



Rhetorical Analysis Writing Conventions

A rhetorical analysis assignment asks you to analyze the effectiveness or persuasiveness of an argument. Specifically, professors may ask you to consider the “rhetorical strategies” or “persuasive appeals,” such as logos, ethos, pathos, and kairos, used by authors to persuade their audience. Analytical writing is evaluative and critical; it forces you to go beyond describing or summarizing. Instead, the aim is to evaluate the significance of a text. Questions of “who” or “what,” common in descriptive writing, are replaced with “why,” “how,” or “so what.” Examples of analytical writing include academic articles, investigative journalism, literary analysis, among others. While each writing assignment is different, this handout will provide an explanation of each rhetorical appeal and offer suggestions on how to write a rhetorical analysis.

Writing Your Rhetorical Analysis

1. **Read and annotate the text.** You may be asked to analyze a video, book, speech, or another text.
 - a. Practice critical reading strategies, such as annotating, reading with and / or against the grain, summarizing, asking questions, defining key and unknown concepts, and reflecting.
 - i. *Reading with the grain* means supporting, extending, or agreeing with the author’s argument.
 - ii. *Reading against the grain* means resisting, challenging, or disagreeing with the author’s argument.
2. **Write the essay!**
 - a. Avoid writing: “The author uses pathos to persuade his/her/their audience to agree with...”
 - b. Instead, write: “The author uses imagery to appeal to the audience’s emotions...” *This framing allows for a more nuanced understanding and analysis of the text.*

Before You Start Writing, Remember....

- Write a thesis statement that clearly evokes your analytical and evaluative judgment about the effectiveness of the author’s rhetorical strategies and argument.
 - Sample: Grose begins building her credibility with personal facts and reputable sources, citing convincing facts and statistics, and successfully employing emotional appeals; however, toward the end of the article, her attempts to appeal to readers’ emotion weaken her credibility and ultimately, her argument. (St. Louis Community College).
- Provide strong evidence in support of the thesis by including specific examples from the text.
- Strategically and accurately incorporate sources into your essay by using signal phrases, quotation marks, and the appropriate citation style. *Refer to our tipsheets on MLA, APA, and other citation guides.*

What to Consider When Analyzing Rhetorical Appeals

Ethos (Author/Speaker): appeal to ethics, credibility, qualifications, or character	
Look for examples of:	Ask yourself:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biographical and professional information • Use of credible sources • Accurate citation of sources • Use of appropriate language and tone according to target audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the author’s reputation or experience in the field? Is the author credible enough to write about this issue? • Is the evidence reliable? Are the sources recent or outdated? • Is the tone appropriate for the audience? • Do you trust the author’s message? • Does the author acknowledge and respond to counterarguments?
Pathos (Audience): appeal to the audience’s emotions, values, and beliefs	
Look for examples of:	Ask yourself:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories, testimonials, anecdotes, or other narrative evidence • Personal connections • Imagery and figurative language • Language that inspires an emotional response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the author do to appeal to the reader’s visual sense? • Does the author offer specific examples of the issue? • Does the author offer specific examples of the issue? • Does the author offer information that may appeal to the readers’ empathy?
Logos (Argument): appeal to logic and reason	
Look for examples of:	Ask yourself:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facts, reasons, statistics, solutions, etc. • Definitions of terms • Cause and effect • Logical reasons and explanations • Counterargument and rebuttal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the argument consistent and clear? • Does the author offer any support for this issues such as facts, statistics, causes, effects, solutions, or even reasons for why this issue exists?
Kairos (Timeliness): the “season,” “opportunity,” or “timeliness” of an argument	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate tone for the right time • Does the author take advantage of the timeliness of this issue? 	

Visit the Writing Center for guidance on grammar, organization, research, and other writing concerns. For information, visit our website: www.nsu.edu/writing-center.