

Rhetorical Analysis Essay

APSU Writing Center Handout

What is a Rhetorical Analysis?

A rhetorical analysis examines how an author uses rhetorical devices such as Logos, Pathos, Ethos, and Kairos to influence its audience.

A "rhetorical device" is a technique the rhetor uses to construct the message: metaphor. Similie, repetition, alliteration, parallelism, rhetorical questions, irony, imagery, analogy, etc. While a "rhetorical appeal" is a means of persuasion.

We do this to make our argument about the effectiveness of the author's choices rather than summarizing the text.

How does the author use rhetoric to impact the audience, and how effective are those devices?

What an Analysis Explains:

- How persuasive and significant a text is
- Why a text is effective or not
- How the text connects with the intended audience

Read and Analyze the Text

Before you start writing the analysis, read through the text and take notes or annotations about important words or phrases, arguments, claims, evidence, tone, timing, purpose, audience, etc.

Consider why the author makes their writing choices and how their rhetorical devices connect with the audience.

Elements to Consider Analyzing

Subject: What is the text about? Can you identify the main topic, arguments, or ideas?

Author: What is the author's stance on the subject?

Audience: Why should the audience care about the topic the author is writing about? Who is the author writing to? Consider the age, interests, concerns, knowledge of the subject, needs, etc.

Purpose: What is the author's goal in writing this? Is the purpose clear?

Tone: How is the author's attitude expressed towards the subject? Are they serious, urgent, optimistic, sarcastic, informal, or more?

Context: What current events or social issues influenced the author's writing?

Rhetorical Appeals and Devices

These are the qualities of the author's argument.

Pathos – Appeal to Emotion

Pathos occurs when a writer draws on the audience's emotions, values, or sympathies to support the argument.

Example: A charity ad showing heartfelt stories.

- Does it evoke emotion?
- Are vivid details and imagery used?
- Does it generate sympathy or other feelings?

Logos – Appeal to Logic

Occurs when a writer persuades using facts, evidence, and reasoning to support an argument.

Example: Data-driven graphs that support a claim.

- Are facts, statistics, or historical knowledge included?
- How does the author provide reasoning to support the claim?
- How well can the audience follow the author's reasoning?

Ethos – Appeal to Credibility

Occurs when a writer establishes authority and trustworthiness with an audience.

Example: “As a scientist with decades of research...”

- How does the writer establish their authority or credibility on the topic?
- What makes the audience trust the writer's knowledge or position?

Kairos – Appeal to Timing & Context

Occurs when a writer takes advantage of the right moment, situation, or circumstances to support an argument.

Example: A speech about climate change given immediately after a major natural disaster.

- Does the writer explain why the issue matters in that particular moment?
- Does the writer connect the argument to current events, historical context, or relevant circumstances?
- Does the timing or context of the argument create a sense of urgency or relevance for the audience?

Body Paragraph 1 (Rhetorical Situation): Analyze the author, audience, purpose, and context.

Explain how these elements influence the way the argument is presented.

Paragraph 2 (Logos): Analyze how the author uses facts, statistics, evidence, examples, or reasoning to support the argument. Explain why this is convincing for the audience.

Paragraph 3 (Ethos): Analyze how the author establishes credibility, authority, trust, or character. Explain why this is convincing for the audience.

Paragraph 4 (Pathos): Analyze how the author appeals to emotions, values, and beliefs. Explain what emotions the author creates to advance the argument.

Paragraph 5 (Kairos): Analyze how the author uses the situation or surrounding circumstances to make the argument more relevant to the audience in this context.

Conclusion: Evaluate the overall effectiveness of the author's rhetorical choices. How do these strategies accomplish the purpose?

References

Norfolk State University Writing Center. (2022). *Rhetorical Analysis*.

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<https://www.uvu.edu/writingcenter/handouts/rhetorical-analysis.html>