
RHETORICAL ANALYSES

“Rhetorical analysis” refers to an in-depth examination of how an author portrays his or her argument or message. It is different from a summary in that a rhetorical analysis analyzes the specific strategies that an author chose to employ while a summary only contains a brief overview of what was said.

Summary v. Rhetorical Analysis:

The sentences below illustrate the contrast between a summary and a rhetorical analysis. Here’s an example of a sentence that you might find in a summary:

- Jones discusses the deforestation of the Amazon and its negative effects on the world’s climate.

Notice that in the sentence above, there is no discussion of HOW Jones makes his argument, only an overview of what his argument is. An example of a rhetorical analysis, on the other hand, is shown below:

- By citing a variety of highly-qualified professors and ecologists, Jones employs overwhelming ethos to further advance his argument.

The sentence above explains how Jones makes his argument by stating that he cites numerous, credible sources and employs strong ethos.

Rhetorical Appeals:

The methods that authors use to persuade their readers are referred to as “rhetorical appeals” and fall under three main categories: ethos, pathos, and logos.

- Ethos: refers to writers’ abilities to portray themselves as credible sources of information.
- Pathos: refers to writers’ abilities to manipulate their readers’ emotions (fear, anger, sympathy) in order to persuade.
- Logos: refers to writers’ abilities to construct logical arguments without mistakenly developing logical fallacies.

Effective arguments oftentimes employ all three of the aforementioned appeals in order to persuade.

Example:

The following is an excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream Speech”:

- I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evidence, that all men are created equal.” I have a dream that one day

on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a *dream* today!

What follows is a brief rhetorical analysis of the excerpt (above) from King's immortal speech:

- In Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, King uses rich, evocative words and phrases to paint a picture and to gain an emotional response from his listeners. Some of these phrases include the alliterative "state sweltering" and the "oasis of freedom and justice." These phrases help the reader envision King's dream and also present a stark contrast between the world that exists and the world that could exist. King then complements his powerful pathos with a touch of ethos by directly quoting the opening line of the Declaration of Independence, making his argument reverberate through any sense of patriotism that his listeners may have held in their souls.

It's important to note that the rhetorical analysis does not discuss *what* was said, but *how* it was said. Furthermore, it analyzes *why* King made the rhetorical decisions that he did and notes the effectiveness of each of those decisions.