

Rhetorical Analysis--The SOAPSTone Method

Not brute force but only persuasion and faith are the kings of this world--Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

Rhetoric- The art or study of using language effectively and persuasively.

Rhetorical analysis- The examination of texts to determine how the author shapes the content to achieve a purpose for a given audience. In other words, finding what the writer wants the reader to understand by analyzing his or her language usage, literary and rhetorical techniques.

When we are mindful of a writer's rhetorical strategy when we read, we are better able to understand his or her message. When we are mindful of our own rhetorical strategy when we write, we are better able to advance our point of view and achieve our purpose.

Use the SOAPSTone acronym and corresponding questions described below as a model to rhetorically analyze a text:

Speaker	The communicator who produced the work. Consider: what has gotten under the communicator's skin? What can you infer about his or her background? Is he or she credible and trustworthy?
Occasion	The time, place, context, and/or current situation that prompted the work. Consider: is the work in response to a specific event or person?
Audience	The group of readers to whom the work is directed. Generally there is a primary and secondary audience; the primary audience is the particular individual or group the writer is addressing, while the secondary audience is the individual or group other than the intended audience who will also read the piece. Consider: what assumptions can you make about the audience in terms of gender, socio-economic status, education, beliefs, etc.?
Purpose	The reason why the work was created. Consider: is the work meant to inform, persuade, or explain? What does the writer want the reader/listener to do?
Subject	The general topic, content, and ideas contained in the text. Consider: how has the subject been presented? Is the subject explicitly stated or is it implied?
Tone	The speaker's attitude. Consider: what striking uses of diction, syntax, details, and imagery help convey the speaker's attitude?