

Writer at work

Kelsey Turner was asked to write a rhetorical analysis for her composition class. She made the following notes and observations on her assignment sheet:

English 1010: Introduction to Writing Rhetorical Analysis of an Argument

*Times, Newsweek,
L.A. Times,
Washington Post, NYT*

Choose a recent editorial from a popular newspaper or magazine and analyze the techniques it uses to persuade its audience. You will want to focus on how the author employs logos, ethos, and pathos to persuade readers. Take a stand (make an argument of your own) as to how well these appeals work.

Important dates:

- September 10: Bring your editorial to class for discussion.
- Monday September 17: Draft due
- Wednesday September 22: Draft returned with comments
- Wednesday September 29: Final draft due

For example: It will work very well with certain audience; it would work better if...

Our Essay Evaluation Form states that we will evaluate this paper by looking at the following four categories. As a class, we will go through these categories and articulate our understanding of good performance in each, for this paper:

- Logic and organization (25%)
- Evidence and development (25%)
- Style (25%)
- Grammar and mechanics (25%)

Could structure around the three types of appeals

Use actual words from the editorial as evidence

Kelsey found a *Washington Post* opinion piece on food banks and poverty that interested her (see pages 305–309 to read the full essay). She began by asking the questions she would need to answer to write a good rhetorical analysis (see page 154). Here are the questions and her responses:

What is the author's purpose?

—To make readers re-think their "generous" donations to food banks, and look at causes of hunger.

Who is the audience?

—Readers of Washington Post (nationwide distribution). People concerned with hunger and poverty. People who usually make gestures rather than really working for change?

Who is the author?

—He worked at a food bank, was very successful, became disillusioned. He understands the problem better than most people.

What is the background?

—It was published right before Thanksgiving, when people are thinking about having enough food as an American tradition.

Which rhetorical appeals are used?

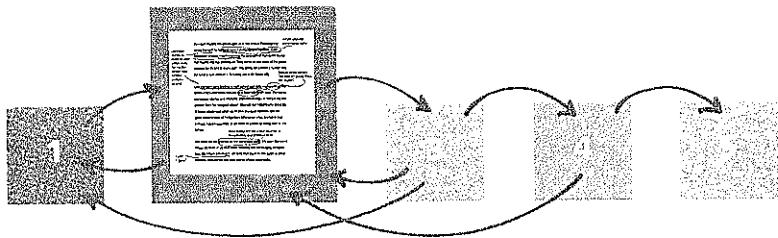
- All three.*
- Pathos—Appeals to readers' sympathy for those who are hungry. Describes fatigue of donors and volunteers with current system. Makes volunteering and donating seem foolish and possibly harmful.*
- Ethos—His background. He assumes readers will agree that it is better to empower people and that we shouldn't patronize them just to make ourselves feel generous.*
- Logos—Paints the bigger picture of poverty, of which hunger is just one part. But he goes back and forth between saying maybe food is given to people who don't need it, and then saying the more food we give, the more people need it. It seems like the meaning of "need" changes.*

The pathos appeals are the strongest and most noticeable, but the ethos of the author probably works the best to persuade people.

How does the language and style contribute to the purpose?

— Words like "play," and "pep rally," are associated with frivolous activities. They belittle the actions of food pantry workers and donors. Author makes food-givers feel kind of stupid or self-interested and short-sighted. Like they are making the problem worse. Blaming them, almost.

2: Analyze context and text



1 Consider the medium and genre

- What is the medium?
- What is the genre of the piece? Is it an editorial? a speech? an advertisement?

2 Consider the main claim or claims

- Summarize the claim, or describe the subject.

3 Consider the evidence

- Note all the reasons and evidence given to support the claim.

4 Analyze the appeals

- How is the author presented? As a credible, trustworthy person?
- How logical are the arguments? Are there any logical fallacies?
- What emotions, if any, does the author appeal to?
- How effective is each one of these appeals and techniques? How effective are they all together? Why are they effective or not effective?

5 Situate the text in its context

- Where do you find evidence that this text was responding to other texts and events?
- What does this text contribute to the ongoing conversation of which it is part?

Consider the style and tone

- How would you characterize the style? Is the style formal? informal? academic?
- How would you characterize the tone? Does the writer or speaker use humor or satire?
- How is language used to influence the audience? repetition? contrast? particular word choices? What metaphors are used?

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Kelsey Turner read her chosen editorial carefully several times, making notes in the margins about the rhetorical appeals she saw being used.

How can anyone not get caught up in the annual Thanksgiving turkey frenzy? At the food bank I co-founded in Hartford, Conn., November always meant cheering the caravans of fowl-laden trucks that roared into our parking lot. They came on the heels of the public appeals for "A bird in every pot," "No family left without a turkey" and our bank's own version -- "A turkey and a 20 [dollar bill]."

Like pom-pom girls leading a high school pep rally, we revved up the community's charitable impulse to a fever pitch with radio interviews, newspaper stories and dramatic television footage to extract the last gobbler from the stingiest citizen. After all, our nation's one great day of social equity was upon us. In skid row soup kitchens and the gated communities of hedge-fund billionaires alike, everyone was entitled, indeed expected, to sit down to a meal of turkey with all the fixings.

And here we are, putting on the same play again this year. But come Friday, as most of us stuff more leftovers into our bulging refrigerators, 35 million Americans will take their place in line again at soup kitchens, food banks and food stamp offices nationwide.

Language makes us think of high school kids having fun rather than serious problem solving.

Establishes his experiences early.

Manipulating donors (instead of giving them the truth?)

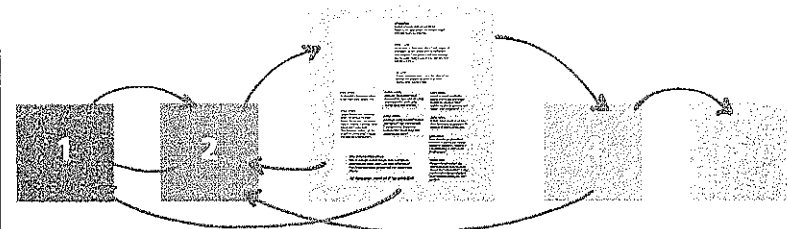
Food banks are not a real solution to hunger—they just pretend to be.

Exact figure?

Finally, Kelsey developed a position that could serve as a working thesis for her paper:

Mark Winne's essay gives good reasons for readers to stop supporting the food banking industry, but the belittling tone he uses to describe food bank donors and workers may insult or offend readers, making them less likely to agree with him.

3: Write a draft



Briefly describe the text you are analyzing

- Describe the medium and genre (newspaper editorial, blog on the Web, radio interview, and so on).
- Who produced it? Where and when did it first appear?

Make a claim

- Analysis adds a new dimension to a text; what will your analysis reveal for readers? Be sure your claim is not an over-generalization and can be supported by textual and contextual evidence.

Analyze the context

- Through research find out what else was being said about the subject your text discusses.
- Track down any references to other texts or events.

Analyze the text

- Select the most important parts of the text to focus on. Choose elements that will show a pattern or illustrate specific techniques you want to talk about. However, be honest: do not leave out evidence that might undercut your claims.
- Build a critical mass of evidence. Supply the evidence and examples to support your claim.
- Make larger patterns or contrasts visible for your readers. For example, does an author seem to be appealing to two different audiences in a single essay? What parts of the work appeal to one audience? What parts appeal to the other?

Build a strong conclusion

- Don't merely summarize what you have already said. Ask yourself "Have I learned anything new in this analysis?" A conclusion can be a good place to succinctly describe a larger pattern you have been tracing in a work. Or, it may be a good place to make conjectures about other works by the same artist, about the motivations of a school or movement, or to tie your analysis of this text to other texts.

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Kelsey used sticky notes to determine the best structure for her paper. She grouped them in different categories and changed their order until she was satisfied with the basic structure for her first draft.

INTRODUCTION

Context of essay: Printed just before Thanksgiving, when people are thinking about food and American tradition.

WINNE'S CLAIM:

Giving food to food banks doesn't end hunger. To end hunger, people should work to end poverty.
 - Use proverb: "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."

MY CLAIM:

Winne's argument makes sense, but some of his appeals will probably do more to alienate readers than convince them.

ETHOS APPEAL:

Co-founded a food bank (shows he has experience, compassion)

ETHOS APPEAL:

makes readers feel suspicious about the motives of food banks. The system's "co-dependency" is "frankly troubling." Food banks "must curry favor . . ." They "carefully nurture [a] the belief" of "doing good" - sounds like they are lying to people.

PATHOS APPEAL:

describes the distribution of turkeys at his food bank as a "high school pep rally," and a "play," making them seem frivolous

PATHOS APPEAL:

volunteers giving out food "seemed even happier" than the recipients. . . . volunteers are "trapped in . . . gratification." Makes them seem delusional and selfish.

LOGOS APPEAL:

Hunger is caused by poverty. Ending poverty will end hunger. Feeding the hungry without addressing poverty will never end hunger. "Give a man a fish . . ."

LOGOS APPEAL:

In fact, Winne claims; if we only feed the hungry, we may make the problem of poverty even worse.

LOGOS APPEAL:

"more than 275,000 Connecticut residents -- slightly less than 3.6 percent of the state's residents -- remain hungry or what we call 'food insecure.'"

LOGICAL FLAW:

If people take free food they don't really need, have they really become less "independent"? If they didn't need the food in the first place then they already are independent.

CONCLUDES WITH PATHOS APPEAL:

tries to motivate readers to really make a difference. Volunteers and donors could make a real difference if they forced government to make laws that would reduce poverty.

MY CONCLUSION: MAYBE HE IS TOO OPTIMISTIC?