

Checklist for Rhetorical Analysis

I. Analyzing the Arrangement

Descriptive Outlining: This process is designed to make explicit the structure of the article, the function of each section, and the claims made by the writer.

1. Draw a line where the introduction ends. Is it after the first paragraph, or are there more introductory paragraphs?
2. Divide the body of the essay into sections based on topics.
3. Draw a line where the conclusion begins. Is it the last paragraph, or does it begin before that?
4. In the margins, write brief statements describing the rhetorical function and content of each paragraph or section.
 - a. What does each section do for the reader? What is the writer trying to accomplish?
 - b. What does each section say? What is the content?
 - c. What are the major claims or assertions made by the writer? (You may want to underline these.)

From your work charting the text, what do you think is the essay's main point? Is it explicit, or is it implicit?

II. Audience and Purpose

1. Who is the audience for this piece?
2. What is the writer trying to accomplish with this piece?

III. Thinking Critically

From the analysis you have done so far, you should be well-prepared to 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.

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. If you were going to do an internet background check on this author, what would you want to find out?

3. What sort of ethos does this writer try to project in this article? What devices does he or she use to project this ethos?
4. Do you trust this author? Do you think this author is deceptive? Why or why not?

Questions about emotional effects (*Pathos*)

1. Does this piece affect you emotionally? What parts?
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?

Logical questions (*Logos*)

1. Aristotle notes that in ordinary speaking and writing we often use what Aristotle calls a “rhetorical syllogism” or an *enthymeme*. This is an argument in which some of the premises remain unstated or are simply assumed. Locate major claims and assertions you have identified in your previous analysis and work out the unstated assumptions behind them. Are these assumptions valid?
2. Look at support for major claims and ask “Is there any claim that appears to be weak or unsupported? Which one and why?”
3. Can you think of counter-arguments that the author doesn’t deal with?
4. Do you think the author has left something out on purpose? Why or why not?

Finally, all things considered, are you persuaded by this author’s thesis and arguments? Why or why not?