

What in the world is a rhetorical analysis?

To begin, let us define what a rhetorical analysis is NOT. A rhetorical analysis is not a summary of a literary work or scholarly article. You may have analyzed a novel's plot line or taken apart the meaning of Shakespeare's "to be or not to be" soliloquy in *Hamlet* before; however, trying to understand the meaning of a work or summarize a story is NOT the goal of a rhetorical analysis!

Now that we've declared the most common mistake among rhetorical analysis papers, let's begin dissecting what a rhetorical analysis does ask you to do.

Definition: A rhetorical analysis requires you to apply your critical reading skills in order to "break down" a text. In essence, you break off the "parts" from the "whole" of the piece you're analyzing. The goal of a rhetorical analysis is to articulate HOW the author writes, rather than WHAT they actually wrote. To do this, you will analyze the strategies the author uses to achieve his or her goal or purpose of writing their piece. Keep in mind that writers of different disciplines often use varying writing strategies in order to achieve their goals. So, it is okay to analyze a scientific article a different way than you would a humanities writer. These authors have very different goals in mind, and thus will use different writing strategies.

Whoa, that was a lot of information!

Okay, so now that you've grasped the "dictionary" concept of a rhetorical analysis, let's break it down into more manageable parts.

*First off, you want to make sure you READ the scholarly articles, literary work, etc., carefully and understand what you have read. Try to identify the author's thesis, or his/her main idea or argument.

*Now that you've read your sources and understand their overall arguments, it's time to start analyzing them for rhetorical features. Take a second look at your sources, but this time, keep the following questions in mind and write the answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Questions to ask yourself when re-reading your articles, sources, etc:

1. What is the thesis, what is the overall argument the author presents?
2. What did the author choose to study? Why?
3. What is the writer's purpose? To inform? To persuade? To criticize?
4. Who is the author's intended audience?
5. How does the writer arrange his or her ideas? Chronologically?
6. How does the writer use diction? (Word choice, arrangement, accuracy, is it formal, informal? Technical versus slang?)
7. Does the writer use dialogue? Quotations? Why?
8. Are important terms repeated?

9. What is the sentence structure of text? Are there fragments, run ons? Is it declarative, imperative, exclamatory? What effect does this have?
10. Does the writer use punctuation to create an effect? Italics, underlining, parentheses? Which marks does the writer use, and when?

*The key idea here when answering these questions is understanding WHY the author chooses to write the way he/she does. So, when you answer the question “Who is the intended audience?” make sure you also think about why the author would write for that particular audience. Do the same for the other questions.

*Of course, these questions are not the only ones you can be asking yourself. If you think of other important ideas and strategies the author is using, consider those as well! These are simply a starting off point.

So you’ve analyzed your sources, answered the questions above, and have identified the rhetorical strategies the author uses. Now what?

1. First, you’ll need to come up with your own thesis for your rhetorical analysis. What point do you want to make about the author’s rhetorical choices? Do the author’s rhetorical strategies make his/her article a strong argument? A weak one?
2. After identifying your thesis, try to arrange the rhetorical strategies you’ve identified in a logical way. For example, you could start by identifying the purpose of the intended audience and why the author chose to write about their topic. Next, you could identify specific stylistic choices, such as word choice, formal/informal language, etc. The idea is to logically transition from analyzing one rhetorical strategy to another. Stay on topic with the strategies that the author uses often and actually has a purpose for using.
3. With each point you make, have a strong topic sentence declaring the overall purpose of the rhetorical strategies you are about to discuss. This will help identify the argument you are making, transition your ideas, and add fluidity.
4. Keep in mind that while authors use different strategies to achieve their purposes, you also need to be making points and evaluations about these strategies, not simply summarizing them. For example, instead of simply stating the author uses formal language in his essay, state what effect is created by using formal language. By doing this you are not only identifying the rhetorical strategy, by analyzing its purpose.
5. As with all academic writing, check for grammar, transitional ease, fluidity, and a logical argument. Proofread, proofread, proofread!

Additional Information

*If you’re having trouble identifying the difference between a summary and an analysis, here are some examples to aid you.

1. Summary: Smith says global warming has negative effects and we should care about our world’s future.

Rhetorical analysis: Smith provides multiple negative effects of global warming and punctuates his sentences with exclamation marks; thus, he uses quantitative descriptions and punctuation to create a sense of urgency in his readers to care about the planet's status regarding global warming.

2. Summary: Johnson has a lot of formal language throughout his paper and hardly any informal words.

Rhetorical analysis: Johnson employs formal language throughout his essay. For example, he argues unequal funding in public schools creates a "horrific imbalance between affluent communities and those that are impoverished" (27). In using formal, academic writing, he establishes himself as a credible and valid author (thus, creating ethos from the classical form).

*Hopefully you now have a better idea of what a rhetorical analysis assignment is looking for and are armed with the tools necessary to complete this type of assignment. Following is a worksheet in which you can arrange your ideas as you read your sources for rhetorical features. Remember that these are potential areas to consider. Your rhetorical analysis may look at all of these features, some of these features, or other features.

Works Cited

UBC Writing Centre. 7 May 2007. The University of British Columbia. 10 December 2007
<<http://www.writingcentre.ubc.ca/workshop/tools/rhet1.htm>>.

WHAT the Author Does	WHY the Author Does It
Author's Thesis/Main Idea:	Why did the author choose this thesis, or idea to study?
What is the author's purpose? To persuade, inform, criticize? Something else?	Why does the author choose this purpose? What effect does it create?
Who is the author's intended audience?	Is there a reason the author chose to write for this particular audience?
How did the write arrange his or her ideas? Chronologically?	Did the arrangement of ideas, or way the author developed them create some sort of an effect? What purpose does it serve? Why did the author arrange his/her ideas this way?

<p>What diction does the writer use? Informal or formal language? Technical vs slang? Word choice, word arrangement, accuracy? Are certain words repeated?</p>	<p>Why does the author use this type of diction? What effect does it create?</p>
<p>What sentence structure does the author employ? Are there fragments or run-ons? Are the sentences imperative, declarative, exclamatory?</p>	<p>What effect does using this type of sentence structure have?</p>
<p>Does the writer use dialogue or quotations?</p>	<p>Why does the author include dialogue/quotations?</p>
<p>Any other important rhetorical features or strategies you noticed?</p>	<p>Why were these used?</p>