Guidelines for the Rhetorical Analysis Essay

The purpose of the rhetorical analysis essay is to determine whether an AP English student can extract meaning from the structure of a piece of writing. The AP readers are asking themselves the following question: does this student know about meaning and structure? For many AP English students, the rhetorical analysis essay is one of the hardest portions of the exam. However, with the following recommendations, the rhetorical analysis essay will become one of the easiest essays – if not, the easiest essay – to write.

Before You Begin Writing

The foundation of the rhetorical analysis is the infamous TPT (Tone, Purpose, and Theme). As you read the piece that is presented to you, you should be writing down a TPT analysis on the margins of your test booklet. You should use around 40 minutes for this essay, thus, you should use approximately 10 of those minutes for the TPT analysis and to gather your thoughts for this essay. If you understand the methodology that follows well, it should take you no more than 30 minutes to write the actual rhetorical analysis. However, if you feel that you cannot perform the process in that timeframe, pace yourself as you see appropriate – but remember to stay within the 40 minute range.

Adjectives that Describe the Author’s TONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sad</th>
<th>Glad</th>
<th>Mad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somber</td>
<td>Joyful</td>
<td>Outraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despairing</td>
<td>Celebratory</td>
<td>Indignant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regretful</td>
<td>Delighted</td>
<td>Incensed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief-Stricken</td>
<td>Jubilant</td>
<td>Irate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heartbroken</td>
<td>Bright</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bittersweet</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Bitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melancholic</td>
<td>Lighthearted</td>
<td>Wrathful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regretful</td>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>Threatening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sarcastic</th>
<th>Reflective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mocking</td>
<td>Pensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynical</td>
<td>Didactic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Informative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardonic</td>
<td>Contemplative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgmental</td>
<td>Nostalgic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Verbs that Describe the Author’s PURPOSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Honor</th>
<th>Assess</th>
<th>Persuade</th>
<th>Accuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mourn</td>
<td>Request</td>
<td>Explain</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate</td>
<td>Invite</td>
<td>Highlight</td>
<td>Validate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear Witness</td>
<td>Mock</td>
<td>Illuminate</td>
<td>Appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call to Action</td>
<td>Affirm</td>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire</td>
<td>Justify</td>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>Ponder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Contemplate</td>
<td>Consider</td>
<td>Expose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urge</td>
<td>Reflect</td>
<td>Declare</td>
<td>Judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticize</td>
<td>Ridicule</td>
<td>Uplift</td>
<td>Soothe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love/Embrace</td>
<td>Belittle</td>
<td>Condescend</td>
<td>Charm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember the following during your analysis:

- As you read, underline examples of imagery – you’ll need them later on.
- First, establish the TONE and jot down the corresponding adjectives.
- Then, using the tone, determine the corresponding PURPOSE and choose the verbs to accompany it.
- When describing tone, be very specific – hence, all the adjectives.
- Some pieces may have a shift or they may have multiple tones and purposes.
- When in doubt regarding purpose, you can resort to “Bear Witness” and “Call to Action” since most authors and writing perform those functions. However, these are **LAST RESORTS** as they are extremely basic as analyses.

For tone and purpose, think of it this way: tone and purpose are married and they always have to reflect each other.

- If the tone of Piece X is **somber**, then the purpose will be to **mourn**.

**And Now, the Actual Writing!**

During the course of the next section, you will see how a rhetorical analysis essay should be written. IF you learn and follow the guidelines below correctly, you will be able to write a high-scoring rhetorical analysis essay for the AP English exam. To help you in seeing how each part of this magic formula comes together, we’ll perform a rhetorical analysis on the song “Beautiful Day” by U2 based on the following question:

_In a well-written essay, analyze how the band U2 utilizes rhetorical strategies in their song “Beautiful Day” to build their purpose._
"Beautiful Day" – U2

The heart is a bloom
Shoots up through the stony ground
There's no room
No space to rent in this town

You're out of luck
And the reason that you had to care
The traffic is stuck
And you're not moving anywhere

You thought you'd found a friend
To take you out of this place
Someone you could lend a hand
In return for grace

You're on the road
But you've got no destination
You're in the mud
In the maze of her imagination

You love this town
Even if that doesn't ring true
You've been all over
And it's been all over you

It's a beautiful day
Don't let it get away

You're out of luck
And the reason that you had to care
The traffic is stuck
And you're not moving anywhere

You thought you'd found a friend
To take you out of this place
Someone you could lend a hand
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You're on the road
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You've been all over
And it's been all over you

It's a beautiful day
Don't let it get away

It's a beautiful day

Touch me
Take me to that other place
Teach me
I know I'm not a hopeless case

See the world in green and blue
See China right in front of you
See the canyons broken by cloud
See the tuna fleets clearing the sea out
See the Bedouin fires at night
See the oil fields at first light
And see the bird with a leaf in her mouth
After the flood all the colors came out

It was a beautiful day
Don't let it get away
Beautiful day

Touch me
Take me to that other place
Reach me
I know I'm not a hopeless case

What you don't have you don't need it now
What you don't know you can feel it somehow
What you don't have you don't need it now
Don't need it now
Was a beautiful day
Introduction

After you’ve performed your TPT analysis, jotted down all your adjectives and verbs, and underlined for imagery, it’s time to begin your introductory paragraph. For the purposes of the rhetorical analysis, you only need two sentences in your introduction: a TPT analysis sentence and a thesis sentence.

The TPT analysis sentence presents your analysis of the piece and demonstrates to the reader that you have been able to extract meaning from the piece. This sentence is constructed as follows:

Adjective and Adjective, Author and Title of Piece, Verb and Main Idea/Theme

What adjectives do you use? The ones you jotted down during your TPT analysis for tone. Your verb will also come from one of the ones you wrote down. As for the main idea/theme, that comes from your own head based on what you perceive to be the central focus of the piece. As a rule of thumb, however, the main idea/theme will almost always include an abstract noun – that is, something such as, racism, love, poverty, etc.

So, a sample TPT analysis sentence for the U2 prompt would be as follows:

Inspirational and optimistic, U2’s “Beautiful Day,” inspires its listeners to find passion in everyday living and enjoy each day to its fullest extent.

Exercise

Identify each of the following for the TPT analysis sentence above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Tone Adjectives</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Purpose Verb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Main Idea/Theme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second sentence in your introduction is your thesis sentence. This sentence specifically addresses the question in the prompt. In every rhetorical analysis prompt you will be asked to not only analyze the strategies in the piece – that would be too simple – but also to analyze them in terms of how they serve a specific purpose for either the author, the piece, or both. Take a look at the prompt we’ve been focusing on again.

The prompt is asking you to analyze how U2 uses rhetorical strategies to “build their purpose.” Thus, the question they are asking is, “What is U2’s purpose?”
Your thesis sentence **MUST** answer the question you are given. If it does not, you have already failed in your analysis. To construct the thesis, use this structure:

\[(\text{Question stem} + \text{Answer})\]

The question stem is basically the question you are asked, except it is slightly reworded for the purposes of your own writing. The answer is, obviously, the answer to whatever question you were asked. For example, suppose the prompt asked the following:

*In a well-written essay, analyze how James communicates his fascination with Central Park to his readers.*

Your thesis statement would read something like this:

*Mr. James communicates his fascination with Central Park by personifying it as a dynamic force that leaves a surreal impact on all those who witness it.*

Let’s try writing the thesis sentence for the U2 prompt. First, write down what U2’s purpose is in the context of this song.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Now, following the structure above, write your thesis for the U2 prompt.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

And that’s it! You have now written your introduction for the rhetorical analysis. If you wish, you may include a grabber before your TPT analysis sentence, however, unless you are absolutely comfortable with doing so, avoid it! The two sentences demonstrated above, if done correctly, are the beginning of the high-scoring essay which AP readers are looking for.

Now, on to the supporting paragraphs!
Supporting Paragraphs

The supporting paragraphs are the most extensive part of the rhetorical analysis essay. This is where you will analyze the strategies within the essay and provide appropriate evidence. For the purposes of the AP English exam, writing about diction and imagery, if it is done correctly, is enough to earn you a high-score on the essay. There’s no need to go into other concepts such as comparisons or contrast to earn a high score.

Thus, your go-to strategies are diction and imagery. You should dedicate a paragraph to each one. Leave imagery for last because that will be your strongest paragraph.

But, how do you write the opening sentence for a supporting paragraph? Well, it’s quite simple, use the following formula:

Adjective + rhetorical device + architectural verb + theme/main idea

The formula is similar to the one for the TPT analysis sentence, however, unlike the latter, it allows for more flexibility in the way it is written.

The adjective will, again, be one of your tone adjectives which you wrote down earlier. However, avoid using the same ones as in the introduction. Your rhetorical device will be either diction or imagery. Your architectural verb should be a verb that implies building, for example, “builds,” “creates,” “expands,” among others. Finally, your theme/main idea ties back to the original one presented in your introduction.

In the case of the U2 prompt, the opening sentence for the supporting paragraph on diction might be something like this:

U2’s use of spiritual diction builds the notion that joy is something that resounds across humanity and can be experienced by any one.

Try writing the opening sentence for the supporting paragraph relating to U2’s use of IMAGERY.
After the opening sentence, you begin writing **the evidence** which supports your assertion in the introduction and in your opening sentence.

This is when you refer to the imagery you underlined while reading the text. These specific phrases and words will become part of your evidence sentences. Do not quote extensively because it will make it seem as if you are simply grabbing random quotes with no real idea as to what you are doing. Remember that your evidence CANNOT stand alone. The evidence must convey the idea expressed in your opening sentence.

For example, in the supporting paragraph regarding U2’s “spiritual diction,” you might use phrases such as, “that other place,” “maze in her imagination,” or “in return for grace.”

Go back to the opening sentence you wrote for the supporting paragraph relating to U2’s imagery. Then, look through your TPT analysis from earlier and write down phrases and words which you can use as evidence to support your assertion.

Once you have finished discussing your evidence, it is time for you to write your **closing sentence**. This sentence MUST restate the idea that you expressed in your opening sentence in a different way. It essentially encloses all your evidence in between your idea.

The quickest and easiest way for you to write your closing sentence is to use a **simile phrase**. Similes are quick, easy, and cheap! Not to mention, AP readers eat them up like candy.

Say, for example, we were writing the ending for the supporting paragraph regarding U2’s diction. Your closing sentence might be a simile phrase such as this one:

*Much like in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s writing, U2’s transcendentalist voice captures the profound impact that the simplicities of everyday life have on humanity.*

Your comparison does not have to be to anything deep and philosophical, it can be something as simple as a movie you saw last week. What matters is that it works and you do it correctly.
Conclusion

The concluding paragraph is simply a restatement of the TPT analysis sentence and the thesis sentence in your introductory paragraph. **DO NOT** simply rewrite both phrases! For the TPT analysis sentence, change your tone adjectives, keep your original purpose verb, and slightly reword your main idea/theme phrase while maintaining its integrity. For the thesis sentence, just reword it while preserving the original meaning.

In addition, don’t forget your concluding transition so the reader knows that your writing is coming to an end.

So, a concluding paragraph for the U2 prompt would be something along these lines:

*In essence, U2’s “Beautiful Day” is uplifting and bright as it inspires its listeners to seize the day and find happiness in their lives. By communicating the enchanting nature of life through their diction and imagery, U2 achieves their purpose of urging their listeners to become part of the intricate and fascinating web of life.*

Outlines for the Structure

Below, you’ll find brief outlines for the structure of the rhetorical analysis as well as the structure for the supporting paragraphs. Once you learn the specifics listed above, these simple outlines will trigger your memory and guide you through your writing.

Rhetorical Analysis Essay Structure

I. Introduction
   a. TPT Analysis Sentence
   b. Thesis Sentence

II. Supporting Paragraph 1 – Diction
    a. Opening Sentence
    b. Evidence
    c. Evidence
    d. Evidence
    e. Closing Sentence (*Simile Phrase*)

III. Supporting Paragraph 2 – Imagery
    a. Opening Sentence
    b. Evidence
    c. Evidence
    d. Evidence
    e. Closing Sentence (*Simile Phrase*)

IV. Conclusion
    a. Reworded TPT Analysis Sentence and Thesis Sentence
Supporting Paragraph Structure (Oreo Structure)

I. Idea (Opening)
II. Evidence
III. Evidence
IV. Evidence
V. Idea (Closing)

Remember: Evidence CANNOT stand alone! It must be surrounded by ideas.

**General Suggestions**

Below are a series of suggestions that you should keep in minding when writing your rhetorical analysis.

- **Attitude is NOT tone. NEVER!!**
- When you read a speech, it helps if you attempt to *visualize* the speaker and the context in which they are speaking.
- Don’t be friendly with authors. If the author’s name is John M. Barry, write his full name, John Barry, Mr. Barry, or use an appropriate pronoun. NEVER write Barry or John. AP readers don’t appreciate it when students act as if they are best friends with the author.
- Dashes in your writing are sophisticated. However, do not overuse them; limit yourself to one per paragraph. That means that when you are done, if you use one dash per paragraph, you’ll have four dashes evenly spaced throughout your entire essay.
- The adjective is the analysis! Correctly used adjectives specify, and the rhetorical analysis is all about specificity.

That’s all there is to a rhetorical analysis! As long as you learn and follow the guidelines specified above correctly, you’ll be able to write a high-scoring rhetorical analysis for the AP English exam.