

Remember, rhetorical analyses examine the “why” not the “what”. You have important things to say, so make an appointment with the Writing Center to help get your message across!

Rhetorical Analysis

So you want to write a rhetorical analysis... good for you! This handout is here to help! A **rhetorical analysis** analyzes how language usage contributes to the author’s meaning and purpose. Think: We’re looking at the “why” of the word choices rather than the “what” of the content.

We do this by looking for rhetorical devices and appeals.

1. Appeals attempt to gain audience “buy-in” through appealing to natural human tendencies. The three rhetorical appeals are ethos (trust of a credible source), pathos (emotions), and logos (logic/facts/reasoning).
2. Devices are stylistic techniques use to convey meaning
Ex: alliteration, metaphor, syntax, juxtaposition, irony, repetition

First, read the prompt carefully! The prompt may tell you the message that the author of your source is trying to send. If so, you’re in luck! If not, don’t panic—just read through and decide what the author’s message is. Either way, the next step is to look for devices that help bring out the author’s message. (Note: Your professor may specify which devices/appeals you are or are not allowed to use.)

Next, organize your essay. The thesis is the road map to your entire paper. It should be detailed, yet clear. Discuss the devices, in the same order that you will discuss them throughout the paper.

Ex: “The author uses X, Y, and Z to convey the message that ____.”

Now for the body paragraphs! These develop the analysis of each rhetorical device.

1. Topic sentence: Main focus of the paragraph

Ex: “By doing X, the author strengthens the idea that ____.”

2. Evidence: Lead into a quotation of a portion of the text that illustrates device

Ex: “The author creates Z effect when they state that ‘insert quotation here.’”

3. Analysis: How does this evidence show that this device contributes to the meaning?

Ex: “By using this technique, the writer causes ____ response in the reader.”

This pattern (Topic Sentence→ Evidence→Analysis) is your three-pronged attack for writing a rhetorical analysis. You can repeat the Evidence→Analysis portion as many times as needed within a paragraph.

Making sure to follow your Evidence with Analysis, rather than Summary, can be tricky. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Analysis: Think, “Why did it happen? What effect did it produce? Why does it matter? Was it effective?”
2. Summary: Think, “What happened? When did it happen? To whom did it happen?”