

11 The Rhetorical Analysis with Evaluation Essay

Now we are going to learn how to analyze a work and explain what tools were used. We will also show why a piece of writing was or *was not effective*.

Rhetoric is the study of how writers and speakers use words to influence an audience. A rhetorical analysis is an essay that breaks a work of non-fiction into parts and then explains how the parts work together to create a certain effect—whether it is to influence, amuse or inform. You can also conduct a rhetorical analysis of a primarily visual argument like a cartoon or advertisement, or an oral one, such as a speech or a presentation.

An analysis of a piece of writing often starts by summarizing that writing (similar to our summary response essay), but that is where the similarities between the summary response and the analysis end. Whereas a summary strives to tell the reader **WHAT** the author said (and in a response, either support or refute the author’s argument), an analysis tells the reader **HOW** it was said. An analysis describes the rhetorical tools, (like appeals, etc.), the author used, in order to understand how the argument was put together.

You could say that an analysis is like looking behind the curtain at a play to see what goes on behind the scenes to make it work.

A rhetorical analysis should explore the goals of the author, the techniques (or tools) that they used, examples of those techniques, and if they were effective. When you write a rhetorical analysis, you are NOT saying if you agree or do not agree with the argument. You are NOT trying to refute or contradict it. Instead, you’re discussing *how* the writer makes that argument and whether or not their approach was successful.

When writing a rhetorical analysis essay, you will break down an article or piece of communication to see HOW exactly the author made his or her argument, and then you will decide if that argument was or was not effective.

This can be a difficult essay to write, because students tend to slip back into summary/response mode. But remember, in this essay you are NOT saying whether the author was right or wrong, but simply whether the author made a strong or a weak argument, and HOW the argument was made.

Remember our discussion of ethos, logos, and pathos? In most rhetorical analysis essays, we will focus on how those three tools were used, and how effectively they were used.

A Rhetorical Analysis Essay Assignment

Next up is the rhetorical analysis essay assignment; this paper should be at least two pages (500 words) in length. This essay will be an analysis of an essay. An analysis goes “beneath the surface” of an essay and explains to the reader how the author made his or her argument and how effective it was. While Essay 1 focused on responding to “WHAT” the author claims, Essay 2 focuses on analyzing “HOW” the writer puts the argument together. To successfully complete this assignment, you will:

1. Select an article from the following:

- a. xxx
 - b. xxx
 - c. xxx
 - d. xxx
 - e. **NOTE: you may choose the same essay you used for Essay 1, or you may choose a different essay.**
2. Summarize the position and main claims for that position in the article;
 3. Identify the audience and purpose of the article;
 4. Identify specific features of the text, including types of evidence/support, argumentation tools (ethos, logos, pathos), and any weaknesses, such as the use of logical fallacies.
 5. Analyze the effectiveness of the use of those features to persuade the audience of the stance supported in the article.

Basic Organizational Pattern

The basic structure from Essay 1 can be used here, with some slight alterations. Here, you would focus on *features* in those body paragraphs, rather than *claims*:

1. Introduction: Setting up some context for the issue is a great way to open a position paper, as it allows you to show the issue is current. End this introduction paragraph with your **thesis statement**. Your thesis statement will most likely look something like this: “*Author X created an effective argument for Y by using tools A, B, and C.*” Of course, if you felt the argument was not effective, your thesis would reflect that.
2. Summary: Summarize the position argued in the article, as well as those main claims. Use signal phrasing in the summary to keep the reader on track.
3. Feature 1: Set up the first feature of the writing in a **topic sentence** that also sets up your basic analysis of that feature. As you analyze, you’ll want to consider the audience and purpose and how the feature would work within that context.
4. Feature 2: See above.
5. Feature 3: See above.
6. Conclusion: Think about how you can lead the reader back out of the paper.

Once again, remember that while you are analyzing an argument, ***your paper is not about the topic/issue so much as it is an analysis of how the writer uses specific techniques to achieve their purpose.*** If the author is writing about vegetarianism, I don’t expect you to either argue for or against that topic. You should instead tell me if the author made an effective argument or not, and then explain why.

GUN CONTROL SAMPLE ESSAY

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Emotionless Debate

Jack Hunter's article "How Gun Control Kills" discusses the negative effects of gun control, a prevalent, controversial topic in America. He argues that increased gun control would have the effect of removing guns from law-abiding citizens without preventing violent crime. His argument also shows how parallel efforts of impeding crime have not been effective. Jack Hunter's argument is effective because he uses a good amount of logos and ethos without allowing pathos to overtake his argument.

Hunter begins his article discussing the Sandy Hook tragedy and the public anger which resulted from it. He mentions how this emotional outpouring, similar to that which people use to support the death penalty, is also used to support gun control. However, he argues that neither is successful in deterring violent crime. Hunter then gives several examples of armed, law-abiding citizens successfully preventing potential massacres. He quotes an article which discusses how supporters of the death penalty don't often realize the repercussions it may cause; similarly, gun control would in fact prevent citizens from protecting themselves and others from potential violent criminals. In conclusion, Hunter firmly states that if liberals are successful in terms of gun control to the degree they wish to be, it would inevitably lead to more death.

Within this article, Hunter uses a fair amount of logos. He cites numerous real events of crimes being stopped by gun-carrying individuals. He also uses logos to dispel the pathos that many use following devastating violence, discussing how those for the death

penalty and those for gun control both use the emotions that sprout from such tragic events to push their agendas. Near the end of the article, he mentions, “Banning knives would not have stopped Jack the Ripper. Banning guns will not stop the crazed few who seek to open fire on the public” (Hunter). Though perhaps a bit on the nose, this is a good use of logos to convince his reader of his argument.

Hunter also uses ethos as a backdrop to his piece. He quotes various other authors to corroborate his claims, proving that others feel the same as him. Hunter’s discussion of the death penalty is quite interesting. Many people who oppose the death penalty also push for gun control; in his discussion of how both the conservative and liberal sides of those debates use pathos to push their agendas, he paints himself as a sort of middleman, saying that neither idea has worked so far. When referring to the two camps—those wanting increased gun restrictions, and those supporting the death penalty—and discussing how they use tragedy to further their causes, Hunter warns, “This happens every single time there is a public shooting that becomes a national tragedy. But it’s demonstrably wrongheaded—and potentially deadly” (Hunter).

Hunter’s only use of pathos is in the beginning of the article, which he then turns around and uses as an example of what not to do. This is an interesting usage of the technique; by using it to incite the reader’s emotions towards the subject, then immediately pulling the reader back with consistent use of logos, it forces the reader to realize that those emotions have no place in the article, and by extension, they have no place in the subject matter, and should be replaced with logos.

Overall, Hunter’s article is a trove of logos with ethos on the edges, keeping everything coherent and not just a smattering of facts. Pathos is only shown in order to

enhance the following logos, showing the reader the importance of logic rather than emotion within this debate. His argument was effective in its tactics to inform the reader and to show the author as intelligent, open, and fair.

Works Cited

Hunter, Jack. "How Gun Control Kills." *The American Conservative*. The American Conservative, 27 Dec. 2012. Web. 30 Feb. 2015.