Rhetorical Analysis

What is a rhetorical analysis?

A rhetorical analysis (sometimes called an argument analysis) gives your opinion on how well you think the techniques used in another writer’s argument convince its audience. In other words, you are evaluating an argument’s strengths and weaknesses and explaining why you think its techniques are effective or ineffective at persuasion. An argument analysis does not agree or disagree with the argument you are analyzing; for example, you can still say an argument was strong despite vehemently disliking what it said. Also, a rhetorical analysis is not a summary. You should not just repeat to your audience everything that the article talked about.

What makes a good rhetorical analysis?

A rhetorical analysis should consider the three classical rhetorical appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos. When considering these appeals, the writer should also consider the author’s purpose and intended audience. For example, one kind of tone may work well when addressing classmates but would be inappropriate if directed towards the business community.

Credibility (Ethos)
- Are there any noteworthy inaccuracies that suggest sloppy writing or dishonesty?
- Is there evident bias or prejudice?
- Are opposing ideas mentioned? Is the author fully informed on the subject?
- Does tone or diction manipulate the reader’s perspective?
- Are all sources credible and authoritative?
- Is common ground used to appeal to readers’ mutual values or beliefs?

Emotion (Pathos)
- Is it effectively used to build rapport with the reader and/or to motivate them to agree or take action?
- Is it used to distract the reader from an important idea?
- Is it overly exaggerated to manipulate the reader’s response?
- Is one emotion appealed to when another would have been more effective?
- Is no emotion appealed to at all?

Logic (Logos)
- Are there apparent logical fallacies?
- Are all claims clearly connected to their evidence?
- Evidence:
  - Accurate: Is it “trustworthy, exact, undistorted?” (Fowler and Aaron 192)
  - Adequate: Is it “plentiful and specific?” (Fowler and Aaron 192)
  - Relevant: Is it “authoritative, pertinent, current?” (Fowler and Aaron 192)
  - Representative: Is it “true to context?” (Fowler and Aaron 192)
  - Ex: If 5% of TCC students say their favorite color is blue, it is not representative of true TCC student diversity to say that all TCC students like the color blue.
Suggested Structure for a Body Paragraph

1. Topic Sentence: Make a claim about the effectiveness of an aspect of the argument.
2. Evidence: Provide examples from the source to prove your claim is true.
3. Reasons: Explain why the evidence provided influences the effectiveness of the argument (ask yourself, how would a reader respond to this?).