

Rhetorical Analysis Essay

Purpose: The primary purpose of this assignment is to analyze someone else's rhetoric, to better understand their message, how it attempts to persuade, and whether it is effective.

Finding a Topic: I like the guidelines under Finding a Topic that our book *EA* provides, as far as how to choose a text to write about goes. They suggest you look for a text with the following qualities:

- a complex verbal or visual argument that challenges, disturbs or pleases you
- a text that raises current or enduring issues of substance
- a text you believe should be taken more seriously

What I see the editors of our book doing with these three items is encouraging you, on the one hand, to tap into texts you can have strong feelings about or, on the other hand, texts that touch on well known topics about which there is much to say. I would add one thing to their list: a text you are interested in and care about. If you don't care about the text you're analyzing, no one else will be either.

Research: you will likely need to do some research to understand your text and its context better. But this is not a research paper assignment. It's a close-reading assignment, drawing on the lens of rhetorical tools that we've been studying.

Argument: Fundamentally, you need to understand that your purpose in this paper is to make an argument about the text you are analyzing. It's not just to analyze, it's to analyze in some way which will allow you to formulate a claim or thesis about the text and how and why it attempts to persuade.

EA provides some good questions to help you develop your claim (top of p. 115). Use these and know that identifying your claim is often the most challenge and always the most important part of a paper like this. The claim will usually reveal itself to you through the process of writing. Don't develop a claim at the outset and then go sniffing around for evidence. That's working backwards. Don't impose a claim on the text. Allow the claim to develop organically through the process of analyzing the text, talking with your classmates about your analysis and talking with me.

Organization: I like the organizational structure that is suggested on p. 116-117 of *EA*. I suggest you try to follow this. To help you stay organized, please include the following sub-headings (in bold) in your paper:

Introduction: Here you introduce the text, your project, and your claim.

Context: Here you tell the reader everything they need to know to understand the text you'll be analyzing and provide a brief summary/synopsis of the piece.

Argument and Analysis: Here you reiterate your claim and walk us through your defense of that claim.

Conclusion: Here you entertain potential alternate views on your argument/analysis and reiterate your claim again and its defense (briefly).

We'll play with these sub-headings as we go and there may be some small adjustment, but I have found that having sub-heading can help students to be clear about the purpose in any given part of their essay.

My sense is that your analysis would run 3-5 single spaced pages (yes, single-spaced, please).