

## HOW TO WRITE: AP Rhetorical Analysis Paragraphs and Essays

### 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:
    - i. HOW do the rhetorical strategies help the author achieve his/her purpose?
    - ii. WHY does the author chose those strategies for that particular audience and for that particular occasion?

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.

### Introduction

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:**

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

### **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.

- 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).

- 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 paragraph of the body 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**

The conclusion is probably the easiest part. Be brief. In one-two sentences, simply remind your reader of the things you said in the introduction.

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**Strong vs. Weak Verbs**

To help you move away from summary and toward ANALYSIS, you need to begin to incorporate strong verbs into your writing when discussing the writer’s rhetorical choices. Below is a list of verbs that are considered weak because they imply summary and a list of verbs that are considered strong because they imply analysis. Strive to use the stronger verbs in your essays to help push yourself away from summary and toward analysis: “The writer flatters...” NOT “The writer says...”

**WEAK VERBS (Summary)**

says	relates	goes on to say	tells
this quote shows	explains	states	shows

**STRONG VERBS (Analysis)**

implies	trivializes	flatters	qualifies	processes	describes
suggests	denigrates	lionizes	dismisses	analyzes	questions
compares	vilifies	praises	supports	enumerates	contrasts
emphasizes	demonizes	establishes	admonishes	expounds	argues
defines	ridicules	minimizes	narrates	lists	warns

Maintain  
Manifest  
Manipulate  
Measure  
Merge  
Minimize  
Modify  
Monitor  
Necessitate  
Negate  
Nullify  
Obscure  
Observe  
Obtain  
Offer  
Omit  
Optimize  
Organize  
Outline  
Overstate  
Persist  
Point out  
Possess  
Predict  
Present  
Probe  
Produce  
Promote  
Propose  
Prove  
Provide  
Qualify  
Quantify  
Question  
Realize  
Recommend  
Reconstruct  
Redefine  
Reduce  
Refer  
Reference  
Refine  
Reflect  
Refute

Regard  
Reject  
Relate  
Rely  
Remove  
Repair  
Report  
Represent  
Resolve  
Retrieve  
Reveal  
Revise  
Separate  
Shape  
Signify  
Simulate  
Solve  
Specify  
Structure  
Suggest  
Summarize  
Support  
Suspend  
Sustain  
Tailor  
Terminate  
Testify  
Theorize  
Translate  
Undermine  
Understand  
Unify  
Utilize  
Validate  
Vary  
View  
Vindicate  
Yield

Instead, say: "The writer creates a \_\_\_\_\_ diction through the use of..." OR "The language of the text is \_\_\_\_\_."

Below are just a few words that you may use to **describe the type of diction** used by the writer. You may want to add words to this list or circle the ones you use frequently.

abstract	learned	literal
academic	loaded	
ambiguous	lyrical	
biting	melodious	
bombastic	monosyllabic	
brusque	nostalgic	
cacophonous	obscene	
casual	obscure	
caustic	offensive	
concrete	ordinary	
colloquial	ornate	
colorful	passionate	
common	patriotic	
connotative	pedantic	
cultured	picturesque	
crisp	plain	
curt	poetic	
denotative	political	
detached	polysyllabic	
divisive	precise	
emotional	pretentious	
esoteric	provincial	
euphemistic	romantic	
euphonious	scholarly	
everyday	sentimental	
exact	shocking	
fanciful	sincere	
flowery	slang	
figurative	subdued	
folksy	symbolic	
formal	tame	
grandiose	technical	
idiomatic	trite	
inflammatory	unifying	
inflated	uppity	
informal	vague	
insincere	vulgar	
jargon		

## Analyzing SYNTAX

**Syntax** refers to the way words are arranged within sentences.

### Schemes

One aspect of syntax is **schemes**. Most English sentences follow a subject-verb-object pattern (ex. I went to the store.) Deviating from this pattern can serve to add emphasize to the author's ideas. [See the **scheme** section of your Style handout for different ways authors can change the pattern of their sentences.]

### Sentence Length

Another aspect of syntax is **sentence length**. Good writers will use a variety for emphasis.

- **Short sentences** – imply straightforward
- **Long sentences** – imply descriptive, detailed

### Sentence Type

A third aspect of syntax is sentence type. Again, good writers use a variety.

- **Simple**: subject-verb (I went to the store.)
- **Compound**: 2 independent clauses joined by a conjunction (I went to the store, and I bought candy.)
- **Complex**: independent clause and dependent clause (While traveling to the store, I saw my friend.)
- **Compound-complex**: 2 independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses (While traveling to the store, I saw my friend, and she gave me money for candy.)
  
- **Declarative**: statement (I went to the store.)
- **Exclamatory**: strong feeling (What a wonderful candy store!)
- **Interrogative**: question (Is this a store?)
- **Imperative**: command (Go to the store.)

### Punctuation

A final aspect of syntax is punctuation. Yes, good writers use a variety here too.

- **Semicolon(;)** gives equal weight to two or more independent clauses in a sentence. Writers use this to reinforce parallel ideas and show how both ideas are equally important
- **Colon(:)** directs the reader's attention to the words that follow. Writers use this to show the reader that the information after the colon is important.
- **Dash (-)** marks a sudden change in thought or tone or sets off a brief summary