Cuckoo for Project 2: They're Gr-r-reat! Cereal Box & Commercial Analysis

True Blue Core Signature Assignment (Prof. Lynn/Fall '25)

Growing up, what did your Saturday mornings look like? At the tender age of six, my only concern on any given weekend morning was to watch *Super Friends* on the swivel console tv and decide how big my bowl of Apple Jacks should be. As the spunky Wonder Twins shapeshifted into various animals and different states of water, I gleefully munched on apple and cinnamon-flavored rings that turned the milk in my bowl a lovely shade of light pink. During the commercial breaks, my eyes would feast on the lime green Apple Jacks box in front of me. *Free Wacky Wallwalker in every box! Fortified with 10 essential vitamins and minerals!* Ah, those were the days . . .

Since Kellogg's Corn Flakes hit the shelves in 1906, cereal boxes have become a staple of pop culture and as such, deserve to be analyzed. You might agree with that, but you might also ask, "What can be gained from a deep analysis of a cereal box and commercial, of all things?" Understanding the conventions of a genre, enhancing reading comprehension, analyzing rhetorical situations, studying primary sources, developing critical thinking, and improving writing skills are just some of the benefits gained from a thorough, thoughtful genre analysis of this kind.

Requirements:

1. Choose at least three subjects: **2 cereal boxes and 1 commercial.** You may choose more, but you must analyze at least three subjects. Concerning cereal boxes, they must be at least 2o years apart. And, while they don't have to be the same cereal, they do need to have a common thread between them (for example, similar mascots or jingles or companies). The commercial can be from any time period, although the golden age of cereal commercials began in the 1950s and lasted through the 1990s. *All subjects must be inserted as images somewhere within the paper. If you cannot embed a commercial within your text, you may use a screenshot from a key moment in the commercial.*

2. Format your paper according to MLA guidelines.
3. Craft an engaging title and hook before introducing the subject of your paper.
4. Present an underlined thesis statement either at the end of the introduction OR the start of the conclusion.
5. Develop all body paragraphs with convincing analytical details and observations. You should go beyond the simple 3-point essay (aka 5-paragraph paper).
6. Incorporate images of all subjects *within* the paper, as I have done later in this handout with my examples.
7. Craft sophisticated transitions as you travel from one point to the next.
8. Conclude your essay by reminding readers what's been discussed without being awkwardly repetitive and leaving readers with a memorable thought. Often, writers circle back to their amazing hooks as they conclude, but this time, they view the hook somewhat differently—in terms of the spectacular analysis that followed the hook!
9. Try your best to compose a Works Cited featuring all three (or more, if you choose) sources. The MLA section located within our course textbook will guide you when it comes to citing commercials on *YouTube*, and cereal box citation examples are provided in this handout. I also ask that you attempt in-text parenthetical citations that feature the first key word from the source's corresponding Works Cited entry.
10. Proofread your paper to ensure that it's relatively free of errors in grammar, mechanics, and punctuation. Matters of importance include but are not limited to comma splices, run-on (fused) sentences, sentence fragments, apostrophe errors, semicolon errors, subject + verb agreement errors, misspellings, and the like. Also, be sure to incorporate fresh, exciting vocabulary along with varied sentence structures, lengths, and beginnings.
11. After you submit your paper, you will create your *own* cereal box! It should promote the same cereal you're analyzing, and it can be a traditional box OR a deviant box. Ideally, your major points of analysis will be featured in a creative manner on all sides of the box.
12. At the same time you submit your own cereal box creation, you will also turn in a one-page reflection that addresses the following: why you chose your topic, what challenged you the most during the composition process, what you are most proud of concerning your project, and how you might use some of what you learned beyond the assignment and our English 1010 classroom.

Helpful Resources:

1. The website titled *The Imaginary World* features numerous archived cereal boxes, with a few going back as far as the 1940s and stopping after the 1980s: https://theimaginaryworld.com/cbarch.html. Another helpful source for finding

vintage cereal boxes is *The Daily Cereal Box*: https://dailycerealbox.tumblr.com/archive. You can also google the name of a cereal and a year, for instance, "Apple Jacks Box 1980." That's how I found some of the images for this very handout!

2. "A Short History of Cereal" via *The New York Times* provides a brief overview that might be helpful as you search for the perfect boxes and commercial to analyze. You can access this article via https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/02/22/dining/history-of-cereal.html.
3. For a sample of vintage cereal commercials, visit https://archive.org/details/classic-cereal-commercials-from-the-50s-60s.

Although there are plenty of discontinued cereal boxes that are worthy of study, one possible approach is to choose a cereal that has been on the shelves for decades and is still going strong, for instance, the aforementioned Apple Jacks. If I were a student, I would first choose a box from the 1960s and then one from the 1980s:

And then, I would choose a modern box on shelves today, along with a commercial from the 1970s:

Doing so would allow me to pick out the similarities and differences among four different subjects—and to analyze how effective each one is when it comes to promoting the product. The importance of topic selection cannot be understated; if you choose an

engaging, fun topic, you are likely to have fun while completing the project. And yes, this *should be* an enjoyable project!

Points of Analysis:

To analyze a cereal box, consider its front, back, and sides, focusing on design, nutritional information, and marketing techniques. Examine the images, colors, and text used to attract the target audience, and analyze the nutritional facts label to understand serving sizes, calories, sugar content, and daily values. Additionally, consider the box's overall message and how it aims to persuade consumers.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

1. Front of the Box:

Pay attention to the images, colors, and font choices. These elements are designed to grab attention and communicate the cereal's appeal.

Identify any mascots or characters featured. These can be powerful tools for connecting with the target audience, especially children.

Analyze the cereal's name and any accompanying taglines. These should be concise and memorable.

Note any claims about the cereal's health benefits, nutritional value, or special offers (e.g., "low sugar," "high fiber," "contains vitamins").

Consider who the box is trying to appeal to based on the visual elements and messaging.

2. Back and Sides of the Box:

Carefully examine the nutrition facts label, including serving sizes, calories, fat content, sugar content, and % Daily Value.

Review the list of ingredients. This can reveal the cereal's composition and any potential allergens.

Look for any diagrams, descriptions of the company, or other details that provide more context about the product.

Analyze how the box uses persuasive language, special offers, or other strategies to encourage purchase.

3. Overall Analysis:

- **Rhetorical Analysis:**

Consider how the cereal box uses language, images, and other elements to create a persuasive message.

- **Target Audience:**

Identify the specific audience the box is designed to appeal to and analyze how well the design achieves that goal.

- **Marketing Strategies:**

Evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing strategies used on the box.

- **Consumer Culture Context:**

Reflect on the cultural context in which the cereal box is presented. How does it reflect the cultural values and trends of the time they were produced?

- **Historical Context:**

Examine the ways cereal boxes can reveal information about the past, such as changes in food availability, nutritional information, and marketing techniques.

- **Comparison:**

Compare the box to other cereal boxes, noting similarities and differences in design, messaging, and target audience.

By carefully examining these elements, you can gain a deeper understanding of how cereal boxes are designed to appeal to consumers and influence their purchasing decisions.

To analyze a cereal commercial, focus on the target audience, the persuasive techniques used, and the overall message. Identify the intended audience (e.g., children, adults, families), analyze the visual and auditory elements (e.g., colors, music, voiceovers), and evaluate the persuasive techniques employed (e.g., celebrity endorsements, humor, health claims). Finally, consider the cultural context and how the commercial aims to evoke emotions and create a desire for the product.

Works Cited Examples:

⇨A sample Works Cited entry for one of my online cereal boxes featured above:

Kellogg Company. "Kellogg's - Apple Jacks - Free Raggedy Ann & Andy window stick-ons - cereal box -1980." *Flickr*, 24 Oct. 2011, https://www.flickr.com/photos/jasonliebigstuff/6276615408. Accessed 26 July 2025.

⇨A sample Works Cited entry for a physical cereal box:

General Mills. "Cinnamon Toast Crunch." Cereal Box, General Mills, Albuquerque.

⇨A sample Works Cited entry for a commercial:

AnnainCA. "1980s Apple Jacks Commercial." *YouTube*, 22 Apr. 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emvrtExs-og. Accessed 1 Aug. 2025.

Tips for making a cereal box for free:

- Reuse materials: Use old cardboard boxes (like those from other products) as your base material, as well as pencils, markers, and crayons for your design.
- Embrace your creativity: Let your imagination run wild and have fun with the process.

- Websites like *Pacdora* offer free downloadable cereal box templates that you can customize and print at home. You can then fold and assemble the box yourself. *Printablee* also has 10 free printable cereal box templates available on Pinterest.

Final Note:

I can't wait to see what you do with this assignment, students! As you've probably noticed, I haven't uploaded any student samples to our D2L course shell because this is a brand-new assignment I designed over the summer. This means that *you* will be the first to complete the project for me—and the first examples I will use next fall when I teach a brand new crop of English 1010 students! Of course, I will get your explicit permission before I use your work for future courses. 😊