

AP English Language and Composition/English 11  
Rhetorical Analysis  
Hot seat opens November 16  
Length: 3 pages

The Rhetorical Analysis assignment achieves two goals: first, you will learn more about your chosen issue, and, second you will learn about effective writing by examining how other writers create successful compositions. Here, you will choose a persuasive piece of writing that engages the topic you are exploring. Choose a piece that is from a **non-scholarly source whose purpose is persuasive and whose writing you fundamentally respect**.

Then, you will analyze this persuasive piece, examining it for the ways the writer deploys the rhetorical strategies discussed in class and in the readings. You will compose a rhetorical analysis that investigates some of the following: the writer's use of appeals, arrangement of ideas, emphasis on or burying of information, mode of delivery, creation of exigence, and so on.

The first (and possibly most important) part of this project is for you to choose a persuasive piece of writing. The document you choose to analyze must engage the topic you're investigating this term. Choose a piece where the writer is addressing a particular audience about a particular issue. The writer should take a stand on this issue and attempt to move his or her audience. In addition, the piece of writing you choose must be worthwhile: do not choose something that is poorly written or that you merely plan to criticize. You may choose a written text, or you may choose a speech or other aural/oral text.

When you analyze this piece of writing, you will need to explain to your readers *how* the writer persuades his or her audience and whether or not the writer's strategies are effective. To provide a thorough analysis for your readers, you'll need to research the writer, the topic the writer wrote about, the audience the writer addressed, and the historical context during which the writer wrote. In other words, you will need to understand and inform your readers about the **rhetorical situation** in which the writer composed this document.

Once you choose your persuasive document and research its rhetorical situation, you will be ready to analyze the piece by describing its strengths and weaknesses. You will examine the writer's use of rhetorical appeals and discuss how those appeals meet the needs and expectations of the audience. You will explain the effectiveness of the writer's choice of rhetorical strategies and make inferences about what that writer has set out to do, why s/he makes certain rhetorical choices, and how s/he wants his/her audience to respond. Thus, to compose your analysis, you'll establish your own thesis statement—your own argument about the writer's rhetorical strategies. You will then support this thesis statement with evidence from the text to demonstrate to your audience that your argument about this persuasive piece of writing is a reasonable one.

It is important to note that when you compose your analysis, you should avoid simply *pointing* to a writer's use of appeals, her use of ethos, pathos, or logos. Instead, you'll want to compose your analysis by discussing both the purpose and effect of each appeal, asking: (1) For what knowable purpose did the writer choose this appeal? (2) What effect does this appeal have on the audience? By considering these questions, you will effectively evaluate the choices the writer makes when attempting to reach his/her audience.

The following questions should help you generate the material you need for planning, inventing, and drafting your rhetorical analysis:

1. What is the rhetorical situation of the essay? What is the essay's exigence? Why is the writer writing at that moment?
2. Who is the writer's audience? How do you know? What is this group's investment in this issue? What is this group's relationship to the writer?
3. What's the writer's purpose? What issue is at stake? What are the writer's constraints? How do the constraints affect the writer's use of the artistic appeals? Of specific evidence, support, or details?
4. What stasis point is the writer engaging?
5. How does the writer establish ethos (good will, good sense, good moral character)? How does s/he establish common ground with her readers? Consider two kinds of evidence for your answers: overt statements concerning the writer's relationship to the audience and the attitudes implied through tone, style, and choice of evidence.
6. How does the writer employ logos (claims, supporting ideas and evidence, implicit assumptions) to (appear to) deliver a rational argument?
7. How does the writer employ pathos (emotions and values) in order to identify her cause with the interests of her reader? How does she connect emotionally with her readers?
8. How does the writer address other positions or ideas? How does the writer respond to, show awareness of, or ignore other positions on the issue?
9. How is the essay organized? What is the thesis statement? How do the supporting paragraphs follow from that thesis? How are the supporting paragraphs themselves arranged: chronologically, spatially, or rhetorically? Does the writer use transition words to enhance the movement of the argument?
10. How well does the piece support its thesis? The (implicit or explicit) topic sentence of each paragraph?
11. How does the writer use specific words, phrases, sentence structures, or paragraph lengths to establish a tone? What is that tone? Is it appropriate?

Remember that these questions should help you to *generate* ideas for your analysis. Your essay should not run through each of these questions one by one. Instead, you want to create a thesis about the essay that focuses on one, two, or maybe even three of these questions and then elaborate on and develop your ideas on these subjects.