

How to Write a RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ESSAY

Step 1: Full Comprehension of the Text:

I. SOAP Analysis of the Prompt – you begin by identifying each part (subject, occasion, etc.,) as much as you can from the PROMPT alone. You may add to your understanding as you read and analyze the passage.

Speaker: _____
Occasion: _____
Audience: _____
Purpose: _____

II. Who, What, How, Why: (After Reading)

1. WHO IS THE SPEAKER AND WHAT MOVES HIM/HER TO SPEAK?
2. WHAT DOES THE SPEAKER SAY? (the literal meaning of the passage)
3. HOW DOES THE SPEAKER SAY IT?
 - How does he/she organize the passage?
 - What information does he/she choose to include or to leave out?
 - What rhetorical strategies—parallel syntax, sentence structure, imagery, allusions, connotative language, figurative language, etc.—does he/she use to make the message memorable?
 - What tone(s) does the speaker establish?
 - How does the speaker appeal to emotions and to reason? How does he/she establish an ethical appeal?)
4. WHY DOES THE SPEAKER SAY IT?
 - What is the speaker’s rhetorical purpose? In other words, what reaction from the audience does the speaker want? A change of thinking? An action?

Step 2: MAD TO WRITE!

Follow this process to prepare for any timed rhetorical analysis essay. Some of this is redundant, but this portion has more to do with the actual process of writing an essay, whereas the previous questions are part of simply gaining full comprehension of the text.

Main ideas – read to determine what points the speaker makes
Annotate – mark passage as you read, to identify different strategies
Divide – figure out how the passage is organized; divide into different sections
Tone – what are the different attitudes/emotions that you can “hear” in the speaker’s words? Each of your section divisions will have one or more tones.
Outline – plan your essay. Like all other essays, your rhetorical analysis essay will have an introduction with a thesis, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
WRITE – write your essay.

Step 3: Organizing and Writing Your Essay:

Some of this is redundant, but this breaks down some of the steps from MAD TO WRITE even further. You should organize your thoughts in response to the above questions into an essay containing an introduction, two or three support paragraphs, and a conclusion:

1. Figure out how the passage is organized, and then divide it into different sections. These sections will determine the focus of your support paragraphs.
2. Identify tone. What are the different attitudes/emotions that you can “hear” in the speaker’s words? Each of your section divisions will have one or more tones. Often, there is a tone shift between the sections of a passage.
3. Write your thesis. How does the author achieve his/her rhetorical purpose?
4. Write topic sentences for each body paragraph. The topic sentence will explain the main idea and/or purpose of the section of the passage, and may include tone(s) words.
5. Decide what strategies you will analyze in each of your paragraphs. Choose strategies that you fully understand and that you can clearly connect to the main idea/purpose stated in your topic sentence.
6. Don’t forget about the conclusion. Here you will answer the “so what?” and “who cares?” questions about the author’s message. Why is this message important (so what)? To whom does this message matter (who cares)?

PRACTICE RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ESSAY

Text: “On the Rainy River” from Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*.

Prompt: In this passage, how do the writer’s language choices (rhetorical strategies) contribute to his/her purpose?

Create an OUTLINE for a possible essay on this chapter that includes the following:

- Thesis (should answer the prompt question directly)
- Body Paragraph 1--Topic Sentence & Possible Evidence:
- Body Paragraph 2—Topic Sentence & Possible Evidence
- Conclusion idea (should address “so what?”)