Rhetorical Strategies

Rhetorical strategies are also called rhetorical modes. These strategies or modes provide writers with a way to structure or analyze essays and paragraphs. This section will focus on the use of rhetorical modes to build paragraphs and essays. Let’s take a look at the term “rhetorical mode” and define each word.

**Rhetorical**: The word rhetorical is the adverb form of rhetoric. Remember that an adverb describes a noun or a pronoun. The adverb rhetorical describes or modifies the noun mode.

The root word of rhetorical is rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art or technique of speaking and writing effectively.

**Mode**: A mode is a way of doing something, a pattern or model.

Rhetorical modes give writers models or patterns for expressing their ideas effectively. What are the rhetorical modes or strategies that are traditionally taught in college composition classes?

* Description: Good description creates vivid images in the mind of a reader. A writer may be asked to do **objective description**, where he or she must relate the physical appearance of a person or place without suggesting any feeling or emotion. Most likely, however, writers will be called upon to write **subjective description**, where the feelings of the writer are made obvious by the word choices in the description. Think of description as taking a picture. In a picture, the objects are static (they do not move), but the picture itself tells a story.
* Narration: Narration conveys action
* Exemplification (Also called “Example.”): We learn by example, and when we read, examples allow us to learn more quickly than if we do not have examples. An example usually describes a real-life situation about the idea that you, the writer, are trying to convey. For example (see, I am using an example here), if the topic sentence of a paragraph is that “Traffic in Miami is horrible,” then you might want to describe a situation of stalled traffic on the Palmetto Expressway at 5:10 PM on a Tuesday afternoon, with slowdowns and cars honking. You might want to let the reader know the time it takes to drive from West Kendall to Coral Gables at 8:00 AM on a Monday morning. You might want to describe the construction work on US 1 in Naranja and Goulds and how that construction restricts traffic to a single lane. Examples clarify your general point, whether you write a paragraph or an essay.
* Cause and Effect
* **Comparison and Contrast:** We use comparison to show how two things are alike or similar; we use contrast to show how two things are different. Typically, we compare things that differ from each other. In other words, there has to be sufficient differences between them to make it interesting or worth our while to compare. Take, for example, the difference between grocery shopping at a supermarket, like Publix, and registering for classes at a university. These activities differ substantially, but they are alike in some ways. If you discuss their similarities, you are using comparison.

Contrast, on the other hand, focuses on the differences between two things. This observation suggests that those two things should be so alike that discussing their differences is interesting or relevant. Take, for example, two computer operating systems, Microsoft Windows and Linux. Operating systems perform the similar functions on a computer. If you discuss the differences between Windows and Linux, you are using contrast.

Remember that there must be a purpose to your comparison or contrast. Are you comparing Windows and Linux to make a recommendation for installing them at a workplace? Are you contrasting grocery shopping and registering for classes at a university to reduce the anxiety that students may have about registering for classes? There must be a purpose or a point for your writing. Otherwise, comparison and contrast becomes an empty exercise, a simple drill.

* Process Analysis: Process analysis asks the question “How?” Specifically, a process analysis paragraph or essay answers the question, “How does this process occur?” Process analysis is different from giving instructions; in instructions, the purpose is to guide someone through a procedure. In process analysis, the purpose is to explain that procedure. Some examples of process analysis would be to explain how a volcano erupts, how blood flows through the body, how a seed germinates, how a device moves through a factory, how children are tested for autism. But be careful. If you answer the question, “How do you study for a test?” you are giving instructions, not explaining a process.
* Classification : Classification looks at a diverse group of objects (a heterogeneous group) and looks for similarities. The writer then creates categories based on those similarities and labels each category. Humor is often, but not always, the intent of writing a classification essay. For example, a student may choose to write an essay classifying students at her school. Such categories may include any of the following: the overachievers, the techies, the jocks, and the club rats. The writer would describe each of these categories in a paragraph, using humorous language and giving examples.
* Division
* Definition
* Argument

These rhetorical modes or rhetorical strategies are useful in writing paragraphs, short essays, and research papers.