Rhetorical Strategies – an Introduction

Rhetorical strategies are tools that help writers craft language so as to have an effect on readers. Strategies are means of persuasion, a way of using language to get readers' attention and agreement.

In your writing or your discussion, you will need to ask and answer certain questions. Why does the author choose to use that strategy in that place? What does he or she want to evoke in the reader? How do these strategies help the author build his or her argument? How do these strategies emphasize the claims the author makes or the evidence he or she uses?

Remember that all rhetorical strategies are either appealing to pathos, logos, or attempting to develop ethos in the author (and her sources).

Ethos

Aristotle's term *ethos* refers to the credibility, character or personality of the speaker or author or someone else connected to the argument. *Ethos* brings up questions of ethics and trust between the speaker or author and the audience. How is the speaker or author building credibility for the argument? How and why is the speaker or author trying to get the audience to trust her or him?
- Aristotle says that a speaker builds credibility by demonstrating that he or she is fair, knowledgeable about a topic, trustworthy, and considerate.
- What specifically does the author do to obtain the reader's trust? How does he or she show fairness? Understanding of the topic? Trustworthy? Considerate of the reader's needs?
- How does she construct credibility for her argument?

Pathos

Pathos refers to feelings. The author or speaker wants her audience to feel the same emotions she is feeling, whether or not they agree on the actual topic. That way, because they feel the same emotions, they are more likely to agree with the author later on.
- What specific emotions does the author evoke?
- How does she do it?
- How does the author use these emotions as a tool to persuade the audience?

Logos

Loosely defined, *logos* refers to the use of logic, reason, facts, statistics, data, and numbers. Very often, *logos* seems tangible and touchable, so much more real and "true" than other rhetorical strategies that it does not seem like a persuasive strategy at all.
- How and why does the author or speaker chose *logos?*
- How does the author show there are good reasons to support his or her argument?
- What kinds of evidence does he or she use?

When Discussing Rhetorical Strategies, Remember to:
1. Identify rhetorical strategies in the text
2. Describe *how* they work
3. Describe *why* they are used – what purpose do they accomplish? Are they appealing to logos, pathos or developing ethos?
4. Always include a discussion of how this strategy helps the author develop and support the argument.

The following is a list of commonly used strategies and questions that will help you consider why the author may have chosen to use those strategies.

Authorities or "big names" – Frequently an author will quote from a famous person or well-known authority on the topic being discussed.
- How does this appeal to authority build trust in her argument that the consensus can be trusted?
- How does this appeal tap into assumptions about scientific method

Cause and effect analysis: Analyzes why something happens and describes the consequences of a string of events.
- Does the author examine past events or their outcomes?
- Is the purpose to inform, speculate, or argue about why an identifiable fact happens the way it does?

Commonplaces – Also known as hidden assumptions, hidden beliefs, and ideologies. Commonplaces include assumptions, many of them unconscious, that groups of people hold in common.
- What hidden assumptions or beliefs does the speaker have about the topic? How is the speaker or author appealing to the hidden assumptions of the audience?
- Who is the intended audience of this piece? What are some assumptions of this intended audience?

Comparison and contrast: Discusses similarities and differences.
- Does the text contain two or more related subjects?
- How are they alike? different?
- How does this comparison further the argument or a claim?

Definition –When authors define certain words, these definitions are specifically formulated for the specific purpose he or she has in mind. In addition, these definitions are crafted uniquely for the intended audience.
- Who is the intended audience?
- Does the text focus on any abstract, specialized, or new terms that need further explanation so the readers understand the point?
- How has the speaker or author chosen to define these terms for the audience?
- What effect might this definition have on the audience, or how does this definition help further the argument?

Description: Details sensory perceptions of a person, place, or thing.
- Does a person, place, or thing play a prominent role in the text?
- Does the tone, pacing, or overall purpose of the essay benefit from sensory details?
- What emotions might these details evoke in the audience? (Pathos)

- How does this description help the author further the argument?

Division and classification: Divides a whole into parts or sorts related items into categories.
- Is the author trying to explain a broad and complicated subject?
- Does it benefit the text to reduce this subject to more manageable parts to focus the discussion?

Exemplification: Provides examples or cases in point.
- What examples, facts, statistics, cases in point, personal experiences, or interview questions does the author add to illustrate claims or illuminate the argument?
- What effect might these have on the reader?

Identification – This is rhetorician Kenneth Burke's term for the act of "identifying" with another person who shares your values or beliefs. Many speakers or authors try to identify with an audience or convince an audience to identify with them and their argument.
- How does the author build a connection between himself or herself and the audience?

Metadiscourse – Metadiscourse can be described as language about language. It announces to the reader what the writer is doing, helping the reader to recognize the author's plan. (Example: In my paper . . .) Metadiscourse can be used both to announce the overall project or purpose of the paper and to announce its argument. It also provides signposts along the way, guiding the reader to what will come next and showing how that is connected to what has come before.
- Metadiscourse can signal the tone the author wants to convey. What is the author's voice in this paper? How does she enter in and guide the reader through the text?
- What role does she adopt? What voice does she use?

Metaphors, analogies, similes –An analogy compares two parallel terms or situations in which the traits of one situation are argued to be similar to another—often one relatively firm and concrete, and the other less familiar and concrete. This allows the author to use concrete, easily understood ideas, to clarify a less obvious point.

Similarly, metaphors and similes assign help an author frame the argument, to pay attention to some elements of a situation and ignore others or to assign the characteristics of one thing to another. **For example, see "The Power of Green" by Thomas Friedman in this reader.**
- What two things are being compared?
- How does this comparison help an audience view the argument in a new way? How does this frame shape the argument?

Motive – Sometimes an author may reference the motives of her or his rhetorical opponents.
- Why we should or shouldn't trust someone's argument –(ex. if the CEO of Krispy Kreme doughnuts argues against nutritional information on product packaging)

Narration: Recounts an event.
- Is the narrator trying to report or recount an anecdote, an experience, or an event? Is it telling a story?
- How does this narrative illustrate or clarify the claim or argument?
- What effect might this story have on the audience?
- How does this narrative further the argument?

Precedent – When an author or speaker argues from precedent, he or she references a previous situation, one that can be compared to the author's situation.
- Does the author reference any historic instances that he or she claims are similar to the one being discussed?
- What details about this historic situation help the author's argument?

Prolepsis – Anticipating the opposition's best argument and addressing it in advance.
- Readers interact with the texts they read, and often that interaction includes disagreement or asking questions of the text.
- Authors can counter disagreement by answering anticipating the opposition and introducing it within the text. Authors then respond to it.

Process analysis: Explains to the reader how to do something or how something happens.
- Were any portions of the text more clear because concrete directions about a certain process were included?
- How does this help the author develop the argument?

Rhetorical question – A question designed to have one correct answer. The author leads you into a position rather than stating it explicitly.
- What is the most obvious answer to this question?
- Why is it important to have the reader answer this question? How does it help the author persuade the audience?

Transitional questions – Lead the reader into a new subject area or area of argument.
- What role do these questions play? How do these questions lead the direction of the argument?
- How is this helpful for the reader?

Structure and Organization
It is important to consider the organization of information and strategies in any text.
- How does this structure or organization help strength the argument?
- What headings or titles does the author use? How do these strengthen the argument?