

Rhetorical Analysis Assignment Examples

Stanford University

http://pwr.stanford.edu/instructors/teach_res/brawn_samp.html

Shay Brawn (Instructor)

Assignment One--Rhetorical Analysis (4 pages)

The purpose of this assignment is to engage closely with a particular text in order to understand its rhetorical purposes and logical structure and to demonstrate that understanding in a well-supported argument of your own. The assignment here is to write about King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," focusing on one of three possible aspects of it:

Option 1. Examine the various strategies King uses to engage his particular audience(s). Some questions to consider: Who is his audience (how can you tell)? What are some of the means he uses to communicate effectively with them? Why are these means particularly appropriate for this audience/ these audiences? Does he maintain the same relationship to his audience(s) throughout? How critical, overall, is this dimension of his essay to the message he is conveying?

Option 2. Assess King's position on the limits of individual responsibility to the law. Some questions to consider: What, exactly, is his position? How does he support various aspects of it? Do you find that support effective? Why or why not? What are the broader implications of what he is arguing?

Option 3. Examine King's references to other texts and other voices. Some questions to consider: What purpose do these references serve? Do they (individually and collectively) serve only one purpose or do they serve multiple purposes? Under what conditions is King most likely to refer to other writers/thinkers? Is there a relationship between this rhetorical strategy and the message he is conveying or his larger purpose as a political and social actor?

Penn State

<http://english.la.psu.edu/details.asp?element=420&id=103#Rhetorical%20Analysis>

Rhetorical Analysis

Preface: This first assignment is designed to introduce many of the course's key concepts. The purpose for writing a rhetorical analysis is to explain how an author attempts to influence an audience. That is, we use specific evidence from the text to establish a generalization (thesis) about the text's rhetoric (how it persuades its readers).

Assignment: Find an advertisement, a traditional printed argument, a website, or some other type of text that you deem to be interesting and that has a persuasive aim. By "interesting," I mean that the text in question should have some sophistication about it. There is no point in analyzing the obvious. Then write an analysis that will help your readers understand how the text works to persuade its audience. Introduce the text and identify its basic claim/thesis. Arrange the body of your paper so that the readers move through it in an orderly way. Also, make a judgment about the text's rhetorical effectiveness.

Note: Your analysis should not simply paraphrase or summarize what the author says. The reader has already read the text and knows what it contains. Your purpose is to provide a way of understanding how the text persuades its audience.

Some basic questions: Below are some basic questions. These questions are not meant to provide an outline for the paper; rather, they simply help you to think about the rhetorical aspects of the text.

1. What is the rhetorical situation? Who is the writer's audience? What is the writer's purpose? Also, think about where the item originally appeared. This may help you to determine the purpose, audience, and scope of the text's argument.
2. How would you describe the writer's *ethos*? That is, what can you apprehend in the text about the writer's character, ethics, attitude, and overall credibility? "*Ethos*" speaks to the trustworthiness of the writer. Those who employ *ethos* to persuade say this: "Believe me, identify with me, because of the kind of person I am."
3. How would you describe the *logos* of the text? "*Logos*" speaks to the logic of the text. More specifically, think about how the supporting claims and the implied claims of the text reinforce the overall thesis. How are they linked together? Also, how does the writer use evidence, data, to support the thesis? Those who use *logos* to persuade say this: "Believe me because what I say is reasonable."
4. How would you describe the *pathos* of the text? How does the writer appeal to emotions? "*Pathos*" means "feeling," and it speaks to the desires, attitudes, and deeply engrained values of a person. *Pathos* is frequently communicated through vivid descriptions, details, and examples. Writers use such things in order to invoke emotional responses. *Pathos*, like *ethos* and *logos*, is also communicated through the style and tone of an essay. Those who use

pathos to persuade say this: “Believe me because X feels good, bad, fearful, joyful, admirable, (etc.) at the very cores of our beings.”

5. How does the text’s structure work? Why are the elements of the text arranged as they are?

6. What is the role of style and tone? Style is one of the most important aspects of any rhetorical text. Style speaks to the overall shape, mood, and atmosphere of the text.

7. What seems to be the writer’s dominant strategy? Each of questions 2-6 addresses a particular kind of rhetorical strategy. All of these aspects are more than likely present in the text at issue, but in most cases, one strategy is dominant. If possible, identify the dominant strategy.

Harvard

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/index.cgi?section=courses#10>

Essay 1 typically begins with the close reading and analysis of a text, two skills essential to academic writing. (As an alternative, Essay 1 may begin with the primary evidence of the students' own experience.) Students learn how to focus their thinking by identifying a question or problem to write about and how to develop their thinking *with evidence* in order to come to their own ideas. Texts for this assignment may include short stories by writers such as Raymond Carver, Ernest Hemingway, and Susan Minot or essays by George Orwell, Richard Rodriguez, Alice Walker, and others.

Rollins

Rhetorical Analysis Assignment

Due dates: Wed, Feb 2, rough draft
Mon, Feb 14, final paper

Write 4-6 pages analyzing Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” for its rhetorical strategy. Imagine that your audience has not read the piece. You must explain the content of the letter, as well as discuss the rhetorical situation and MLK’s intentions, audience, ethos, establishment of common ground, etc. Be careful not to simply summarize the letter. Talk about *how* MLK makes his argument.

Typed, double-spaced, 12-pt font.