

WRITING CENTRE  
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## WRITER'S WORKSHOP

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## WRITERS' WORKBENCH

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**WRITING A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS**

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**RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: CRITICAL READING**

When you are asked to do a "rhetorical analysis" of a text, you are being asked to apply your critical reading skills to break down the "whole" of the text into the sum of its "parts." You try to determine what the writer is trying to achieve, and what writing strategies he/she is using to try to achieve it.

Reading critically means more than just being moved, affected, informed, influenced, and persuaded by a piece of writing. Reading critically also means analyzing and understanding how the work has achieved its effect. Below is a list of questions to ask yourself when you begin to analyze a piece of prose. These questions can be used even if you're being asked only to read the text rather than write a formal analysis (a sample of detailed formal analysis follows later in this section). Keep in mind that you don't need to apply all of these questions to every text. This rather exhaustive list is simply one method for getting you started on reading (and then writing) more critically.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK FOR A CRITICAL READING:**

- What is the general subject? Does the subject mean anything to you? Does it bring up any personal associations? Is the subject a controversial one?
- What is the thesis (the overall main point)? How does the thesis interpret/comment on the subject?
- What is the tone of the text? Do you react at an emotional level to the text? Does this reaction change at all throughout the text?
- What is the writers' purpose? To explain? To inform? To anger? Persuade? Amuse? Motivate? Sadden? Ridicule? Anger? Is there more than one purpose? Does the purpose shift at all throughout the text?
- How does the writer develop his/her ideas? Narration? Description? Definition? Comparison? Analogy? Cause and Effect? Example? Why does the writer use these methods of development?
- How does the writer arrange his/her ideas? What are the patterns of arrangement? Particular to general? Broad to specific? Spatial? Chronological? Alternating? Block?
- Is the text unified and coherent? Are there adequate transitions? How do the transitions work?
- What is the sentence structure like in the text? Does the writer use fragments or run-ons? Declarative? Imperative? Interrogative? Exclamatory? Are they simple? Compound? Complex? Compound-complex? Short? Long? Loose? Periodic? Balanced? Parallel? Are there any patterns in the sentence structure? Can you make any connections between the patterns and the writers' purpose?
- Does the writer use dialogue? Quotations? To what effect?
- How does the writer use diction? Is it formal? Informal? Technical? Jargon? Slang? Is the language connotative? Denotative? Is the language emotionally evocative? Does the language change throughout the piece? How does the language contribute to the writers' aim?
- Is there anything unusual in the writers' use of punctuation? What punctuation or other techniques of emphasis (italics, capitals, underlining, ellipses, parentheses) does the writer use? Is punctuation over- or under used? Which marks does the writer use when, and for what effects? Dashes to create a hasty breathlessness? Semi-colons for balance or contrast?
- Are important terms repeated throughout the text? Why?
- Are there any particularly vivid images that stand out? What effect do these images have on the writers' purpose?
- Are devices of comparison used to convey or enhance meaning? Which tropes--similes, metaphors,

personification, hyperbole, etc. does the writer use? When does he/she use them? Why?

- Does the writer use devices of humour? Puns? Irony? Sarcasm? Understatement? Parody? Is the effect comic relief? Pleasure? Hysteria? Ridicule?

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