Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical Analysis (RA) is an examination of the ways in which a document (such as an essay, speech, advertisement, or commercial) attempts to persuade its intended audience. In some cases, RA also requires you to determine the effectiveness of the ways in which the document attempts to persuade its intended audience.

Two Types of Rhetorical Analysis

In college, you are likely to encounter two types of RA:

Textual Rhetorical Analysis examines a text, such as an essay, letter, speech, book, or article.

Visual Rhetorical Analysis examines a visual document, such as a print ad, poster, or visual artwork.

1. Identify the SOAPSTone

- **Speaker** - also known as the author or rhetor: who created this document?

- **Occasion** - when and where does the document appear?

- **Audience** - who is this document meant for?

- **Purpose** - what is this document trying to accomplish?

- **Subject** - what is the topic of the document?

- **Tone** - what is the writer's attitude about this subject?

2. Then, identify the rhetorical appeals:

Ethos: Appeal to ethics and credibility.

"My experiences makes me uniquely qualified for the job."

Author tries to convince the audience of the author's credibility or character. Can also refer to principles or beliefs that define a person, community, or era.

Examples:

- Citing one's experience or credentials
- Language ad vocabulary appropriate to the audience, topic, and purpose
- Correct spelling, grammar, and syntax

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Ask yourself: "How does the speaker indicate their credibility?"

Pathos: Appeal to emotion.

"You'll make the right decision because you have something that not many people do: you have heart."

Author uses words and images to inspire anger, pity, joy, fear, etc. in the audience.

Examples:

- Evocative imagery
- Stories of emotional events
- Meaningful language

Ask yourself: "What emotions does the document want to make its audience feel? How do they do this, and why?"

Logos: Appeal to logic.

"The algorithms have been run in a thousand different ways, and the math continues to check out."

Author uses facts, reason, and data to persuade the audience.

Examples:

- Citing facts, data, and research
- Using historical and literal analogies
- Constructing logical, consistent arguments

Ask yourself: "What facts does the document present to its audience, and why?"

Kairos: Appeal to timeliness or appropriateness.

"This is a time when we need to band together to insure that we are doing all that we can to protect our living children. This new law will help us to keep kids in school safe from outside harms."

Author uses references to a relevant issue or current event to persuade the audience.

Examples:

- Citing current events, or desired, time-sensitive actions
- Using references to specific wants of an audience
- Constructing urgent arguments

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Ask yourself: "What timely issue does the document present to its audience, and why?"

A **Textual Rhetorical Analysis** will examine the above rhetorical elements and appeals, and may also identify any logical fallacies that detract from the document's effectiveness.

A **Visual Rhetorical Analysis** will require you to identify all of the above as well as the visual elements of the document, such as color, imagery, font style, medium, genre, and the size, location, and orientation of objects. Your visual rhetorical analysis will examine how these visual elements contribute to or detract from the persuasiveness of the document.

3. Now you have enough information to write your thesis statement.

Some instructors only want you to identify the rhetorical strategies, speaker, and purpose in a document.

Thesis = *Rhetorical strategies* + **speaker** + purpose
Example: "Through his skilled use of *ethos, pathos, and logos* **Dr. Seuss** convinces young readers it's important to try new things."

Some instructors want you to identify what elements were effective and what elements were ineffective.

Thesis = **Speaker** + *Rhetorical Strategies* + evaluation of the document's effectiveness.

Example: "While **Maybelline's** advertisement for the new Color Sensational Pearls lipstick appeals to the audience's familiarity with the company [*ethos*], interest in beneficial ingredients [*logos*], and desire to feel beautiful and confident [*pathos*], the contradictory messages in the text undermine the ad's overall effectiveness." [ineffective rhetorical element.]"

Unless your instructor says so, you are not absolutely required to focus only on *logos, ethos*, and *pathos*. You can also look at other elements, especially in a text-based document such as an article, essay, speech, or story. These elements may include logical fallacies, organization, tone, and use of evidence:

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Thesis = **Speaker** + *Purpose* + Other rhetorical elements.

Example: "**Senator Gardner's** response to a Durango woman's question about women's access to reproductive health *hardly answered the question at all*: it consisted of a generic reiteration of Gardner's pro-life stance, and a non-sequitur [logical fallacy] about how broadcast television stations in Durango can now access news from Denver rather than Albuquerque."

What to include in your introduction

A hook to grab your reader's attention

1. A description of the document that identifies the **SOAPSTone**
2. Any other elements that will help your reader imagine and understand your thesis statement

What to include in your body paragraphs

Use the **MEAL** structure to develop your body paragraphs. The main idea of each body paragraph should correspond with one of the supporting points from your thesis statement.

a. **Main idea**: what are you going to prove to your reader in this paragraph?
b. **Evidence**: what evidence from the document supports what you want to prove?
c. **Analysis**: how and why does this evidence support what you want to prove?
d. **Link**: what should your reader understand by the end of this paragraph?

What to include in your conclusion

Summarize your main claims and ideas.

Remember to not introduce any new claims or ideas

Most importantly, consider the following questions and answer some or all of them for your reader: What's at stake?

- What does the intended audience gain or lose if they accept or reject the document's claims?
- What's the larger significance of this document?
- Why is it important to recognize the rhetoric of the document?

Finally, a recent study showed that every time a student waits until the last minute to write their rhetorical analysis, a defenseless kitten sheds a thousand tiny tears. Therefore, please

come to the Writing Center as soon as you get your assignment. Our tutors know how to help.

Can you identify the rhetorical appeals in the above statement?

Remember to save often!

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