The Rhetorical Analysis Essay

Like a Literary Analysis Essay (see the Writing Center’s Resources and Handouts), a Rhetorical Analysis Essay does more than simply summarize another author’s piece of writing. Your Rhetorical Analysis Essay will analyze the various parts of a text and will demonstrate how these parts work together to form the finished text. Rather than describing or summarizing WHAT the author has written, you will instead discuss HOW the author writes.

The simplest way to get started with your analysis is to make a list of topics associated with rhetoric, and then to note examples of each rhetorical topic as it appears in the author’s work. You might do this by answering each of the following:

- **Who is the author?**
  What do you know about the author in terms of his/her credibility? Are they an expert on the topic? Are they a respected writer or journalist? Are they a professional who might have a certain amount of credibility due to the nature of their position? Do they have a particular political or professional slant (do they tend to argue in favor of a conservative or liberal bias)? List anything about the author that will help you discern the context of the writing (see below).

- **What is the context for the author’s writing?**
  What is the genre of the text you are analyzing? Is it a magazine, journal, or newspaper article; a speech; a report; a presentation; or some other form of writing? Can you see reasons for the author writing about his/her topic at that particular moment in history? Is s/he engaging in a popular debate of the day? Is the author answering another author’s assertions? As much as possible, describe the context that surrounds your author’s writing.

- **Who is the author’s audience?**
  How does the author’s tone, use of examples/data/research, vocabulary, etc. suggest something about the target audience for the writing? Can you determine anything about the audience’s educational level, age, political or ideological affiliation, familiarity with the topic, etc.? List anything that lets you support your description of the audience.

- **What is the author’s purpose?**
  What does the author want his/her writing to accomplish? Is the author trying to persuade, to instruct, to inspire, to refute, to entertain, or to inform? List anything that lets you support your assertion of the author’s purpose.

For a different list of questions to ask yourself as you begin, see the following link to BYU’s “Silva Rhetoricae”: [http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Pedagogy/Rhetorical%20Analysis%20heuristic.htm](http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Pedagogy/Rhetorical%20Analysis%20heuristic.htm)
Next, make a list of the various rhetorical strategies the author uses to achieve his/her purpose:

- Do you see examples of Aristotle’s Appeals?
  - Logos – an appeal to reason
    - Where does the author use logic to support his/her assertions? This could be in the form of data or expert opinion or other kinds of evidence that the author cites.

  - Pathos – an appeal to emotions
    - Where does the author attempt to make the reader feel emotional about the topic or argument? What emotions are targeted (fear, sympathy, compassion, anger, pride or patriotism, outrage, etc.)?

  - Ethos – an appeal to credibility
    - How does the author portray him or herself? Does s/he refer to their own background or experience? Does s/he make sure to mention the credentials of any writer whose work is being used in support of the argument (For example, in a paper on climate change, the author may do this: “According to psychologist and member of the UN’s Panel on Human Rights, James Peachy . . .”)

- Does the author use a particular tone or style to appeal to his/her audience?
- Does the author use specific kinds of imagery or details to appeal to his/her audience?

Next, write a thesis for your analysis. You might do this by stating whether or not you think the piece of writing you are analyzing uses rhetoric effectively given the author’s purpose and audience. For example, “In his essay, Martin Luther King effectively uses various rhetorical strategies and appeals to persuade his readers that African-American leaders should be more forceful in their resistance to segregation.”

Finally, create an outline for your paper. The following is a useful example:

**Introduction**
- Give the author, title, and genre of the piece you will be analyzing
- Briefly summarize the piece of writing you are analyzing
- State your thesis

**Body**
- Organize your analysis in terms of strategies and appeals used by the author with different paragraphs for different strategies and/or appeals

**Conclusion**
- Reiterate and possibly expand upon your reasons for believing the author used rhetoric effectively or ineffectively in his/her writing

For more help, see the following link:
https://youtu.be/9s0LqAdqkV0