



Writing a Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetoric studies how writers use words to influence a reader. Rhetorical analysis separates a work of non-fiction into manageable parts and then demonstrates how these parts together create a persuasive argument. When writing a rhetorical analysis you are **NOT** summarizing a text **NOR** are writing whether you agree with the author or not. A rhetorical analysis is writing about **how** the author makes his/her argument and whether or not their method used is successful.

Prewriting Questions

Author

- Who wrote the piece?
- Does the author's professional or academic background create bias in their argument?
- What authority can you attribute to the writer?

Purpose/Intent

- Why did the author write this article?
- What is the time and place of the piece?
- Do current events influence why this piece was written and published?

Audience

- Who is the author's audience?
- How does the author try to appeal to the audience's values through particular language?
- What assumptions does the author make about the audience's knowledge or beliefs?

Communicative style/tone

- How does the author convey their message through the use of language?
- Does the author use a particular style or tone throughout the article?



Analyzing the Text

The rhetorician (the writer making the argument) uses two methods to make their argument. The first method, discussed in-depth below, are the appeals of ethos, logos, and pathos. The second method is inartistic proofs, which include facts, surveys, polls, data, statistics, etc.

Ethos

Ethos uses the writer's credibility or expertise to make an argument. Here the writer may be a credible source or may incorporate credible sources to support the writer's argument.

- ⇒ **Example:** A heart surgeon from Johns Hopkins Hospital makes a credible argument linking heart disease to smoking and cholesterol intake.

Logos

Logos appeals to reason and logic. Academic arguments frequently rely on reason and logic because serious scholarship depends on evidence and proof.

- ⇒ **Example:** In his argument showing how pro-corporate sympathies dominate both of America's two major political parties, Prof. Noam Chomsky cites statistics showing that corporate contributions to both parties in the past two decades have been nearly identical.

Pathos

Appealing to an audience's emotion is called pathos. In using pathos, the writer taps into the reader's sympathy or compassion, anger or disappointment, desire or love, and sometimes even sadness or happiness to convince the reader of the writer's argument.

- ⇒ **Example:** A TV commercial asking viewers to contribute to pet adoption agencies uses images of cute or sick dogs to appeal to the viewer's compassion for protecting innocent animals.

Thesis, Body, and Conclusion

Your **introduction** should clearly state your argument about how the text's author persuades the reader. This is where you state your thesis. Try to select a few rhetorical techniques the author uses most strongly.

- ⇒ **Example:** In his article "The Myth of Liberal Media Bias," Edward S. Herman effectively convinces his reader of the myth of liberal bias in the media by demonstrating the corporatist



⇒ right-wing stranglehold on mass media through analyzing who actually controls America's dominant sources of news information. Herman achieves this by using his scholarly expertise (ethos) in the political economy of American media to demonstrate facts and statistics (logos) convincing his reader that American news outlets rarely present information from a left-wing perspective.

Each **body paragraph** should start with a strong topic sentence relating to your thesis statement in your introduction. Every sentence in each paragraph should relate to that paragraph's topic sentence. This gives your paper unity and cohesion in that your body paragraphs flow from the points raised in your introduction. Each paragraph should give examples of rhetorical techniques the author uses while giving examples from the text. Make sure to end each body paragraph with a transition sentence that connects it to the next body paragraph.

Your **conclusion** should be brief and summarize how your body paragraphs reinforce your thesis in your introduction. This is not the time to introduce new information. Instead, explain why your argument matters.

For example, the conclusion of your rhetorical analysis may point out Herman's underlying message of corporate media control and how his rhetorical techniques influenced the efficacy of his argument.

Further Assistance: For more detailed help or if you have questions, visit the Writing Center located in the Lewis University Library or call 815-836-5427.