

# Rhetorical Analysis

Writing an Effective Thesis

# What It Should Include

- An analytical thesis should address:
  - What is the author doing?
  - How is the author accomplishing this?
  - Why is the author doing it?
- Furthermore, a rhetorical analysis can include:
  - Is the author successful in his or her purpose?

# The Rhetorical Thesis

The author employs [*rhetorical device/diction/syntax*] to create [*mood/tone/rhetorical appeal*]. In doing so, the author accomplishes [*purpose*].

# Why? (Purpose)

- Why is the author writing this? What does the author want to accomplish?
  - What is the author's audience? How has the audience shaped his or her purpose?
  - Are there constraints on the author's purpose?
  - Is the author's purpose exigent? Is it a rhetorical or non-rhetorical exigence?

# Why? (Purpose)

- Lincoln seeks to reassure his country that the losses of the Civil War were for a higher purpose.
- Vonnegut argues that the structures we create to guarantee our freedoms often do the opposite.
- David Foster Wallace encourages his listeners to choose to live a life of humble awareness.

# What? (Appeal)

- What ideas or conceptual frames does the author employ in order to accomplish this purpose?
  - What tone / rhetorical appeal does the author create?
  - What mood does the author generate in the audience?
  - What recollections, connections, or inferences does the author invoke?

# What? (Appeal)

- Lincoln draws a parallel between the losses at Gettysburg and sacrifices made by martyrs and heroes in the past.
- Vonnegut creates a sense that anything is possible and blurs the lines between reality and fiction.
- David Foster Wallace juxtaposes two incongruous life perspectives: one of unconscious egocentrism and the other of mindful attentiveness.

# How? (Techniques)

- How does the author create these ideas or conceptual frames in the text?
  - What diction or syntax does the author employ?
  - What rhetorical (or literary) devices does the author use?
  - What structure or organizational framework does the author develop?

# How? (Techniques)

- Lincoln makes allusions to the Bible and the funeral orations of ancient Greece.
- Vonnegut disregards the familiar elements of plot structure.
- David Foster Wallace alternates between casual diction and sobering, serious language.

# Example #1

- In his Gettysburg Address, Lincoln draws a parallel between the losses at Gettysburg and sacrifices made by martyrs and heroes in the past by making allusions to the Bible and the funeral orations of ancient Greece. In doing so, Lincoln reassures the country that the losses of the Civil War were for a higher purpose.

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## Example #2

- Vonnegut disregards the familiar elements of plot structure in his novel *Breakfast of Champions*. This unconventional approach creates a sense that anything is possible and blurs the lines between reality and fiction. Vonnegut's novel, then, can be read as an argument that the structures we create to guarantee our freedoms often do the opposite.

## Example #2

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## Example #3

- By alternating between casual diction and sobering, serious language, David Foster Wallace juxtaposes two incongruous life perspectives – unconscious egocentrism and mindful attentiveness – in an effort to convince his audience to make the choice to live a life filled with humble awareness.

# Example #3

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# Evaluation

- Was the author successful in accomplishing his or her purpose?
  - You can confine your evaluation to the elements of the text:
    - The Onion's gentle mockery, however, comes across more as a misogynistic attack on college women than a satire of campus intellectuals.
    - Or you can evaluate the speech in terms outside of the text:
      - Lincoln's speech, however, was most likely too unusual and unexpected to a contemporary audience to have the intellectual and emotional impact he intended.

# What To Avoid

- Avoid using the terms logos, ethos, or pathos more than once – these terms are not substitutes to demonstrating conceptual mastery.
  - Logos: “makes the logical argument” or “posits the claim”
  - Ethos: “establishes credibility” or “connects with the audience”
  - Pathos: “evokes” an emotion

# What To Avoid

- Unqualified or unsupported opinions or statements of interest:
  - America is the best country.
  - This music has nothing of value to offer the world.
- Ambiguous, vague, or useless language:
  - His arguments are good.
  - She has many negative opinions about Australia.
  - One element of this appeal is logos.
  - There are other arguments too.