

Checklist for Rhetorical Analysis

When our practice conforms to our theory, our effectiveness trebles.—
George Campbell, 1752

Applying rhetorical theory from antiquity to the present, we will see in ENG 584 to what degree the practice of each twentieth-century rhetorical critic conforms to his or her theory and whether the effectiveness of that practice is trebled, halved, or otherwise affected. When one's practice conforms to one's theory, is practice more effective? How so? If one's practice does not conform to one's theory and yet is effective, what does that mean? What if deviation from one's theory improves one's practice? Or what if someone else's theory better accounts for the effectiveness, or the most effective moments, of one's own practice?

The following checklist, then, is intended to help you use theory both old and new to analyze the rhetorical practice of writers who theorize about rhetoric. Such analysis also serves as preparation for the MA Exam in Twentieth-Century Rhetoric (with occasional glances toward the other two areas, I. History and III. Pedagogy).

The Old Rhetoric: (from ENG 581)*

I. Rhetorical appeals/proofs: Analyze the character and intentions of the author, the emotional effects of the language and the details on the reader, and the logic and support of the arguments.

A. Ethical questions (*Ethos*)

1. Who is this author? What can you tell from the information in the text? Does he or she have the background to speak with authority on this subject?
2. Aristotle says that ethos “constitutes the most effective means of proof,” embodied by the following characteristics: character or trustworthiness; intelligence, knowledge, or experience; good will or identification; and power or charisma. What sort of ethos does this writer try to project in this article? What devices does he or she use to project this ethos?
3. Do you trust this author? Do you think this author is deceptive? Why or why not?

B. Questions about emotional effects (*Pathos*)

1. Aristotle claims that “the orator persuades by means of [the] hearers, when they are roused to emotion by [the] speech; for the judgments we deliver are

not the same when we are influenced by joy or sorrow, love or hate.” Does the assigned reading affect you emotionally? What parts affect you how?

2. Do you think the author is trying to manipulate your emotions? How?
3. Do your emotions conflict with your logical interpretation of the arguments? In what ways?

C. Logical questions (*Logos*)

1. Aristotle notes that in ordinary speaking and writing we often use what he calls a “rhetorical syllogism” or an *enthymeme*, a mode of argument in which some of the premises remain unstated or are simply assumed. Locate major claims and assertions you have identified in the assigned reading and work out the unstated assumptions behind them. Are these assumptions valid?
2. Aristotle says that the other mode of argument in rhetoric is the *example* (i.e., “rhetorical induction” or “particular cases”). Locate major examples. Are they used as premises for an enthymeme, or do they work as arguments by themselves?
3. Look at support for major claims and ask “Is there any claim that appears to be weak or unsupported? Which one and why?”
4. Can you think of counter-arguments that the author doesn’t deal with?
5. Do you think the author has left something out on purpose? Why or why not?
6. Finally, all things considered, are you persuaded by this author’s thesis and arguments? Why or why not?

II. The Question at Issue (*Stasis*)

1. For the Roman rhetoricians, *stasis* (where the many points of agreement between us and our interlocutor come to a standstill where we agree to disagree) is related to not only *inventio* but also *logos* because *stasis* represents the central turning point of a case: Does a case turn on a question of fact, of definition, of cause-effect, of quality, or of policy? Here are some examples:

Is ENG 584 offered in winter quarter? (question of fact)

Is a really large “seminar” essentially a “lecture section”? (question of definition)

Is the overenrolled grad program a result of *El Niño*, a moribund economy, and/or effective recruiting? (question of cause-effect)

Is eliminating the MA Program in English justified? (question of quality)

Is the MA in English really less desirable than the MBA? (comparative question of quality)

Should we protect (or how should we protect) the MA Program in English from budget cuts and “reprioritization”? (question of policy)

Identify the central issue upon which the argument turns. Is the writer finally or mainly arguing the existence of some thing or problem? Is the writer finally or mainly defining or redefining what something is? Is the writer finally or mainly arguing that something should be interpreted or valued differently from how it is commonly/typically interpreted or valued? Is the writer finally or mainly arguing that something should be done (changed or reinforced or instituted)?

2. For your *stasis* choice, note the decisive textual and/or contextual evidence.

III. Figures of Speech, Figures of Thought

In addition to the handout on figures/tropes (from Johnson, *A Rhetoric of Pleasure*) and the selection from *Rhetorica ad Herennium* in our text *The Rhetorical Tradition*, useful sources for listings of and insights into figures/tropes are Richard Lanham’s *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, Linda Woodson’s *A Handbook of Modern Rhetorical Terms*, Arthur Quinn’s *Figures of Speech*, Sharon Crowley’s *Ancient Rhetoric for Modern Students*, and the chapter on the codification of Roman rhetoric in Murphy et al.’s *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*. Figures can endow address—possibly even empty address—with clarity, emphasis, power.

1. Select a passage that seems to flow well—a passage where the writer seems to have reached her stride, found her voice, matched message and medium magnificently. What figures are at work in this passage?
2. For the same passage, is there anything the “literary feeling” or crispness or flow has the power to conceal, anything that should give us pause or make us nervous?

IV. St. Augustine on Style (the Means of Expression)

1. In *On Christian Doctrine*, St. Augustine quotes Cicero: “‘To teach is a necessity, to please is a sweetness, to persuade is a victory’” (136). Of the three, only the essence of teaching “resides in the things we have to say, the other two in the manner in which we say it” (136). Teaching, therefore, requires a “plain,” “simple,” or “subdued” manner (if one “is understood,” then one has succeeded as a teacher, “no matter how [one] has spoken); pleasing (i.e., praising or condemning) a “moderate” manner; and persuading a “grand manner” (145-46):

And just as he [the listener] is delighted if you speak sweetly, so is he persuaded if he loves what you promise, fears what you threaten, hates what you condemn, embraces what you commend, sorrows at what you maintain to be sorrowful; rejoices when you announce something

delightful, takes pity on those whom you place before him in speaking as being pitiful, flees those whom you, moving fear, warn are to be avoided; and is moved by whatever else may be done through grand eloquence toward moving the minds of the listeners, not that they may know what is to be done, but that they may do what they already know should be done. (136-37)

Does the assigned reading mainly aspire to teach, to please, or to persuade? Explain your choice. (By way of preparing for the MA exam, consider whether Augustine's kinds of discourse correspond, respectively, to Aristotle's: *forensic*, *epideictic*, and *deliberative*.)

2. Does the manner of the assigned reading follow Augustine's prescription? If not, does the assigned reading's manner nevertheless suit its aim? Either way, explain your reasoning, pointing to textual evidence where appropriate.
3. As ultimately rhetoric is about the converting of souls, anything less is lamentable. Figurative expression should direct the listener/reader to discern "an abstract pattern of philosophical significance beneath the symbolic configuration" ("Translator's Introduction" xv). What is the abstract pattern beneath the assigned reading's figurative texture, and what is the significance of that pattern? Can it be understood as a kind of soul-converting enterprise?

The New Rhetoric: Checklists for Rhetorical Analysis (from ENG 584)

PART ONE: PERSUASION (RHETORIC AS FORMING ATTITUDES, INDUCING ACTION)

Kenneth Burke says the "basic function of rhetoric" is the "use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 41). But, as with Aristotle's treatise *The Art of Rhetoric*, rhetoric can also function as the study of rhetoric (see *A Rhetoric of Motives* 36). Whether the studies of rhetoric I have assigned you fulfill the basic functions of rhetoric remains to be seen.

I. Dramatism/Pentad: Burke's pentad is his "grammatical" shorthand for discussing motives. Burke's pentad—Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose—is dramatic, he says, because it "treats language and thought primarily as modes of action" (*A Grammar of Motives* xxii)—the use of symbols to act on others, and on oneself as well, for certain ends. In

any rounded statement on motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*. (xv)

or put another way

Dramatism centers in observations of this sort: for there to be an *act*, there must be an *agent*. Similarly, there must be a *scene* in which the agent acts. To act in a scene, the agent must employ some means, or *agency*. And it can be called an act in the full sense of the term only if it involves a *purpose* (that is, if a support happens to give way and one falls, such motion on the agent's part is not an act, but an accident). ("Dramatism"—an encyclopedia article in which Burke also suggests that "Attitude"—as an "*incipient action*"—be added to the pentad)

These terms can occur in grammatical "ratios" that have rhetorical implications. Sometimes the scene is said to cause or require a certain act, as when the "events" ("crimes" or "an act of war"?) of 9/11 caused/required President Bush to respond with unusual force. Or a purpose-agency ratio may be in effect when a judge decides a case in which a car known to be stolen was used to rush a badly injured child to a hospital. Burke says there are ten such significant ratios: scene-act, scene-agent, scene-agency, scene-purpose, act-purpose, act-agent, act-agency, agent-purpose, agent-agency, and agency-purpose (15).

1. Which ratio dominates? Plug in the specific terms (e.g., for purpose-agency: emergency rescue-stolen car).
2. What major implications of this ratio inform the assigned reading?
3. Suggest another ratio that might have been appropriate, listing some changed emphases and their implications.

II. Terministic Screens: The "nature of our terms (or terministic screens) affects the nature of our observations, in the sense that the terms direct the attention to one field rather than to another" (Language as Symbolic Action 46). Note that this agency is not in our intentions but in the terms themselves, for however much we seek "vocabularies that will be faithful *reflections* of reality," those vocabularies will be "*selections* of reality." And "any selection of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a *deflection* of reality" (A Grammar of Motives 59)—where "deflection" means not ignoring but rather revealing "*only such reality as is capable of being revealed by this particular kind of terminology*" (313). Note Burke himself calling the symbolic power of Hitler's Mein Kampf "medicine" and "the well of Nazi magic" (Philosophy of Literary Form 192)—a document in which it is imperative to study the "'medicinal' appeal of the Jew as scapegoat" (195).

1. List some of the assigned reading's key terms and metaphors. What were they selected to reflect?
2. What realities did the selection thereby deflect? Is any of the deflection acknowledged in the assigned reading?

III. Identification/Consubstantiality: Persuasion “involves communication by the signs of consubstantiality, the appeal of *identification*” (A Rhetoric of Motives 62). In the “simplest case of persuasion,” Burke says “[y]ou persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his” (55). Such identifications are always stylistic (persuasion=*my ways* perceived as [=] *your ways*; a “way of life is an *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*” [21]):

[W]e might well keep it in mind that a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker’s interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience. So, there is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion, identification (‘consubstantiality’) and communication (the nature of rhetoric as ‘addressed’). (46)

1. Who is addressed? (Think of Booth’s “implied reader.”) How do you know?
2. What “ways”—of speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea—has the author tried to identify as yours?
3. Where are you not persuaded, either because the identification failed or because it was missing altogether?

IV. Four Master Tropes: handout from A Grammar of Motives

1. The four basic tropes play a major role in “the discovery and description of the truth” (503), the making sense of reality. To each trope Burke attaches a corresponding “realistic” application:
For *metaphor* we could substitute *perspective*;
For *metonymy* we could substitute *reduction*;
For *synecdoche* we could substitute *representation*;
For *irony* we could substitute *dialectic*. (503)

What is the main trope animating the assigned reading, the main logic behind the terministic screen?

2. Where does the main trope shade into others? Are there any places where it is difficult to discern which single trope is playing the major role? Or any places where the interanimation is especially complex?

V. Richard Weaver: “Language Is Sermonic”

“Values enter, at some stage or other, into every argument,” for any advocate “appeals to values in order to induce the hearer to make certain choices rather than others and, most

of all, to justify those choices so that they may be accepted and approved by others” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric 75).

1. Create a binary grid, putting anything the text highly values under the “plus” (+) side and each valued item’s antithesis under the “minus” (-) side.
2. How is the text addressed to people in their full humanity and historicity, its “well-fleshed words” accommodating the world’s “thickness, stubbornness, and power”?
3. How are “common topics” (see Aristotle’s The Art of Rhetoric) exploited as persuasive substance: being (defining the nature of something), cause (placing something in a cause-effect relationship), relationship (interpreting something in terms of similarity and dissimilarity), or authority (accepting something on the basis of testimony or authority)?
4. Identify the text’s “highest good,” that which it uses all its art to emphasize, that to which it directs most of its “power” so that we see *this* and not *that* as “most exigent.” Provide evidence for your choice. Where does the text’s highest good rank in Weaver’s hierarchy (where definition is most noble and circumstance least noble)?

(Compare Weaver with Booth—his The Rhetoric of Fiction [from ENG 582, Rhetoric and Poetics] as well as Modern Dogma and Rhetoric of Assent—who asks questions like the following: Based on the sum of his or her choices, to what values is the implied author committed? What is the implied author like, that is, what image of him do we get? Where does the author want the reader to stand? What kinds of appeals does the work make to readers? What have we been made to desire? Has that desire been gratified? [These last three questions are, in turn, influenced by Burke’s discussion of “form” in Counter-Statement, also from ENG 583.] Is the author a reliable guide—to the norms she imposes not only on her readers but also on her own textual practice?)

PART TWO: EPISTEMOLOGY (RHETORIC AS A WAY OF KNOWING)

To say rhetoric is *epistemic* (i.e., a way of knowing) is not to claim that there is no truth, is not to claim that objects do not exist independently of a perceiver, but rather to claim that our understanding of truth and objects is constructed in particular places at particular times for particular purposes under particular constraints. Where knowledge in classical rhetoric is something to be framed, knowledge in twentieth-century rhetoric emerges via the generative, dialectical process of framing. (Note that this category, then, could logically include Burke’s terministic screens and four master tropes.)**

I. Stephen Toulmin: Arguments as Ways of Knowing

Argument is a movement from accepted *data* through a *warrant* to a *claim*. *Data* (i.e., evidence) answer the question, “What have you got to go on?” The *warrant*, because it authorizes the mental leap from data to claim, answers the question, “How do you get there?” As the conclusion, a *claim* is the final proposition, the answer to the argument’s question at issue.

Data, warrant, claim—these are argument’s three indispensable elements. There are also three commonly occurring but not necessary elements: *backing*, *rebuttal*, and *qualifier*. *Backing* refers to arguments made in support of warrants that readers do not accept at face value. A *rebuttal* recognizes certain conditions under which the claim does not hold or will hold in a qualified, restricted way. The function of a *qualifier* is to register the degree of force which the claimer believes her claim to possess.

1. Diagram the text’s simple argument, as follows:

[D]ata-----Therefore, [C]laim

Since [W]arrant

Example: [D] Rhetorica has violated 50 of 52 international agreements.-----
Therefore, [C] Rhetorica would violate the proposed ban on nuclear-weapons testing since [W] past violations are symptomatic of probable future violations.

2. Diagram the argument with additional elements, where appropriate:

[D] Rhetorica has violated 50 of 52 international agreements. Therefore, [C] Russia would [Q] **probably** violate the proposed ban on nuclear-weapons testing [R] unless the ban on nuclear-weapons testing is significantly different from the violated agreements.

But [W] because past violations are symptomatic of probable future violations— [B] other nations with such records of violations have continued such actions; furthermore, most foreign-policy experts claim that chronic violators almost never change their ways—therefore, [C] Russia [Q] **most likely** will violate the proposed ban { [R?] unless the ban really is significantly different from the violated agreements }.

3. All in all, is the argument strong or weak, is it warranted, can its usefulness be corroborated by “collaboration” with what you have learned from other disciplines, other fields of labor (compare with formal logic, where an argument is right or wrong, valid or invalid, true or untrue)?

II. Chaim Perelman/Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca: Practical Argumentation/Rhetoric

1. How is the text an argument (“a meeting of the minds”) rather than a demonstration?

2. To this end, how is “presence” created, how is the “real” made and appealed to, what “philosophical pairs” are made and “dissociated”?
3. Based on what you found for #2, would you say the argument appeals mainly to a “particular” audience of real people with specific interests and choices to make or to a “universal” audience (i.e., “all reasonable beings,” which “means anybody capable of following the argument”)? Briefly explain.
4. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca say that whether it is possible for an audience to be universal is immaterial, for it “nonetheless remains true that, *for each speaker at each moment*, there exists an audience transcending all others” (The New Rhetoric 30). For the assigned reading, who is this audience? How do you know? (Compare with Booth’s ideal implied reader.)
5. How does this audience, in turn, embody not only a concept of what is *true* but also (and this is not addressed by Perelman/Olbrechts-Tyteca) a concept of what is *good*? (See Crosswhite, The Rhetoric of Reason 151; compare with Weaver).

III. Hélène Cixous: Writing the Body

1. Does the assigned reading ever laugh at its symbolic (phallic) body, at its magisterial attempts to generalize? Where?
2. Are there signifiers of communion, of linking with and giving to the other, playing with and around the signifieds of persuasion, knowledge, logic, reason, mastery?
3. If there are no libidinal disruptions of reckless high seriousness, where should there be? Why? Is it impertinent to ask *why?* *Who* cares why? (See also Gates’s The Signifying Monkey.)

*Note #1 (Reading): The metaphor of “transaction” (from Louise Rosenblatt’s The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work—the central text in ENG 589, Pedagogies of Reading, and one of the MA exam texts for the Pedagogy section) arguably informs every experience of reading. It is the transaction among the inert text on the page and the project-directed activity of a reader that transforms that text into an argument, a poem, a set of instructions . . . Text and reader both play a role in the construction of meaning; both are participants in a process that *must* be initiated and negotiated.

**Note #2 (A Study Strategy for Comprehensive Exam in Twentieth-Century Rhetoric): Because exam questions routinely ask you to synthesize, critically and creatively, a lot of wide-ranging material, you ought to consider other ways you might group these rhetorical

theorists and their projects. One could, for example, argue a distinction between those who follow and amplify Plato versus those who follow and amplify Aristotle—or a distinction between those who are master readers versus those who are writing teachers.

Or theorists like Burke and Cixous might be said to constitute a subversive epistemic: neither is comfortable standing still [*stasis*]; to the brinksmanship of settling differences, both prefer the consubstantial potentiality implicit in meaning-making and meaning-breaking-wide-open. Or, with reference to Augustine's three styles, Burke's and Cixous's provocatively "grand eloquence" might be set against the "plain style" of the "teachers" (e.g., Toulmin as Ramus reincarnated?) and the "sweet style" of the "reassurers" (e.g., Booth?)—assuming one could demonstrate that for Burke and Cixous the grand style was best suited to (a) the urgency of the situation to which their essays were stylized responses and (b) the audience's tacit if not explicit familiarity with, or feeling for, the subject.

Or theorists who flirt against (rather than with) authorial intention might be considered alongside the intention-situating projects of Foucault and Derrida (in the former's project, discursive formations [as distinct from authors/readers] determine intention/author-ity; in the latter's, the structure of iteration insures that the intention animating the utterance can never be "present"). And so on.