

# Rhetorical Analysis: Pre-Writing

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Learning how to identify and analyze rhetorical tools is an important part of the collegiate experience. This handout emphasizes several tools which can aid in the analysis of rhetoric in an effective, well-organized paper, but always tailor your work to your audience and assignment.

## Analyzing through Questions

Speakers and writers use rhetorical tools in order to appeal to logic (logos), emotion (pathos), or authority (ethos). Some examples of tools include word choice, humor, statistics, examples, analogies, anaphora, metaphors, etc. The tools may have an emotional, authoritative, or logical appeal depending on the way they are used, and some tools can be used for more than one appeal. Asking yourself specific questions regarding the effect of rhetorical tools you encounter is a good place to begin expanding and improving the analysis within your paper. Here are some questions to consider:

### If the tool appeals to authority (ethos)

- What authority does the speaker hope the target audience will trust? Is the authority of the speaker in question, or is the authority an outside source?
- Why does the speaker choose that particular kind of authority? What connections is the speaker trying to make in the minds of the audience?
- Is it likely that the audience will accept this authority? Why or why not?
- How does establishing credibility of or trust in this authority help persuade people to trust the speaker?

### If the tool appeals to logic (logos)

- Why does the speaker use a logical argument instead of a pathetic or ethical one? What is the audience's likely reaction to this sort of logical reasoning?
- How selective or particular is the logic? Is there any evidence of logical fallacy? If so, why? Does the fallacy undermine the argument, or strengthen it?

*Note: For more information on logical fallacies, see the handout "Logical Fallacies."*

- Is the speaker using logic to persuade the audience about a highly emotional issue? If so, why?

### If the tool appeals to emotion (pathos)

- What emotion is the speaker highlighting? Why is that particular emotion highlighted? Why would this emotion be powerful for the speaker's audience?
- What particular tool is used to manipulate or arouse these emotions? Does it work? Why or why not?
- Once the speaker has created an emotion in the audience, how does the speaker connect that emotion with the purpose of the speech? Is this effective? Why or why not? In other words, how does establishing an emotional connection help persuade people to follow the speaker?

## The Analytical Process: A Sample

In rhetorical analysis, you must first show the connection between each rhetorical tool identified and the way the speaker uses those tools to create a reaction in the audience. Then explain why each tool was effective for that particular audience.

The following example demonstrates an effective analytical process, taking a sample from the speech “Against the Spanish Armada” by Queen Elizabeth I:

I know I have but the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart of a king, and of a king of England, too; and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realms: to which, rather than any dishonor should grow by me, I myself will take up arms.

You will most likely have a powerful, positive reaction to this speech. You will then determine a stance: to argue that the speech is effective.

Next, determine the rhetorical tools Elizabeth uses to make her argument. Looking at the segment critically, notice that Elizabeth manages to logically connect the fact that she is a Queen with the responsibility to defend her realm. Queen Elizabeth ironically juxtaposes the fact that she is a *feeble woman* against the invading European princes and references herself many times in the segment.

Select a rhetorical tool to focus on: Elizabeth’s use of repetition. Note that Elizabeth refers to herself seven times and that five of those references show Elizabeth as the subject of the clause. Next, consider why Elizabeth would refer to herself so often and list the possibilities:

Elizabeth was reminding her troops how important she was

Elizabeth wanted to have her troops remember her when they were in battle

Elizabeth wanted to appear confident

Elizabeth was egotistic

Elizabeth was emphasizing her role as a Queen

Elizabeth was using repetition of a subject to create a dramatic feeling in her audience

Review your list and decide on a likely possibility: Elizabeth wished to establish her authority in the eyes of her subjects. This is only one possible analysis of many possibilities; however, this aspect can be explored in depth. Next, consider how referring to herself so often helps Elizabeth’s troops accept her as their leader. Look at each specific reference and notice how in every instance Elizabeth portrays herself as active and powerful. By attaching herself to verbs commonly associated with power and ruling, you can reason and argue that Elizabeth is able to repetitively emphasize her position as the ruler of the English people.

You are now ready to write a paragraph of your rhetorical analysis:

In the passage, Elizabeth refers to herself no fewer than seven times. In each instance, Elizabeth connects herself to active verbs which emphasize her dynamic and powerful status: “I have,” “I know,” “I think foul scorn,” “I will take up arms.” This repetition of her autonomous identity is a powerful way of reminding her troops that she is, in fact, their queen and military leader. By demonstrating her own personal power, Elizabeth shows that she is just as capable as “any prince of Europe” of defending her lands and people; the repetition of that idea with her carefully chosen verbs connects her power as a person (and as a “kingly” woman) with her power as a queen.

Even at this point, you can analyze more deeply: Why was it so important for Elizabeth to establish herself as a “king”? What elements of the verbs Elizabeth chose communicate power and monarchy to the audience? Is there any aspect of her word choice that would be more stirring to a military audience than a civilian one? After exploring the issues, you may discover many other aspects of the repetitive word choice to analyze and write about. Once you have chosen specific tools to write about and examples to draw upon, you are ready to write your rhetorical analysis.