

# Rhetorical Analysis



## What is a Rhetorical Analysis? What should it do?

A rhetorical analysis is a close examination of what makes an argument work well. When writing a rhetorical analysis, the writer begins with a text to evaluate. This text could be a journal article, speech, advertisement, or even an image. As long as your text makes an argument—tries to convince you of some idea, rather than just summarizes—it is suitable.

Here are the steps to begin your Rhetorical Analysis:

**Identify—** Begin by reading the text closely, taking inventory of the features and characteristics of the text. The rhetorical analysis will first identify how the argument functions. This is the time to ask questions about the text in connection with the rhetorical situation. Such as: When was this text written? Does it use any of the rhetorical appeals? Who is the audience for this text?

**Analyze—** This step takes the identification of the rhetorical elements a step further. It asks *why* the author has used certain techniques to make the argument. Examples of analysis may look like this: Why was pathos used in the introduction of this article, rather than logos? Would this argument be received if written twenty years ago? Why or why not? How do the genre conventions of this argument affect how it was written?

**Evaluate—** Now it's time to consider the successfulness of how the author uses rhetorical strategies within the text. You will ask: Is this argument effective or not? Which elements make it persuasive and how do they accomplish this goal? What could be changed to make the argument more effective?

To summarize, the rhetorical analysis examines the interactions between a text, an author, and an audience to determine the effectiveness of an argument. Keep in mind that you are not determining whether or not you agree or disagree with the argument. Instead, you are analyzing how the author makes the argument and whether or not it is effective.

---

## Rhetorical Elements to Consider

---

### The Rhetorical Situation:

Here are a few elements to consider as you perform your close reading. The list below will help you get started, but it is not a total list of all things to consider. This handout features the most common elements.

Note: You may find it useful to take notes as you move through a text, annotating places you see these elements functioning to build the argument.

**Purpose:** The purpose refers to the expected outcome desired by the author of the text. Ask yourself, *what* is the author's purpose? Then you might ask: *How* is the author's purpose accomplished in the text, or possibly — how it is *not* successful?

**Audience:** The audience consists of the readers, spectators, or listeners of the text. This audience could be real (listening and reading) or invoked (intended audience). How does the author address the audience in this piece? And what is the effectiveness of this method? What does the author assume about the audience?

**Author:** It is important to examine the role of the author in the text, too. Does the author possess ethos? Does the role of the author seem prominent in the piece, or does the author seem to fade into the background?

**Context:** This element refers to the place and time in which the argument exists. Would this argument function the same today as it did when it was originally written (especially if written many years ago)? Are there historical elements that we should consider?

**Medium:** This refers to the method in which the argument is received. It could be written text, an image, a speech/sound, or a different combination of mediums. How does the author's choice of delivery impact the effectiveness of this text?

### The Rhetorical Appeals:

These appeals are present within the rhetorical situation and can be layered throughout the text. A quick reference is listed below, but please see our additional handout on the rhetorical appeals for a deeper look.

Ethos: The authority and credibility of the author

Pathos: Emotional appeals to the audience

Logos: The use of logic and reason to create an argument

Kairos: The critical time in which an argument is considered most effective

Keep in mind that your instructor may have specific elements he or she would like you to feature in your rhetorical analysis. Be sure to look at your assignment prompt and follow all guidelines for the assignment.