

# THE RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ESSAY\*

*Things you must know in order to accurately analyze a text:*

1. SOAPS
2. Rhetorical Strategies
  - a. Appeals (ethos, logos, pathos)
  - b. Style (diction, syntax, details, imagery, tone, etc.)
3. Why did the author choose these strategies for the particular audience, occasion, and/or purpose?
  - a. This is the analysis part! Without this, you are merely summarizing the text. b. Think about these questions:
    - HOW do the rhetorical strategies help the author achieve his/her purpose?
    - WHY does the author chose those strategies for that particular audience and for that particular occasion?

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Once you've identified the information above, it's time to begin putting your thoughts and ideas into a format that proves you have accurately analyzed the text. There are many ways to write an effective rhetorical analysis essay.

Below is one way that is a good, simple format to help you get started. You may find as you become more comfortable with analysis that you want to deviate from this format. That's fine as long as you are still focusing on numbers 1-3 from above.

*\*information adapted/borrowed from The Art & Craft of Analysis and AP Lang teachers everywhere.*

## INTRODUCTION

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The introductory paragraph to an analysis essay is usually brief. However, it must contain some essential information.

Put SOAPS in your introduction and follow this format:

### 1. **Speaker, Occasion, and Subject**

(Writer's credentials), (writer's first and last name), in his/her (type of text), (title of text), (strong verb – see list at end of this handout) (writer's subject).

*Well-known essayist and writer, Joan Didion, in her essay, The Santa Ana, describes the dramatic mood altering effects of the Santa Ana winds on human behavior.*

### 2. **Purpose**

(Writer's last name)'s purpose is to (what the writer does in the text).

*Didion's purpose is to impress upon readers the idea that the winds themselves change the way people act and react.*

### 3. **Audience**

He/she adopts a[n] (adjective describing the attitude/feeling conveyed by the writer) tone in order to (verb phrase describing what the writer wants readers to do/think) in his/her (intended audience).

*She creates a dramatic tone in order to convey to her readers the idea that the winds are sinister and their effects inescapable.*

### *Additional Example*

Novelist, Amy Tan, in her narrative essay, "Fish Cheeks," recounts an embarrassing Christmas Eve dinner when she was 14 years old. Tan's purpose is to convey the idea that, at fourteen, she wasn't able to recognize the love her mother had for her or the sacrifices she made. She adopts a sentimental tone in order to appeal to similar feelings and experiences in her adult readers.

## BODY PARAGRAPHS

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This is the analysis part! This is where you include a detailed explanation of strategies used by the writer. When writing an analysis, it is crucial that you work chronologically through the text. This means that you start at the beginning of the text and work your way through it by discussing what the writer is saying and the effectiveness of the strategies he/she is using at the beginning, middle, and end of the text.

Sometimes this means that you will discuss each paragraph (one at a time), and sometimes this means that you will divide the text into sections and discuss the beginning, middle, and end of the text. Whether you discuss each paragraph or each section depends on the length and organization of the text itself.

To help you move chronologically through the text, there are transition words you can use. A few of them are listed below:

|                  |                   |               |                  |
|------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------|
| <i>begins</i>    | <i>opens</i>      | <i>closes</i> | <i>contrasts</i> |
| <i>shifts to</i> | <i>juxtaposes</i> | <i>ends</i>   | <i>moves to</i>  |

Every analysis paragraph MUST:

- Identify the part of the text you are analyzing by using transition words and strong verbs to explain what is being said.
- Identify the strongest rhetorical strategies used in that particular section. This includes incorporating specific text examples (exact words from the text – see last page of this handout for proper format) into your own words. Do NOT try to discuss every strategy the writer uses; pick the strongest!
- Clearly and specifically explain how the rhetorical strategies are used to help the writer achieve his purpose and reach his audience.
- The above items must be woven together seamlessly into one sophisticated paragraph of the body of your analysis essay. A sample format is below:

**FORMAT and EXAMPLE** [from Pres. Reagan’s speech after the space shuttle Challenger explosion in the 1980s]:

1. The **first** sentence identifies which section of the text you are discussing and the main idea of that section.  
(Writer’s last name) (transition word) his/her (type of text) by (strong verb) that (main idea of this section of the text).  
*Reagan begins his tribute to the Challenger astronauts by acknowledging that the shuttle accident has appropriately postponed his planned State of the Union address and by expressing the depth of his and his wife’s personal grief.*
2. The **second** sentence conveys the writer’s support for the main idea by identifying and providing a specific example for one rhetorical strategy used by the writer. [This sentence is repeated if you want to discuss more than one rhetorical strategy.]  
*He appeals to the mournful emotions of the audience by admitting that he and Nancy are “pained to the core” (3), that today is rightfully a “day for mourning and remembering” (2-3), and that the accident is “truly a national loss” (4).*
3. The **third** sentence explains how the rhetorical strategies you discussed in the previous sentences help the writer achieve his purpose by using an in order to statement.  
*He joins in this time of mourning in order to unify the nation and humbly admit that “we share this pain with all of the people of our country” (4).*
4. The **fourth** sentence identifies the effect of the writer’s use of these rhetorical strategies on the audience.  
*This outpouring of emotion from the president conveys a calming tone that reassures the Nation that their grief is both understandable and proper.*

Put it all together and this is what **one body paragraph** of a rhetorical analysis essay might look like:

Reagan begins his tribute to the Challenger astronauts by acknowledging that the shuttle accident has appropriately postponed his planned State of the Union address and by expressing the depth of his and his wife's personal grief. He appeals to the mournful emotions of the audience by admitting that he and Nancy are "pained to the core" (3), that today is rightfully a "day for mourning and remembering" (2-3), and that the accident is "truly a national loss" (4). He joins in this time of mourning in order to unify the nation and humbly admit that "we share this pain with all of the people of our country" (4). This outpouring of emotion from the president conveys a calming tone that reassures the Nation that their grief is both understandable and proper.

## **CONCLUSION**

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Be brief. In one-two sentences, emphasize the "takeaway" from this piece of writing.