

Rhetoric and Analysis

at You Will Learn

- ▶ To determine the main idea, purpose, tone, author's credibility, and emotional effect of a text
- ▶ To analyze how a text's arrangement, diction, syntax, imagery and allusions, and figures of rhetoric support the main idea
- ▶ To write a rhetorical analysis essay

As the first three chapters suggest, we analyze nonstop while we read and write. But clearly analysis is not just a reading and writing activity. Consider following ways you analyze in your daily lives.

If you're thinking about going to college, you need to analyze the various factors involved in making a wise choice of institutions: How do people characterize the quality and reputation of the school? How much do tuition, fees, books, and room and board cost? Does the school have a good program in your proposed major? What is the social life like? Is the school close to your home—if you want to stay close?

If you're working on a computer and you lose your connection to the Internet, you need to analyze what has gone wrong: Has the web site gone down? Has your location lost its Internet connection? Has something gone wrong with your particular computer? Did you do something to disconnect the Internet?

If you're planning a major trip in a car, you need to analyze a range of options: Do you want simply to take the shortest route? Do you want to avoid congested traffic? Do you want to enjoy beautiful scenery? Do you want to stop off someplace—a shopping mall, a historic site, somebody's house—along the way?

In other words, you analyze all the time, and you analyze in similar ways no matter what the problem or plan. Notice what these situations share:

- They all have a big central question: Is this the best college or university for me? What has gone wrong with the Internet? What is the best route for our road trip?
- They all involve a series of smaller, more detailed speculations about the “component parts” that help answer the big, central issue: What's the cost? Is the computer plugged in? Will we stop on the trip?
- They all call on you to analyze.

Analysis is a term used so often that we seldom stop to think what exactly it means. It's helpful to return to the word's *etymology*, its origin. **Analysis** comes from an ancient Greek word meaning to unravel or loosen. For thinkers in the classical world of Greece and Rome, analysis referred to a systematic process of investigation, unraveling elements to see how they worked.

That's a pretty fair characterization of how the word is used today. When you analyze anything, whether for a specific assignment or for your everyday reading and homework, you think about the big question. Then you unravel it. You untie it. You divide it into its components to investigate it systematically, to see how its parts work, and to determine how the parts speak to the whole.

Think of all the opportunities you might have in school to engage in analysis during a typical semester. In economics, you analyze how stock market prices vary with unemployment statistics. In humanities, you analyze how Picasso's *Guernica* conveys an attitude about war. In health, you analyze the effects of diet on athletic performance. To begin the analysis in any of these classes, you confront the big, central question: In general, how does the stock market respond to unemployment rates? What is the central idea about war in *Guernica*? How important are proteins and carbohydrates in an athlete's diet? Then you unravel and loosen the object of analysis—the stock market, the painting, the diet—in order to formulate the “component parts” probes that collectively lead to an answer to the big central question.

In short, the keys to analysis—to the type of reading, thinking, and writing you must do in your everyday life, in many of your classes, and certainly on the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition examination—are two:

1. Determining and addressing the big central question of whatever you're being asked to analyze.
2. Probing how the component parts of the object at hand collectively answer the big central question.

There's an important idea related to this last point. Once you determine the components, the elements that make up the whole, you make decisions about which might be most important, which are less relevant, and you structure your analysis to reflect your evaluation of the elements you've examined.

In the rest of this chapter, we'll concentrate on how to do both these operations—find big ideas, examine and evaluate the parts that make them up—carefully and systematically in relation to a text. In short, we'll focus on how to do rhetorical analysis.