

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

WHAT IS A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

A rhetorical analysis describes and evaluates the decisions that an author makes within a specific text. Instead of examining **what** an author says, a rhetorical analysis examines **how** they say it. Remember, rhetoric is always used for a purpose. The author seeks to achieve something—to inspire change, motivate people to act, call for something to stop, or something else.

A rhetorical analysis should examine the author's rhetoric and provide evidence from the text to support any interpretations. The analysis should move beyond restating the ideas presented in the text to making an analytical argument. It is important to note that a rhetorical analysis is not literary analysis: The focus is not on what the text is about or the literary devices that the author employs, but rather on how the author constructs the text for a specific rhetorical situation. If there is no mention of purpose, audience, genre, rhetorical appeals, etc. then it is not a rhetorical analysis.

EVALUATING THE RHETORIC

When you analyze a text, you evaluate how its parts work together as a whole to a particular end. When performing a rhetorical analysis, you analyze the author's rhetorical methods to determine if the text is effective overall. Ultimately, in a rhetorical analysis, you want to answer the following questions:

- What is the main purpose of the text?
- Does the text achieve this purpose? How and why/why not?
- Do the author's rhetorical choices help or hinder this purpose? How and why/why not?

Answering these questions will help you form an arguable claim (thesis statement) about that text. You will often find that some of the author's rhetorical choices are effective while others are not, and you can discuss that in your analysis. That can potentially give you a more complex thesis statement.

To help answer those questions, considering the rhetorical situation is a good place to start. There are seven key parts of the Rhetorical Situation for you to consider:

1. **Genre:** Is the text an academic article, a Yelp review, a scientific study, a newspaper feature, an email, a TikTok, etc.? Each of these genres comes with different formats and styles of writing.
2. **Audience:** Who is the author speaking to? Who are they trying to motivate, inform, or challenge?
3. **Purpose:** What does the author want their audience to do? You can't decide if a text is effective if you don't know what it is trying to achieve.
4. **Stance:** What's the author's opinion on their topic? What kind of tone do they use?
5. **Context:** What context surrounds the text? How does the author address other people who have spoken on the same topic?
6. **Medium:** How does the author present their message? Is it digital, printed, visual, audible?

CONTACT US:

(702) 895-3908 | writingcenter@unlv.edu
unlv.edu/writing-center



7. **Design:** How does the text look? Does the author use pictures? What color and font choices do they make?

RHETORICAL METHODS

Once you've identified the text's rhetorical situation, consider the rhetorical appeals and devices the author uses to persuade their audience. These techniques differ somewhat from literary devices, though there is some overlap between the two. Just remember that rhetorical analysis focuses primarily on the author's intent and purpose of the text, not on the content of the text.

RHETORICAL APPEALS

The three primary rhetorical appeals are logos, ethos, and pathos. Consider how the author is using one or more of these appeals to persuade their audience.

1. **Logos** is an appeal to reason or logic
2. **Ethos** is an appeal to authority or credibility
3. **Pathos** is an appeal to emotion or values

RHETORICAL DEVICES

When choosing evidence for your rhetorical analysis, you can consider the following devices, as well as any others that you identify:

- **Allusion:** An indirect reference to something (like a person, event, piece of art, or another text) that lies outside the text being read.
- **Anaphora:** Repetition of words at the beginning of phrases
- **Anecdote:** Use of a personal story
- **Euphemism:** Substitution of a crass or offensive term for a subtle, humorous, or polite one.
- **Hyperbole:** Purposeful exaggeration
- **Irony:** A statement that intends to convey the opposite of what it says, often for humorous, satirical, or emphatic purposes
- **Metaphor:** Comparison (e.g., "the sky is a sea of clouds")
- **Oxymoron:** Contradictory word or phrase (e.g., "jumbo shrimp")
- **Personification:** Attribution of humanity to non-human things (e.g., "The trees whispered.")
- **Simile:** Comparison using like or as (e.g., "the sky is like a sea of clouds")