (pathos) starting with page one. The conclusion to these rhetorical appeals on each subcommittee example always lists the chairman, committee members and space for their respective signatures. Again, this is ethos because it conveys authority in the subject matter and directly shows every member is bound to the document and the content therein.

Subsequent pages of the subcommittee reports, directly after the message, shows where the money is going. These are the budget reports, and every dollar is itemized to a specific area of need. An example of this portion of the report (2013) can be found in Fig. 1. While all of budget reports are inserted inside each of the committee’s report and vary somewhat aesthetically, their layout and function are essentially the same. There is an agency number to the far left, where the money is allocated to, a description of the allocation, and dates in which the money is to be allocated in. Rhetorically, this table is part of the logos because it deals with raw, factual numbers and information pertaining to each itemization. Additionally, the budget report is the context of the entirety of the document, since finance is the key priority with Virginia’s Senate Finance Committee ([sfc.virginia.gov](http://sfc.virginia.gov)., 2013, p. 1). Furthermore, the budget report is important for the constituency of the SFC because it outlines exactly what our

government's officials were elected to do.

Senate HHR Subcommittee Report (2013 General Assembly)				
Agency	Description	GF FY 2013	GF FY 2014	GF Biennium
<b>Secretary Of Health And Human Resources</b>				
282 #1s:	Secretary to Develop Fall Prevention Strategy	\$ -	\$ -	Language
282 #2s:	Community-based Mental Health Services and Schools	\$ -	\$ -	Language
<b>Comprehensive Services For At-Risk Youth And Families</b>				
283 #1s:	Capture CSA Unappropriated Balances to Expand Services	\$ -	\$ -	Language
283 #5s:	SB 863 - CSA Services to Former DJJ Residents	\$ -	\$ 91,106	\$ 91,106
<b>Department for the Aging</b>				
284 #1s:	Add Funds for SeniorNavigator	\$ 50,000	\$ -	\$ 50,000
<b>Department Of Health</b>				
290 #1s:	Funding from VRSAF for 12 Lead ECGs for EMS Organizations	\$ -	\$ -	NGF
290 #2s:	Funding from VRSAF for National Background Checks	\$ -	\$ -	NGF
292 #1s:	Authorize Release and Fee to Provide Death Records to Private Entities	\$ -	\$ -	NGF
294 #1s:	Emergency Plan for Power Loss in Nursing and Assisted Living Facilities	\$ -	\$ -	Language
296 #1s:	Restore Funding for Local Dental Services	\$ -	\$ 967,944	\$ 967,944
296 #3s:	Remove GF for Bonus Payment	\$ (350,000)	\$ -	\$ (350,000)
297 #3s:	Restore Funding for St. Mary's Health Wagon	\$ -	\$ 38,356	\$ 38,356
297 #4s:	Restore Funding for CHIP of Virginia	\$ -	\$ 427,628	\$ 427,628
297 #5s:	Restore Funds for Poison Control Centers	\$ -	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,000,000
297 #6s:	Expand Funding for Statewide Sickle Cell Chapters of VA	\$ -	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000
<b>Department Of Health Professions</b>				
303 #1s:	Fees for Licensed Professional Counselors	\$ -	\$ -	NGF
<b>Department Of Medical Assistance Services</b>				
304 #1s:	SB 996 - Medical Costs for Additional Inpatient Bed Days	\$ -	\$ 634,999	\$ 634,999
307 #1s:	Report on Neurobehavioral Treatment Pilot Program	\$ -	\$ -	Language
307 #2s:	Intent to Eliminate Occupancy Standard for Nursing Home Reimbursement	\$ -	\$ -	Language
307 #3s:	Increase Medicaid Payments for Private Duty Nursing Services	\$ -	\$ 1,509,708	\$ 1,509,708

Page 1 of 3

**Fig. 1** (SFC—Health and Human Resources Subcommittee, 2013, p. 5)

The amendments section, which can be found in each Senate Finance Subcommittee report, is typically several pages long and deals with ongoing corrections and exceptions to the annual budget. Thankfully, this section utilizes genre to its greatest potential because of the strict layout it follows. In each subcommittee report, the amendments listed by the subcommittee responsible, which department it will affect, and the dollar amount that is to be corrected for each year. Perhaps the most important part of an amendments page is the *Language* and *Explanation* sections. In the Language section of the amendment, all of the corrections via line item are listed in words and outlines a brief description of the amendment itself. This is a good example of logos, because it conveys the message of the amendment. The Explanation section is equally important because it tries to explain why the change is needed. This is

another good example of pathetic appeal, because it shows the subcommittee's concern for the change, the amendment's intent and goal. An example of the amendments section (2013) can be viewed in Fig.

2.

Public Safety Subcommittee		Item 388 #3s	
Public Safety	FY 12-13	FY 13-14	
Department Of Corrections	\$0	\$663,757	GF
<b>Language:</b>			
Page 339, line 5, strike "\$845,169,967" and insert "\$845,833,724".			
Page 341, after line 15, insert:			
"O. Included in the appropriation for this item is \$663,757 the second year from the general fund to establish a separate program for inmates under 18 years old who have been tried and convicted as adults and committed to the Department of Corrections by the courts. This separation of these offenders from the general prison population is required by the new requirements of the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act."			
<b>Explanation:</b>			
(This amendment transfers appropriations from the Department of Juvenile Justice to establish a separate program for inmates under 18 years old who have been tried and convicted as adults and committed to the Department of Corrections by the courts. This separation of these offenders from the general prison population is required by the new requirements of the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act.)			

**Fig. 2** (SFC—Public Safety Subcommittee, 2013, p. 9)

All of the reports by Virginia's Senate Finance Subcommittees follow a specific format and layout so readers can quickly and effectively identify which type of report they are viewing. Additionally, utilizing genre helps with establishing a strong ethos in that it binds several reports visually—by images and text to establish authority as an official government document. The message is understood throughout as budgets are included in each report with a summary of where money and taxes are to be allocated and why. This is important for constituency of the elected members in that genre helps in conveying purpose, dedication, and ownership of every document signed. Furthermore, there is a human side to all the numbers because it directly affects real people inside and outside the government. Established genre conveys professionalism, authority, message, and pathetic appeal to subject matters

that are typically difficult to convey, understand, and project adequate human factor.



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