

Rhetoric is communication designed to affect an audience. It can be employed in writing, artwork, music, film, advertising, etc. A rhetorical analysis, which may serve as a standalone piece or as part of a larger work, analyzes how an author uses rhetoric to produce a desired reaction in the audience. This handout addresses the purpose of and process of writing a rhetorical analysis. It serves as a general resource and should not replace assignment guidelines.

What is the Purpose of a Rhetorical Analysis?

A rhetorical analysis assesses the effectiveness, credibility, and relevance of an author's claim. It provides background to their work, but, most importantly, it provides an analysis of the rhetorical strategies they use to affect their audience. A rhetorical analysis does not agree or disagree with the author but instead creates its own argument that addresses how effectively the author achieves their goal of persuading their audience.

Understanding the Rhetorical Situation

When analyzing a work rhetorically, it is important to understand the entire context of the work in order to conduct an effective analysis. The following categories and questions may help you understand the rhetorical situation of the work you are analyzing. Be sure to understand how each of the items below relates to the rhetoric the author has used to impact their audience.

- **Subject:** What is the work about? Is there any deeper or hidden meaning?
- **Author:** Who is the author? What should the audience know about them? What is the author's stance or position on the subject? What are their biases?
- **Purpose:** Why did the author create the work? Is the author's purpose clear?
- **Tone:** How does the author communicate their position? What atmosphere does the author create?
- **Audience:** Who is the audience? How do you know? How does the author cater to their audience?
- **Context:** When was the work created? What historical or current context influenced the author?
- **Medium/Design:** What medium or design did the author use to convey their message and influence their audience? How do the author's design choices reflect their message?

Identifying Rhetorical Strategies

Once you understand the rhetorical situation, begin identifying the rhetorical strategies the author uses to convey their message or to persuade their audience. These strategies generally include rhetorical appeals and devices.

Rhetorical Appeals and Devices

An author strategically uses rhetorical appeals like ethos, pathos, and logos to persuade their audience. The combination of appeals used depends on an author's audience and purpose. Rhetorical devices are used alongside ethos, pathos, and logos to evoke a desired reaction in an audience. Definitions and examples of rhetorical appeals and devices are given in the following table:

Appeal	Definition	Examples of Rhetorical Devices
Ethos	Invokes authority and credibility and helps an audience trust the author	Referencing credible sources, establishing credentials, and including personal experiences
Pathos	Invokes emotion and values and connects an audience with the author	Using humor, including vivid imagery, and addressing relatable or emotional topics
Logos	Invokes logic and engages with an audience's reasoning	Including data and statistics, relying on common sense, and avoiding logical fallacies

Note: Different devices may be used to convey appeals depending on the medium of an author's work. For example, a written piece may use genre, word choice, and sentence structure, while a work of art may use color, texture, and style.

Identifying rhetorical appeals and their associated devices is central to rhetorical analysis:

Correct: In his retelling of *Cinderella*, Perrault persuades his audience using pathos. This is done through his use of hyperbolic language to describe both the stepfamily's cruelty and Cinderella's goodness, creating sympathy for Cinderella's struggles and invoking feelings of injustice in his audience. (This example identifies the rhetorical appeal and related device the authors used to persuade his audience.)

Incorrect: In his retelling of *Cinderella*, Perrault uses specific word choice to craft his tale. (This example does not explain how the author's use of the rhetorical device connects to a rhetorical appeal and impacts his audience.)

Writing a Rhetorical Analysis

While a rhetorical analysis often includes an introduction, analysis, and conclusion, the most important components include the **thesis statement or claim** and the **evidence and analysis** in the body paragraphs.

Introduction

Generally, the introduction of a rhetorical analysis provides necessary context or background regarding the piece and/or its author. The introduction typically includes a thesis statement that establishes the main argument and outlines the rest of the paper.

Thesis Statement

The thesis statement of a rhetorical analysis states your claim regarding the effectiveness of the author's use of rhetoric. It discusses how the author impacts or persuades their audience using rhetorical appeals and specific devices. It does **not** summarize or argue whether the author is right or wrong.

Correct: "In his *Cinderella*, Perrault evokes pathos using symbolism and metaphors to teach the value of kindness." (This example argues *how* the author successfully impacted their audience and analyzes the rhetorical strategies the author used.)

Incorrect: "In his *Cinderella*, Perrault tells the story of a girl who attends the royal ball with the help of a fairy godmother and just a bit of magic." (This example *summarizes* the author's main point but does not analyze it.)

Incorrect: "In his *Cinderella*, Perrault argues that kindness and grace are more important than beauty, an idea that is still relevant today." (This example *argues for* the author's claim but does not analyze it.)

Body Paragraphs

Body paragraphs support the thesis statement by introducing and analyzing evidence from the text. Use the following steps to guide each body paragraph:

- Include a topic sentence that introduces the rhetorical device the author uses to make an appeal.
- Provide at least one direct example from the piece that uses that rhetorical device.
- Consider the author's purpose for using the device and how it supports the appeal.
- Analyze how effectively the author's use of the device appeals to or persuades the audience.
- Conclude the paragraph by connecting back to the topic sentence and/or thesis.

Example of a Body Paragraph

Perrault uses hyperbolic language to create pathos that endears his audience to Cinderella and to highlight the cruelty of her stepfamily. He describes Cinderella's stepmother as "the proudest and most haughty woman that was ever seen," and her stepsisters as "exactly like [their mother] in all things." In contrast, Cinderella is described as being "of unparalleled goodness and sweetness of temper" (Perrault). In using emotionally charged and hyperbolic words like "proudest and most haughty" and "unparalleled goodness and sweetness," Perrault strongly contrasts the stepfamily's pride with Cinderella's virtue, thus preparing his audience to fully understand and appreciate the juxtaposition of Cinderella's goodness in the face of her stepfamily's cruelty.

Conclusion

In the conclusion of your rhetorical analysis, remind your readers how each rhetorical strategy you have analyzed throughout your paper works together to support your thesis statement regarding the effectiveness of the author's use of rhetoric. The conclusion may also address the larger implications of the work and should provide a sense of closure.