



Rhetorical Analysis

The purpose of a rhetorical analysis is to examine a message in depth. You can apply this to any type of media, writing, speech, marketing, etc. Often, the creators of content are not only sharing information and ideas; they are attempting to persuade you that their ideas have merit. Your job as the one performing the analysis is to pull apart the elements of the piece in question, describe it, and provide detailed commentary on what that aspect of the work is doing to affect the audience.

In your paper, do NOT agree or disagree with the presenter's argument (that is not the purpose of a rhetorical analysis); instead, discuss whether the message and its delivery was effective.

4 Categories to Consider

The categories of Rhetorical Analysis that are often referred to are Ethos, Pathos, Logos, and Kairos. While these categories do not necessarily need to be called upon by name, they are a useful place to start when analyzing your piece of media in question.

Ethos - Consider the credibility of the creator of the content. Who created it? What are their credentials, and how does that relate to their reliability as a trusted source for the message? If the content does not have a specific person listed, consider the entity that sponsors the production. For example, The Cleveland Clinic would be a greater authority to create an infographic about a medical concern rather than an anonymous blog.

Pathos - What is the emotional appeal of the piece? Consider how characteristics (colors, music, passionate language, etc.) of the message can elicit involuntary responses. Note: not everyone's response may be the same to emotional stimulation; however, the intention behind said stimulation is worthy of commentary and analysis. For example, manipulative messaging in an ad for a diet pill states, "With one pill a day, you too can be beautiful, fit, and fabulous attracting the partner of your dreams!" Dissect this message by pointing out the specific words and phrasing that are intended to elicit feelings of inadequacy based on normative standards of beauty and desirability. While some may not be fooled or enticed by this messaging, your commentary can make note of the intention of the message on the audience.

Logos - Consider the facts that the argument uses. Are they strong and supported details that relate to the intention of the message? What do these facts do for the effectiveness of the argument? An ad aimed to stop people from smoking might say, "Smoking a cigarette per day increases your risk for cancer by 75%." Describe this fact and elaborate on how it can affect the audience.

Kairos - This category refers to the timeliness of an argument. This could be both the totality of the message and the current events that surround the presentation of the message. Or, consider the sequencing of the message affects the impact that it makes. For example, a political speech doesn't usually lead with heavy hitting promises. The speaker must warm the crowd up by making themselves relatable/ likeable first before moving into claims and promises. How can the timing of the message help or hinder the receptivity of it?