



ENG301

Rhetorical Analysis

WHAT IS RHETORICAL ANALYSIS?

Rhetorical analysis is the process of examining the rhetorical (and argumentative) moves the author(s) make and “explaining *how* something works, how each part functions in the whole” (Mauk and Metz 105).

Nancy wood, in *Essentials of Argument*, frames rhetorical analysis in the context of the “rhetorical situation,” (Kairos), specifically, “the *text*, the *reader*, or audience, the *author*, the *constraints*, and the *exigence* or cause” (28).


What does the above mean: We have to consider the situation in which a text was created, in order to understand and explain how it works and functions for its intended audience and purpose.

EXAMPLES OF RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

The use of pastel colors on Weightwatchers.com's homepage creates a softer appearance for the text embedded in the colors.

The phrase "beauty is truth, truth beauty" (9) functions as a signal of Keats' conclusion in the final line, "that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (10). What begins as a generalization transforms in the end to a statement about exigency.

"In Brown's sixth paragraph, he appeals to value by connecting over-reliance on cars and the breakdown of community" (Mauk and Metz 108).



The previous examples are starts to rhetorical analysis. As Mauk and Metz note, “to accomplish genuine analysis, the writer has to both identify the argumentative move (such as an appeal to value) and then *explain how it works*” (108, italics Mauk and Metz).

A rhetorical analyst must be careful to focus on the what and how and not on the value of the rhetorical move or the argument. When we shift to making a claim about the value about the rhetorical move, we begin to argue.

WHICH RHETORICAL MOVES DO WE ANALYZE?

The answer to this question depends on the analyst. In an academic essay you may be given several moves to look at (i.e. ethos, pathos, and logos). In other situations, *you* may have to look at the entire text and determine what is the most important to look at (i.e. a poster reminding viewers about safety procedures to make the rhetoric more compelling; you could look at layout, font, and color, or other elements of the poster).

Rhetorical analysts need to narrow the moves looked at to the most important. A decision matrix may help with this, by identifying the most important criteria and moves we see in the text.

- Question for consideration: what other rhetorical moves besides ethos, pathos, and logos could we look at in our analysis?

FOCUS AND DIRECTION

Keep in mind what Mauk and Metz say about discussing the “how” of a rhetorical move. A good rhetorical analysis identifies specific moves and HOW they are being used.

This means the process of rhetorical analysis involves identifying specific and relevant examples, within a central framework that makes a claim about the subject of the analysis.

Therefore when we introduce our analysis we need to make two moves:

- Introduce the text we will analyze and provide background about it to ensure our readers understand what it is.
- Provide a specific thesis that identifies our purpose for the analysis, and what parts of the text we will analyze.
 - Readers will expect us to follow the order of ideas in our thesis. If you say you will analyze ethos, pathos, and logos, a reader will expect to see our first supporting paragraph focus on ethos, the next on logos, and so on.

When we conclude our analysis we may simply restate our main claim (or “thesis”), but we may also want to make a final statement about our analysis to help readers understand why the analysis is important.

- Another way to think about introducing and concluding rhetorical analyses may be found by answering the question, “How does this analysis contribute to the conversation?”

ORGANIZATION

The Purdue Owl has a good breakdown of how to organize a rhetorical analysis at

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/725/02/>

The standard structure of a rhetorical analysis essay contains an introduction paragraph, one or more supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion.

- As noted at the OWL, there are three ways to structure our supporting paragraphs, and which structure we choose depends on how we want to analyze the text.

ANALYSIS PITFALLS

There are several common pitfalls in rhetorical analysis, which are pitfalls or fallacies because we have to have evidence for what we claim about the text:

- Assuming the intent: We claim we know the intent of the author. This is a pitfall because we have to have evidence to prove we know the intent, otherwise we are generalizing.
 - Example: Smith wanted to convey a sense of appreciation (what evidence do we have that Smith wanted to do this?).
- Assuming the effect on the reader.
 - Example: Readers will feel impassioned by this example (where is our evidence for how ALL readers will feel?).
- Taking a stance.
 - Example: Smith's use of logos is effective here; that makes his argument very good (how does this argument about the text help us understand HOW logos is being used?).

Works Cited

Keats, John. "Ode On a Grecian Urn." *John Keats*. Ed. Elizabeth Cook. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. 288-289. Print.

Mauk, John and John Metz. *Inventing Arguments Fourth Edition*. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016.

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