HOW TO WRITE A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Analytical writing moves beyond just summarizing or reporting information. In a rhetorical analysis you apply critical reading skills to break down a text through specific contextual lenses—otherwise known as rhetorical devices. The goal of your analysis is to articulate if and how the writer achieved their goal of the work (to persuade, inform, motivate, etc.).

You will establish an argument (thesis) that speaks to the writer’s effectiveness or ineffectiveness in the use of rhetorical appeals (logos, ethos, and pathos) and other rhetorical strategies that persuade or fails to persuade a reader in favor of the writer’s argument. That means you will make a claim and then use specific evidence from the text and your understanding of rhetorical appeals to support your claim about how and why it accomplishes its goal.

Remember: you do not need to agree with the argument being presented. You are not offering a commentary on the subject, arguing in favor of or against the writer’s position/issue, or explaining the issue. Instead, you are analyzing how the writer is making their argument and how successful they are.

Steps in Creating a Rhetorical Analysis

Part 1: Analyze

1. Pick your text and read it thoroughly.
2. Determine the speaker, audience, purpose, & genre.
   - The speaker refers to the first and last name of the writer. If the writer has credentials that lend to their authority on the subject, consider those.
   - The audience is who the text was written for. What is said, how much is said, and how it is phrased is all influenced by the audience. For example, is the work published in a peer reviewed, scholarly journal or in an online periodical for the general public? Where a piece is published can give it a different context for evaluation.
   - The purpose refers to what the writer wants to accomplish in the text. What is the author is trying to do by writing this piece? Inform? Persuade? There may be more than one purpose, and the purpose is what shapes our writing, determines our genre and audience, and helps us understand what to say and how to say it.
   - The genre refers to what kind of writing it is: a letter, report, profile, poem, instruction, parody, etc. How does the genre affect the content? Does it require a specific strategy or format? Does it affect the tone or type of language (formal or informal)?
3. Examine the use of rhetorical appeals.
   - Ethos (ethical appeals): the writer’s credibility and character. Example: a family therapist with 20 years of practice has significant ethos on the topic.
Conversely, someone with those same credentials wouldn't have as much ethos when talking about ecology.

- Logos (logical appeals): appeals to logic and reason to make an argument. A writer who supports an argument with evidence, data, and undeniable facts uses logos.
- Pathos (emotional appeals): evoke emotion in order to gain approval or agreement. The emotion can be positive or negative: sympathy, fear, anger, the desire for love, any emotional response. If an article about violent crime provides personal, human details about victims of violent crime, the writer is likely using pathos.

4. Note the style details—imagery, tone, syntax, diction, etc.

5. Form your analysis: Review the information you’ve gathered and determine what it suggests to you. Ask yourself how the rhetorical appeals help the author achieve their purpose. Do the strategies work or fail? Why did the author choose those strategies for that audience and that occasion? Determine if the choice of strategies may have changed for a different audience or occasion. Do all these parts work together to help the author achieve an overall purpose?

Understand there are two voices in a rhetorical analysis: the author's and your own. Some ways to differentiate are by saying, "The author states," "The author thinks," or "The article states." Then, follow up with your own analysis, but avoid "I" phrases.

Part 2: Writing

1. Write your introduction.
   - Clearly identify the text you are analyzing. Give the title, author, and—if a speech—the occasion. Include a brief summary of the text. There should be no more than one or two paragraphs of summary.
   - Develop a clear claim regarding the article (your thesis statement). It should reflect what you found in your analysis, not a restatement of the original author’s thesis. The thesis should state your stance and give a clear direction of where you’re heading.

2. Write the body.
   - Support your claim. Most of your paper should be devoted to analysis and supporting evidence. Make your claim and then give examples to support that claim. Try to focus on using words such as “effective” or “ineffective,” rather than “good” or “bad.”
   - Give plenty of evidence and support for your claims. Rely on hard evidence rather than opinion or emotion. This means using quotes and paraphrases.
   - Keep your tone objective. This is a scholarly paper, so you need to use third-person, standard academic English. This means avoid words like "I" and "we."

3. Write the conclusion
   - The conclusion should pull everything together, restating what you accomplished in your paper. It is not a restatement of your thesis, but a reflection on how you accomplished your goals.
   - Restate your main ideas, briefly explaining why they are important and how they summarize your thesis. (Brief because you have already done this in the body of your paper)
   - Do not introduce new information in your conclusion.