Rhetorical Strategies

Writers don't just randomly sit down and ramble about a topic. They first consider the point that they want to make—the argument. Next, they consider their audience. Finally, they consider the best way to construct that argument to convince or persuade their audience.

But what types of evidence will they use? What tone will they adopt? What strategies will be most persuasive for that audience?

Rhetorical strategies are tools that help writers shape language to have an effect on readers. Strategies are means of persuasion, a way of using language to get readers' attention and agreement.

Note that it is not enough to simply name strategies and state that they are there. You goal is to discuss how they function, why an author might have chosen the strategy, and how the strategy and content combine to influence their audience.

In your writing or your discussion, you will need to ask and answer certain questions. Why does the author choose to use that strategy at that point in their argument? How do these strategies further their claims or the evidence he or she uses? How do they help the author build his or her ethos and how does this lend to their argument? What does he or she want to evoke in the reader?

When describing why a strategy is used, you should also consider alternative strategies, and think about how they would work differently—for better or worse. It might be helpful to consider what would happen if the strategy were left out – what difference would it make to the argument? This will help you figure out why the particular strategy was chosen.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS PARAGRAPH(S) OUTLINE

When Discussing Rhetorical Strategies, Remember to:

1. Identify a rhetorical strategy in the text and state the main reason why the author uses that rhetorical strategy. If you cannot identify or name a particular strategy in the passage you analyze, it is okay to describe what the author does, but you need some grounding, some focus.
2. Provide an example of the strategy by quoting a section of the text that represents

that strategy; if you are identifying an organizational structure or linking parts of a text, either quote exemplary sections of text that represent the important point and the strategy, or paraphrase/explain what the author says/does. A salient quote, one that represents the most important part of a text you wish you highlight, helps you discuss and analyze the strategy.

3. Describe *how* the strategy works.
4. Describe *why* the strategy is used – what purpose does it accomplish? How does it achieve an ethos appeal, pathos appeal, logos appeal? All strategies accomplish all appeal, though one may dominate. Always include a discussion of how this strategy helps the author develop and support not only the sub-claim, but overall argument (i.e., their thesis).

Anecdote/Narration: Recounts an event.

- Is the narrator trying to report or recount an anecdote, an experience, or an event? Is it telling a story?
- How does this narrative illustrate or clarify the claim or argument?
- What effect might this story have on the audience?
- How does this narrative further the argument?

Allegory: an extended narrative in prose or verse in which characters, events, and settings represent abstract qualities and in which the author intends a second meaning to be read beneath the surface of the story; the underlying meaning may be moral, religious, political, social, or satiric.

- "on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose- bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him....This rose-bush, by a strange chance, has been kept alive in history; but whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness, so long after the fall of the gigantic pines and oaks that originally overshadowed it, or whether, as there is fair authority for believing, it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson, as she entered the prison-door, we shall not take upon us to determine. Finding it so directly on the threshold of our narrative, which is now about to issue from that inauspicious portal, we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers and present it to the reader. It may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow."—Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

Alliteration: repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words that are close to one another:

- *P*eter *P*iper *p*icked a *p*eck of *p*ickled *p*eppers.
- "*F*reak of *f*ancy in my *f*riend."—Edgar Allen Poe
- "*F*ish, *f*owl, *f*lesh, roasted in luscious stews, and seasoned, I trust, to all your tastes."—Nathaniel Hawthorne

Allusion: a brief or indirect reference to a person, place, event, or passage in a work of literature or the Bible assumed to be sufficiently well known to be recognized by the reader. Allusions add depth and universal significance to a passage.

- "I am *Lazarus*, come from the dead."—T.S. Eliot (referencing Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead in the New Testament)
- "What can be more moving than a wise, high-strung woman begging a child's forgiveness, even as *King Lear knelt to Cordelia* for Pardon."—Helen Keller (unfortunately referencing Shakespeare's King Lear asking his only faithfuldaughter who had been cast out for forgiveness)

Antithesis: A special kind of distribution that emphasizes binary opposites—an either/or strategy that denies middle ground and polarizes the argument. It's not a compromise figure of speech; it's a two-sided expeditio.

- How does a parallel structure or either or argument influence the debate or frame an issue?
- How does the exclusion of middle ground amplify a particular idea?
- In what way does the opposition or contrast support the argument?

Example: (1) "I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering with the injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice."—MLK, Jr. (2) "To err is human; to forgive divine."— Alexander Pope in his "An Essay on Criticism"

Authorities or "big names": Frequently an author will quote from a famous person or well-known authority on the topic being discussed.

- How does this appeal to authority build trust in her argument that the consensus can be trusted? How might this authority appeal to a specific audience?
- How does this appeal tap into assumptions about scientific method?
- What does the authority focus on, how is he or she acknowledged in their respective fields, and what effect does this have on the author's argument?

Comparison: Discusses similarities and differences.

- Does the text contain two or more related subjects?
- How are they alike? Different?
- How does this comparison further the argument or a claim?
- This can be a small part of a paragraph or a larger organizational structure.

Example: "Must a powerful fairy like myself condescend to explain her doings to you who are no better than an ant by comparison, though you think yourself a great king?" (Andrew Lang, "The Wonderful Sheep." The Blue Fairy Book, 1889.

Definition: When authors define certain words, these definitions are specifically formulated for the specific purpose he or she has in mind. In addition, these definitions are crafted uniquely for the intended audience. By using definition, you make something clear or distinct.

- Who is the intended audience?
- Does the text focus on any abstract, specialized, or new terms that need further explanation so the readers understand the point?
- How has the speaker or author chosen to define these terms for the audience?
- What effect might this definition have on the audience, or how does this definition help further the argument? How does this definition create a framework of understanding?

Example: "Creativity—which I define as the process of having original ideas that have value—more often than not comes about through the interaction of different disciplinary ways of seeing things." --Ken Robinson's "Schools Kill Creativity."

Description: Details sensory perceptions of a person, place, or thing.

- Does a person, place, or thing play a prominent role in the text?
- Does the tone, pacing, or overall purpose of the essay benefit from sensory details?
- What emotions might these details evoke in the audience? (See Pathos)
- How does this description help the author further the argument?

> Example: "Johansen and his men landed at a sloping mud-bank on this monstrous Acropolis, and clambered slipperily up over titan oozy blocks which could have been no mortal staircase. The very sun of heaven seemed distorted when viewed through the polarizing miasma welling out from this sea-soaked perversion, and twisted menace and suspense lurked leeringly in those crazily elusive angles of carven rock where a second glance showed concavity after the first showed convexity." –*The Call of Cthulhu,* H.P. Lovecraft

Division and classification: Divide a whole into parts or sorts related items into categories.

- Is the author trying to explain a broad and complicated subject?
- Does it benefit the text to reduce this subject to more manageable parts to focus the discussion?

Example: "People looking to lose weight have a few options: exercise, diet, weight loss pills, and surgery. Exercising involves going to a gym, working out at home, or joining some sort of class or sports team. Those who are dieting can talk to a doctor

about a plan for them. Weight loss pills can be taken, if proper precautions and directions are followed. Individuals who are severely overweight can talk to a doctor about having surgery to lose the weight that they need."

Exemplification: Provides examples or cases in point.

- What examples, facts, statistics, cases in point, personal experiences, anecdotes, or interview questions does the author add to illustrate claims or illuminate the argument?
- What effect might these have on the reader?

Hyperbole: exaggeration: to make a mountain out of a molehill.

Identification: This is rhetorician Kenneth Burke's term for the act of "identifying" with another person who shares your values or beliefs. Many speakers or authors try to identify with an audience or convince an audience to identify with them and their argument.

- How does the author build a connection between himself or herself and the audience?
  Example: "MAXIM is here to make your life better in every way! Hot women, cool cars, cold beer, high tech toys, hilarious jokes, intense sports action, . . . in short, your life will be SUPERSIZED."

Metadiscourse – Metadiscourse can be described as language about language. It announces to the reader what the writer is doing, helping the reader to recognize the author's plan. (Example: In my paper . . .) Metadiscourse can be used both to announce the overall project or purpose of the paper and to announce its argument. It also provides signposts along the way, guiding the reader to what will come next and showing how that is connected to what has come before**.**

- Metadiscourse can signal the tone the author wants to convey. What is the author's voice in this paper? How does she enter in and guide the reader through the text?
- What role does she adopt? What voice does she use?

Metaphors, analogies, similes: An analogy compares two parallel terms or situations in which the traits of one situation are argued to be similar to another—often one relatively firm and concrete, and the other less familiar and concrete. This allows the author to use concrete, easily understood ideas, to clarify a less obvious point. Similarly, metaphors and similes help an author frame the argument. They encourage the audience to pay attention to some elements of a situation and ignore others, or they assign the characteristics of one thing to another. For example, see "The Power of Green" by Thomas Friedman in this reader.

- What two things are being compared?

- How does this comparison help an audience view the argument in a new way? How does this frame shape the argument and your understanding?

Analogy Example: “Last year’s profile of the stock index looks like a roller-coaster ride at your local amusement park.”
Metaphor: “Time is but a stream that I go a’fishing in.”—Henry David Thoreau “It is a government of wolves over sheep.” —Thomas Jefferson

Personification: the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something nonhuman, or the representation of an abstract quality in human form.

- What human characteristic or trait is attributed to a nonhuman object, and what does that trait or characteristic suggest about the object?
- What details about that trait influence the way you think about the object?

Parable: An analogy expressed in a simple symbolic story, a common preaching vehicle.

- How does the parable support a part of the argument?
- What detail in the parable is important for the argument?
- What does the parable represent in relation to the overall argument?

Example: There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What the hell is water?"—David Foster Wallace, “Kenyon Commencement Address”

Precedent: When an author or speaker argues from precedent, he or she references a previous situation, one that can be compared to the author’s situation.

- Does the author reference any historic instances that he or she claims are similar to the one being discussed?
- What details about this historic situation help the author’s argument?

Prolepsis (Counterargument/Rebuttal): Anticipating the opposition’s best argument and addressing it in advance.

- Readers interact with the texts they read, and often that interaction includes disagreement or asking questions of the text.
- Authors can counter disagreement by answering anticipating the opposition and introducing it within the text. Authors then respond to it.

Process analysis: Explains to the reader how to do something or how something happens.

- Were any portions of the text clearer because concrete directions about a certain process were included?

- How does this help the author develop the argument?

Rhetorical question: A question designed to have one correct answer. The author leads you into a position rather than stating it explicitly.

- What is the most obvious answer to this question?
- Why is it important to have the reader answer this question? How does it help the author persuade the audience?

Rule of Justice: (from *The New Rhetoric*, by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca) a special kind of argument by analogy that "requires giving identical treatment to beings or situation of the same kind" (218). This strategy compels comparison.

Example: You let the other student submit late work, so you need to let me submit late work.

Other Strategies:

- Emotionally loaded language
- Loaded language
- Emotional examples
- Figurative language
- Emotional tone (humor, sarcasm, disappointment, excitement, etc.)
- Framing

Structure and Organization

It is important to consider the organization of information and strategies in any text.

- How does this structure or organization help strength the argument?
- What headings or titles does the author use? How do these strengthen the argument?

Some elements of structure to consider:

Type of Organization:

- **Topical**: The argument is organized according to subtopics, like describing a baby's bubble bath first in terms of the soap used, then the water conditions, and lastly the type of towels.
- **Chronological**: The argument is organized to describe information in time order, like a baseball game from the first pitch to the last at-bat.
- **Spatial**: The argument follows a visual direction, such as describing a house from the inside to the outside, or a person from their head down to their toes.
- **Problem – Solution**: The argument presents a problem and a possible solution, such as making coffee at home to avoid spending extra money.
- **Cause and effect**: Describe the relationship between the cause or catalyst of an event and the effect, like identifying over-consumption of candy as the cause of tooth decay.

FRAMES & FRAMING

Frames are typically constructed through the use of metaphors, definitions, narratives, categories and metalinguistic commentary. They are used to get an audience to attend to certain elements of a situation and ignore others; to construct a particular way of seeing an issue, event, person or group, and to shape the way an audience understands the context of communication. They can have persuasive effects.

Exercise: construct what you think are the major frames used to discuss homelessness

One Event: Three Frames, Three Solutions[1]

Charlotte Ryan, author of Prime Time Activism, offers a good example of how one event can be framed in many ways, with a profound impact on the event's meaning. Consider the following three different versions of one news story:

1. "An infant left sleeping in his crib was bitten repeatedly by rats while his 16-year-old mother went to cash her welfare check."
2. "An eight-month-old South End boy was treated yesterday after being bitten by rats while sleeping in his crib. Tenants said that repeated requests for extermination had been ignored by the landlord. He claimed that the tenants did not properly dispose of their garbage."
3. "Rats bit eight-month old Michael Burns five times yesterday as he napped in his crib. Burns is the latest victim of a rat epidemic plaguing inner-city neighborhoods. A Public Health Department spokesperson explained that federal and state cutbacks forced short-staffing at rat control and housing inspection programs."