

Rhetorical Analysis: Writing



This handout discusses the organization of a rhetorical analysis paper. Keep in mind that it is only a guide; your essay will probably vary from this outline depending on your audience and specific assignment.

Introduction

Begin your essay by providing a context for your work. In your introduction, consider these questions:

- What is the rhetorical situation? What is the setting? Why is the work taking place?
- Who is the speaker? Who is the specific audience?
- What is the speaker's purpose? What is the speaker trying to convey to the target audience? What are the speaker's goals for the text? What is being argued or suggested?
- How does the speaker achieve this purpose? What tools are used?

When you combine these essential elements, your thesis may look something like this: “(The author) uses (tools) to effectively/ineffectively convince (the audience) that (argument).”

It is important to think about possible connections between tools. Examine what is happening in the text as a whole, rather than just a list of tools. For example, some tools may build the author's ethos, and other tools build on that ethos and give a logical argument that the audience might not have believed otherwise. Or perhaps each of the tools contributes to an emotional appeal that the audience will find convincing.

Body Paragraphs

Once you have identified some tools the author uses to make the argument, you are ready analyze how and how well the author uses those tools. Remember that to analyze well, you'll need to use several specific examples from the text, often direct quotations, for each tool you are analyzing. This may take one or more paragraphs. Decide on an organization that works best for your argument. See the “Rhetorical Analysis: Prewriting” handout for more guidance on analyzing tools.

- Begin each paragraph with a sentence that answers the question, “What does this tool contribute to the author's argument—how does it convey the author's purpose?”
- Give the quotation and explain how or why it is a good example of the rhetorical tool you've described.
- Analyze the quote's effectiveness. Explain the effect that the tool has on the author's specific audience and what this effect has to do with the author's argument. In other words, connect the tools to the author's purpose.

Remember, the tools are not the appeals (pathos, logos, ethos) and vice versa. See the “Rhetorical Analysis: Revision” handout for other common errors and how to avoid them.

Conclusion

To provide an effective ending to your rhetorical analysis, consider incorporating the following into your conclusion:

- Reinforce your thesis statement by summarizing your main points.
- Let your readers know why it matters. Provide insights and implications of your claims about the rhetoric the author uses.
- Provide a sense of closure for your readers.