

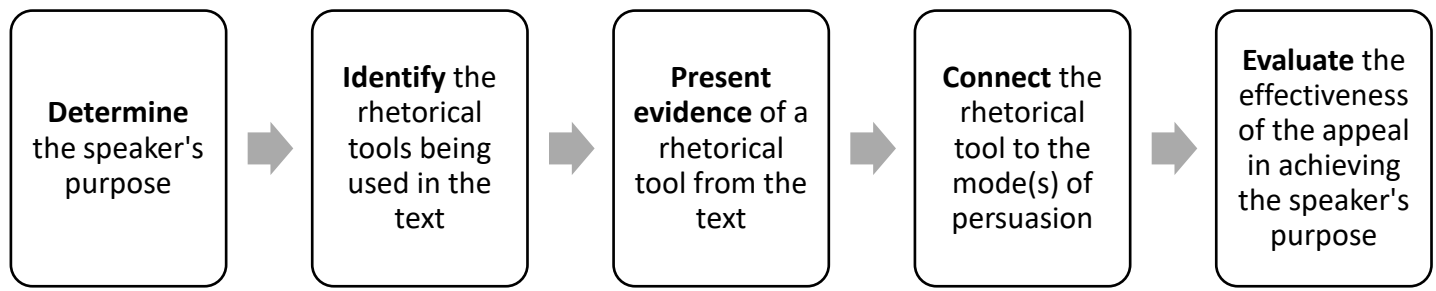
# Rhetorical Analysis Process



Learning how to identify and analyze rhetorical tools is an important part of the academic experience. This handout outlines the general principles and processes associated with rhetorical analysis; however, you should always tailor your work to your audience and assignment.

## The Rhetorical Analysis Process

Conducting rhetorical analysis consists of several steps, as shown below. This handout covers each step in detail.



### Determine the Speaker's Purpose

The speaker's purpose is often directly related to the audience they are addressing and the context of the selected piece. Consider what the author is trying to convince this **specific** audience to think or do in this **specific** context. To better understand the speaker's purpose, identify details about the audience (e.g., values, beliefs, culture, race, gender, socio-economic status, religion, political affiliation, etc.), and consider the historical or cultural context of the piece (e.g., when it was written, where it was published/delivered, or what motivated the author to create it).

### Identify the Rhetorical Tools

Speakers and writers use **rhetorical tools** (e.g., allusion, humor, or repetition) to activate or emphasize **modes of persuasion or rhetorical appeals** (ethos, logos, and pathos). For example, a speaker may use statistics to build his or her credibility (ethos), or a writer might use an anecdote to create an emotional connection with the audience (pathos). Here are some tools to look for, although this is not a comprehensive list:

- alliteration
- allusion
- analogy
- anaphora
- anecdote
- description
- euphemism
- examples
- hyperbole
- jargon
- metaphor
- paradox
- parallelism
- reasoning
- rhetorical questions
- rhythm
- simile
- testimony
- wordplay

Rhetorical tools can sometimes be used for more than one appeal (e.g., a personal story on parenting may connect with an audience emotionally while also establishing the speaker's authority as an experienced parent). Consider how one tool might have multiple functions.

**Note:** Be careful of analyzing the rhetorical tool *word choice*. It is better to choose specific aspects of the speaker's word choice to discuss rather than simply citing the author's word choice. For instance, "Elizabeth uses words associated with power and monarchy to emphasize her role as Queen of England" is a more effective analysis than "Elizabeth uses word choice to emphasize her role as Queen of England."

## Present Evidence of a Rhetorical Tool

Whether you use a direct quote or a paraphrased idea, referencing specific passages of the text is a crucial step in identifying and exemplifying an author's use of a rhetorical tool. After introducing the rhetorical tool you are highlighting, provide one or two examples of the rhetorical tool from the text. While providing examples is important, avoid overusing evidence since the majority of your paper should be analysis.

## Connect the Rhetorical Tool to the Mode of Persuasion

Depending on the audience and context of a work, different rhetorical tools will have different effects. For example, the use of historical allusions will affect an audience of studied professors differently than an audience of young students. When connecting a rhetorical tool to a mode of persuasion, consider these questions:

### Does the tool appeal to authority (**ethos**)?

- Is the speaker seen as a credible source to the audience? Why?
- Why does the speaker choose to use this particular rhetorical tool to establish authority? What connections is the speaker trying to make in the minds of the audience?
- Is the audience likely to accept this authority? Why or why not?
- How does establishing credibility of or trust in this authority help persuade people to trust the speaker?

### Does the tool appeal to logic (**logos**)?

- Why does the speaker use a logical argument instead of an emotional or authoritative one? What is the audience's likely reaction to this sort of logical reasoning?
- How selective or particular is the logic? Is there any evidence of flawed logic? If so, why? Does this undermine the argument, or strengthen it?
- Is the speaker using logic to persuade the audience about a highly emotional issue? If so, why?

### Does the tool appeal to emotion (**pathos**)?

- What emotion is the speaker highlighting? How would this emotion impact the speaker's audience?
- What particular tool is used to influence or cause an emotional reaction? Does it work? Why or why not?
- Once the speaker has affected the emotions of the audience, how does the speaker connect that emotion with the purpose of the speech? Is this effective? Why or why not?

**Note:** Although rhetorical tools can be categorized by their connection to ethos, pathos, and logos, these modes of persuasion are not tools themselves. Avoid such phrases as “the author uses ethos” in favor of more concrete and specific phrases, such as “the author quotes experts in the field in order to establish ethos.”

## Evaluate Effectiveness in Achieving the Speaker's Purpose

As you evaluate the speaker or author's work, consider the modes of persuasion or appeals being made by each rhetorical tool. Consider whether the audience is actually feeling or thinking what the speaker intended. Did the speaker or author achieve the purpose of the work? Explain why or why not.

**Note:** Evaluating the effectiveness of rhetorical tools does not include stating an opinion about your agreement with the speaker's stance or the likeability of the speaker or author. Be careful not to confuse the audience's outward actions (e.g., cheering, silent, etc.) with the effect of the rhetorical tool. Rhetorical analysis is an analysis of how a text or work is constructed and how its structure helps the author or speaker achieve a purpose.

# Rhetorical Analysis Organization



Without effective organization, the identification and analysis of rhetorical tools can be confusing. This handout establishes a common method of organization with a variety of prompts to aid your writing process. Since this is only a guide, your outline may vary depending on the assignment.

## Introduction

Begin your essay by providing the context for your work. In your introduction, consider these questions:

- What is the rhetorical situation? What is the setting? Why is the work taking place?
- Who is the speaker? Who is the specific audience?
- What is the speaker's purpose? What is the speaker trying to convey to the target audience? What are the speaker's goals for the text? What is being argued or suggested?
- How does the speaker achieve this purpose? What tools are used?

After combining these elements, your thesis may look something like this: [The author] uses [tools] to appeal to [mode of persuasion] and [effectively/ineffectively] convince [the audience] that [argument] or persuade [the audience] to [action].

## Body Paragraphs

Once you have identified tools the author uses to make their argument, you are ready to analyze how and how well the author uses those tools. Remember to use specific examples from the text for each tool you are analyzing.

**In the first paragraph, Bonnicksen uses vivid imagery to capture his audience and evoke a sense of loss in his readers.** He uses phrases like, “20,000-foot-high plumes of smoke,” “smoke stretching for 300 miles,” “1,500 archaeological sites [. . .] scarred or destroyed,” and “blackened hillsides” (108). With these descriptions, Bonnicksen creates a powerful image of the bleak outcome that results from “prescribed” or “controlled” fires. Such an image persuades readers that controlled fires, which are intended to protect the forest and enhance its diversity and health, are in reality responsible for the destruction of entire hillsides and the environment as a whole. Furthermore, Bonnicksen continues to develop the essay’s somber tone by using the word “blackened,” a color often associated with feelings of despair, hopelessness, or even death.

Begin each paragraph with a **topic sentence** that guides the organization of the paragraph and answers the question, “How does [rhetorical tool] convey the author’s purpose?”

Provide clear **evidence or examples** of the rhetorical tool (a paraphrase or direct quotation) and explain how or why it is a useful example. **Note:** Be careful not to stretch your analysis to make a tool appear to do something that the text does not support. If the analysis seems uncertain or contrived to you, it will likely feel like a stretch in logic for your reader.

**Analyze** the quote’s effectiveness. Connect the rhetorical tool to a mode of persuasion by explaining the effect the tool has on the author’s specific audience. Explain what this effect has to do with the author’s argument and purpose. **Note:** Be careful to analyze the text, not to simply summarize the content. Simply listing examples of the rhetorical tool and saying “it was effective” is not analysis. Make connections between the example(s) and the author or speaker’s purpose clear.

Source: sample paragraph adapted from “American Forests Go Up in Smoke.” *Writing and Rhetoric Supplemental Guide*, 2014, pp. 23–24.

## Conclusion

To provide an effective ending to your rhetorical analysis, consider incorporating the following into your conclusion:

- Reinforce your thesis statement by summarizing main points.
- Let your readers know why it matters. Provide insights and implications (conclusions that can be drawn) of your claims about the rhetoric tools and appeals the author uses.
- Provide a sense of closure for your readers.