

Chapter 5: Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical Analysis – a close reading of a text to find how and whether it works to persuade.

Considers the basic strategies of the argument.

Identifies the ethos (character appeal), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logic appeal).

Rhetorical analysis... asking yourself what strategies the writing uses to move your heart, win your trust, and change your mind... and whether or not it is successful.

I. Composing a Rhetorical Analysis

... how the components of an argument work together to persuade or move an audience

Any argument can be analyzed – advertisements, editorials, political cartoons, even movies and photographs.

Since arguments have many aspects, an analysis might focus on the elements that stand out or make the piece intriguing or problematic.

1. What is the purpose of the argument? What does it hope to achieve?
2. Who is the target audience?
3. What appeals or techniques does the argument use... emotional, logical, or ethical?
4. Who is making the argument? What ethos is created? What values does it assume?
5. How does it try to make the writer seem trustworthy?
6. What authorities does the argument rely on or appeal to?
7. What facts are used? What logic? What evidence? How is the evidence arranged or presented?
8. What claims are advanced in the argument? What issues raised? Which issues are ignored or evaded?
9. What are the contexts – social, political, historical, cultural? Whose interests does it serve? Who gains? Who loses?

10. What shape does the argument take? How is the argument arranged/presented? What media does the argument use?
11. How does the language or style of the argument work to persuade?

Effective rhetorical analysis does more than *describe* techniques and strategies. It *shows* how key devices in an argument actually succeed or fail.

Quote freely from the writing. Describe the elements in a visual argument (photograph, chart, graph, drawing, etc.).

Explain precisely how the argument evokes a particular response (challenging, insulting, calming, etc.) from the audience.

II. Understanding the Purpose of an Argument

Persuasive intentions may be in-your-face or coy. Some arguments are stealthy; others are straightforward. Genre is important in determining how to assess an argument.

III. Understanding Who Makes an Argument

Knowing *who* claims *what* is critical to analysis. Some arguments include the name or institution attached to the appeal.

Knowing the author's name (and reputation) is a starting point for analysis. What else have they published? Where?

Readers can't ignore the writer's bias, special interests, and conflicts of interest.

IV. Identifying and Appealing to Audiences

Purpose – Author – Audience

Most arguments are composed with a specific audience in mind and devise customized strategies to convince or persuade. Most arguments are made in a context; knowing this context will help the rhetorical analyzer determine who they intend to reach and how.

How the author establishes credibility with the audience is important. *Respect* is crucial, especially if the audience doesn't agree with the author on a critical issue or if they aren't knowledgeable about the issue.

Audiences must be treated fairly and honestly. How the writer does this must be part of rhetorical analysis.

Analysis should explain how the author shares values (or at least understands) the audience.

V. Explaining Arguments from the Heart: Pathos

Appealing to the audiences' emotions and feelings, these arguments often use visual claims to persuade.

When analyzing emotional appeals, judge whether the emotions (anger, sympathy, envy, joy, love, etc.) advance the claims offered.

Study the words. Consider the emotions they evoke. Consider the claims they support. Is the writer successful in her/his pathos?

VI. Examining Arguments Based on Character: Ethos

Readers believe wise, honest, trustworthy writers. Look for evidence of these traits. Does the author have experience or authority to write on this subject? Is evidence presented in full? Are important objections to the author's position acknowledged and addressed? Is the documentation?

Above all, does the writer sound trustworthy? Sometimes the emotional appeal is delivered in a subtle way using non-assertive language.

VII. Examining Arguments Based on Facts and Reason: Logos

Most arguments hinge on having a plausible claim and good reasons to believe it. Not all main ideas are contained in a neat thesis statement. Readers may sometimes have to infer the claim; sometimes arguments are perfectly obvious.

Writers stake out a claim and offer reasons to support it, or they make a case that leads to a conclusion.

An essay may have a series of claims, each developed to support a larger point. Every paragraph may develop a specific related idea. Rhetorical analysis requires the writer to examine these separate propositions and the relationships between them. Are the links solid? Are there inconsistencies? Does the end of

the piece support what was proposed at the beginning?

Examine the quality of the information and data. Is it presented accurately and does it represent a range of respected opinion on the topic?

The profusion of electronic sources materials has made evaluating the quality of sources critical. Reliable sources are often difficult to find amidst the junk accessible via the computer.

VIII. Examining the Shape and Media of Arguments

Arguments = statement + proof

Writers use all types of strategies to present their arguments.

In rhetorical analysis, it's fair to criticize the writer for what she/he omits from the argument.

Some arguments may benefit from transitions, headings, or a confident voice.

Consider how the writer uses a particular type of media to present the argument... cartoon, billboard, editorial, essay, etc.

IX. Looking at Style

Writing style is important in making the case for an argument.

Stylistic, effective writing...

- Displays clear focus

- Is concrete, specific, memorable, colorful

- Crackles with energy (intensity & emotion)

 - Is fresh (may contain surprises (like a negative definition or a sentence fragment or a poetic expression or a list of items/ideas)

- Links important ideas between sentences and paragraphs

- Is exact and correct

- May use vivid verbs, metaphors, anecdotes, repetition

- Varies sentence/paragraph length, structure, openings

- Avoids clichés, jargon, euphemism, redundancy, triteness, wordiness