

MODES OF RHETORIC

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Rhetorical modes can serve multiple functions: A paper that narrates can also analyze and define - but the author of the prompt must think about how she wants the reader to organize that complexity. One suggestion is to suggest to students that they select an overarching encompassing mode and support that with a buttressing mode. For example argument and analysis is often buttressed by analogy and example.

1. **Description** – Word painting through the use of significant details. Intended to convey sensory perception (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch). Faculty in art history papers might ask students to describe two paintings before analyzing or comparing them to one another.

Example: Describe your service site. Who is served? Where do they come from? How do they find the site?

2. **Narration** – Storytelling; reviewing a sequence of events. More intent on representing what happened than explaining why it happened. Many service-learning papers include an element of narration to “set the stage.”

Example: How did Sojourner House come to be and how did its constituency evolve over time?

3. **Example** – Pointing to instances; using particulars to get at principles. In argumentation in any discipline, examples are used to support a thesis or main idea.

Example: Using current and projected neighborhood demographics, craft an argument aimed at state lawmakers for increased ESL services.

4. **Compare/Contrast** – The juxtaposition of two or more ideas/events/objects in hopes that by seeing one through the lens of the other, each may be explained and clarified, or alternatively one may prove better than the rest. Compare/contrast could be used with description in a service setting to discuss two separate events.

Example: After considering the position of parental rights groups, sketch out and defend your own conception of parental rights. In other words, what do you think should be recognized as parent rights and why?

5. **Process Analysis** – The separation of an action or series of actions into progressive parts. May be directive (tell the reader how to do something) or informative (explain how something works). The classic process analysis is a lab report or “how to” article.

Example: Create educational materials for the agency describing the steps of immigrating to the US post 9/11.

6. Analysis (Division and Classification) – Unlike process analysis, this type of analysis can be applied to ideas, not just actions. Analysis occurs in two steps: 1. Divide the subject into parts: 1. Rhetorical Modes 2. Classify each into an existing category or into categories of the writer’s invention. Analysis is common to the social sciences and is often used to break up a social phenomenon, homelessness, into parts and to assign social meaning to each of these parts.

Example: Summarize what you have learned about the boundaries of the field of mental health from the point of view of an immigrant. What suggestions can you make for modifying mental health services?

7. Analogy – Drawing a parallel. Analogy is illustrative, not argumentative, in that it’s intended to help the reader understand one thing by likening it to a more familiar thing.

Example: Explain how the human eye works by likening it to the lens of a camera.

8. Cause and Effect – Asking why; to analyze by dividing into reasons and results. Might be used in a history paper, for example, to deepen understanding of a certain event by discussing its precipitating factors.

Example: What led President Bush to champion the No Child Left Behind Act? Considering these factors, was this decision justified?

9. Extended Definition – To establish a boundary; to determine what something is and what it is not. One paper can include definitions of many terms or ideas, but extended definition occurs when the goal of the paper is to define a larger concept.

Example: Discuss how “romanticism” plays out in the two poems. I suggest you cogently define “romanticism” and which of its features are most important.

10. Argument – To persuade by appealing to reason, emotion, or both. Many other modes are useful tools in accomplishing the overall goal of argument. Argumentative papers are common to nearly every discipline.

Example: Should family court in Rhode Island be open to the public? If possible draw on experiences with family court. Consider the pros and cons while deciding the appropriate policy.

11. Exposition – To explain or set forth. Answers the 5 W’s: who, what, where, when and why. An objective news story is a good example of exposition.

Example: Without presenting one argument as correct, explain which scholars make which arguments in the debate surrounding evolution and what these arguments are.