

## Rhetorical Analysis Prompt

BRING THIS PROMPT TO THE WRITING LAB WITH YOU.

You are required to write two out-of-class rhetorical analysis papers this semester. They should be in MLA format.

*These papers will be due the Monday of the week the essay you are analyzing is due in class.*

Instructions:

1. Carefully read the essay you are supposed to respond to. Read actively—take notes, highlight, argue with the text, note what it reminds you of, or other essays that might support or refute it.
2. Your job is NOT to agree or disagree with the essay per se. Your job is to determine if the essay is “well argued.” There are a number of things to look at that we will be covering in class. Use what you know now (& if you’re ambitious, look in to some of these ideas before we get to them) to analyze the essay.
3. You should be applying at least 3 kinds of knowledge to the writing of each and every paper for my class: 1) understanding of what constitutes *rhetorical analysis* (which points 6 & 7 below cover in some depth, and we will try to do every day in class), 2) effective rhetorical practices, as covered in *They Say, I Say*, and 3) understanding of logic, critical reading & critical writing, as covered in the handouts under Files.
4. Use outside sources to support your arguments about the essay. Each four page paper should have at least 2 outside sources. An acceptable paper will use all its outside sources in the text (not just list them in the Works Cited page). A very good paper will use each several times. You must have at least three sources (including the original essay) listed in your *Works Cited* page. Use sources as outlined in points 6 & 7.
5. Paper page counts are meaningful, and do not include Works Cited, covers, or anything else which isn’t writing.
6. Use your sources to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the argument you are analyzing, not the arguments themselves. So...not “The original essay says X is wrong, but this essay says it’s right,” but “The original essay had few facts supporting its case, but this essay, by so-and-so, uses dozens of facts in the first two pages to build a rational argument that is very difficult to dispute.”
7. You may analyze the essays a number of ways. Here are a few of the most effective:
  - Compare to other essays on the same topic by others. Sometimes you can find articles that respond directly to yours, other times you will have to find pieces which are simply on the same topic. Who is more logical? Who uses more or better evidence? Who is fairer? Who is more qualified?
  - Look, in depth, at the appeals (rational/emotional/ethical) that the author uses to make their arguments. Rational appeals are about logic & objective (science/observation based) evidence. Emotional appeals are about appeal to others’ feelings or shared humanity. Ethical appeals are about how a writer argues: Do they use & identify reputable sources? Does the evidence say what they say it does? Do they deliberate lie/distort or confuse the audience? Are they fair, honest, persuasive?

- Look at the logic used in the essay. Does the author use any logical fallacies? How do you know it's a fallacy?
- Look at the evidence the author uses. Does it come from reputable sources? Is it current? Does it say what he/she says it says? Is it plentiful enough?
- Does the author anticipate opposition? When they bring up objections that they will argue against, are they "real" objections (that an actual human would make?) or are they "straw men"—designed to make their opponents look foolish, and not meaningfully critical or realistic?
- Does the author make any unfair arguments: attacks on his opponents' personal lives, name calling, slander, etc.?

Got questions?

You should ask them.