

About this sample rhetorical analysis: The following rhetorical analysis originally appeared in Volume 10 of *e-Vision Journal of First-Year Writing*, which published the work of students in James Madison University's first-year writing courses from 2000-2012. This paper analyzes an opinion piece that was published in *The Breeze* (JMU's student-run newspaper) on September 8, 2009. While this paper follows many of the conventions of a rhetorical analysis, it uses strong language and personal opinions, which are fairly unusual. Most rhetorical analyses employ a more neutral tone and an analytical perspective. Make sure to talk to your professor about assignment instructions and expectations, which can vary. For more information about rhetorical analyses, see an overview of rhetorical analyses (along with more resources) at [this link](#).

Giant Emotion Meets Tortured Logic

by Kinsey Blumenthal

The CIA is being destroyed and the United States sold out. Or at least that's the claim Patrick Haggerty makes in his article "The Passing of a Giant," which appeared in the September 8, 2009, edition of *The Breeze*, James Madison University's student-run newspaper. The piece, which starts out stressing the CIA's importance and arguing against investigations into the CIA's interrogation techniques, quickly deteriorates into what can only be described as a prophecy of doom and despair. Very much driven by pathos, Haggerty's article feeds on the fears not just of people still very concerned about terrorist attacks, but also of those apprehensive about the government and the direction in which the country is being taken. Throughout the article there is a feeling that to support the investigations of the CIA is unpatriotic and little short of heresy. Haggerty's conviction is admirable, but fervor is hardly a qualification for an articulate argument, especially if the argument is established solely on vehemence and zeal.

"The Passing of a Giant" is a response to the government's decision to investigate the allegations of torture that have been leveled at the CIA. Haggerty argues that since the CIA works to protect the United States and United States

The writer uses the opening sentences to provide key information about the text she will examine: its author (speaker) and title, where it was published, and a brief summary of its message.

The opening sentence serves as an attention-getter.

In this paragraph, the writer employs a critical and emotionally charged tone, using language like "deteriorates," "feeds on fears," and "hardly a qualification." Some professors may prefer a more neutral tone in a rhetorical analysis.

This is the writer's thesis. In addition to making an evaluative claim about how well or poorly the speaker fulfills the rhetorical purpose, some instructors might also like the thesis statement to map out the paper by listing the techniques the paper will analyze.

This paragraph does two different things: It provides context for the article. Then, it talks about the powerful diction in the article. Both of these are important moves—but they might be stronger in separate, more developed paragraphs, each with their own topic and concluding sentences.

citizens, the CIA should not have to answer for the way it obtains information. Much of the article’s power resides in the diction. Strong words, such as “ineptitude,” “sacrifice,” “relinquished,” “criminalized,” “appeasing” (a particular favorite), and “neutering,” really set the tone.

Here, the writer supports her claim about diction with examples of strong language from the text.

Haggerty refers to the allegations of torture in just one paragraph, where he covertly labels torture “interrogation techniques.” The end of this particular paragraph—“And now that work to help protect our country is going to be criminalized?”—marks the article’s transition from a defensive attitude to the attacking attitude which lasts the rest of the article. “Criminalized” is a powerfully negative word, making this a very serious accusation of injustice in the federal government. Haggerty’s view is that the government investigations are nothing more than a power play, that there is no real reason for them. Even so, Haggerty is very careful never to use the word “torture.” Thus, he effectively downplays the reason for the investigations and the issue of torture.

Notice how this paragraph focuses on the speaker’s word choices and the effects of those word choices. Although the writer of this analysis clearly disagrees with the article’s argument, she sticks to the purpose of a rhetorical analysis—to examine if and how the speaker accomplishes his purpose (not to rebut his argument).

This is an effective topic sentence. It provides the main claim the paragraph will address. It also focuses on the efficacy of the speaker’s message.

Regardless of whether or not people agree with what he says, Haggerty is effective in eliciting an emotional response. He plays upon doubts readers may have regarding the relatively new administration. He accuses the president of allowing the investigations as a way of appeasing other countries and putting those countries before his own. By overseeing the CIA, the government has limited the CIA’s potential and has reduced the quality of information gathered for U.S. troops in the Middle East:

Notice how the second sentence in this paragraph makes an analytical claim, and the sentence that follows supports it with summary of the article. Achieving a good balance of analysis and summary can be tricky. To avoid providing too much summary and not enough analysis, make sure summary serves as evidence for a claim, as demonstrated here.

This centralization of an important CIA program [interrogations] shows that the president is not interested in making sure our troops in Iraq or Afghanistan are better armed with information, he is interested in appeasing foreign leaders and groups like Amnesty International....By apologizing for activities that support our country’s soldiers, the

president makes himself appear to be weaker, and by proxy, our country appears weak.

Claims of a lack of presidential support for U.S. troops overseas, appeasement of foreign leaders, and a weak image for the president and the U.S. are unfounded.

This paragraph concludes effectively by describing the emotional reactions the audience might have to the speaker's message.

None of these claims are backed up with any type of evidence, but Haggerty treats them as "facts." Haggerty goes on to assert that these "events" are proof of a carefully planned government conspiracy: "This follows Obama's drive to centralize power to the White House and away from the public." Haggerty thus evokes anger and indignation in all of his readers and fear in those who agree with him. People are either outraged by his slanderous accusations or terrified of the country being sold out and of the total, inevitable control of the government.

Learning to differentiate ethos, logos, and pathos takes practice. This paragraph is about the emotional effects of the speaker's message (pathos), but providing (or failing to provide) evidence for claims has more to do with an argument's logic (logos).

This "pivot" is a common move in rhetorical analyses. After acknowledging how the speaker is effective, the writer shifts into describing the ways in which he is ineffective.

As important as emotion is for engaging readers, it is not enough. There must be some degree of reason and logic behind an argument. An argument can be made without pathos (appeal to emotion), but it cannot be made without logos (logical support and reason). Lack of coherent logos is the main pitfall of Haggerty's article. Once readers overcome the pathos and begin to actually examine the article, the argument unravels. As a result of so much unfocused emotion the author has accomplished little more than to antagonize those people with different viewpoints. His entire argument is one-sided and poorly supported.

Some professors may expect more (and earlier) references to rhetorical elements and appeals than this writer provides.

Every claim in a rhetorical analysis should be supported by evidence or examples. Here, the writer needs to provide evidence of her claim that the speaker's argument is poorly supported.

The only bit of this article that could even remotely show another side of the issue is stuffed near the end of a paragraph, halfway through the article and in between dashes. Haggerty claims,

The techniques used to gain this important and timely information had to be effective. Methods like waterboarding (simulated drowning), threats to family and outright lying— regardless of their moral standing— proved to have excellent results for the agency.

In saying “regardless of their moral standing,” Haggerty tries to downplay torture and take morals out of the issue, but it can’t be done. Torture is a moral issue. Torture and morals are intertwined and can’t be separated. Many would argue torture is so controversial because it is morally ambiguous. This ambiguity is the center of the argument for investigating the CIA. Morals are not relative and have to be thought through and taken into consideration. Haggerty could have argued that it is not morally wrong to torture when lives are at stake, but he didn’t. In those five words—“regardless of their moral standing”—he undermines his entire article. He tries to escape the connection between morals and torture by using a Machiavellian “the ends justify the means” approach, without recognizing that people do not generally agree with this mindset. Additionally, there is controversy over how “excellent” the results really were. Haggerty doesn’t say how he knows the CIA’s results were excellent and, without a reference to a credible source, we are left relying on what we know of history, which is to say that information gathered under torture is dubious, at best.

The writer’s analysis is particularly strong here, as she explains why the speaker made the choices he did, why those choices didn’t work, and what he could have done better.

This material might fit better into the previous paragraph, which needs examples of the speaker’s failure to provide evidence for his claims.

Logic again fails with Haggerty’s comparison between President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain: “History was not kind to Neville Chamberlain’s attempt to appease 1930s Germany. By neutering the CIA, will Obama face the same fate?” The effect of the accusation that the President is only concerned with “appeasing” other countries is especially potent and lingering considering this is the way the article ends. But a worse comparison for the point Haggerty is trying to make is hard to imagine. The government is talking about the prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment being applied to the CIA. In this situation, there is no dictatorial state—bent on conquering Europe and controlling the world—encroaching on other countries. Not only

When evaluating the logic of a message, it is useful to discuss any logical fallacies that occur. In this case, the writer identifies a “false equivalence” (though she does not use the formal name of the fallacy).

Here, the writer points out that the comparison made by the speaker may have the opposite of its intended effect.

does the association not fit the situation, it opens the door for more fitting comparisons between allowing torture and Nazis.

This last comparison is especially striking when paired with the sentence “Who would want to work for an organization where you could be prosecuted for doing your job?” Some of the worst atrocities ever committed can be traced back to the claim “I was only doing my job” or, similarly, “I was only following orders.” These were excuses many used when on trial in Nuremburg for crimes against humanity after World War II. If those excuses didn’t work then, why should they work now? And while Haggerty’s question is not exactly the same as the Nazi war criminal claims, it is remarkably similar. If we accept these feeble excuses, we change what our country stands for. After all, the United States’ 8th Amendment in the Bill of Rights is famously known for the phrase “protection against cruel and unusual punishment.” If we torture, we engage in behavior that our Constitution prohibits and that we condemn other countries for.

This paragraph deviates from the conventions of a rhetorical analysis. Here, the writer moves away from analyzing rhetorical choices and directly criticizes the speaker’s argument. Some professors may accept counter-arguments in a rhetorical analysis, while others may not. Either way, remember the aim of a rhetorical analysis is to evaluate how effectively or ineffectively a work accomplishes its intended purpose, not to support or critique the ideas in that work.

This paragraph summarizes the essay’s main points—a common move in conclusions. Some instructors may want the conclusion to move beyond summary and offer a fresh analytical perspective. One way to do this is to answer the question “So what?” (i.e., why might it be important to rhetorically analyze this piece?). Another approach is to answer the question or “What next?” (i.e., what should readers do in response to this analysis?).

Haggerty’s article is, alas, an ineffective argument that does not endear itself to opposing views, and that falls apart under scrutiny. Because it is a pathos-based article, the piece is engaging, but that could be good or bad. There are no grey areas and there is no room for compromise. The writing is akin to those polls with loaded questions that get people to answer them the way the person giving the poll wants them to answer. The use of emotion—especially playing on people’s fears and concerns—is highly manipulative. This is especially true since Haggerty doesn’t talk much about the investigations, despite their being the point of the article. He says nothing to convince anyone that holding the CIA accountable for its actions will be its death sentence.

This paper only cites one source—the article that the writer analyzed. Some instructors may require writers to incorporate more research. This paper could have incorporated additional research about:

- the context for the political issue that is the focus of Haggerty’s article
- the characteristics of readers of *The Breeze* (the audience for Haggerty’s piece)
- Americans’ and, college students’ opinions about torture

Works Cited

Haggerty, Patrick. “The Passing of a Giant.” *The Breeze* 8 September 2009: 7.

NOTE: The full text of Patrick Haggerty’s “The Passing of a Giant” is available [here](#), via James Madison University’s Scholarly Commons.

According to the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook*, periodical titles should be italicized, months should be abbreviated, and page numbers should be preceded by a p. (for single-page articles) or pp. (for multi-page articles). The second part of this citation should look like this:

The Breeze, 8 Sept. 2009, p. 7.