

# Rhetorical Analysis

In writing a rhetorical analysis, we consider whether the writer's arguments are persuasive (and why) or not persuasive (and why not). Rather than judging the topic or ideas, we are evaluating whether or not—in the eyes of the audience—the writer's choices effectively achieve his or her purpose.

## The rhetorical situation

The rhetorical situation is the **context** of the piece of writing, including the speaker, audience, writer's purpose, and message. For example, if we ask someone for advice, the person may want to know the factors involved and ask, "What's the situation?"

## Elements of content and style

To assess how a writer is persuasive, a rhetorical analysis dissects the piece of writing to examine its parts in detail. Some of an essay's elements relate to the content, what the essay actually says, and some relate to its style, or the way in which it is stated.

## Rhetorical appeals

Rhetorical appeals are the qualities of an argument that make it truly persuasive. To make a convincing argument, a writer appeals to a reader in several ways. The four different types of persuasive appeals are **logos**, **ethos**, **pathos**, and **kairos**.

**Logos**, the appeal to logic, is used to convince an audience with reason. Logos would contain a clear message and cite facts, statistics, authorities, and literal analogies.

*Example:* "Of all the studies in the last decade, none recommend that this is an effective treatment for losing weight."

**Ethos**, the ethical appeal, is used to convince an audience of the author's credibility or character.

Authors develop ethos by sounding fair or unbiased or by introducing their expertise or background.

*Example:* "The doctor's many years of experience show he is qualified to prescribe a treatment that will produce the best result."

**Pathos**, the emotional appeal, is used to invoke sympathy with meaningful language, a moving tone, or touching stories.

*Example:* "Some people feel they have wasted their lives, but it is never too late to renew a sense of purpose and meaning and make a valuable contribution to the world that only they can make."

**Kairos** describes the most suitable time and place for making an argument and the most opportune ways of expressing it.

*Example:* "Today's generation of students in their 20s is firmly tuned in to a digital world."

An example of using all four appeals would be that in making a request of a parent, we might give a logical reason for the request, show why we deserve it, make an emotional appeal, and present the request at an appropriate time.

## Rhetorical appeal examples in a courtroom trial

One way to understand a rhetorical analysis and the appeals is by an analogy of a courtroom trial. We are not considering the facts or forming an opinion about the trial itself; rather, we are focusing on how well the attorney argues his or her case.

- Logos—Soundness of logic and reasoning**  
 How clearly and logically does the attorney state the case? In opening remarks, the attorney might say, “I am going to prove to you that my client is innocent.” The case develops in a logical and understandable manner, with evidence, witnesses, experts, and counterarguments.
- Ethos—Establishment of the speaker’s credibility and fair and honest treatment of the issue**  
 The attorney might speak of the client’s strong reputation, achievements, or standing in the community. The case is handled with honesty, rather than name-calling or harassing the opposing side. The attorney may draw upon legal precedents, or rulings in other court cases.
- Pathos—The ability to engage the audience’s sympathy**  
 An attorney often uses pathos in a trial to appeal to the jurors’ emotions. The defense attorney may stress the client’s disadvantages or difficult childhood. The prosecuting attorney may emphasize the victim’s age, whether young or old, or the severe loss to family life.
- Kairos—The element of timing**  
 Timing can be important in a trial by bringing in facts or witnesses at the right time and order for maximum impact. An attorney may delay re-examination of a witness until other testimony proves it was false. A surprise witness may be called who changes the direction of the trial.

ETHOS	PATHOS - emotion	LOGOS
Impartiality	Anger	Reason
Confidence in delivery	Empathy	Evidence
Authority	Fear	Logic
Honesty	Hope	Statistics
Fairness	Jealousy	Anecdotes
Reliability	Justice	Authority
Trustworthy	Love	Case Studies
Credibility	Patriotism	Analogies/Comparisons
Educated	Pity	Cause and effect
Cites credible sources	Sympathy	Rationality
Reputation	Vivid language	Proof

Sources:

Click, James. “Lecture Notes February 23.” English 1301, Blinn College-Bryan. 23 Feb. 2007.

Lunsford, Andrea A., and John J. Ruszkiewicz. *Everything's an Argument*. Bedford/St. Martin, 2016.

See also: *So What? The Writer’s Argument*, 2nd ed., pp. 97-122.