

Inventing Your Rhetorical Analysis's Content

When preparing to write a rhetorical analysis, the first thing you need to do is closely read the text you are analyzing. Read through it at least a couple of times, taking special note of any places where the author seems to make important points or perhaps misses an opportunity to do so.

Inquiring: Highlight Uses of Proofs

Now, do some analysis. When looking closely at the text, you will notice that authors tend to use three kinds of *proofs* to persuade you:

Reasoning (*logos*): appealing to readers' common sense, beliefs, or values

Credibility (*ethos*): using the reputation, experience, and values of the author or an expert to support claims

Emotion (*pathos*): using feelings, desires, or fears to influence readers

Rhetoricians often use the ancient Greek terms *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* to discuss these three kinds of proofs, so we have used them here. Let's look at these concepts more closely.

Logos: Highlighting Uses of Reasoning. The word *logos* in ancient Greek means "reasoning" in English. This word is the basis for the English word, *logic*, but *logos* involves more than using logic to prove a point. *Logos* also involves appealing to someone else's common sense and using examples to demonstrate a point. Here are some common ways people use reasoning to influence the beliefs and opinions of others:

If . . . then: "If you believe X, then you should believe Y also."

Either . . . or: "Either you believe X, or you believe Y."

Cause and effect: "X is the reason Y happens."

Costs and benefits: "The benefits of doing X are worth/not worth the cost of Y."

Better and worse: "X is better/worse than Y because . . ."

Examples: "For example, X and Y demonstrate that Z happens."

Facts and data: "These facts/data support my argument that X is true or Y is false."

Anecdotes: "X happened to these people, thus demonstrating Y."

As you analyze the text, highlight these uses of reasoning so you can figure out how the writer uses *logos* to influence people.

Ethos: Highlighting Uses of Credibility. The Greek word *ethos* means "credibility," "authority," or "character" in English. It's also the basis for the English word, *ethics*. *Ethos* could mean the author's credibility or the use of someone else's credibility to support an argument.

Highlight places in the text where the author is using his or her authority or credibility to prove a point:

Personal experience: "I have experienced X, so I know it's true and Y is not."

Personal credentials: "I have a degree in Z" or "I am the director of Y, so I know about the subject of X."

Good moral character: "I have always done the right thing for the right reasons, so you should believe me when I say that X is the best path to follow."

Appeal to experts: "According to Z, who is an expert on this topic, X is true and Y is not true."

Identification with the readers: "You and I come from similar backgrounds and we have similar values; therefore, you would likely agree with me that X is true and Y is not."

Admission of limitations: "I may not know much about Z, but I do know that X is true and Y is not."

Expression of good will: "I want what is best for you, so I am recommending X as the best path to follow."

Use of "insider" language: Using special terminology or referring to information that only insiders would understand.

When you are searching for *ethos*-related proofs, look carefully for places where the author is trying to use his or her character or experience to sway readers' opinions.

Pathos: Highlighting Uses of Emotion. Finally, look for places where the author is trying to use *pathos*, or emotions, to influence readers. The psychologist Robert Plutchik suggests there are eight basic emotions: joy, acceptance, fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger, and anticipation. As you analyze the text, highlight places where the author is using these basic emotions to persuade readers.

Promise of gain: "By agreeing with us, you will gain trust, time, money, love, advancement, reputation, comfort, popularity, health, beauty, or convenience."

Promise of enjoyment: "If you do things our way, you will experience joy, anticipation, fun, surprises, enjoyment, pleasure, leisure, or freedom."

Fear of loss: "If you don't do things this way, you risk losing time, money, love, security, freedom, reputation, popularity, health, or beauty."

Fear of pain: "If you don't do things this way, you may feel pain, sadness, grief, frustration, humiliation, embarrassment, loneliness, regret, shame, vulnerability, or worry."

Expressions of anger or disgust: "You should be angry or disgusted because X is unfair to you, me, or someone else."

Some other common emotions that you might find are annoyance, awe, calmness, confidence, courage, delight, disappointment, embarrassment, envy, frustration, gladness, grief, happiness, hate, hope, horror, humility, impatience, inspiration, jealousy, joy,

FIGURE 9.1 Advertising and Emotions

Advertising relies heavily on pathos arguments, because there isn't much time available to persuade a customer to buy something.



I need you.

So do thousands of other homeless pets in your area. Many have been left without homes because of relocation, while others were dumped mercilessly on the street as babies. Every day animals are rescued in our area with the hope of finding a loving family and a place to call home. Without help, this isn't possible.

That's why the Humane Shelter of Southern Illinois is calling for volunteers. Our mission is to provide shelter, food, medical care, and love to each and every animal in our facility, every day. The only way to reach our goal is with your help. Fill out an application today, and help our shelter stay alive.

Humane Society of Southern Illinois.
It all starts with you.



www.humanesocietysil.org

loneliness, love, lust, nervousness, nostalgia, paranoia, peace, pity, pride, rage, regret, resentment, shame, shock, sorrow, suffering, thrill, vulnerability, worry, and yearning.

Frequently, writers will not state emotions directly. Instead, they will inject feelings by using emotional stories about others or by incorporating images that illustrate the feelings they are trying to invoke. Advertisements, for example, rely heavily on using emotions to sell products (Figure 9.1).

Researching: Finding Background Information

Once you have highlighted the proofs (i.e., *logos*, *ethos*, *pathos*) in the text, it's time to do some background research on the author, the text, and the context in which the work was written and used.

Online Sources. Using Internet search engines and electronic databases, find out as much as you can about the person or company who created the text and any issues that he, she, or they were responding to. What historical events led up to the writing of the text? What happened after the text was released to the public? What have other people said about it?

Print Sources. Using your library's catalog and article databases, dig deeper to understand the historical context of the text you are studying. How did historical events or pressures influence the author and the text? Did the author need to adjust

the text in a special way to fit the audience? Was the author or organization that published the text trying to achieve particular goals or make a statement of some kind?

Empirical Sources. In person or through e-mail, you might interview an expert who knows something about the author or the context of the text you are analyzing. An expert can help you gain a deeper understanding of the issues and people involved in the text. You might also show the text to others and note their reactions to it. You can use surveys or informal focus groups to see how people respond to the text.

Organizing and Drafting Your Rhetorical Analysis

At this point, you should be ready to start drafting your rhetorical analysis. As mentioned earlier, rhetorical analyses can follow a variety of organizational patterns, but those shown on page 137 are good models to follow. You can modify these patterns where necessary as you draft your ideas.

Keep in mind that you don't actually need to use rhetorical terms, such as *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, in your rhetorical analysis, especially if your readers don't know what these terms mean. Instead, you can use words like "reasoning," "credibility," and "emotion," which will be more familiar to your readers.

The Introduction

Usually, the introduction to a rhetorical analysis is somewhat brief. In this part of your analysis, you want to make some or all of these moves:

Identify the Subject of Your Analysis and Offer Background Information. Clearly state what you are analyzing and provide some historical or other background information that will familiarize your readers with it.

State the Purpose of Your Analysis. Explain that the purpose of your analysis is to determine whether or not your subject was effective or persuasive.

State Your Main Point or Thesis Statement. Rhetorical analyses are usually used in academic settings, so they often include a clear main point or thesis statement in the introduction. Here are examples of a weak thesis statement and a stronger one:

Weak: The advertisements for Buffalo Wild Wings are effective because they are funny.

Stronger: Buffalo Wild Wings' "The Official Hangout of March Madness" campaign is successful because it humorously shows that B-Dubs is a place where funny, unexpected, and even magical things happen to the young people who are there.

Stress the Importance of the Text. Tell readers why your subject's rhetorical strategies are interesting or worth paying attention to.

Explanation of Rhetorical Concepts

After the introduction, you should define and explain the rhetorical concepts you are using to analyze the text. So if you are using *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, you need to

students, telling them that they need to have extra energy to get through their hectic days. One of its recent advertising campaigns, which is called "Red Bull Gives You Wings," began in 2005 with simple hand-drawn movies like the one shown in Fig. 1.

In this advertisement, a bird relieves himself on a man who looks a lot like a professor. The man then drinks a can of Red Bull and sprouts wings. He flies above the bird, pulls down his pants, and proceeds to return the favor (offscreen, thankfully). The viewer hears the bird screech in horror as an image of a can of Red Bull fills the screen, but we can all imagine what happened.

During the span of the 30-second advertisement, the man transforms from being a seemingly helpless victim to a superheroic figure who can take vengeance on the bird. Drinking Red Bull is shown to be the way he gains this new power.

The length of your summary depends on your readers. If they are already familiar with the text you are analyzing, your summary should be brief. You don't want to bore your readers by telling them something they already know. If, however, they are not familiar with the text, your summary should be longer and more detailed.

Analysis of the Text

Now it is time to analyze the text for your readers. Essentially, you are going to interpret the text for them, using the rhetorical concepts you defined earlier in the rhetorical analysis.

There are two main ways to organize this section:

- You can follow the organization of the text you are analyzing, starting from the beginning and working to the end of the text. Apply the rhetorical concepts to each major section of the text.
- You can discuss the text through each rhetorical concept separately. For instance, if you are analyzing the uses of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* in a text, you would separately discuss the text's use of each kind of proof.

For example, here is a discussion of *pathos* in the Red Bull advertisement:

Using Emotion to Sell Red Bull

Like much advertising aimed at young people, the Red Bull advertisement uses emotions to bring home its argument. In this advertisement, the use of humor is what gives the message its emotional punch.

Many young people feel like the professor in this advertisement, because they perceive that they are ultimately powerless in society. So when someone else treats them badly, young people usually assume they need to just take it. In this case, the Red Bull advertisement shows the bird relieving itself on the professor-like character. In most situations, the man would simply need to suffer that humiliation. But, he has a secret weapon, Red Bull. He drinks a can, sprouts wings, and humorously takes revenge on the bird.

The story itself is an emotional parable that reflects the life of most young people. The bird represents all the things in young peoples' lives that humiliate and embarrass them but that they cannot fix. The professor-like man, though not young, is a figure that students can relate to, because he is still in the educational

system and seems powerless in his own way. So when he is able to actually use a product like Red Bull to take revenge, young people not only laugh but also feel an emotional release of their own frustration. The emotional message to young people is, "Drink Red Bull, and you can get back at all those people who crap on you."

The humor, coupled with the revenge theme, makes the advertisement's use of emotion very effective. According to Mark Jefferson, a professor at Penn State who studies advertisements, the use of revenge is very effective for reaching college students. "Students often feel powerless in a world that tells them they are adults but refuses to give them power. Advertisements that tap into that frustration in a humorous way are very powerful" (23).

In this discussion of emotion, the writer is applying her definition of *pathos* to the advertisement. This allows her to explain the use of emotion to sell Red Bull. She can now go on to discuss the use of *logos* and *ethos* in the ad. Or, if she has more to say about *pathos*, she might make her rhetorical analysis about the use of *pathos* alone.

The Conclusion

When you have finished your analysis, it's time to wrap up your argument. Keep this part of your rhetorical analysis brief. A paragraph or two should be enough. You should answer one or more of the following questions:

- Ultimately, what does your rhetorical analysis reveal about the text you studied?
- What does your analysis tell your readers about the rhetorical concept(s) you used to analyze the text?
- Why is your explanation of the text or the rhetorical concept(s) important to your readers?
- What should your readers look for in the future with this kind of text or this persuasion strategy?

Minimally, the key to a good conclusion is to restate your main point (thesis statement) about the text you analyzed.