

## Essay # 1—Critical Rhetorical Analysis (CRA) of a Speech

**Task:** Select a **written speech** worthy of rhetorical analysis (i.e., a text that will reward your in-depth examination). Write an in-depth Critical Rhetorical Analysis of that text.

**Length:** 1250-1500 words, 5-6 (double-spaced) pages

### Reader-Ready Revision, Due SES #6

Bring 4 copies for Workshop

### Mandatory Revision, Due SES #7

This version includes Works Cited, Postwrite, Workshop Acknowledgments, and Writing Center Acknowledgements

### Optional Revision, Due SES #12

- Must have at least 250 additional words in **boldface** type
- Must have a new Postwrite with 2 headings (“What I Changed” and “What I Learned About Rhetoric by Revising This Essay”)

### Goals

- To examine a speech deeply and thoroughly
- To use and explore the tools of in-depth rhetorical analysis
- To use **explicitly** rhetorical strategies and techniques to persuade a mixed audience (us) that your insights into the text and into rhetoric are valid
- To tell us things about the speech and about rhetoric that are not obvious to the casual reader of the speech
- As always, to create new knowledge about texts and genres

### Possible texts

- Select a meaningful speech—a good place to start looking is American Rhetoric <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/>
- There are many speeches that are eminently fruitful for a CRA that are not as famous as ones like King’s “I Have a Dream:” and Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address.”
- It’s your responsibility to select a speech that has enough material for you to say significant things about.

### Directions: How to Write a Critical Rhetorical Analysis (CRA)

An **Essay of Critical Rhetorical Analysis** systematically examines 1 unit of analysis and 1 fruitful passage in order to accomplish the following tasks:

1. To see how rhetoric operates in a text
2. to deeply explore how a particular unit of analysis works to achieve the text’s purpose(s)
3. to do a close reading of one key passage (1-2 paragraphs)
4. to answer a significant Research Question about the nature and function of rhetoric

**Research question.** The research question is what you want to find out about rhetoric by studying a particular text. The Research Question guides your analysis of the text. Your essay should contribute to our understanding of how rhetorical processes work as well as to our understanding of the text itself.

- Audience interest is generated by your Research Question about rhetoric.
- The Research Question must be stated explicitly as a question (with a question mark at the end, **not** buried in a *that*-clause).
- The Research Question must be stated **in general terms** (i.e., it does **not** name the specific rhetor nor the specific situation of the text you are dealing with)
  - because the insight into rhetoric that you develop (your thesis) should be applicable to more than just the one text that you are analyzing
  - because you should be able to expand your essay by adding a 2<sup>nd</sup> text that illustrates (and answers) the same question with some minor variations
    - **NO:** “How does *Plato* use imagery to build a convincing argument about *the nature of reality* in ‘*The Allegory of the Cave*?’”
    - **YES** “How does *a rhetor* use imagery to build a convincing case *about an abstract topic*?”
- Here are some sample research questions:
  - “What devices does a liberal rhetor use to convince conservatives that a particular policy is necessary?”
  - “What techniques can a rhetor use to build ethos when writing on a controversial topic?”
  - “What specific devices can a rhetor use to create appeals to pathos in his/her audience?”
  - “What types of metaphors does a rhetor use to convince the audience of his/her emotionally charged position?”
  - “What rhetorical strategies does a minority rhetor use to achieve legitimacy for his/her cause?”

Select one of the following **Unit of Analysis** (again, it’s your responsibility to select the one that reveals the most about your particular speech):

- Logos (appeals to the audience’s reason and logic)
- Pathos (appeals to audience’s emotions)
- Ethos (techniques that make readers believe what is said because they trust the personality of the rhetor reveal in the text)
- Metaphor and other forms of comparison (analogy, similes)
- Tone (e.g., Irony, Sarcasm, Academic, Sentimental)
- Types of evidence used (& their effect)

### Procedure

- You create a Research Question in one of following ways:
  - You have a question about rhetoric in mind even before you read the text
  - Or you find something rhetorical that puzzles you in the text
  - Or in the process of looking at all the units of analysis that you have collected, a question forms in your mind.
- Read that text carefully, noting various units of analysis. To illustrate, we’ll talk about John Doe’s essay.
- Then go through the text again, looking for and listing all examples of each unit. For instance, if you were looking for metaphors, you would make a list of all the metaphors in the text.
- Then categorize them--e.g., in Doe’s essay
  - Metaphors that compare clowns to inanimate objects
  - Metaphors that compare other people to clowns
  - Metaphors that compare aspects of Doe’s personality to clowns.

- The list and categories, however, are merely raw data. If you simply gave them to your readers, they would ask, “**So what?**”
- The next step is for you to decide/discover the impact that unit has on the meaning and effect of the whole text and how it helps you answer your Research Question.

### Structure of Your Essay

Your essay should have the following sections, and it **must use these specific headings**. Make this a coherent and unified essay. Remember that each section has its own purpose, so don't evaluate in the analysis section, etc. Here are the sections:

- **Introduction** –an Intro does the following (not necessarily in this order):
  - Names the author and the text.
    - Establishes **kairos**—why should we particular readers (members of 21W.747 in 2010) care about this particular text at this particular time? Often at least part of the way to do this is to state your Research Question **explicitly**.
  - Explain the **rhetorical situation** (the original audience, context, occasion, where the speech was first delivered, etc.).
  - State your rhetorical question.
- **Summary** of the text (this should be brief). This summary must state **explicitly** the rhetor's purpose, thesis and major points **Explicitly** use the terms **text's purpose, thesis, major points**. The point of a Summary is to give us a sense of the rhetor's points, not to give us a complete list of every minor point and example. Be very specific—there's a significant difference between saying “he comments on the world situation” and saying “he denounces enemies of freedom and praises new democracies” (the latter is what you need to do).
- **Analysis**—This major section has two subsections (each with its own heading and each a minimum of one full paragraph).
  - **Unit of Analysis** — Define the unit of analysis you will use and explain briefly why you have chosen this particular unit. Go beyond a mere dictionary definition to demonstrate that you have command of the concept.. The end of our syllabus has numerous websites that should help here (no Wikipedia). Explicitly use that term throughout your essay. Use quotations as evidence, explicitly explaining how the quotation is evidence supporting your thesis.
  - **Close Reading** -- Select one key passage in the speech (1-2 paragraphs long), quote it in full, and then go through it with the proverbial fine-tooth comb, extracting everything possible from it—examine pathos, logos, ethos, stylistic techniques, appeals to audience needs and values, etc. Organize this section with each of your paragraphs focused on one thing (e.g., ethos, metaphors)—do not organize this section based on the order in which the speech's sentences appear.
- **Insight into Rhetoric--** Explain what this particular text reveals to you about rhetoric. Here you explicitly answer your Research Question. How did your analysis of the unit support or prove your answer to your Research Question? What is the text's **diachronic** and **synchronic** significance, if any?
- **Reflection--**This section gives you a chance to respond to the text and its implications, expressing your own point of view on the issues that that the text raises. Here you can speculate about the impact of the text or the lessons it teaches (or failed to teach). Explain what you thought of the author's argument — did it work? Why or why not? What is the text's relevance, if any, to your work and your intellectual life?

### A Couple of Analytical Techniques

1. Use the rhetorical canon of Invention to help develop your ideas

- a. Think about the specific rhetorical situation your rhetor faced—what was he or she **expected** to say in such a situation and where (if anywhere) does he or she not fulfill those expectations? Why didn't he/she?
2. Use the rhetorical canon of Style (as Wayne Booth does below in a short piece on Crick and Watson) to explore various ways the rhetor might have said something and then speculate about why he chose the method used
  - a. For instance, Booth writes

They [Crick and Watson] open, for example, with

*"We wish to suggest a structure" that has "novel features which are of considerable biological interest."* (My italics, of course)

Why didn't they say, instead: "We shall here *demonstrate a startling, totally new* structure that will shatter everyone's conception of the biological world?" Well, obviously, their rhetorical choice presents an ethos much more attractive to most cautious readers than does my exaggerated alternative. A bit latter they say

"We have made the usual chemical assumptions, namely...."

Why didn't they say, "As we all know..."? Both expressions acknowledge reliance on warrants, commonplaces within a given rhetorical domain. But their version sounds more thoughtful and authoritative, especially with the word "chemical."

- b. Exploring alternate phrasings can reveal a lot about ethos, style, and the rhetor's vision of his/her audience.
3. If you find metaphors or similes, there are two key analytical terms that you need to use **explicitly**-- **tenor** and **vehicle**. Every image has the part that the rhetor assumes is known to us (the vehicle) and a part that the rhetor assumes we don't know at all or well or don't know in the way he/she wants us to know it (the tenor)
4. To analyze an image is to focus your attention on all the elements of the vehicle, to explain which ones apply and which don't and to explain how the rhetor keeps the unintended ones from popping into our minds.

### Potential Pitfalls of Any Analytical Essay

1. **Pitfall—Asserting rather than proving.** Avoid saying "X makes us believe Y." Explain, give proof: "X makes us believe Y because..."
2. **Pitfall--inability to go beyond the obvious.**
  - How do you know you are stating the obvious? If the idea came to you when you first read the text, it's probably obvious.
  - Don't settle for your first impression or insight. Push deeper, speculate, consider other possible ways the rhetor might have said things and the reasons why he/she chose the phrasings and approaches he/she did.
3. **Pitfall--Lazy structure.** Too often, we simply follow the organization of the text we are analyzing. But that organization was devised for that text and that rhetor's purpose (to convince), not for *our* essay or our purpose (to analyze).

- Avoid “Doe creates his ethos in many ways. In the first paragraph, he.... In the second paragraph he....”
  - Instead, do analysis. Here’s an example:
    - “Doe creates his ethos by using humor and by alluding to Mark Twain and Winston Churchill. For example, he jokes about X (par. 28), a comment which derives much of its humor from his earlier remark about Y (par.16). These jokes remind of us of his earlier references to Woody Allen (par. 3) and to John Stewart (par. 2) and show us that ....
4. **Pitfall--Lack of explicitness.** Stick with ideas. For example, if you make a point that a particular quotation or allusion adds to the rhetor’s ethos, explain explicitly what that ethos is and how that quotation or allusion adds to it. Simply *asserting* that it is so is not *proving*.
  5. **Pitfall--Audience boredom.** Make your essay interesting
    - Avoid making it a laundry list of the occurrences of a unit of analysis
      - **Not:** “Doe uses 15 metaphors. The first metaphor is Q “quote metaphor.” The second metaphor is R “quote metaphor. The third...”
      - Instead, do analysis (e.g., “Doe’s 15 metaphors fall into two categories—clichés and absurd comparisons. ” or “Doe’s 15 metaphors perform one of two functions—either they create an emotional appeal or they make a startling comparison.”)
      - Make your own style interesting—vary sentence structures, use rhetorical devices where appropriate, etc.
  6. **Pitfall--Point of view.** Use first-person plural (*we/us/our*)--**not** *the reader* or *the listener* or *you*—since we all tend to mix pronouns, when you are at the editing stage, use FIND for *reader, listener, you* and replace them.
  7. **Pitfall--Focusing on the impact on the original audience**
    - Usually we don’t know (or don’t know accurately) how the original audience reacted
    - Rhetorical critics focus on the rhetoric in the text and on what its purpose(s) seem to be.
      - Never say “This metaphor **makes the audience feel sad** because...”—we cannot know how the audience felt, so claiming that we do undercuts our ethos.
      - Instead, say “This metaphor **seems to be intended** to make **us** feel sad **because...**”
    - The only time to use “the readers” or “the listeners” is when talking about the original audience, and the only time you should be talking about his original audience is when you talk about their expectations in your Introduction
    - **Pitfall—Seepage.** Keep material in the section where it belongs.
    - **Pitfall—The smorgasbord approach.** As we get better at analyzing rhetorically, we see more and more stuff to talk about. But the point of every act of rhetorical criticism is to say **more about less** rather than less about more. **You create knowledge by exploring a few things deeply.**
    - **Pitfall—Praising or attacking.** Saying things like “brilliant” or “ridiculous” undercuts your own ethos as a rhetorical critic. Keep evaluation comments out of the Summary and Analysis section. You might give a bit of praise or blame in the Introduction as part of the reason why the text you are examining is worth examining. And evaluation (as long as you have given evidence to support it) is appropriate in the Reflection section.
    - **Pitfall--Believing data collection is the point.** If all you can do is to point out that there are 20 examples of parallelism or 12 metaphors, then you haven’t done analysis (you’ve done counting). Collecting raw data is not enough—it is the **significance** of that data that is the new knowledge that you are creating. Significance includes the rhetor’s assumptions revealed by the data, the rhetor’s beliefs about his/her audience as

revealed by the kinds of evidence he/she chose to use and the kinds he/she did not use, etc, Use that data to prove your interpretation. Here is an example:

**Clowns appear in three different types of metaphors in John Doe's "My Life is a Circus." Perhaps the most noticeable of metaphors are those that are metaphors *about* clowns. Blah blah**

**Although the metaphors about clowns are the most prevalent in the essay, those that compare other people to clowns are the darkest in mood. For instance, blah, blah blah**

**Although neither the most frequent nor the darkest, the metaphors that compare aspects of Doe's own personality to clowns are the most profound. For example, he says that "my Id is the clown supreme" (43). What does he mean by "clown supreme"? At least two possible interpretations exist. Blah blah blah.**

## Requirements for all Essays

**Meaningful titles** (at least in an academic setting and in this class) have a colon and a subtitle. For example,

- King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail": A Critical Rhetorical Analysis
- Walking Away from Omelas: The Rhetoric of Happiness

**A Postwrite** (100-250 words) is required for each Mandatory Revision and for each Optional Revision. It is your opportunity as a rhetor to explain to me what rhetorical approaches, strategies, and techniques you incorporated into your essay in order to make it persuasive. It is the way you demonstrate a conscious understanding of the art of rhetoric and to explain your conception of your audience's beginning attitudes towards your topic, your thesis, and yourself as rhetor. It must use these boldfaced headings:

- **My Thesis**
  - Copy and paste your thesis statement here
- **My Audience**
  - Before they read your essay, what were your audience's probable attitudes towards your topic and your thesis? What makes you think so?
  - Before they read your essay, what was their attitude toward you as rhetor? You need to be specific here—you need to seriously consider the role(s) you have played in class discussions, workshops, etc. Which of your beliefs have you actively expressed? How "visible" have you been so far in class? Will you need to "repair" your ethos or simply build on it?
  - Specifically explain how you dealt with their attitudes in your essay.
- **How I used Ethos**
  - What ethos were you trying to project?
  - Give a specific list of things you did to enhance your ethos -- e.g., how did you establish your sagacity (wisdom, expertise), goodwill (having concern for audience's survival and growth needs), character (moral excellence, credibility, justice, self-control, common sense, etc.)?
- **How I used Pathos**
  - What specific emotions were you trying to invoke in your audience?
  - A la Aristotle--What specific emotions did you try to stir or change—anger into calm, or calm into anger, revenge into mercy or mercy into revenge, etc.?
  - Give a specific list of things you did to appeal to your audience's emotions
- **How I used Logos**

- List specific places where you used logos
- What types of evidence did you use?
- **How I used Style**
  - List specific stylistic things that you did

**Workshop Acknowledgements** (this section is included only in the Mandatory Revision)

Here you tell me explicitly who gave what good advice, who didn't give good advice, etc. Here is a brief sample:

- Student X advised me to use more quotations to prove my points. blah blah
- Student Y pointed out that...etc.
- Student W didn't really give any useful advice

**Writing Center Acknowledgements:**

(this section is included only in the Mandatory Revision).

Tell me explicitly who you worked with in the Center and what advice she/he gave:

- Amanda asked me questions that helped me see some other implications of the rhetor's use of..., particularly x and y . She also....
- Although I asked Eric to help with my organization, all he focused on was grammar, so he wasn't really much help.

Note: for both Workshop and Writing Center Acknowledgements, it is important to say who was not helpful as well as saying who was helpful.

**Documentation Format:**

- Quotations should be introduced and then commented upon. For each quotation or reference to a text, use MLA in-text citations
  - According to Doe, "blah blah" (34).
  - Supporting this idea is the belief that "blah blah" (Doe 34).
- At the end of your essay, you need a **Works Cited**: here you list the text(s) you used in your essay; and list the sources alphabetically by author's last name.

So the 1<sup>st</sup> page of your all versions of your essay (RRR and Mandatory Revision and Optional Revision) should look like this:

**Your Name + email address**

**Date**

**A Meaningful Title: A Meaningful Subtitle**

Then *skip 2 lines* and start your essay.

After the last sentence of your essay, skip 3 lines and then give Works Cited, etc. Here is what he **last page** of the Mandatory Revision looks like this:

Last sentences of your essay Blah blah.

**Works Cited**

Blah blah

**Workshop Acknowledgement:** blah blah

**Writing Center Acknowledgement:** blah blah

**Postwrite:** blah blah



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