
RHETORIC

Rhetorical Analysis

Many essays and assignments focus entirely on the “what,” on the content of an author’s argument. Rhetorical analysis also asks you to think about “**how**,” on the manner in which the author constructed and presented his/her argument.

Author: The person or organization who is responsible for the content and composition of the argument.

Example: Stephen Colbert, the writers of *The Colbert Report*, and Comedy Central

Audiences:

Real Audience: This is the audience of people who actually read or encounter the argument.

Example: My grandmother, who flips past it while searching for reruns of *House*.

Implied Audience: This is the audience of people for whom the text itself says it is intended, but not the author’s true audience.

Example: Conservative Americans, especially those who might watch *Fox News*

Intended Audience: This is the audience of people whom the author hopes will read and be influenced by the argument.

Example: Liberal Americans, especially young voters or the politically cynical

Purposes:

Actual Purpose: This is the purpose you believe the author had in mind when creating the argument.

Example: Stephen Colbert wants to ridicule events and people in the news and, perhaps, also convince his viewers to take more politically liberal stances.

Stated Purpose: This is the purpose according to the argument itself.

Example: Stephen Colbert’s stated purpose is to deliver serious news; we find humor in it because we know his actual purpose is to ridicule events and people in the news.

Reading Strategies:

You will want to read the text you plan to analyze both “with the grain” and “against the grain.” In reading “with the grain,” you “believe” everything the author tells you without question. In

reading “against the grain,” you pose challenges to the author’s claims and techniques. Read your text a few times, making note of the following features and marking examples.

Rhetorical:

Patterns of Organization
Appeals to *Ethos*
Appeals to *Logos*
Appeals to *Pathos*
Figurative Language
Patterns of Opposition

Visual/Aural:

Colors or Color Scheme
Page Layout
Fonts/Typefaces
Images
Graphics
Narrator Characteristics
Music/Soundtrack
Sound Effects

Claims:

Despite the focus on “how,” make sure not to ignore the “what.” Consider what kinds of claims the author is making and where.

Claims of Fact: usually based on objective facts but are sometimes interpreted by the author for the purpose of argument, making them more like an opinion.

Example: The automotive industry has depleted our natural resources to the point of crisis.

Claims of Value: present an evaluation or judgment of a situation. They often use value-laden words like variations of “good,” “bad,” “moral,” “immoral,” “beautiful,” “ugly,” etc.

Example: Developing the natural wilderness in Alaska would irreversibly mar the beauty of the land.

Claims of Policy: often call for action and use “should” or “must” statements.

Example: As a state-funded institution, the university should stop outsourcing jobs to overseas companies and hire in-state employees to bolster the local economy.