Analyzing Written Texts

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The reading, lecture, and writing assignments you completed during the Ad Analysis Units have provided an excellent foundation on which to build as you prepare to write the Textual Analysis Essay. The awareness of audience and the understanding of rhetoric you gained over the last two learning units will help you immensely as you analyze a written text. If you're like a number of students I've had in the past, though, you might be a little confused about how analyzing an essay compares to analyzing an advertisement, and you may even be a little intimidated at the thought of analyzing a written work. To help you understand how to approach analyzing a written text, let's look at how rhetorical appeals commonly work in written works and then look at how you might prepare to write the Textual Analysis Essay.

Analyzing Written Texts

We'll start with analyzing written texts. Like advertisements, written works contain appeals to ethos, logos, and/or pathos. Let's consider how an author might incorporate these in a written work.

A. We'll start with **ethos**. You might remember that when advertisers use ethos, they appeal to a spokesperson's or a particular company's character, credibility, or status. In written works, ethos appeals to the author's credibility. That is, ethos refers to whether the author comes across as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and likeable. An author's ethos can depend not only on what he says in an essay, but also on his or her reputation as a scholar or public figure. If an author is well known in his or her field, that reputation may predispose the reader to trust (or distrust) the author's argument. If an author is unknown, he or she may not be able to rely as heavily on ethos to convince the audience. Let's look at some textual elements that impact ethos.

   1. First, **point of view** strongly impacts readers' perception of the author**.** Using **third person** point of view, for instance, often makes the author appear **objective** and **scholarly,** while using **first person** point of view tends to be more **informal** and **personable**, reminding the reader that the author is drawing upon personal experiences and a unique perspective. When authors use **second person** point of view, they create an even **more informal** tone and develop a **direct connection with readers**. Of course, the impact of first and second person point of view depends upon the essay's content. Authors can hurt their ethos if their use of first person makes them seem arrogant or proud. Likewise, if the author is attacking or accusatory, directly referencing the reader through second person point of view may put readers on the defensive.

   2. Secondly**, tone** also influences an author's ethos. Tone refers to the author's **attitude toward the subject** matter **and** the **audience**. It can be developed through elements including point of view, word choice, organization, supporting materials, and treatment of

opposing viewpoints. An author's tone might be described as light-hearted, comedic, concerned, serious, solemn, accusatory, defensive, satiric, belligerent, balanced, etc. There is no "correct" tone for an essay, but tone does impact the audience's perception of the author and, depending on the appropriateness of the tone for a given audience and situation, it can impact ethos positively or negatively.

3. Thirdly, **personal references and examples** can help or hurt an author's ethos. Throughout the course of an essay, authors may mention their credentials, past experiences with an issue, or commitment to a cause in order to remind the readers of their credibility and appeal to their own ethos to help prove a point. Well-known authors might reference their own expertise in order to reinforce points, whereas lesser-known authors may need to work in personal examples and references to their past experiences and research in order to build ethos and prove themselves credible.

4. Finally, the **overall content** of any written work impacts an author's ethos. Organization, language, research, and logic will all impact readers' likelihood to trust and respect an author. If readers see typos, faulty logic, poor research support, or even poor language skills, they will be less inclined to respect the author's arguments. Likewise, if readers sense that an author is being unfair to the opposition, they may be unwilling to trust the author's supporting evidence, even if it's good evidence.

As you look for examples of ethos in the professional essay, remember that authors always create ethos, whether they intend to or not. Some authors may consciously draw on or seek to build their own ethos, but even those who don't deliberately appeal to ethos create an impression on readers and develop either good or bad, strong or weak, positive or negative ethos.

B. Let's move on to **logos**, or **appeals to reason**. Because academic writing presupposes a well-educated audience trained in critical thinking and because academic argument hinges on well-thought-out and well-supported claims, logic plays a significant role in academic writing. In fact, while advertisements tend to rely heavily on emotional appeals, academic writing relies primarily on logical appeals. Any professional essayist writing for an academic audience will damage his or her ethos and fail to convince the audience if an argument lacks strong logos. Let's look at some ways to analyze logos in a written text.

1. The **type of evidence** used in an essay strongly impacts logos. Any time an author makes a claim in a text, he or she must lay out reasons and evidence to support that claim. The better the support, the better the appeal to logos. Authors often use **definitions**, **comparisons**, **real-life examples**, **hypothetical examples**, **expert testimony**, **lay testimony** (from everyday people), **statistics**, and **scientific or sociological studies** to support their main points.

In considering the quality of an author's evidence, you might consider whether it is **anecdotal or empirical**. **Anecdotal evidence** refers to **non-scientific evidence** and usually involves an observation of **one or two isolated cases** that can't be considered representative. Occasionally an expert might draw on several personal experiences to effectively support a point; because the person is considered an expert, he or she can be trusted to choose good, representative examples. However, sometimes, as in the case of Katha Pollitt's references to her daughter and niece in "The Smurfette Principle," authors offer limited isolated examples and argue on the basis of insufficient evidence.

In contrast to anecdotal evidence, **empirical evidence** refers to evidence that can be **verified by observation** or **experimentation**. When authors offer statistics and review studies, they use empirical evidence. Empirical evidence usually provides proof of an author's claim, convincing the audience that the claim is true. However, the sample size of a study, the credibility of the researchers, and the applicability of the research can either negatively or positively affect an essay's logos.

2. Not only does the type of evidence build a logical appeal, though; the **amount of evidence** used in an essay also significantly impacts logos. Some claims can be proven with the use of a single definitive study or a strong explanation; however, others require multiple types of support to convince an audience. In analyzing logos, always consider whether the author provides sufficient evidence and why an author might or might not choose to include certain types of evidence. For instance, some authors might choose to include empirical evidence, anecdotal evidence, a personal example, and expert testimony to prove just one claim. The ways authors stack and organize various types of evidence might make an essay more or less logically sound and make an argument more or less effective.

3. No matter how good the evidence provided, however, the **quality of logic** the author employs when presenting that evidence can either substantiate or undermine an argument. Academic essays generally strive to incorporate good logic in an attempt to convince a critical audience. However, academic and professional essays sometimes inadvertently, or even purposefully, manipulate readers through the use of **unsubstantiated claims**, **faulty reasoning**, and **misrepresentation of facts**. We call these errors in reasoning **"logical fallacies."** Because logical fallacies often render an argument invalid, you should be familiar with them. Your reading assignment in *From Inquiry to Academic Writing* provides definitions for and examples of multiple logical fallacies. Please take the time to look over these carefully if you haven't already done so.

4. Finally, whether or not the author offers **concessions and refutations** can determine the strength of an essay's logos. A well-thought-out and well-supported argument will appeal to readers' reasoning capacities through addressing opposing viewpoints when possible. Particularly when arguing a controversial point, authors can strengthen their own arguments by explaining and responding to views and research which contradict their own.

Considering opposing viewpoints also allows readers to consider all sides of an issue and shows that authors have done the same. When authors respond to objections, they can either concede a point by admitting that the opposition is correct on that point, or they can refute a point by trying to disprove the claim with evidence and logic. Refuting points can strengthen logos by showing not only the strength of the essay's argument, but the weakness of other positions.

C. Finally, let's look at **pathos**, or **emotional appeals**. Just as advertisers employ emotional appeals to grab audiences' attention and connect them to a product, writers frequently employ pathos to help keep readers' interest and convince them of their arguments.

1. Probably most obviously, **narrative** appeals to emotions. Incorporating stories is perhaps one of the best ways to emotionally connect to readers, as stories put a human face on a general concept and engage readers' imaginations. Providing a statistic about the number of children who die of AIDS in Africa each year might leave readers unmoved; however, incorporating a narrative about a specific child and his family would likely call upon human sympathy and help readers identify with the situation.

2. Much like stories, **examples** can not only add credibility to a claim, but can also build emotional responses. When analyzing the use of examples, pay attention to whether the author provides just one example or stacks several on top of each other. Authors usually include multiple examples to support a single claim, either because the claim requires a great deal of logical support or because each example offers a different emotional element. When several real-life examples appear throughout a text, consider whether the stacking of these examples has a particular emotional impact.

3. Along with narrative and examples, **testimony** can impact readers' emotions. Authors often incorporate quotations to support their points. When authors use expert testimony, they're usually doing so to appeal to ethos and logos by showing that experts verify that claim. However, authors might also use prestige testimony and lay testimony. Prestige testimony includes quotes or opinions of famous and admired people who, although recognizable, cannot provide expert insight into the situation. Lay testimony comes from ordinary people who may have opinions or experiences related to a claim, but are not scholars or experts. Of course, whenever we hear someone else's words or opinions, we think about the feelings and perspective of the person offering them and often have emotional reactions to those words.

4. Authors also use **facts and statistics** to appeal to pathos. Just as facts and statistics help build logos, they can impact an audience emotionally—particularly if they're shocking or unfamiliar. For instance, most of us do not think about the AIDS epidemic on a daily basis, so if we read statistic after statistic about girls involved in sex trafficking, it would likely impact us emotionally.

5. Finally, **connotative language** can develop pathos. As you learned last week, connotative language uses words and phrases which have emotional associations. For instance, most people associate the word "mother" with nurture, love, discipline, and protection. Thus, traditionally we attach positive emotions to the word "mother." Likewise, when authors stack particularly vivid or colorful language, it can build an emotional impact. For instance, when used in isolation, the words "weary," "dusty," "dank," "dark," "filthy," "downtrodden," "abandoned," and "alone" might not have an emotional impact on readers, but if they were scattered throughout a single paragraph or page, they might build on one another to create negative emotions in an audience.

When used appropriately, narratives can put a human face on a scientific study or statistic and help the readers see the concrete reality of otherwise abstract facts or numbers. Likewise, a well-integrated personal example can improve an author's ethos. Colorful, connotative language can even create emotional reactions to engage readers in logical arguments in which they might otherwise lose interest. However, writers have to carefully balance their appeals to emotion and logic, as an over-reliance on pathos can undermine an argument by making it appear unsubstantiated, informal, and emotionally manipulative. Well-educated, academic readers would consider an argument lacking solid logic and relying too heavily on emotional appeals to be weak and ineffective.

As you analyze the uses of ethos, logos, and pathos in written works, remember that authors generally combine the three types of appeals to effectively reach their audiences. However, don't forget that within the genre of academic writing, a good argument requires strong logical proof. While ethos and pathos play an important role in any argument, they must be used in addition to logos. Any attempt to build an argument on only ethical or emotional appeals would "turn off" an academic audience and make them question the veracity of the claims and the credibility of the author.

Preparing to Write the Textual Analysis Essay

Now that you understand what you're looking for as you analyze written texts, let's look at the **steps to writing the Textual Analysis Essay**.

1. As with any essay responding to or analyzing a text, you'll first need to **read and annotate the text.**

2. After a first read, you'll want to **determine** the text's **thesis, major claims, audience**, and **purpose.** You will not be able to analyze the effectiveness of the author's methods until you've determined what the text says, to whom it is speaking, and what it's trying to accomplish.

3. Once you have determined the text's argument, audience, and purpose, you can **analyze the text's methods**. I recommend following these steps as you do so:

a. Look at the text **section by section or claim by claim** to see how each claim is supported. As you do this, you will not only want to ask whether the author provides enough support, but also what method the author uses to support each claim. You will want to take note of the following textual elements:

    i. **Point of view**
    ii. **Expert testimony**
    iii. **Facts, statistics, studies**
    iv. **Definitions, comparisons, contrasts**
    v. **Types of examples**
    vi. **Narratives**
    vii. **Prestige and lay testimony**
    viii. **Colorful or connotative language, and**
    ix. **Organization of supporting material**

b. After you've analyzed isolated textual elements**, look for patterns**. Does the author repeat any techniques throughout the essay? Does the author organize and develop support for claims in a similar manner throughout the essay? Does the text shift from one type of appeal to another as the argument develops?

c. Next, **consider the organization of the essay** and its impact. Does the arrangement of ideas, images, or claims help or hinder the argument? Does it impact the audience? How?

d. Finally, **look for** all the ways the author uses **ethos, logos, and pathos** throughout the text. This will involve looking at **isolated textual elements** as well as the essay's **organization and overall content**.

The Textual Analysis Brainstorming Activity in this unit should help you through the analysis process.

4. After you've analyzed the text, you should **develop a working thesis statement**. Remember that a good thesis statement makes an arguable claim and maps out the basic components of an essay. For the Textual Analysis Essay, your thesis should meet the following **two criteria**:

a. It should **make a judgment about the effectiveness of the professional essay's argument**.

b. It should **mention the major textual elements** you'll analyze.

The Sample Textual Analysis Thesis Statements PDF further specifies how you might develop a thesis for this essay. Please take the time to look at it closely.

5. Once you have your working thesis, you will need to **decide on an organizational pattern**, **develop main points**, and **dig** back through the text **for specific references and quotes** to help build your analysis.

6. You should then be ready to **outline and draft your essay.**

As with the other two essays you've written this term, if you take the time to thoughtfully analyze the professional text before you start writing, you should have no difficulty coming up with enough to say in your essay. However, as you know by this point, if you try to jump into a rough draft without having first put in the work of prewriting, you'll probably have a difficult time offering insightful observations and analysis.