

Classical Rhetorical Analysis: Four Samples

The following connects to p. 232 of *Acting on Words*.

A Rhetorical Analysis of “The Right Stuff”

Lee Jennings decided to adapt his critical analysis of “The Right Stuff” into a rhetorical analysis. He decided to use his previous criticism (see pp. 218-19 and “‘If Only It Were that Simple’ Expanded by Research” at the enrichment site, Chapter 14) while providing a different focus; his new focus in the following essay involves examining Suzuki’s use of persuasive appeals.

A Rhetorical Analysis of “The Right Stuff”

Lee Jennings

David Suzuki’s “The Right Stuff” features the gracious, entertaining and informative style we have come to associate with this well-known host of *The Nature of Things*. He begins with the interesting speculation from the book *Is There Life After High School?* that “impressions formed in high school are more vivid and indelible than those formed at any other time in life.” Suzuki stresses the importance of high school education and prepares his readers for a proposal related to making that education as valuable as possible. A rhetorical analysis reveals the varying degrees of success with which Suzuki employs logos, pathos, and ethos: while Suzuki’s ethos is strong because of the reputation he brings to his writing and his use of pathos to appeal to his target audience of parents and educators, his use of logos is weak. Suzuki is skilled in argumentation, but his strong ethos fails to make up for the lack of support for his thesis that high school science courses should begin with sex education.

Suzuki’s ethos is dependent on his achievements in science, and no one would question the wisdom of choosing him to speak to high school students about science. Although he

is not an expert on adolescents or education, his own education and experience garner him enough credibility to offer a reasonable opinion on the topic. Because he does not need to establish who he is or what he is talking about, he can assume that his audience will listen, if not wholeheartedly embrace his ideas. He also depends upon making a connection with his audience, and his chosen title “The Right Stuff,” would evoke both the 1979 book by Tom Wolfe and the screen version of 1983, which emphasized the risk-taking fearlessness of the astronauts, of whom only those with “the right stuff” were chosen to go into space. For parents and educators familiar with the book and movie, there would be a carry over into their reading of the article, even though Suzuki does not refer directly to the source of the title, and it remains for the readers to determine if he means that the “right stuff” is being taught or whether educators need to have “the right stuff” (the willingness to change methods to something innovative and potentially risky) to reach high school students with the material that Suzuki believes is essential for them to know.

Because there will be parents in the 1980s (when we can assume this article appeared before it was republished in book form in 1989) just as likely to be concerned as parents of any decade if the high school science teacher appeals to teenage sexual interest to “sell” the subject, Suzuki wisely delays his thesis, first by appealing to his target audience: parents and educators who grew up in relatively the same era as he did, who may even experience some nostalgia for high school when, in the first paragraph, he asks them to invoke their own memories. He appears to have begun his own musings based on the book he has just read. This is a disarming strategy that gets his readers onside before his argument begins, and certainly belongs in both the realms of ethos (his credibility – he had similar experiences to theirs) and pathos (feelings of nostalgia).

His personal anecdote takes up most of the essay, and throughout, he invites his readers to experience what he does, the apprehension, the fears, even the biases, before enjoying the success of his impromptu introduction to his talk. His reader hears the advisor claiming the teenage crowd will “tear [Suzuki] apart.” His reader is invited to fear the “tough” audience just as Suzuki did, although he admits “[t]hey looked pretty normal.”

The danger of mentioning the large number of Aboriginal students in the audience as part of the “tough” crowd is that it could be seen to reflect a racist attitude, rather than, as he probably intends, to create an atmosphere of “otherness” – of students from people of whom many suffered abuse through the dominant culture’s educational methods of forced assimilation, for example. The population, including the idea of the “tough” Northern town would likely be mentioned to target audiences not familiar with the area. Here, depending on the perspective of his reader, his use of emotional appeal would either be very effective or be upsetting for the reader. However, stories, even those that raise the ire of the reader, always have emotional appeal, and Suzuki’s strategy to reach his audience with pathos and ethos before logos is a good one. The main idea is that the school audience is large, and to Suzuki, all the students would be culturally remote, either because of racial ancestry or the town’s location.

When Suzuki greeted his young audience with the comment, “I’m a geneticist. I know you’re basically walking gonads, so I’m going to talk about sex,” he claims the audience was hooked, and a lengthy, productive discussion of science emerged from this departure point. Suzuki has prepared the readers somewhat for his statement by talking about the importance of hormonal changes in teenagers in connection with their high school experience in his second paragraph. Because his example is personal testimony, it serves as logical evidence, as well as having emotional appeal. The cause-effect strategy of the way he began his talk and its consequences is the strongest use of logos, in fact, his only use besides his personal testimony. The effect of his decision to introduce his talk by appealing to the interest of teenagers in sex must be delayed so that the parent readers are willing to listen to it. If the thesis had been introduced at the beginning of the essay, certainly some readers would immediately react with skepticism, dismissal, or even hostility.

However, Suzuki commits the fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* by assuming that his remark caused this reaction. The reaction could have been caused by his charisma and celebrity. Furthermore, certain students might have been privately disturbed by his directness: one observer cannot determine how 400 students are responding on deeper

levels. This flaw of oversimplification weakens Suzuki's essay in general. Beginning a talk with a good-natured joke about sexuality is not the same as giving a class in sex education. Suzuki had no evidence that the students would have welcomed or needed a sex education talk in order to follow to the next points he discussed. Other examples of hasty conclusions can certainly be found. Suzuki, for instance, assumes that the hormonal changes of puberty inevitably disrupt high school students, causing their preoccupation with sex. To his credit, he does try to anticipate and answer resistance to his thesis, based on parents' pressure on school boards to "keep sex education out of school," but his response that the teens will learn about sex anyway and that they will not get the real facts is unsupported. He also does not question why this reluctance to allow students to have access to sex education may exist, if it does.

The major question overlooked by Suzuki's essay—one of logistics-- is how can the schools, understaffed and overstressed, add the difficult subject of sex education to their curriculum. Admittedly, David Suzuki wrote his essay at a time when education budgets were in better shape than they are today, and he certainly makes an excellent point that educators should respect their students and appeal to their interests. Nevertheless, his argument for sex education in the schools clearly needs further thinking. In spite of Suzuki's strong ethos and persuasive use of pathos, he needs a stronger use of logos to make an argument here. The best he can hope for is to get his audience's attention – then it is up to them to see if and how his ideas should be implemented in the schools.

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Practice Activity

1. Read "Eugenia Gilbert's "A Rhetorical Analysis of 'The Ways of Meeting Oppression'" on pages 228-231. Then apply the Differences and Similarities Test described in *Acting on Words*, Chapter 12, pp. 185-86 to outline a detailed comparison of that essay and the adapted version above. Discuss your findings with your classmates and instructor.
2. Read Lee Jennings' critical essay "'If Only It Were that Simple' Expanded by Research" at the enrichment site, Chapter 14. Then apply the Differences and

Similarities Test described in *Acting on Words*, Chapter 12, pp. 185-86 to outline a detailed comparison of that essay and the adapted version above. Discuss your findings with your classmates and instructor.

Commentary

In response to Practice Activity 1 above, note that even though Gilbert's essay and Jennings' essay both focus on persuasive appeals, they are organized differently and do not limit the disparate views the writers have: the writer of the King analysis is interested in how the piece persuaded readers in various target audiences, but sees the rhetorical strategies as entirely effective, despite any possible weaknesses in the way the argument was made. The writer of the Suzuki analysis, while recognizing the possible appeals of the ethos and pathos, wants to convince his readers that the essay is seriously flawed when it comes to logos. These examples show that just as in a critical analysis, a rhetorical analysis takes into account both the positive and negative aspects of the original author's argument, but depending on the intent of the writer analyzing the piece, the analysis can either be more exploratory or more critical.

In response to Practice Activity 2 above, note how Jennings in his rhetorical analysis was able to incorporate his criticisms while still showing the persuasive aspects of Suzuki's argument. Jennings rhetorical analysis follows Suzuki's essay chronologically.

Outline

Intro., background, brief summary, identification of author's thesis and probable intended audience, thesis of this analysis

Body Para. 1-3 first part of Suzuki's essay – dependent largely on ethos and pathos, connecting to readers, as appeals, using personal anecdote, potential and real weaknesses

Para 4-5 last part of Suzuki's essay – logos, dependent on the success of the first part. Here the weakness of insufficient evidence and oversimplification undermine the argument.

Conclusion – how Suzuki's essay is not credible as an argument, what it needs, and what its current value is.

Three Samples of Rhetorical Analyses Written in Class

Each of the three essays that follow analyzes a reading selection from *Acting on Words*. These student authors had discussed and practised identifying various writers' use of logos, pathos, and ethos in class. For their final in-class assignment, they were asked to choose from a list of essays in the text that had not been discussed in class, and write a rhetorical analysis of approximately 700-900 words. Although they chose the essay ahead of time and were able to prepare to write the essay, they were not allowed to bring in an outline or anything pre-written except for brief notes in the margins of their textbooks. Therefore, the writing in these essays is not as smooth as if they had been allowed to edit and re-write outside of class, but the essays all serve as good examples of how the methods of classical rhetorical analysis can be easily and effectively used. The essays share certain characteristics: the essay being analyzed and its author are identified in the introduction, which also includes a summary of the essay, and the student's own thesis, outlining the strategies used and assessing their success. As part of the assignment, students were asked to underline their thesis statements.

First Example

A Rhetorical Analysis of "The Other Canadians and Canada's Future"

Marin Lepp

In his essay "The Other Canadians and Canada's Future," Habeeb Salloum delivers a vivid picture of Canada's past, present and future states of immigration and multiculturalism. He begins by briefly outlining the history of ethnic diversity within

Canada, the difficulties immigrants faced as they became assimilated into Canadian culture and the implementation of the Multicultural Act by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Salloum then continues on to describe what Canada has been like since – the benefits of multiculturalism, as well as the criticisms it has faced. Additionally, he identifies those who are against multiculturalism as, ironically, descendents of immigrants, as they have adopted a view of Canada similar to that of Anglo Canadians. Clearly, the author has two target audiences. Primarily, he speaks to the descendents of the immigrants who are opposed to multiculturalism, but this essay is also intended for the educated and socially informed of British society since it was originally published in the widely circulated *Contemporary Review*. The most appropriate sentence that could be labelled as his thesis is “Canadian society has become, at least on the surface, a truly cultural mosaic.” Salloum utilizes logos well, for the most part, with his use of examples and statistics, though there are a few instances where his appeal to logic is somewhat weak. However, he integrates pathos excellently due to appropriate placement of this strategy; and the fact that he is knowledgeable about the issue strengthens his ethos.

The audience that Salloum is trying to reach is clear, while his thesis encompasses the fundamental purpose of the essay. It can be said that his target audience is the descendents of immigrants, since he identifies many of them as being opposed to multiculturalism. He addresses this group because he sees the irony in this ideology, that those whose ancestors were once new to Canada could have benefited from the concept of tolerance and multiculturalism. Also, there is irony in the fact that these people, for the most part, now possess an “Anglo” view of Canada’s future. The secondary audience may be recognized as educated readers with an interest in socio-cultural issues who may not be aware that assimilation still subtly occurs in Canada, since he outlines some of the controversies surrounding multiculturalism. Naturally, this readership would also maintain a degree of interest in the current state of Canadian multiculturalism and how this nation is dealing with diversity. His thesis lies at the end of paragraph 4, where he states that “Canadian society has become, at least on the surface, a truly cultural mosaic.” This is supported by the fact that the remainder of the essay encompasses the topic of multiculturalism, but his thesis still suggests that assimilation and opposition still exist within Canada.

Because Salloum has a definitive thesis and target audience, he utilizes logos effectively throughout most of his essay, though in some places his logic is weak. The organisation of the paper begins with many facts based on Canadian history and then moves into clear examples as to why assimilation into Canadian culture was difficult for ethnic minorities. With statistics and accurate dates in previous and recent history, Salloum uses logos to reinforce his credibility. As he ventures into Canada's post-Multicultural Act milieu, he continues to use effective statistics and examples to support his message that multiculturalism is beneficial, as well as to demonstrate why some people are against it. However, he eventually states that "even more forgotten by multiculturalism are Canada's 'First Nations Peoples,'" without providing adequate support for this assertion. Also, in paragraph 19, he outlines the negative aspects of assimilation, and uses his own family as an example of how they have intermarried and lost much knowledge of their Arabic origins. This appeal to logic needs more support as to why assimilation is negative when it is an inevitable, naturally occurring force. Even in Canada, where individual cultural preservation is encouraged, it is unrealistic to maintain every aspect of ethnic culture.

Conversely, Salloum used pathos and ethos quite appropriately throughout. Emotional appeal was used near the beginning of his paper, in order to emphasize the harsh realities that immigrants once faced when trying to integrate in a predominantly English and French society. One of the examples of pathos used here is his description of his own experience: "Black Syrian' ... These epithets during my own school years were daily taunts... the school was a painful place for a child of non-British origin." Also, since the majority of pathos was used at the beginning, it has the effect of drawing the reader in, whereas it is used more sparingly toward the end, where the author appeals to logic and the development of his argument. His ethos is based on his credibility to write about this issue, since Salloum himself is of non-British descent. Also, another dynamic that reinforces his ethos is that he thoughtfully addresses the other side of the issue, as demonstrated by paragraphs 12, 13, 17 and 20.

Essentially, Salloum delivers an effective argument for his original audience through his used of logos, pathos and ethos. He carries out what is fundamentally stated in his thesis. However, despite his effective use of examples, his argument would have been

more effective if his logic was more developed in some areas. Also, this would have made him more credible in the eyes of current readers. Aside from this, he produces effective emotional appeal that is appropriate for both his target audience and for current readers. For both audiences, his ethos is strong, since he is informed and presents a fair argument, considering more than one facet of the issue.

Focus Questions

1. Lepp has identified two different audiences for this essay. What is each audience's level of knowledge on the subject? How would each audience react differently to Salloum's essay?
2. Do you agree with Lepp's identification of Salloum's thesis? If not, what do you think is the purpose of his essay?
3. Has Lepp identified the main areas in which Salloum has used logos, pathos, and ethos to persuade his audience(s)? Are there points you would leave out? Are there any that you think should be added?
4. Note how Lepp has structured her essay. Is it effective?

Second Example

A Rhetorical Analysis of "A Liberal Education is Key to a Civil Society"

Ivy Williams

James Downey's essay entitled "A Liberal Education is Key to a Civil Society" was written sometime after 1993. Downey summarizes his view on the "value of a liberal education" and how university educators should be responsible for incorporating it into all undergraduate studies to give students "a broad base of skills, knowledge, and outlook for a meaningful engagement as citizens." Downey's target audience is his colleagues in the universities, especially those in the humanities and social sciences faculties, whom he thinks are failing in setting an example of social capitalism. Downey's thesis states that the value of a liberal education in universities is that it prepares students to prosper in social capitalism and creates a much needed civil society.

He also states that it is the responsibility of the universities to incorporate a liberal education. Downey effectively appeals to his audience by using logos (cause and effect on society, using a well respected colleague's studies), pathos (in his respectful tone of language, and reminders of his colleague's responsibilities to their students and society), and ethos (his standing as a past Dean of two universities, an author and a well respected speaker).

Downey identifies his audience early in the essay by addressing the humanists and social scientists in the university. He also directly addresses his colleagues in “starting with ourselves, in universities,” when he explains who should be addressing the problem of a lack of strong community in our society. He again speaks directly to his colleagues when he states that “we, who profess ourselves to be humanists and social scientists...[,] must be prepared to lead by example, starting with our own universities--the programs we offer, the academic citizenship we practice.” Downey is a well known and respected speaker in universities and past president of the universities of Waterloo and New Brunswick, and his essay could well have been a speech prepared for his colleagues. He is imploring his colleagues that it would be “better and truer” for them to take responsibility and commit to setting an example of a civil society in the university they teach in. He supports his views on the institutions having a positive effect on society by stating that “an institution that relies on mutual respect and assistance is simply more effective at achieving its ends than an oppositional, distrustful community.”

Even though Downey refers to only one other colleague's studies for support of his thesis, this use of logos is quite effective with his target audience, since the majority of his colleagues would know of Robert Putnam from Harvard University. Putnam is a well known author of books and scholarly articles published in 10 languages, he is a past dean of JFK School of Government, and he is held in high esteem as a speaker at universities. Downey would have been even more effective if he had used at least one more study, especially one from the North American continent. Downey uses cause and effect well throughout the essay in stating how society has changed from valuing social economics to valuing capitalistic economics. He states people feel that “social capital has been depleted in Canada” and says it is “the result in part of severe and often crude economic measures governments and corporations have taken to balance budgets, contain

costs, and increase productivity.” He says that the effect of this is that “economic disparities have grown,” and people have become apathetic. His logical appeal is quite strong throughout by his reminding his colleagues over and over of the effects a liberal education would have on society versus the capitalistic sway that it seems to be given at present.

Downey’s use of pathos may seem a bit weak, but to his target audience it would be very effective in that he uses a very respectful language tone in imploring his colleagues to take action and be responsible members of the institutions they represent. His use of the words “better and truer,” “mutual respect and assistance,” “application of knowledge and values it embodies,” and “heart of the university” are particularly effective. In his last statement, he uses his strongest pathos as he restates his thesis in saying, “If we who profess ourselves to be humanists and social scientists wish to defend and promote the ideals of a liberal education in a hard-edged materialist culture, we must be prepared to lead by example, starting with our own universities- the programs we offer, the academic citizenship we practice.”

Downey’s ethos lies in the fact that he himself is a past president in universities and he is very knowledgeable about what goes on in universities as far as teaching goes. He is a well known speaker to his colleagues and a writer as well. He also is well connected to other deans, presidents, professors and other faculty members of universities. His essay is very effective in the way he uses logos and pathos in appealing to his target audience even though he could have been more specific in ways for the faculty to address the problem he sees.

Focus Questions

1. Williams has identified Downey’s colleagues as his target audience. Does she provide convincing evidence for this identification? Are there any reasons that this essay would not be targeted at college or university students? Note how Downey does not explain in any detail what a liberal education or a civil society is.
2. Do you agree with Williams’ identification of Downey’s thesis? If not, what do you think is the purpose of his essay?

3. Has Williams identified the main areas in which Downey has used logos, pathos, and ethos to persuade his audiences? Are there points you would leave out? Are there any that you think should be added?
4. Note how Williams has structured her essay. Is it effective?

Third Example

Strength Through Creative Comparison

Nicholas Hamilton

Margaret Atwood defines the relationship between Canadians and Americans in her article “Canadians: What do They Want?” Although Canadians are addressed in the writing, it is mainly focused towards Americans, as the article was published in a political magazine from the United States. Atwood’s main idea in the paper is that American citizens are not only unaware of the “members of the family” to the north but of the different relations shared. The article is effective in portraying and defending the thesis. In fact, her use of excellent comparisons, melded with logos, pathos and ethos, expose American readers to a new outlook.

The article was published in *Mother Jones* magazine, a not for profit political magazine from the United States. The main intent of a non-profit magazine is to educate readers, which in this case is the American public. It is not a coincidence that a magazine of this nature would present an article warning of American ignorance. In fact, the magazine serves as an excellent setting for the work to effectively communicate with the targeted audience. Atwood, who has lived in both Canada and the US, carefully expresses her ideas on a potentially explosive topic in a way to evoke emotion, but not to start controversy. Often in the paper, the reader traces a finger over the lines, “We’re in this together,” which could be misinterpreted as her thesis, but it is just a shock-absorber for her main ideas regarding ignorance. Literary tools like that are not the only ones found in the paper; in fact, Atwood’s finest device she wields is her knack for effective comparisons.

The introductory comparison of Canada to a woman who is judging a man, America, on his looks is excellent. Not only does it snag the reader and use carefully

chosen description, but builds up into subsequent paragraphs and eventually makes the conclusion very strong. The “snag” in the introduction comes from a devised use of pathos. When alluding to the jackboots, a knee-high boot worn by militants, Atwood associates war and rape. Many men would take offence to this comment, provoking an aggravated persona in male readers. Nonetheless, they continue reading to understand how this lady can back up what she has said. The women, on the other hand, would find this mildly amusing, especially when Atwood includes how a man in her poetry reading class responded. Even though drawn in for different reasons, the reader is interested, which will allow for a more concise message to be delivered from the author.

The comparisons continue at the end of the second paragraph when Atwood is attempting to explain why Canadians have a hard time telling Americans why they are not particularly liked. The comparison adds little to the content, if any at all, but the effect it has on the reader is well worth the handful of words. “The old lifebuoy ads” referred to are ads for soap and centre on body odor. Comparing America to the stinky friend and Canada a buddy having a tough time telling him he stinks works well to provide emotional response and to present a Canadian opinion on the neighboring country’s relationship.

The previous paragraphs have demonstrated how Atwood is able to include pathos within her comparisons. The next comparison, however, presents a logical approach to proving a point. In this section, Atwood emphasizes a well known idea of stepping into someone else’s shoes to gain perspective. She illustrates a situation where America becomes economically controlled by Mexico and experiences a situation similar to what Canadians face. The key part to the comparison is the end, when Atwood points out a response to a change in economic control to exemplify how Canadians feel. In the 80’s when this article was published, America continued its economic prosperity resulting from the Second World War, while Canada was still stuck in a rut. As a result, much of Canadian economy was bought by American investors. Atwood is wise to include this in her writing because it is one of the largest factors for the difficulties in relations between the US and Canada. Her logical approach is effective in educating readers by having them experience a new perspective.

Towards the end of the paper, Atwood herself forms a new perspective not completely felt in the writing to this point. She switches to a view an American may appreciate which enhances her credibility, as she sees multiple sides. In fact, returning to the initial comparison, Atwood completes her writing by expressing a simple way to better the relationships between countries. She ends with a hopeful tone, bringing the reader closure from a comparison--stuffed with ethos, pathos and logos--driven essay.

Focus Questions

1. Note how Hamilton has identified the audience for this essay. If you didn't know that this essay was commissioned by an American magazine, would you be able to guess that the audience was American and not Canadian? Why or why not? How would Canadian audiences react to this essay?
2. Do you agree with Hamilton's identification of Atwood's thesis? If not, what do you think is the purpose of her essay?
3. Has Hamilton identified the main areas in which Atwood has used logos, pathos, and ethos to persuade her audiences? Are there points you would leave out? Are there any that you think should be added? Is Hamilton's own use of humor appropriate?
4. Note how Hamilton has structured his essay (which is different from the first two examples). Is it effective?