

IS THIS A RHETORICAL QUESTION?

The rhetorical analysis essay is a type of essay for which you will be asked to read between the lines of a text and discuss how the writer expresses himself or herself. Keep in mind that you are not expected to summarize the document; instead, you are pointing out what strategies the writer uses to effectively get his or her point across. Essays of this type will have prompts containing the words *analyze*, *explain*, and/or *point of view*.

SAMPLE ESSAY #1—HERE'S HOW IT'S DONE

Below is a sample rhetorical analysis prompt. Let's start by taking a quick look at the instructions for our first sample essay.

THE DIRECTIONS

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay score.)

The passage below is extracted from Booker T. Washington's most famous speech, known as "The Atlanta Compromise Address." Washington presented the address to the Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895. Read the entire passage carefully. Then write an essay analyzing the rhetorical strategies that Washington uses to convey his point of view.

THE FIRST TIME YOU READ THE PROMPT

You should read the prompt twice, pen in hand. The first time, you should read only to identify the type of essay they're asking you to write and what you're supposed to do. Also underline any directions that the essay gives you. Your instructions should now look as follows:

The passage below is extracted from Booker T. Washington's most famous speech, known as "The Atlanta Compromise Address." Washington presented the address to the Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895. Read the entire passage carefully. Then write an essay analyzing the rhetorical strategies that Washington uses to convey his point of view.

For this question, you're expected to analyze Washington's rhetorical strategies. The prompts will not always have a marker to show that you are required to present your analysis in an *expository* essay, but it will be obvious that you are required to explain. Often, but not always, the prompt will contain the word *explain*. Basically, if the prompt doesn't instruct you to argue (or take a stand on an issue), then you'll be expected to explain something. Sometimes, the prompt will give you the point of view or position, but sometimes it won't. As you can see, this prompt does not give you the point of view. In this case, *What is his point of view?* amounts to *What is his position?*

Before reading the essay for the first time, you know that you have two main tasks. As you read the passage, you'll need to

1. figure out Booker T. Washington's point of view, and
2. identify the rhetorical strategies he uses.

By the way, almost all AP English Language and Composition Exams require that you identify or analyze rhetorical strategies, so it is essential that you spend a lot of time studying Chapters 9 through 11, which are devoted to rhetorical strategies.

THE SECOND TIME YOU READ THE PROMPT

The second time you read the prompt, you should circle clues or key elements that you know or need to figure out. For example, the first clue in this question is "Booker T. Washington." You may already know that he was a famous African American leader and scholar of the nineteenth century; many public schools in the United States are named after him. If you do not know that, then you would have to glean the information from the text. "Most famous" is another clue; this implies that this person gave several famous speeches, and this tells you something important about Booker T. Washington if you do not know about his fame to begin with. You should also note the date of the speech, for it gives a clue about the speech's historical context, which will be important. Washington delivered the speech in the South (Atlanta, Georgia) just 30 years after the Civil War. Finally, the audience is important. It is likely that the attendees of the Exposition were mostly white, and this is confirmed early in the reading passage—which you are ready to read.

THE PASSAGE

One-third of the population of the South is of the Negro race. No enterprise seeking the material, civil, or moral welfare of this section
 Line can disregard this element of our population
 5 and reach the highest success. I but convey to you, Mr. President and Directors, the sentiment of the masses of my race when I say that in no way have the value and manhood of the American Negro been more fittingly and
 10 generously recognized than by the managers of this magnificent Exposition at every stage of its progress. It is a recognition that will do more to cement the friendship of the two races than any occurrence since the dawn of our freedom.

15 Not only this, but the opportunity here afforded will awaken among us a new era of industrial progress. Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom;
 20 that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill; that the political convention or stump speaking had more attractions than starting a dairy farm or truck garden.

25 A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal, "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back, "Cast down
 30 your bucket where you are." A second time the signal, "Water, water; send us water!" ran up from the distressed vessel, and was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are." And a third and fourth signal for water was answered,
 35 "Cast down your bucket where you are." The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River. To those of my
 40 race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbor, I would say: "Cast down your
 45 bucket where you are"—cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.

Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the
 50 professions. And in this connection it is well to bear in mind that whatever other sins the South may be called to bear, when it comes to

business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man's chance in
 55 the commercial world, and in nothing is this Exposition more eloquent than in emphasizing this chance. Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are
 60 to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper
 65 in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the useful. No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a
 70 poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities.

To those of the white race who look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange
 75 tongue and habits for the prosperity of the South, were I permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race, "Cast down your bucket where you are." Cast it down among the eight millions of Negroes whose habits you know,
 80 whose fidelity and love you have tested in days when to have proved treacherous meant the ruin of your firesides. Cast down your bucket among these people who have, without strikes and labour wars, tilled your fields, cleared
 85 your forests, built your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, and helped make possible this magnificent representation of the progress of the South. Casting down your bucket among
 90 my people, helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, and to education of head, hand, and heart, you will find that they will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields,
 95 and run your factories. While doing this, you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen.
 100 As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past, in nursing your children, watching by the sick-bed of your mothers and fathers, and often following them with tear-dimmed eyes to their graves, so in the future, in our humble way,

- 105 we shall stand by you with a devotion that no
foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our
lives, if need be, in defense of yours, interlacing
our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious
life with yours in a way that shall make the
110 interests of both races one. In all things that
are purely social we can be as separate as
the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things
essential to mutual progress.

THE ANALYSIS

What is Washington's point of view? Is he an angry man
now warning of rebellion? Is he a timid man begging
for help? Washington's point of view is that of the man
who is to rally toward the same economic flag. He employs
part of his speech.

1. Throughout there is an appeal to sentiment. This is
the paragraph.

2. First, there is the central image of the basket, which could be considered part of
either an extended metaphor or an allegory. This is first addressed to the black
population, then to white people.

3. Finally to support the imagery, Washington uses analogy (e.g., "there is as much
dignity in using a field as in using a house," a new tactic (e.g., the reference to
people of foreign birth) and interesting deductive reasoning. Washington purports
that the colored people will and must work as blacks in the past prove that they will
be found hard-working collaborators in the future. While the claim is reasonable, the
logic is not in the past that Washington is talking about, the blacks were slaves. For
the most part, they had no choice but to be hard-working and loyal.

Now, keep all the above information in mind as you read the following sample essay, which was
written in 40 minutes under actual test conditions.

THE ANALYSIS

What is Washington's point of view? Is he an angry man demanding change? Is he an outraged man warning of rebellion? Is he a timid man begging indulgence? No, he is none of these. Booker T. Washington's point of view is that of the inspirational Southern preacher who urges blacks and whites to rally round the same economic flag. He employs three principal rhetorical strategies in this part of his speech.

1. Throughout, there is an appeal to sentiment; this is particularly noteworthy in the first paragraph.
2. Next, there is the central image of the bucket, which could be considered part of either an extended metaphor or an allegory; this is first addressed to the black population, then to white people.
3. Finally, to support the imagery, Washington uses analogy (e.g., "there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem"), scare tactics (e.g., the references to people of foreign birth), and interesting deductive reasoning. Washington purports that the continual loyalty and hard work of blacks in the past proves that they will be loyal, hard-working collaborators in the future. While the claim is reasonable, the logic is not; in the past that Washington is talking about, the blacks were slaves. For the most part, they had no choice but to be hard-working and loyal.

Now, keep all the above information in mind as you read the following sample essay, which was written in 40 minutes under actual test conditions.

A STUDENT ESSAY

Born into slavery and liberated by the Emancipation Proclamation, Booker T. Washington is widely regarded as one of the most influential African American figures in the history of the United States. In 1881, he started the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, and soon became recognized, admired, and respected for his wisdom. Because a number of well-placed business leaders and political figures turned to him for advice, he delivered his most famous speech "The Atlanta Compromise Address" in 1895. It is an explication of his beliefs that his fellow African Americans and other former slaves should make the best of what they have and strive to excel in the positions and jobs they already occupy rather than continually fighting for something. Furthermore, he argues that the people of the white race also do not see what they have around them. A moving speech, the impact of the "Atlanta Compromise" was so powerful partially because of Washington's skill as an orator and partially because of his strong rhetorical strategies of appeal to ethos, allegory, and repetition, and style and tone.

One of the most memorable quotes from the "Atlanta Compromise" is "cast down your buckets where you are." In this short allegory about a lost ship without drinking water being found by another ship and saved by using what was around them, Washington conveys his central idea that African Americans can help themselves and save themselves by using what resources they already have. The lost ship, in thinking that it is surrounded by salty water, does not even attempt to try the water before the second ship suggests the idea. Similarly, Washington implies that simply because they do not think they have anything to work with, the African Americans who were once slaves do not try to see what can be done with what they have. The impact of the allegory of the two ships is strengthened by Washington's repetition of the phrase "cast down your bucket where you are." However, in repeating it, he applies it to not only the African Americans, but also to "those of the white race." In that context, he states that the white Americans could look to the African Americans for help with the "prosperity of the South" instead of looking to "those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits." Again, he implores both sides to look around and make use of what is already present.

The idea of the speech is set up in the introductory paragraph, wherein Washington states that the recognition of the race of the "American Negro" at the Exposition will do much to "cement the friendship of the two races." It is in this paragraph and these phrases that Washington turns to the strategy of an appeal to ethos. By asserting that the Exposition will help further the friendship between the white Americans and the African Americans, he subtly suggests that this end, this friendship, is what the organizers of the exposition should want (a moral want). This appeal is utilized again in the final paragraph of the passage. In asking the white Americans to cast down their buckets, Washington also asks them to remember that the

African Americans “have proved [their] loyalty to [the white Americans] in the past.” Thus, he seems to be saying it would be immoral for the white Americans to turn away from proved loyalty when they are in search of help and employees.

However, the most compelling element of Washington’s speech is his tone and style. When reading the passage, one can almost imagine Washington delivering his oration. His tone and style are uplifting, optimistic, and emphatic, much like the tone of a passionate Southern preacher. His own emotions seem to be invested in every word. With phrases like “it is at the bottom of life that we must begin, and not at the top,” or “there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem,” Washington lends nobility and a right to pride to the common labor that most African Americans performed at the time. When he speaks of casting down the bucket “in agriculture, in mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions,” he assures both the African Americans and the white Americans that hard labor is not something to be looked down on. Neither, he implies, is the struggle to rise above your station a condemnable action. Nevertheless, he always comes back to the point that one must first make use of what is already present and readily available before searching for something else.

A wise and powerful man and speaker, Booker T. Washington often knew just what to say to convey his ideas and opinions. Even more important, he knew how to phrase and present what was important. In “The Atlanta Compromise Address,” Washington successfully utilizes the strategies of appeal to ethos, repetition, allegory, style, and tone to impart his message of using what one had to improve oneself. In simplified terms, “The Atlanta Compromise” is a speech based on *carpe diem*, the idea of seizing what one has and using it to one’s advantage.

What do you think? This essay would probably earn a score of 7 or 8; it’s strong, but it isn’t as clear as it could be. It’s obvious from the outset that the student knows about Booker T. Washington and understands the historical context of the speech. The fact that both the introduction and the conclusion evince an attempt to go beyond the bare bones is probably what would make the reader lean toward the higher score.

However, there are two glaring problems in this essay. Although one of them would probably not affect the score, it is an unnecessary and entirely avoidable error; it has to do with the five-paragraph form. The last sentence of the introduction announces a road map for the essay: “strategies of appeal to ethos [sentiment], allegory and repetition, and style and tone.” That’s fine. However, the student goes on to address the three examples in a different order: First the student addresses allegory and repetition, then discusses appeal to sentiment, and, finally, gets to style and tone. Luckily, most AP readers would overlook this, but it’s better to be safe than sorry—keep your organization consistent. There is another problem that readers would probably not overlook. Do you remember the two tasks that we set for our reading? One was to look for rhetorical strategies. The other was to establish a clear point of view. The student never addresses point of view in a coherent manner and in the only mention of it seems to confuse it with tone.

Let’s look at another example of an analytical/expository essay, to get more practice.