Prewriting Checklist: Analyzing Advertisements
From Alfano & O’Brien, Envision, Chapter 2

- **Content**: What exactly is the ad selling? An object? an idea? Both?

- **Message**: How is the ad selling the product? What is the persuasive message that the ad is sending to the audience?

- **Character and setting**: What is featured by the ad? An object? a scene? a person? How are these elements portrayed? What are the ethnicity, age, socioeconomic class, and gender of any people in the advertisement? How do these choices relate to the ad’s intended audience and reflect deliberate rhetorical choices?

- **Theme**: What is the underlying message of the ad (beyond “buy our product”)?

- **Medium**: What medium was the advertisement produced in? Television? print? radio? How did this choice suit the rhetorical purpose of the ad and accommodate the needs of a particular audience?

- **Historical context**: In what country and at what historical moment was the advertisement produced? How do the demands of context shape the persuasive appeals at work in the ad? How does the ad reflect, comment on, challenge, or reinforce contemporary political, economic, or gender ideology? How does this commentary situate it in terms of a larger trend or argument?
• **Word and image:** What is the relationship between the word (written or spoken) and the imagery in the ad? Which is given priority? How does this relationship affect the persuasiveness of the advertisement?

• **Layout:** How are the elements of the ad arranged—on a page (for a print ad) or in sequence (for a television or Internet commercial)? What is the purpose behind this arrangement? How does the ad’s organization lead the reader through—and facilitate—its argument?

• **Design:** What typeface is used? What size? What color? How do these decisions reflect attention to the ad’s rhetorical situation? How do they function in relation to the ad’s rhetorical appeals?

• **Voice:** What voice does the text use to reach its audience? Is the language technical, informal, personal, authoritative? Is the voice comic or serious?

• **Rhetorical appeals:** How does the advertiser use the images to work in conjunction with rhetorical appeals? For instance, does the image reinforce an appeal to reason? Is it designed to produce an emotional effect on the audience? Does the use of a certain style, such as black-and-white authority, contribute to the ethos of the ad?
• **Strategy of development:** Narration? definition? comparison-contrast? example or illustration? classification and division? process? analogy? cause and effect? How do these strategies contribute to the ad’s persuasive appeal?

• **Cultural resonance:** Does the ad use famous events or places or recognizable symbols to increase its persuasiveness? If so, how does that establish audience or a relationship to a cultural moment?