Rhetorical vs. Literary Analysis

Both types of analysis ask you – the student writer – to assert a thematic argument about a piece of writing.

But the way your argument is phrased, and the kinds of evidence and analysis you will use, differ.

Literary Analysis means...

- Analyzing a work for its literary content. This form of analysis focuses on interpretation of the work and argues for a particular way of understanding it.
- Literary analysis answers the question: **What is the author saying?** (Often, what is the author saying about being human?)
- The *what* is open to interpretation. You will provide evidence, but that evidence could potentially be interpreted another way.

Literary Analysis considers literary elements:
- Plot
- Character
- Conflict
- Setting
- Point of view
- Symbol
- Theme
- Language & style

Rhetorical Analysis means...

- Analyzing the language (rhetoric) of a work and its effect in communicating intended thematic ideas. It focuses on how an author’s choices shaped the content to achieve a given purpose with an intended audience. Thus it examines the interactions between author, text, and audience.
- Rhetorical analysis answers the question: **How does the author make his or her argument?**
- The *how* being examined in rhetorical analysis isn’t open to interpretation — the author IS using language the way you say he/she is because your examples/evidence will illustrate that.
Rhetorical Analysis considers
The Rhetorical Triangle

- Structure
- Mode
- Tone
- Syntax
- Diction
- Repetition
- Parallel Structure
- Allusions
- Figures of speech
- Anecdote
- Imagery

Rhetorical Analysis considers...

- the author’s intended audience
- the author’s purpose (argument)
- the organization of the work and how that organization might influence the reader
- the author’s use of language and rhetorical devices
- the type of appeals being used (ethos, logos, pathos – more on this later)

Rhetorical Analysis

• The kinds of questions we ask in crafting a rhetorical analysis might include:
  - How does the author appeal to her audience? Are these appeals ethical? Emotional? Logical?
  - How is the text structured? How does that structure serve the author’s purpose? Is there parallel structure? Repetition?
  - How does the language of the text fulfill its purpose? Is figurative language being used? Is the language formal? Informal?
  - Why has the author made these language choices? What is their likely effect on the reader?

Rhetorical Analysis vs. Literary Analysis

• Like literary analysis, rhetorical analysis offers an argument about what the author is saying – but uses stylistic elements as evidence to prove those assertions.
• Rhetorical analysis focuses on how a given audience is likely to react to the thematic focus of the piece given the stylistic choices the author/speaker has made.

Literary Analysis thesis

“Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* suggests that to find the true expression of American ideals, one must leave ‘civilized’ society and go back to nature.”

What will my evidence be?

Rhetorical Analysis thesis

“Mark Twain uses a child’s voice and satire in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to force a post-Civil War audience to recognize the historical and ongoing bigotry in Southern society.”

What will my evidence be?
### Rhetorical Analysis

- Though it can be used to analyze fiction – all writers have a rhetorical style – rhetorical analysis more typically deals with non-fiction: essays, speeches, columns, editorials – texts in which writers are making a specific argument and attempting to persuade a given audience.

### Rhetorical Analysis thesis for non-fiction work

“Martin Luther King Jr.’s *I Have a Dream* speech uses biblical allusions, repetition, and a strong appeal to patriotism and democracy to persuade a troubled nation that the time has arrived for racial justice and full integration.”

*What will my evidence be? How does this differ from literary analysis?*

### Literary Analysis thesis for non-fiction work

“Martin Luther King Jr.’s *I Have a Dream* speech condemns a nation that has not lived up to its democratic ideals and asserts it can only do so through full integration of the races.”

*What will my evidence be? How does this differ from rhetorical analysis?*

### Rhetorical Analysis thesis for non-fiction work

- Both examples assert a thematic argument
- The examples (quotes, etc.) you provide as evidence will differ given which kind of analysis you are doing.