

THE RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ESSAY

OVERVIEW

The Rhetorical Analysis Essay is the second of three essays on the AP Language and Composition Exam. You will have to dissect a piece of nonfiction writing. From there, you'll be asked to identify the main argument along with specific rhetorical devices that the author uses to fortify his or her writing.

The Rhetorical Analysis Essay is out of 6 points: 1 point for a strong, defensible thesis; up to 4 points for evidence, incorporated information or commentary; and 1 point for demonstrating a complex understanding of the topic. The official AP rubric for the Rhetorical Analysis Essay is located at the bottom of this document with a sample rhetorical analysis essay.

TIPS

BEFORE WRITING:

- Read the selection twice and don't forget to annotate
- 1st read for understanding, 2nd identify and categorize important parts that contribute to the main argument
- Look for patterns or shifts in tone or content
- Writers build up their argument through a variety of strategies such as tone, style of diction, rhetorical modes (examples, comparisons, narratives, descriptions), and rhetorical devices (anaphora, repetition, antithesis)
- If you are stuck, remember that a writer either utilizes emotion or logic. Build your response upon that knowledge.

INTRODUCTION:

In your introduction, you will need to include information on the speaker, purpose, audience, context, and exigence. An acronym is SPACE.

Speaker: Who is talking? What do we know about this author? How does this contribute to his or her argument?

Purpose: Why is the author writing this piece of literary work?

Audience: Who is the author's intended audience? Who are they addressing? What do they assume about their audience?

Context: What is happening in the world when this text was produced? What are the biggest issues on the speaker's mind, which they might be directly or indirectly addressing?

Exigence: Why is the author addressing this topic right now? What was the spark that moved the speaker to act out?

A Sample Paragraph Incorporating SPACE:

In 1975, amid the women's rights movement, author and social critic Susan Sontag wrote "Beauty: Put Down or Power Source." Targeting Vogue readers – mainly women concerned with their physical appearance – she discussed how the concept of beauty has been diminished and, therefore, denigrates women. In her essay, she employs _____ and _____ to convince her audience that society should work to elevate beauty to its prior status as part of the human ideal.

*Your introduction paragraph should only be 3 sentences.

Thesis: Place this as the last sentence of your introduction paragraph. Don't forget to include the rhetorical devices that the author uses, which can serve as your controls or topic sentences for each body paragraph. Lastly, at the end of the thesis include the specific argument the author is prompting.

The prompt will give you a general argument and information on exigence or context. However, analyze who wrote the piece of writing and the time it was published to achieve a deeper understanding. For example, if the work was published in 1780, using your APUSH knowledge, you know that the American Revolution was occurring. How could that impact this piece of work? Who wrote the piece, was it a patriot or loyalist?

BODY PARAGRAPHS:

Topic Sentences: These will be the skeleton of your body paragraphs. Use those strong verbs listed within our website to fortify your response. Your goal for this sentence is to introduce the rhetorical device, mode, or other strategies that you will be analyzing in this respective paragraph. Clearly state the argument this strategy supports and the target audience.

Picking and Introducing Quotes:

- As you are reading the source a second time, pinpoint the places where you want to quote from. You want to strive for at least 2 strong and relevant quotes that buttress your response.
- These quotes should not be very long as you want your body paragraph to be filled with your thoughts and not words from the given text.
- When you are introducing the quote, utilize transitions to help one idea flow into another.
- Additionally, introduce the quote. Give background on who is talking or what is occurring before injecting the quote.
- Do not reveal the message of the quote prior to quoting it and cite the paragraph number from where you got the quote from
- Build towards your strongest evidence

Commentary

- This should be the bulk of your essay but unlike the synthesis and argument essay this is a formal piece of writing. Thus, do not use personal pronouns
- Do not critic the author, your job is to analyze what the author is arguing and how he or she supports the argument
- After stating each respective quote, discuss:
 - The importance of the passage and what it is discussing
 - The contributions to the overall argument and the most important words of the quote
 - How the passage reveals an idea within the greater argument

- Does the author inject ethos, pathos, or logos? How does this effect the target audience?
- If you pick pathos, explicitly state what emotion the author is trying to trigger
- How does this passage resonate given the circumstances (context or exigence)?
- Apply knowledge from SPACE to elaborate on the impact of the quote
- As you write your body paragraphs, recognize that you should build momentum towards your strongest point. Move swiftly through those initial paragraphs and save time for the big finish. The last paragraph should be the one with the most important evidence and deepest analysis.

CONCLUSION:

- Given the limited amount of time, you may not be able to squeeze in a conclusion.
- However, if you do get to a conclusion, transition from your last topic before restating in different words the techniques, audience, and argument inherent in the given piece of work.

Scoring Rubric for Question 2: Rhetorical Analysis

6 points

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<p>Row A Thesis (0-1 points)</p> <p>1.A 4.B</p>	<p>0 points For any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no defensible thesis. • The intended thesis only restates the prompt. • The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim. • There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt. 	<p>1 point Responds to the prompt with a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.</p>
<p>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</p>		
<p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only restate the prompt. • Fail to address the rhetorical choices the writer of the passage makes. • Describe or repeat the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense. 		
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. • The thesis may be anywhere within the response. • For a thesis to be defensible, the passage must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point. • The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn’t do so to earn the thesis point. • A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning. 		
<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to the prompt rather than restate or rephrase the prompt, <u>and</u> the thesis clearly takes a position rather than just stating that there are pros/cons. 		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria								
<p>Row B Evidence AND Commentary (0–4 points)</p> <p>1.A 2.A 4.A 6.A 8.B 8.C</p>	<p>0 points Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.</p>	<p>1 point EVIDENCE: Provides evidence that is mostly general. AND COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student’s argument.</p>	<p>2 points EVIDENCE: Provides some specific, relevant evidence. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.</p>	<p>3 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning. AND Explains how at least one rhetorical choice in the passage contributes to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.</p>	<p>4 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning. AND Explains how multiple rhetorical choices in the passage contribute to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.</p>				
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes									
<p>Typical responses that earn 0 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. • May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant. 						<p>Typical responses that earn 1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to focus on summary or description of a passage rather than specific details or techniques. • Mention rhetorical choices with little or no explanation. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 2 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. • May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument. • May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim. • Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 3 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. • Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument. • Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims. • Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 4 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. • Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument. • Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained. • Explain how the writer’s use of rhetorical choices contributes to the student’s interpretation of the passage.
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. • To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same rhetorical choice if each instance further contributes to the argument, purpose, or message of the passage. 									

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<p>Row C Sophistication (0-1 points)</p> <p>2.A 4.C 1.C 6.A 6.B 6.C</p>	<p>0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.</p>	<p>1 point Response demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.</p>
<p>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</p>		
<p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to contextualize the text, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations. Only hint at or suggest other arguments. Examine individual rhetorical choices but do not examine the relationships among different choices throughout the passage. Oversimplify complexities in the passage. Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the analysis. 		
<p>Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Explaining the significance or relevance of the writer's rhetorical choices (given the rhetorical situation). Explaining a purpose or function of the passage's complexities or tensions. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive. 		
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student's argument, not merely a phrase or reference. 		