

## Writing and Rhetoric

### 3 Rhetorical Analysis Heuristics

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#### Long version

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##### Rhetorical Situation

1. What is the rhetorical situation? Why was this piece written? For what occasion? What appears to be the author's purpose in writing the piece?
2. Publication information:
  - a. When was the article written?
  - b. Are the ideas expressed current?
  - c. Where were these articles published (in what journal)?
  - d. Does the publication information affect your view of the arguments being made?
3. Are there any contextual clues in the text that tell you the author's purpose in writing?

##### Claim

1. What is the claim? Is there a clear thesis?
2. What arguments or points of proof does the author use to support his/her claim?
3. Is there a call to action in the article? Is it the logical result of the facts presented? Or does the call to action seem to come out of nowhere?

##### Structure of the Argument

1. What is the structure of the paper? Is the organization clear? Do you think the argument would have been more effective if organized differently.
2. Is the argument presented well? Does the author transition from one topic to another? Are the transitions smooth?
3. Where does the author's main point appear: at the beginning, followed by the defense, or does the author build a case and state the claim as a conclusion? Is this tactic effective? Is the tactic intentional?

4. Is the main argument implicit or explicit? What are the ramifications of that choice?
5. Does the introduction introduce the issue effectively? (NOTE: the question is not whether the claim is stated in the opening paragraph.) Does the introduction get your attention? Does it set the stage? Is it too global in scope?
6. Does the conclusion summarize the argument effectively? Is it too global in scope?

##### Methods of Appeal

###### Ethos

*(credibility of the author or moral position)*

1. Does credibility come from the publication (the journal or book) or the author's extrinsic (external credentials) ethos?
2. Does the author establish credibility intrinsically (through the writing)? If so, how?
3. What kind of tone does the author project? Is the author warm? intelligent? hostile? humorous? serious? scholarly? sarcastic? angry? What evidence supports your conclusion?
4. What other comments do you have about the ethos of this piece?

###### Pathos

1. Does the author interact with the audience? How?
2. Does the author use "I" or "we"? If yes, give examples. How does the choice to use the first person affect the argument?
3. What emotions does the author appeal to? How?
4. What other comments do you have about the pathos of this article?

## Logos

1. Where does the author get his/her factual information: primary research? secondary sources (outside authorities)? personal reflection or experience?
2. What strategies does the author use for persuasion? description? personal experience? narration? process? cause and effect? classification? illustration? definition? comparison and contrast? analogy? Give specific examples from the text.

*Based on your answers to the questions about ethos, pathos and logos, does the author rely primarily on one method of appeal to build his/her argument? How might the use of the three appeals be strengthened?*

## Sources

1. Where does the author's evidence come from?
2. Is it clear when the author is quoting/paraphrasing/summarizing material from another article?
3. Is evidence from other places clearly attributed?
4. Does the author use quotations? Are there too many? Is each one "unique" -- in other words, could the author have said it as well or better (or shorter) in his or her own words?

## Alternative Positions/Counterargument

1. What questions, if any, are raised by the article? Are there "holes" in the argument that the author has avoided?
2. Does the author address these questions? Effectively?
3. Does the author consider alternative positions? Are these positions conceded, refuted or downplayed? How?

## The "writing"

1. Can you find an example of really good writing in the article? Really bad writing? Why is it good or bad?
2. Are there any "key" terms that the writer uses frequently? Are they "loaded" or argumentative terms?
3. Does the author use stylistic devices such as rhetorical questions, repetition of words or phrases for emphasis, parallelism, or lists? Examples? Are they overdone, underutilized, appropriate for the piece?

## Author

1. What can you find out about the author: education? job? where he works? credentials?
2. Does the author appear to be biased in any way? Does this bias add to or detract from the effectiveness of the argument?

## Audience

1. Who is the audience for this article?
2. What characteristics or values do the audience members share? Name at least three.
3. What assumptions about the audience and its beliefs and values has the author made?
4. How has the author tailored his/her writing to the audience?

## Effectiveness

1. Is the article persuasive? Is it effective in communicating its claim? Why?

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## Shorter version

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A second (and shorter) framework (heuristic) for rhetorical analysis is to find examples from the text to support your answers to the following questions:

1. What is the main point or points the author is trying to make in this essay?
2. Who do you think the author's audience is? Is there more than one intended audience? Remember that "the general public" is too vague – use more descriptive demographic information to describe the public if you believe it to be part of his audience.
3. What does the author seem to take for granted about how much his audience knows?
3. What is the purpose of the piece?
4. What leads you to believe that the author is a credible source? In what way does he show his credibility within the text?
5. What is the call to action in this piece? What is the author asking his audience to do or to believe?

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## Shortest version

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A third - and my "shortcut" - heuristic for rhetorical analysis:

1. What is being said?           \*\* The claim \*\*
2. How is it being said?           \*\* The writing \*\*
3. How does the "how" affect the "what"?   \*\* Does the writing help/hinder the message? \*\*

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