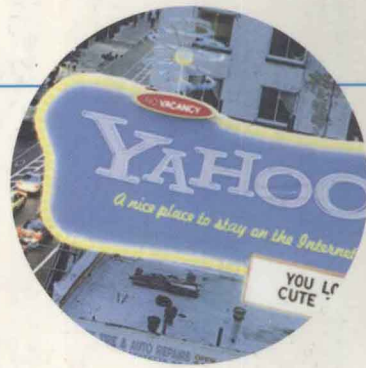
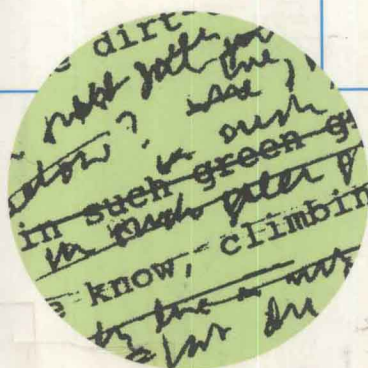


# convergences

message • method • medium



Robert Atwan



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Robert Atwan

Curry College

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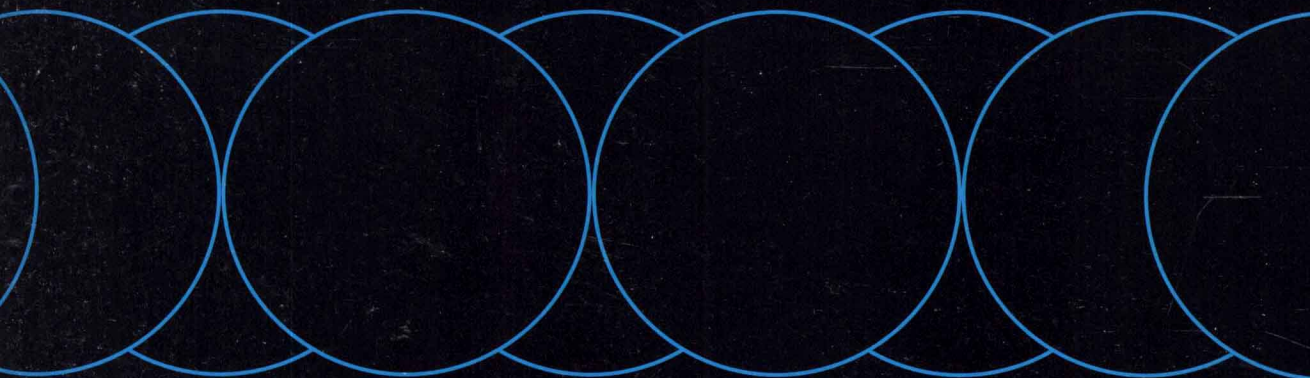
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Visit the *Convergences* companion Web site for materials to supplement the text. Referenced throughout the book, our Web site offers students and instructors a variety of opportunities to further explore message, method, and medium—*online*.

- **Web links** (marked in the text) send students to the sites represented in the book, with targeted questions to help them think about ways the medium of the Web affects the presentation of text and image.
- **Annotated links to online museums** allow students to further explore the vast collection of photography, painting, and other art forms posted on the Web.
- **Annotated links to online magazines** guide students to some of the best sources for essays and other texts available on the Web.
- **For instructors, the complete text of the Instructor's Resource Manual** is available, downloadable in pdf format.
- **TopLinks** provide a dynamically generated database of links organized by topic that will guide students to useful Web sites for their papers.
- **The English Research Room** provides reference information, interactive tutorials, practice exercises, and additional assignments that help students conduct research and write research papers.
- **Research and Documentation in the Electronic Age**—an online version of the popular booklet by Diana Hacker—provides clear, authoritative advice on documentation in every discipline.






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Student Site

Welcome to the companion Web site for *Convergences* by Robert Atwan.

**View Content by Chapter**

- Chapter 1: Staging Portraits
- Chapter 2: Telling Secrets
- Chapter 3: Shaping Spaces
- Chapter 4: Making History
- Chapter 5: Dividing Lines
- Chapter 6: Redefining Media

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## PREFACE FOR INSTRUCTORS

*Convergences* is a new kind of composition reader, designed for a new generation of students. The convergence—or coming together—of the computer, the Internet, and new telecommunications systems with older ways of sharing information has profoundly changed the ways we obtain and process information. And changes brought by such convergences are not confined to the world of computer technology. They occur throughout our culture—in art, literature, education, entertainment, and media—as boundaries between forms break down. This book explores the impact of all these convergences on the acts of reading and writing. What are the prospects for the printed word in a culture that depends increasingly on moving pictures? As traditional print culture begins to blend into an emerging visual culture, how do we adjust to and interpret the new texts that emerge? How do we help our students read the world around them critically?

*Convergences* is intended for those instructors who want their students to be critical readers of all the texts they encounter, no matter in what form, whether online, on screen, or on paper. Today's communicators—writers, artists, speakers, designers—employ words, images, color, shape, design, layout, and perspective for unique, specific purposes. Therefore, students will be asked to explore not just what a text says but also why, where, how, and for whom it is created. How are we meant to read this essay, or view this photograph? Which conventions does a given text meet, and which does it break? How do Web sites respond to advertisements, how do ads respond to the daily news? What do horror movies have to do with historical events? Today's student is a new kind of reader, one who must respond to a constant stream of images, words, and ideas. To create thoughtful, effective texts of their own, students need to become critical consumers of message, method, and medium.

This collection not only brings together an incredibly wide range of verbal and visual readings, it also highlights the way they speak to each other. With essays, photographs, Web sites, poems, cartoons, stories, billboards, advertisements, paintings, monuments, and maps, this composition reader represents the range of texts students confront every day. By grouping these texts in clusters that cross genre and medium—one “selection” may consist of a poster, a Web site, an essay, and a poem, for example—the book invites students to map out relationships between verbal and visual

messages, and to trace the analytical process other writers, thinkers, and artists have followed.

The selections are organized into six chapters whose simple and familiar themes come with a twist. Thematically arranged composition readers traditionally start with the personal — that is, with a chapter on portraying people. In *Convergences*, Chapter 1 is **Staging Portraits**; the selections in this chapter explore how verbal and visual portraits reveal certain details while hiding others. Chapter 2, **Telling Secrets**, asks why we love to tell secrets, and what our secrets tell about us. Chapter 3, **Shaping Spaces**, focuses on what it means to think spatially — whether the space is a piece of paper, a room, or the World Wide Web. Chapter 4, **Making History**, suggests that describing the past means interpreting it. Chapter 5, **Dividing Lines**, shows how different groups of people draw lines between “us” and “them.” And the final chapter, **Redefining Media**, explores the evolving relationship between media and message in our increasingly wired lives.

*Convergences* introduces a critical perspective students can use to analyze both verbal and visual texts. How can you tie together visual and verbal narratives? What are the conventions of a tabloid newspaper, and how do writers and artists play with those conventions? Which rhetorical strategies make an argument effective? How do poets and photographers think about, and then make use of, metaphor? What does an online diary share with traditional private writing, and where does it diverge?

*Convergences* surrounds a wide variety of texts with editorial apparatus that prompts students to ask what, where, when, how, and why as they read and write. Why does it matter that the message be tailored for the medium? Why has this Web site been posted, and what has its creator chosen to emphasize? Who is this advertisement aimed at, and what is it selling? The book presents each new reading as the end result of conscious choices made by its creator, and it helps students learn to make conscious choices constructing their own texts. By asking about shared sets of conventions, features, and purposes, as well as about what is being said in a text, *Convergences* meets the analytical needs of today’s student.

We have tried to address the challenges presented by such a wide range of material with practical, accessible, editorial help for students.

- A **general introduction** establishes the critical importance of message, method, and medium, and covers four “universal” categories that help us approach any text: audience, purpose, composition, and context. The introduction also offers succinct, hands-on information on the basics of reading and writing about different genres, including the essay, the advertisement, the poem, the photograph, and the Web site.
- Six **chapter introductions** explore each of the book’s major themes, offer historical background to critical and artistic movements, and clarify the many ways in which various selections are linked.

- Definitions of **key terms**, examine how a critical rhetorical or literary strategy was applied in a given selection.
- **Comments** from writers, artists, and critics bring outside voices into critical dialogue with the readings and suggest directions students can take in their own questioning of the texts that surround them.
- **Message/Method/Medium questions** at the end of each selection prompt students to consider specifically what each text is saying, the verbal and visual strategies used to construct each message, and the impact that medium has on the message.
- **Writing/Researching/Collaborating questions** at the end of each chapter prompt students to make connections within and outside the text as they write critical or creative responses to what they have read.
- A **glossary of terms** integrates classical rhetoric with the terms of marketing, media, and mass persuasion, with marginal glosses in the text to help students tie the material they read into a larger rhetorical context.

### Resources for Teaching CONVERGENCES

A comprehensive, imaginative instructor's manual — *Resources for Teaching CONVERGENCES* — provides a thorough guide to teaching the diverse messages, rhetorical methods, and types of media represented in the student text. It also explores further connections between selections, provides “Additional Writing Topics,” and lists print, Web, and audiovisual sources that may be used in conjunction with each selection.

An integrated Web site — [www.bedfordstmartins.com/convergences](http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/convergences) — links students to the sites included in the book, and offers questions for further exploration and other resources for students and instructors. In addition, Bedford/St. Martin's TopLinks — a topical links database accessible through the site — guides students to the best links with the most useful information on the important authors and complex ideas presented in *Convergences*.

### Acknowledgments

Responding to sample chapters and an early outline, several reviewers offered a number of useful suggestions and pointed out some encouraging directions. I am very grateful to Angi Caster (Highline Community College), Jeff E. Cravello (California State Polytechnic University), Carrie Heimer (University of New Hampshire), Charles Hood (Antelope Valley College), Priscilla Kanet (Clemson University), David Norlin (Cloud Community College), and J. Wylene Rholetter (Auburn University). Sometimes enthusiastic and sometimes critical, these reviewers helped keep me focused on practical instructional goals. I tried to follow their advice as much as possible.



As always, I am indebted to the staff of Bedford/St. Martin's for their magnificent support, starting with publisher Chuck Christensen and editorial director Joan Feinberg, who discovered the seeds of this project lying dormant in a proposal I had prepared for a different kind of book. Still, *Convergences* would not have taken root without the energetic support of my editor, Alanya Harter, whose flow of ideas and grasp of cultural and media studies, along with her remarkable sense of design, made it seem as though I had working behind me an entire editorial team. Every page of this book reflects her creative, conceptual, and critical contribution. I am also extremely grateful to her assistant, Josh Levy, who helped in a wide variety of ways and whose research skills proved invaluable. Jeff Voccala assisted with manuscript preparation in its later stages and helped in the preparation of the glossary. Given our extremely tight schedule, I appreciate the Herculean efforts of all those in production, especially production editor Bridget Leahy, who adroitly kept a complicated production process in motion, ensuring that everything flowed smoothly through often challenging channels. Kendra LeFleur managed the art program, Catherine Hetmansky oversaw the production process, and Elizabeth Schaaf managed production concerns. I am grateful also to editor in chief Karen Henry for her ideas early on and her continuing support of the project.

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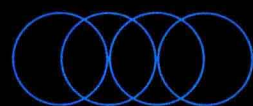
I also want to especially acknowledge the contributions of Anna George, the designer for the book, who graphically presented the ideas I had sketched out conceptually and then laid out each chapter, selection, and question. Her cool, clean design provides an engaging, student-friendly environment for a very diverse selection of readings.

I am also much indebted to Rodes Fishburne, associate editor of *Forbes ASAP*, for first calling my attention to the idea of convergence while I was consulting with him on potential contributors to the magazine. *Forbes's Big Issue IV: The Great Convergence* (October 4, 1999), with essays by Kathleen Norris, James Burke, Stanley Crouch, Edward O. Wilson, Kurt Vonnegut, and Jan Morris, along with many other distinguished writers and thinkers, remains one of the best introductions to this important concept.

Four friends generously helped me work out some of the questions I encountered in formulating different ideas that shape this book. For their

kind assistance I would like to thank Bruce Forer (former film critic for MSN.com), Melinda Harris (*Aperture* magazine), Peter Lushing (Cardoza Law School), Jon Roberts (St. Thomas Aquinas College), and Jeffrey Wallen (Hampshire College). Coming closer to home, I appreciate the support I received from my wife, Helene Atwan, and my children, Gregory and Emily, who are finally old enough to help out in concrete ways. I dedicate this book to them.

— Robert Atwan



## Introduction

# convergences

Every time you see a term boldfaced or highlighted on the page — in this introduction and throughout the book — it means that the glossary at the end of the book provides you with more information about that term, along with page numbers to help you find examples of the term in action.

What is **convergence**? The word essentially means “coming together at a single point from different directions.” We speak of several roads converging into a single road or opposing views converging into a unified position. In April 1912, the British luxury ship *Titanic* and a colossal iceberg converged in the North Atlantic in one of the twentieth century’s most famous disasters. In this book you will find numerous examples of how the ongoing and large-scale convergence of technology, media, and culture is rapidly altering traditional patterns of communication and demanding new critical aptitudes and new perceptual skills. Reading, writing, and the capacity to decipher visual material will be more important than ever before.

*Convergences* was designed to help you develop the critical tools necessary for understanding how a wide variety of verbal and visual texts are conceived, composed, targeted, interpreted, and evaluated. To do this, the book — as its subtitle suggests — encourages you to examine every selection

## COMMENT

“In schools and colleges, in these audio-visual days, doubt has been raised as to the future of reading—whether the printed word is on its last legs. One college president has remarked that in fifty years ‘only five per cent of the people will be reading.’ For this, of course, one must be prepared. But how prepared? To us it would seem that even if only one person out of a hundred and fifty million should continue as a reader, he would be the only one worth saving, the nucleus around which to found a university. We think this not impossible person, this Last Reader, might very well stand in the same relation to the community as the queen bee to the colony of bees, and that the others would quite properly dedicate themselves wholly to his welfare, serving special food and building special accommodations.”

— E. B. White, circa 1940



from three different, though interrelated, critical approaches: *message*, *method*, *medium*.

We want you to look at every text and think about

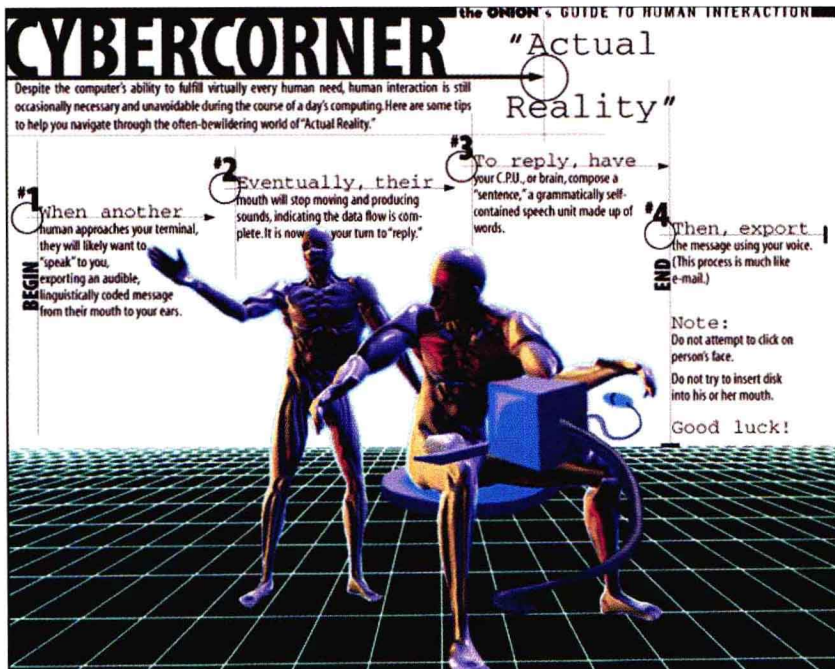
1. *What* it is saying — its *message*.
2. *How* it goes about saying it — its *method*.
3. *Why* it is delivered to you in a particular way — its *medium*.

These three perspectives are so interdependent that it is difficult to detach one from the others. Your final response to any given work should take all three perspectives into account. But for instructional purposes, we focus on message, method, and medium as separate windows through which we can view a chosen text.

## message

We typically use the word **message** in three ways: as a discrete unit of communication (“You have an important message”); as a condensed moral or central idea (“What’s the message of Oedipus Rex?”); and, informally, as a strong signal or gesture that drives home an unmistakable point (“Don’t worry, he’ll get the message”). In each sense, a message — whether verbal or nonverbal — has something to do with **content** and meaning, which is how we will consider it throughout this book.

*The Onion*, “Cybercorner: *The Onion’s Guide to Human Interaction*.” *The Onion* — basically humor in newspaper clothes — started as a free weekly newspaper at the University of Wisconsin in 1988. In 1996, it took its show online and has since been hailed as one of the best sources for humor on the Web. Its “serious” stories mock traditional newsprint format and subject matter. Recent headlines include “Apple Employee Fired for Thinking Too Different,” “Marilyn Manson Now Going Door-to-Door Trying to Shock People,” and “America Reminded of Beef’s Existence by Bold New Ad Campaign.” In other words, the message is not what it at first appears to be in this newspaper. Here the spoof plays with interactive videogame formats and stereotypes about computers and the people who use them. To check out *The Onion* online, go to [www.theonion.com](http://www.theonion.com). (© 1998 by Onion, Inc.)



**Rigo 95, *Innercity Home*.** San Francisco artist Rigo 02 (his name changes with the year) builds ► his art around the iconography of road signs. *Innercity Home*, a thirty-seven-foot square replica of an interstate sign, is painted on the side wall of a housing project in San Francisco. One tenant said of the piece, “On this street you are either on the way up or on the way down; we want to show which we are.” (Photo courtesy of Gallery Paule Anglim)

When we make attempts to interpret any sort of written or visual material, we are usually asking ourselves a series of questions: What is this short story about? What does this painting mean? What is the point of this editorial? In some texts, the message or meaning may be fairly obvious. We are all familiar with reading comprehension tests in which we are asked to identify the main point of a short prose passage. Similarly, a letter to a newspaper, for example, may make a single, unambiguous point, and that’s that. In some short essays, the central message may be spelled out in no uncertain terms.

In everyday communication, for convenience, we often boil the content down into its essential message. We reduce a ten-page proposal to its main point or points. We summarize a crime story in a few words. We outline the plot of an action film. But identifying the message or meaning of more complicated works can require more critical effort and even some creativity. The message may not stare us in the face or jump off the page. The main point or central idea may be impossible to state directly. There may even be more than one message. A writer or artist may do something unexpected and you may need to supply missing information to understand the work. For example, the painting on the side of the building shown here looks at first glance like an enormous highway sign. It means more when we learn that San Francisco artist Rigo worked with the people who lived in the community—a newly built project—to come up with the message you see. Rigo had originally planned to paint an arrow pointing up with the message “Sky Here.” What does it mean to use the iconography of road signs in public art, and to display the resulting work not in a gallery but in an urban landscape where the audience is composed of commuters in their cars? If you saw the picture here without the explanation provided by the caption, what would you think Rigo is suggesting about community, art, or life?

In trying to identify a work’s message or meaning, be careful not to merely note its subject or theme. To say, for example, that a particular essay is “about terrorism” is not the same as identifying its message. That requires another step: What exactly is the essay saying about terrorism? What attitude does the author have toward that subject? To take another example, saying that Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a play “about revenge” does not in any way tell us what message Shakespeare wants to deliver on that complicated



dramatic subject. Finding the message requires a deep penetration into the text.

We usually know that a work is complex when we cannot easily produce a brief summary or main point, a caption or callout that conveniently supplies us with the gist of the entire work. Many works of literature and art (as you will discover in the following chapters) are intricate and contain several levels of meaning with different and perhaps contradictory messages. In some fiction we may not be able to find a moral center or a character whose judgments we can rely on. This is not necessarily the result of an artistic flaw or failure; it is more than likely intentional. In many creative works the burden of discovering a message or formulating a meaning will seem to fall entirely on the reader or viewer. Many works of art and literature do not “contain” a message or meaning the way a can of vegetable soup contains its ingredients. The individual reader or viewer is responsible for the construction of meaning. It is good to be wary, of course, of reading more into a picture or an essay than what is there, making a text more complicated than it really is. Yet you also have to remember that “reading into” a work is the only way to establish its meaning, to get at any internal contradictions, and to expose hidden agendas.

Also as you look for meaning, be careful of too quickly dismissing some works as simple, trivial, or inconsequential. Many of the texts in this book — essays, poems, photographs, ads — look simple and casual on the surface, yet their simplicity often masks an impressive complexity. Many great works can support an infinite amount of “reading into.” Many artists strive for a surface simplicity, even an innocence, which camouflages complicated ambitions. And this is true not only of literary and artistic works. In the following chapters you are encouraged to probe deeply into works that may seem unremarkable — advertisements, Web pages, maps, news photos, magazine covers, comic strips, posters, and so on. Your effort to find more than meets the eye should lead to insightful observation and productive discussion.



#### COMMENT

“Rigo is one of a growing, informal group of new artists who, like many before them, tweak society, either by defacing the symbols of contemporary America or by inviting that society in.”

— Catherine Berwick, art critic

**Ron English, *Camel Jr's*.** Ron English is an artist who appropriates the methods and media of advertising. In this example, he uses colorful, inviting graphics on a billboard to make a statement about the way Camel brands and markets its products. English, who calls himself a landscape painter, began his career actually altering landscapes, painting over billboards and changing the focus of their messages from marketing to social awareness. (© Ron English)

## method

The message is *what* a text is saying; the **method** is *how* it goes about saying it. Everything we see, read, or hear is expressed in a particular fashion, no matter how ordinary it seems. “Hello,” “Hi,” “Hey,” “Dude!” “Good morning,” “How’s it going?” “How are you?” “Whassup?” “What’s happening?” and “How you doing?” are all common greetings, but each one represents a different method for delivering a message, with varying levels of formality and tone. A Polaroid snapshot and a black-and-white studio photograph may each be taken of the same subject at the same time and in the same position, but the two pictures will suggest different moods and approaches. As you examine the selections in this book (or any text outside it), ask yourself, *Why did the author or artist choose this means of expression and not another?* Why does the advertising copywriter use just these words or the photographer shoot from just that angle? Why does the poet make just this

comparison and not another one, or why does a fiction writer tell a story from one character’s perspective instead of another’s?

The words and images we choose, the perspectives and viewpoints we decide on, the ways we organize and arrange our ideas—all these pertain to method. At some levels of expression, critics believe that there can be no distinction between what we say and how we say it. Once at a reading, the poet T. S. Eliot was asked what he meant by a particular passage; he answered by simply re-reading the lines. He was making the point that if you



repeat what you said in different words, then you have not said the same thing. “Good morning” is not the same as “Whassup?”

A discipline that studies the various methods and procedures of expression is **rhetoric**. Developed in ancient Greece, rhetoric was first employed to teach orators the most effective ways to express themselves and persuade audiences. Its formulations were eventually systematized and applied to written language. Traditional rhetoric has lately been brought to bear on the visual arts. We now see the convergence of traditional rhetorical methods with the techniques of film, art, photography, and graphic design.



We are immersed in rhetoric: we hear it in political speeches and courtroom arguments; we experience it in literature, opinion columns, and TV commercials. There is no escaping its methods and strategies.

We frequently think of rhetoric in a negative fashion: we speak of “empty” or “mere” rhetoric when we criticize something for having no substance. Or we use the word “rhetorical” to mean pretentious, bombastic, or overly elaborate. Because it is often used for persuasive purposes, rhetoric is also negatively associated with manipulation. But we should not confuse these limited characterizations with the general critical and creative practices of rhetoric. Rhetorical methods apply to all expression — empty or profound, devious or sincere, true or false, visual or verbal. To understand rhetoric is to understand how something is generated, expressed, structured, and put to purpose.

In other words, rhetorical terms provide incredibly useful tools for you to use to take apart and then reconstruct the texts in this reader — both the traditional essays and the works in new art forms. *Convergences* uses various tools to highlight these terms for you: marginal definitions; extended discussions of key terms within the chapter; and a glossary at the end of the book that collects rhetorical and visual terms and suggests how they relate to each other. The following list previews some common rhetorical methods as they apply to oral, written, and visual discourse. All of these methods are covered in greater detail later on.

- **Narration.** Storytelling is one of the most popular ways to organize information or render an account of events. It is employed by journalists reporting on a newsworthy incident, by literary writers crafting a novel, by cartoonists depicting a humorous episode. Photographers and painters narrate with imagery: circling the cupola of a Renaissance cathedral in Florence, Italy, is frame after frame of mosaics that represent various stories from the Old and New Testaments. The movies we enjoy could not exist without a narrative line, nor could most television commercials, especially those that depend on the narrative technique of “before and after.” For more on narrative, see page 130.
- **Description.** Writers and artists are known for their meticulous observations. We tend to think that pictures can give us a better or more accurate sense of what something looks like than words can, but as some of the selections in this book demonstrate, that is not always the case (see the Elián González selection, pp. 435–39). Through specificity of detail, a talented writer can help us visualize a scene while at the same time clearly conveying an attitude or idea about it, whereas visual artists cannot be so direct. Unless accompanied by an explicit title or caption, visual texts require a developed ability on the part of the viewer to perceive or infer the artist or photographer’s mind-set. One goal of this book is to help you develop that ability. For more on description, see page 485.