

## Rhetorical Terms

A rhetorical analysis breaks an essay, speech, cartoon, advertisement, or other persuasive or argumentative performance, into parts and considers how those parts come together to create an effect. The following is an alphabetically arranged list of terms often used in rhetorical analysis.

In the list below, the “rhetorician” would be the writer, speaker, or artist who has created the text being analyzed. For example, if you’re writing a rhetorical analysis of an essay by Mark Twain, Twain is the rhetorician, and your analysis would discuss the choices he made as an author and the effect those choices have on readers.

**Alliteration:** the repetition of letters or sounds at the beginning of a word. It can be used to create a mood or make a passage memorable.

**Ex.** “I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet” (Robert Frost, “Acquainted with the Night”).

**Amplification:** extensive development of one subject or idea. Rhetoricians may intentionally treat a point in many ways so that it can be shown in different lights or emphasized.

**Ex.** “Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player who frets and struts his hour on stage and then is heard from no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing” (Shakespeare, “Macbeth”).

**Allusion:** a brief reference to a historical or literary figure, event, or object that the target audience would know, thus helping them identify with the rhetoric and also showing the rhetorician is well-read. For example, allusions to the Bible and Shakespeare are common among English-speaking rhetoricians.

**Ex.** “And this will be the day—this will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with new meaning: ‘*My country ’tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing . . .*’” (Martin Luther King, “I Have a Dream”).

**Authority:** the invocation of an expert or facts to increase the credibility of a message. Often, the authority is quoted directly and his or her credentials mentioned to show exactly what was said.

**Common ground:** the point at which people in general disagreement can agree. Rhetoricians often use the technique of laying common ground if their target audience is likely to oppose their claims or reject their arguments. Beginning with common ground places the rhetorician and the audience on the same level, opening the way for the audience to consider the argument.