

And to make matters more complicated, written texts often have more than one purpose. They try, for instance, to predict and solve, to amend and historicize, to defend and calm. In fact, any combination you can imagine has likely been at the heart of more than one article, essay, or blog written in the past month alone! A good analysis attempts to recognize and describe that combination.

ACTIVITY

The essays in this book have been categorized, in part, according to rhetorical purpose. Essays in Chapter 2, for instance, primarily *remember* a key experience from the past; those in Chapter 4 *analyze* a concept; those in Chapter 9 *evaluate* a place or thing. But there are two problems with our categories: (1) They are a bit too broad, and (2) they suggest that each essay has a singular purpose. Choose any essay in Chapter 2 through 13. Read the essay closely and then describe the purpose as narrowly and accurately as possible. Consider the possibility that the essay may, in fact, be more specific than the chapter title suggests and that it may have a dual or multifaceted purpose.

Analyzing the Thesis/Main Idea It may come as no surprise that academic essays are not the only written texts with thesis statements. Articles, editorials, and reports of all kinds usually have a single insight that drives the content. And if we are doing textual analysis, we should try to understand that insight. From there, we can determine how all other elements come into play. Remember, however, that thesis statements are not always—or often—at the end of the first paragraph. (That conventional placement of the main idea works in scholastic writing, but in college, professional, and popular contexts, the main idea may come in the middle of a text, in the conclusion, or anywhere at all. It might also be implied—not stated directly but suggested by all the other elements.)

Analyzing Support/Rhetorical Tools You are likely familiar with a major aspect of rhetorical analysis—the elements that writers use to support their claims. If you have written an academic essay (and chances are that you have written a number of them!), you have worked to support and develop your ideas with common *rhetorical tools*. You have likely used allusions, narration, secondary sources, definitions, examples, and so on. For the analytical work in this chapter, you will identify and explain how other writers use them. The following list contains rhetorical tools from other chapters. Depending on the nature of your chosen text, some will be more relevant than others:

- **Allusions:** references to history, science, nature, news events, films, television shows, or literary texts (see pages 52 and 118)
- **Authorities/Outside Sources:** references to published sources (see page 148)

- **Definitions:** denotative (dictionary) or connotative (commonly agreed upon) meaning for words (see page 147)
- **Description:** focused and specific detail (see page 86)
- **Dialogue:** direct discussion between two or more people (see page 53)
- **Examples:** specific cases or illustrations of a phenomenon (see page 146)
- **Facts:** agreed-upon events or truths, or conclusions drawn from investigation (see page 255)
- **Figurative Language:** metaphors, similes, analogies, or any statement that changes the literal and denotative (dictionary) definition of words (see page 87)
- **Narration:** any form of storytelling (see page 51)
- **Personal Testimony/Anecdotes:** individual accounts or experiences usually in narrative form (see page 255)
- **Scenarios:** hypothetical or fictionalized accounts (see page 255)
- **Statistics:** information (often given as numerical value) collected through experimentation, surveys, polls, and research (see page 255)

And this list is only the beginning. There are other rhetorical tools to explore and identify, especially if you are analyzing an argumentative text—one that is evaluating, persuading, or taking a stand on an issue. In that case, be on the lookout for argumentative support strategies:

- **Appeal to Logic:** relates the argument to the audience's sense of reason, *or* creates a line of reasoning for the audience to follow.
- **Appeal to Emotion:** relates the argument to an emotional state, or it attempts to create a particular emotional state in the audience.
- **Appeal to Character:** relates the argument to a quality of the author/speaker.
- **Appeal to Need:** relates the argument to basic human needs (economic, physical, sexual, spiritual, familial, political, etc.).
- **Appeal to Value:** relates the argument to shared values (judgments about right/wrong, success, discipline, selflessness, moderation, honesty, chastity, modesty, self-expression, etc.).

Finally, argumentative texts have an additional layer: They engage opposing claims and positions directly. In fact, some argumentative texts devote significant passages to confronting the opposition. They engage what others have said about the issue at hand. Following are three common elements related to opposing or outside positions:

- **Counterargument:** anticipates and refutes claims or positions that oppose those being forwarded by the writer.

- **Concession:** acknowledges the value of others' claims.
- **Qualifier:** acknowledges the limitations of, or makes clear boundaries for, the writer's own argument.

ACTIVITY

Read April Pedersen's article, "The Dog Delusion," in Chapter 8: Making Arguments. In small groups, try to identify rhetorical tools from the preceding list. Seek out support strategies (such as allusions, personal testimony, and examples), as well as argumentative elements such as appeals, counterarguments, concessions, and qualifiers.

Analyzing Organization The arrangement of all these elements also matters. As you are well aware, writers consider all the ramifications of introductions, conclusions, and everything in between. A text might build from the broadest to the most specific point. It might begin with narration and then return to it in the final sentences. It might clump all counterarguments together or counter only in the conclusion. Each organizational strategy can impact the overall effect of the text. Imagine the difference between an article that starts with personal testimony and one that begins with a string of statistics. The two strategies would impact audiences differently and may also create different voices. A sound textual analysis explains how the order of elements plays into the overall development of the text.

Analyzing Voice and Vitality Voice is the presence of the writer in the text—more specifically, the character or tonality of that writer. We're not talking about the real human who is off somewhere in the world (or in history) but the identity that is lurking within the elements of the text itself. As we explain in Chapter 1 and Chapter 18 all texts—even the most formulaic—have voice. From the thesis to its placement, from figurative language to popular allusions, everything that happens in a text shapes the way a writer sounds. For example, imagine an article that begins with an allusion to punk rock, specifically to the Sex Pistols, and how that article might differ from one that begins with an allusion to Beethoven. Of course, these are extreme differences, but they show how one single element can impact the overall feel of a text—and the way the author sounds in the readers' thinking.

Analyzing Context Translated directly, context means *with text*. In other words, context involves all the cultural, human, and physical stuff around the text itself—all the forces that motivated the writer, influenced the claims, and even shaped the nature of the audience. If we want to understand a text, we must examine the context and its constituent parts:

- **Publication:** the journal, magazine, or website that first brought the text into public view. Focusing on the publication can tell us a great deal about text—primarily the kind of audience the writer expected to reach.

- **Intended Audience:** the type of readers most likely to read the text. An analysis of the intended audience includes some basic demographic factors such as age, gender, sex, race, socioeconomic class, political affiliations, religion, even geographical location. Once we narrow in on these factors, we can develop an understanding of the audience's values and assumptions. For example, if we are analyzing a declaration from Black Lives Matter published in a popular magazine such as *The Nation*, we can quickly draw some conclusions about the intended audience's values—that the readership supports policies that yield greater forms of social justice, especially for African Americans. If we know that, we can understand why the declaration may not spend lengthy passages trying to convince the audience of that value.
- **Exigence:** the specific provocation for the text. Exigence is a Greek term that usually translates as *crisis*. For example, a major winter storm, a government shutdown, and a breakdown in peace negotiations are public exigencies that may provoke a range of articles, reports, and blogs. But exigence can also be thought of as an issue or occasion. A parade, a commemoration, a solar eclipse, or an uptick in employment might spur writers into action. If we can discern the exigence driving a text, we might better understand its claims, appeals, allusions, and examples.
- **Cultural Context:** the prevailing values and beliefs that shape everyday life around the text. Writers and readers belong to communities, cultures, and civilizations. They live within a huge network of events: political upheavals, entertainment trends, national tragedies, weather patterns, and so on. And public texts shimmer with all that collective activity. From direct references to subtle traces, a text includes elements of the culture around it. A good analysis includes those traces.

Analyzing Intertextuality Texts often speak back to or depend on other texts to make meaning. They exist in dialogue with other written works. This dialogue is called *intertextuality*. For example, the signs shown in Figure 6.1 make meaning, and humor, by echoing or referencing some other statement.



Figure 6.1 These signs use intertextuality to make meaning.

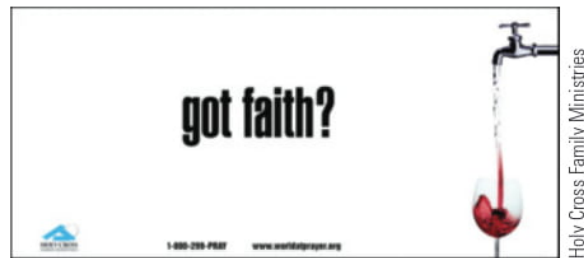


Figure 6.2 “Got faith” ad campaign

Although each sticker makes some sense alone, they all have more meaning if we know the references—if we know, for instance, the old saying about making lemonade when life hands you a lemon. We (as readers) participate in the meaning-making process. We bring our prior knowledge forward and create a compound text—a kind of chemical reaction (at least in our thinking) that’s ignited by the two statements: one directly in front of us and one swirling around in our prior experience. In recent years, advisers have picked up on this intertextual strategy. Consider the “Got Faith” ad campaign, Figure 6.2, which echoes the famous “Got Milk” ads that came several years before. In this way, intertextuality adds layers of meaning to any text. When designers and advertisers make a text speak to other familiar texts, they tap into the public domain.

Analyzing Subtext If people have ever told you to “read between the lines,” they were hoping you would sense a layer of implied ideas—those suggested but not directly stated or written. This layer of implication is sometimes called *subtext*—meaning that it is under (sub) the more visible and obvious layers. Subtext might also be thought of as a collection of assumptions and hidden values, messages that are not obvious but are present nonetheless. For example, when someone asks what you do for a living, the question involves more than your job. It involves issues of status, identity, economic situation, schedule, even personality. And if you offer a short answer (“I’m in marketing”), that answer has subtext. The same goes with a formal written text. Many of the claims, questions, and supporting statements have subtext. And a good analysis calls out that subtext.

ACTIVITY

Humor relies on subtext. We laugh at jokes because we know what’s left unsaid. Laughter, in a sense, is the sound of us acknowledging what we understand but leave unexpressed. Consider, for instance, these fake state mottos. What ideas are implied in each statement?

Arizona: But It’s a Dry Heat

California: As Seen on TV

Colorado: If You Don’t Ski, Don’t Bother

Florida: Ask Us about Our Grandkids

Indiana: 2 Billion Years Tidal Wave Free