

## Rhetorical Analysis

**Rhetorical analysis** focuses on how authors use specific communication strategies to accomplish their communication goals. When you write a rhetorical analysis essay, your goal is to discuss the communication (*rhetorical*) strategies the author uses to create the desired effect in the target audience **and** how/why those strategies work (or don't work).

### An Effective Rhetorical Analysis

- Determines the primary goal or purpose of the text
- Identifies various rhetorical strategies the author uses to accomplish that goal
- Provides specific examples of the strategies used, how they are used, and why they are used
- Discusses the effect(s) of the various strategies on the author's target audience
- Offers explanations for why the strategies, individually and together as a whole, do or do not work to achieve the author's goal

### Step 1: Beginning an Analysis

To get started, you'll need to carefully listen to, read, or view the text you're analyzing to get a sense of the **rhetorical situation**. You may also need to do a little research, depending on your assignment prompt. The rhetorical situation includes:

#### **Audience**

- The person or people the author is trying to communicate with or to

#### **Purpose**

- The reason for creating the message and the desired outcome

#### **Environment**

- Where the communication takes place (the physical or virtual place/space)
- The social, economic, and/or historical context in which the communication occurs

#### **Medium**

- The tools the writer uses to create and deliver the message to the audience

#### **Author/Creator**

- The person or people that composed the text

### Step 2: Identifying Strategies

Once you have a sense of the rhetorical situation, you need to read, view, or listen to the text again to look for specific **rhetorical strategies** the author uses. These include:

**Pathos strategies** create an emotional response in the audience to gain acceptance and approval for the ideas expressed. These types of strategies include things like *Word Choice*--choosing words or phrases that evoke strong feelings in the audience and *Targeting Basic Human Needs or Desires*--implying that the audience or their loved ones will personally benefit.

**Ethos strategies** are designed to get the audience to trust the author and thus the message. Examples include *Source Usage*--providing trustworthy sources to explain, illustrate, or support ideas; and *Fairness*--acknowledging and addressing more than one side of the argument or topic.

**Logos strategies** create understanding or acknowledgement of ideas and information through evidence and reasoning. Examples of *Evidence* strategies are using *statistics, research findings, and real-life examples*; *Reasoning* strategies explain how the evidence provided by the author supports the author's ideas or claims.

**Kairos strategies** take advantage of what's currently happening in the audience's everyday life to engage and relate to the audience. Examples include *Referencing Current Issues and Events* and *Endorsements by Popular Public Figures* to support the author's ideas, position, or purpose.

**\*\*As always, you should refer to your class notes and materials for the kinds of rhetorical strategies you should look for in the text you're analyzing.** Your instructor may want you to look for types of strategies not mentioned above or for specific strategies discussed in class.

### Step 3: Writing Your Analysis Essay



**Pro tip:** Organize your ideas from your work above into an outline or diagram—whichever works best for you--before you start writing your rough draft. From there, it's easy to see if you have enough information for each paragraph and if your ideas are flowing logically both within paragraphs and throughout the paper as a whole.

**Essay Structure:** Generally, analysis essays have the following elements

- In the introduction paragraph: Start with something general about the topic, lead to the text you're analyzing (give title and author/creator), briefly summarize the author's thesis or purpose, and state your thesis at the end of this paragraph.
- In each body paragraph:
  - **Claim/Point** of paragraph (e.g., the first sentence of the paragraph might be: "One effective rhetorical strategy the writer uses is word choice.")
  - **Evidence** from the text you're analyzing (e.g., examples of strategy used)
  - **Reasoning** (e.g., explanation of how the strategy helps achieve the author's goal)
- In the conclusion paragraph: Briefly summarize and/or tie all of your claims/points together and restate your thesis.

**\*\*Other elements may also be included, depending on your specific assignment.\*\***

Note: For images, pictures, or art, see also our Visual Analysis handout.  
For movies or documentaries, see our Film Analysis handout.