

# A Guide to Rhetorical Analysis and Critique

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*You may be asked to analyze and critique something you have read. Clarify with your instructor what kind of analysis and critique they want you to compose. If they want a rhetorical analysis, you are being asked to explain what makes the text effective (usually, as an argument).*

*Here is one way to work toward composing a rhetorical analysis and critique:*

- **Read the text once.** Focus on getting the general idea. As you read, underline sentences that you think are important and circle any words that you don't understand, but don't stop reading to ponder these things.
- When you are finished, **write a brief freewritten response to the text.** Identify what you think the author's main point is and state it in your own words. Write down anything that you think is important. Focus on things you really like or dislike about the text.
- **Read the text again, more slowly and carefully.** Try to identify and underline the thesis statement. Identify and underline any sentences that contain major supporting points (topic sentences). As you get to words you circled the first time, see if you can figure out the meaning without looking them up and write the meaning in the margin. If you can't figure out the meaning, look it up and write the definition in the margin in your own words. Imagine you are having a conversation with the writer. As you get to places you don't understand or you disagree with, write questions in the margin. As you get to places you like or agree with, put something in the margin to remind you of this place.

*Start drafting your analysis and critique.*

- **Explain, in your own words, the author's main point.** Is the main point stated or implied? Is it at the beginning or end of the article? If it is implied, how did you figure it out?
- **Discuss each of the supporting points in the text.** Explain how the points relate to each other? That is, how does the writer create connections between her ideas? How does the writer develop ideas? Are there methods of developing ideas in this text that are particularly effective?  
Here are *some* ways that writers develop ideas: listing, defining, providing examples, explaining, reporting, comparing, contrasting, describing, providing anecdotes (personal stories), concrete profiles, and/or statistics and facts.
- **Identify the overall argument style the writer is employing:** is it a logical argument (logos), an argument which appeals to the emotions (pathos), or an argument which relies on the writer's persona (ethos)? Is it some combination of the above? How do you know this? Find places in the text that illustrate the author's style of argument.
- Based on the above information, **critique the text.** Is the writer's argument effective? Why or why not?

Combine and revise the above information so your paper moves smoothly from analysis to critique. Treat your paper like an argument: you are persuading your audience that you carefully read the text and that your critique is well-founded and reasonable.