

WHAT IS ANALYSIS?

Analysis is about breaking something into its pieces to learn how the pieces fit together into a whole.

To learn about and prevent diseases, doctors analyze bodies, looking at organs and bodily functions: They analyze the skeletal and muscular systems, the organs of digestion and sight, and the cellular processes of those different systems and organs. Once doctors understand how these different parts fit together, they can start questioning how a change in one part affects other parts, how (for example) a disease of the liver affects stomach functioning.

Similarly, social scientists analyze crises that are the result of human action (such as wars and economic depressions) and crises that result from a mixture of human and natural causes (deaths from heat waves or hurricanes). They try first to understand the political, social, economic, and technological structures of towns, cities, countries, and regions so that they can ask how actions and events affect those different structures. They hope in this way to learn what went wrong and how a similar crisis might be avoided in the future.

Similarly, communication specialists analyze the texts we give each other. Some specialize in analyzing political speeches, some in television advertising, some in film, some in literature, some in digital communication. These specialists bring different analytic tools to their work. In this book, we use the analytic tools of rhetoric.



88

PART 5 QUESTIONING

In the upcoming pages, we follow the scheme for analysis shown below, to help you move from analyzing to understand to analyzing to ask questions of a text.

By breaking a text down into its parts, we can

If we can describe the parts of a text and how they fit together into a whole, then we can say we understand the text and what its composer's purpose might have been in producing it.

Once we understand a text, we can question it.

- Do the strategies used in the text fit with its purpose?
- Is the intended audience likely to be persuaded by the strategies used?

- Can I support the purpose?
- Are the strategies used valid?
- Do I accept those strategies, or think they are ethical?
- Do I think the text's composer respects the text's audience?

WHAT IS ANALYSIS?

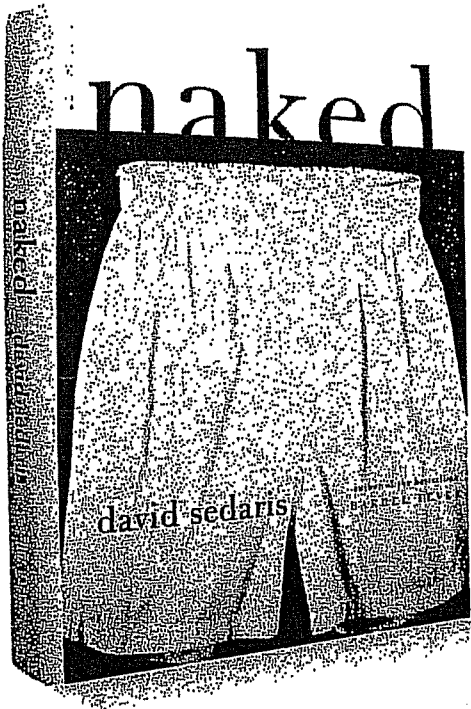
UNDERSTANDING AND ANALYZING TEXTS

In this book, we use the analytic tools of rhetoric to understand what the parts of a communication are and how those parts fit together to make a whole—and how the parts work to make a communicator's purposes clear to the intended audience in a particular context.

BEGINNING RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Almost any rhetorical analysis begins with these two steps:

- 1 Determining the choices composers make in developing a text.
- 2 Considering how those choices help composers achieve their purposes with their particular audience in the context at hand.



PART 3 QUESTIONING

90

BEGINNING A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF A BOOK COVER

This example for starting a rhetorical analysis looks at the book cover to the left.

1 Determining the choices composers make in developing a text.

To do this, we list as many choices as we see, in any order:

- the book's title
- the book's size
- the typefaces used, and their size
- the placement of the elements, such as the title relative to the photograph
- any information about the book in addition to its title
- the book cover is different from what we usually see: The paper cover doesn't cover the whole, just part of it—so there must be something hidden under it
- the use of a photograph
- the colors used
- the overall feeling: humorous

2 Considering how those choices help composers achieve their purposes with their particular audience in the context at hand.

It's tempting to say that the cover's purpose (like any book cover) is to sell the book—and that is certainly part of the purpose. But if a cover helps persuade someone to buy the book, the cover must interest the buyer. If the buyer knows the author's writing, maybe the cover design doesn't matter; if, however, someone doesn't know the author, then the cover's purpose has to be about giving someone a strong, particular sense of what is inside *this* book. What do the strategies above suggest about *naked*?

The title and photograph are important choices because they are emphasized. The photograph is of boxer shorts, which for some reason in American culture are objects of some silliness. Their presence tells us

this book is about fairly recent topics and not about people living long ago.

Naked is a word we apply to humans, not animals, and though it can imply serious things, the word can also imply awkwardness, like losing your clothes while swimming—or being caught in public in your underwear. Because the title is printed without a capital letter—which implies informality—and is combined with the photograph, we get the sense that this book is not about heavy topics. The cover also has only the one photograph, telling us that what is in the book is probably not complicated: This is, probably, not a book of detailed history. It is about people, possibly their awkward behaviors.

THERE ARE CATEGORIES FOR ANALYZING THE STRATEGIES USED IN COMPOSING...

as we discuss on the next pages. Also, analyzing a composition is easier when we compare it to another composition, as we do with this book cover on the next pages.

UNDERSTANDING AND ANALYZING TEXTS

UNDERSTANDING AND
ANALYZING TEXTS

DEVELOPING A SENSE OF THE AUTHOR

WE MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE COMPOSERS OF TEXTS

Whenever you use a text, you develop a sense of the person who made it.

Listening to the radio, you probably develop—without thinking—a sense of any speaker's gender and age, and probably also a sense that the person is serious, funny, or well-informed. You could be wrong in all your assumptions—but that doesn't stop you from making such assumptions.

We make the same assumptions when we read and even when we look at photographs, posters, or video games: We develop, consciously or not, a sense of who made the text and whether the person is trustworthy, authoritative, knowledgeable, intelligent, and so on.

WE NEVER KNOW A REAL PERSON THROUGH THE ASSUMPTIONS WE MAKE

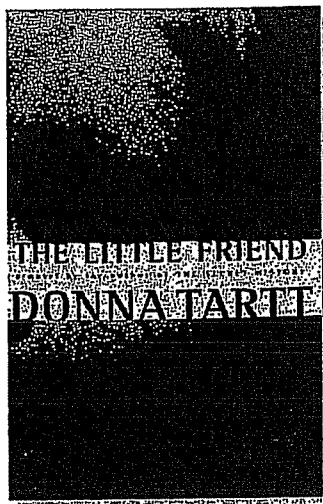
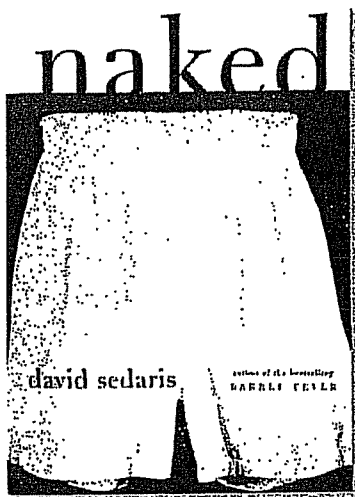
Text producers choose how they want to appear in their texts: Writers choose tone of voice, the evidence they use, and how they describe others. Because the evidence is limited—and sometimes carefully crafted—the sense we develop of composers is always limited and partial; we never get to know a real person through a text.

Composers can use any strategy available to them to shape how audiences understand who the composers are. In traditional rhetorical terminology, the sense that audiences develop about composers is called

ETHOS.

PART 5 QUESTIONING

92



ETHOS IN BOOK COVERS

The context of book cover design says something about ethos. Rarely do writers design their own book covers; instead, a book's publisher chooses a designer. The designer works alone, or with an art director or photographer, but the work has to be approved by the publisher and (usually) by the author.

The ethos we associate with a cover is therefore not necessarily the ethos of the books—but the two should be close if the cover is to achieve its purpose of suggesting what the book is about.

Notice that ethos can, therefore, be the result not of one person's decisions but of several people's.

The cover for *naked* looks professional, composed by someone who knows about using words, typefaces, and photographs together. Its humor suggests not only that the book will be funny but also that the person who made the cover has a sense of humor.

The cover for *The Little Friend* was composed by the same designer, and it too looks professional and has similar elements: one photograph, the title of the book, the author's name, and information about another of the author's books. Even though the strategies are similar, however, the second cover is a bit creepy: The extreme close-up on the face of a doll looking sideways suggests someone trying to see what's going on behind her, an undoll-like emotion.

Both covers show us someone who is able to suggest that objects have more life than we usually expect.

All these facets of this ethos—the professionalism, the humor, the attention to objects—suggest that these books are connected with makers who are clever and able to get readers to look below surfaces.

UNDERSTANDING AND
ANALYZING TEXTS

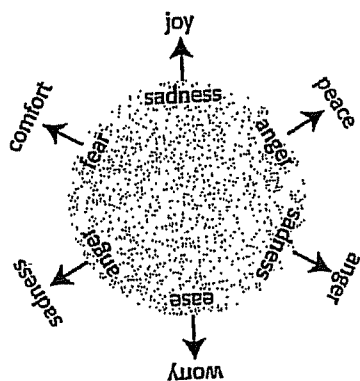
UNDERSTANDING APPEALS TO EMOTIONS

PEOPLE COMPOSE TEXTS TO MOVE OTHERS

Every text is composed for a purpose—and for that purpose to be achieved, the audience has to shift. The shifting can be as simple as the audience's attention being shifted from one object to another—but most often it is larger: a shift from passivity to engagement, from not knowing or caring about a topic to knowing and caring, from feeling hopeless to wanting to act.

In all of this, there is a shifting in the audience's emotion.

What emotions does a composer consider the audience to hold on a topic before they read, see, or hear a text—and what emotions does the composer hope the audience will hold afterward?

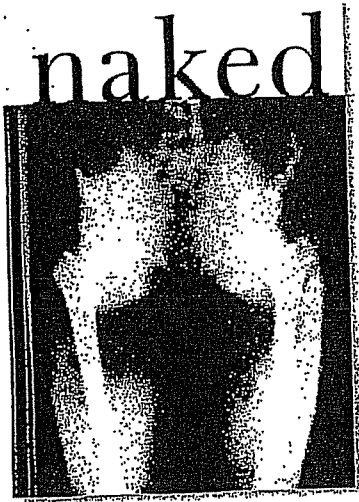


In rhetoric, a composer's use of strategies to shift an audience's emotions is called

PATHOS.

PART 3 QUESTIONING

94



PATHOS IN BOOK COVERS

Earlier, we talked about how *naked's* cover is about engaging with an audience's sense of humor: The title of the book and the photograph of boxer shorts are simple and funny. Perhaps we can say, then, that the cover's main pathos appeal is that of humor.

But there is another strategy we mentioned that we have not discussed: the part of the cover that comes off.

The boxer shorts are printed on a paper jacket that covers only part of the book. The jacket overlaps *naked*; the paper does not—as we expect with most book covers—cover the whole book; we are led to wonder what is under the cover, under the boxers.

In addition to its humor, the cover therefore also offers some interaction and provocation. It asks the audience to expect something under the cover ... and under the cover is an x-ray, a body

more naked than we might have expected. Our emotions are called into play as we realize that we were (perhaps) hoping to see something else but instead are given a very exposed naked body. We are teased by this cover—perhaps made to laugh, perhaps made to question why we were expecting to see something else.

The second book's title, *The Little Friend*, suggests childhood—but the photograph plays emotionally with the associations we probably have with childhood. A close-up photograph of a face engages us with the face's emotion. A close-up of a face turning its eyes toward shadows behind it suggests worry, concern, fear of something about to happen. When the face is a doll's, we have entered the realm of fairy tales and fantasy. The emotions encouraged by this cover are in your face, and unsettling.

UNDERSTANDING AND ANALYZING TEXTS

95

UNDERSTANDING ARRANGEMENT

(including logic)

THE BREADTH OF LOGOS

Logos may make you think of logic, and that is appropriate. Both words developed from the same Ancient Greek word.

Logos, as a name for a strategy that looks at the arrangement of a text, includes logic. Logic is about how ideas are structured—arranged—to have a very specific kind of effect.

So when you hear the word *logos*, it is fine to think about all kinds of arrangements that are used to structure texts, including the particular set of arrangements we call *logic*.

EVERY TEXT UNFOLDS IN TIME

Even in posters and book covers, we see some elements first and some second because some elements are big or at the top. We have to look longer to see the arrangements of novels, essays, films, and video games. We may read a book's conclusion first, but in the Table of Contents we see that the composer put the chapters into a particular order. On a website we can look at individual pages in any order, but we see that the designers have designated one page as the home page—and we still have to look at each page starting at the top.

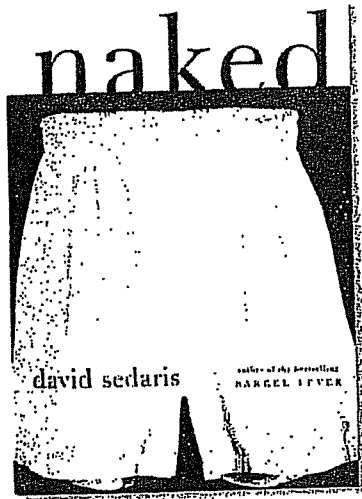
To move audiences, composers make choices about the order in which (they hope) audiences experience their work.

Choices about order can concern the

- **Large scale of a text.** What introduces someone to the text and what concludes it, or what does someone see first, then second, and so on?
- **Middle scale.** How are intermediate parts of a text given shape, such as sections or paragraphs in writing, the arrangements of one photograph in an advertisement that contains ten photographs, and so on?
- **Small scale.** In writing, the order of words in a sentence shapes how readers read; in sound recordings, background music or ambient sounds play behind main sounds, but still shape a listener's overall experience.

In rhetoric, a text's arrangements (including its logical arguments) are referred to as the strategy of

LOGOS.



LOGOS IN A BOOK COVER

When readers first encounter *naked*, they probably notice the photograph first, because of its size, and then the title. The author's name is smaller than the title, and tied into the photograph.

When an author is well-known, sometimes the person's name is larger than the title, but in this case we can see that the composers believed the suggestive title would probably attract more readers than the author's name—even though this author is now quite well-known. Even smaller than the author's name, however, are two short lines of text that inform readers that this author has written another (best-selling) book; the cover's composers decided that this information is important enough to include, but not important enough to make bigger than any of the other elements.

A final element of arrangement—of logos—is the strategy of having another photograph hidden under the first.

Whereas the arrangements of *naked* encourage eyes to move over the cover, putting together (and taking apart) the pieces, the arrangements of the cover of *The Little Friend* keep a viewer's eyes held close to the middle. The placement of the doll's eye right on top of the title—which is lined up closely with the author's name and information about another of the author's books—puts the points of visual interest of this cover close together. There is really nothing else to look at, so the arrangements support the pathos of this cover: We are aware of the darkness to the side, but we do not know what is there. This arrangement asks us to identify with the doll, to wonder what might be over there.

A SAMPLE ANALYSIS ESSAY

As we wrote earlier, the first step of doing analysis is to analyze for understanding. Can you describe what you think the purpose of the text is, and for whom it was intended? Can you find evidence from the text—quotations, your observations about how ethos, pathos, and logos are used—that supports your understanding? If you can do that, then you understand a text.

Your understanding may differ from others' analysis of the same text, but as long as you can use as evidence the strategies you've noted, then you have built your own understanding. Listen to how others analyze, and notice how they use the evidence of the text.

On the opposite page is a written rhetorical analysis of one of the book covers we examined on the previous pages, as an example of how you can write such an analysis for understanding.

You'll notice that the writing uses some of the descriptions from the preceding pages; this is one way to develop an analysis: Write down your observations, and then use them to build a more formal analysis (such as one required by a class assignment).

The introduction

The introduction of the essay tells readers something of what the essay is arguing—but only enough to give readers direction and (the writer hopes) curiosity.

The subject of the essay

The writer of this short essay is careful to explain to readers what the explicit subject of the essay is.

The strategy of the essay

Here the writer lists pertinent strategies used by the composer of the text being analyzed.

The conclusion

In the conclusion to the essay, the writer argues for the main strategy used by the composer of the text being analyzed, and (in the last sentences) shows how that strategy connects to the purpose of the text.

I would have thought a book cover made of a single photograph and a few words would give a reader only a bare, literal sense of the book, telling a reader, for example, that "This book is about boxer shorts." The book cover I analyze—designed by Chip Kidd for the book *naked* by David Sedaris—contains such limited elements, and yet it engages potential readers in puzzling out odd emotional relationships and so gets them engaged with the book even before they turn to page one.

The cover of *naked* is composed, at first glance, of a simple photograph of bright white boxer shorts on a shaded blue background. The word "naked"—all in lower-case letters in a straightforward serifed typeface—is at the top, on a white background, partially covered by the photograph. The author's name is in the same typeface on top of the boxer shorts, along with a few words about another book he's published. This combination of elements is informal, straightforward, and balanced, with everything symmetric and centered. Based on such a description, this cover suggests a book that could be mundane and perhaps even boring. But boxer shorts are rarely on book covers, especially so large in proportion to everything else, and to put them together with "naked" presented so informally encourages a reader to wonder where the person is who wore the shorts: Is that person running around naked somewhere?

But there is more to the cover. Kidd has readers wondering about who was wearing those shorts, but his design also suggests an answer might be available. The boxer shorts are printed on a paper jacket that covers about three-quarters of the book. The jacket partially overlaps "naked"; the overlapping, combined with how the paper does not—unlike most book covers—cover the whole book, leads readers to wonder what is under the cover, under the boxers.

In addition to its humor, the cover therefore also offers some interaction and provocation. It asks the audience to expect something under the cover...but what is under the cover is probably unexpected.

Under the cover is an x-ray of a lower torso, a body more naked than we might have expected. Readers are teased by this cover—perhaps made to laugh and perhaps made to question why they were expecting to see something else.

Most book covers show people or objects that give readers a literal sense of what is in the book: A book cover with a dog on a leash is about dog training; a book with a palm tree is about the South Pacific. Kidd has instead used the rhetorical strategy of pathos as his primary strategy: While the arrangement of elements (including the order of seeing the boxer shorts before seeing the bony torso) encourages readers to see the informal relationship between the elements, it is the humor and surprising interaction and discovery that give readers a sense of this book. A reader who looked at this cover and in response thought that this book was a funny but edgy intimate look at a man's life would not be far off. It is possible readers would buy this book—the general purpose of the cover—because they have gotten involved emotionally with that man's life only by picking up the book to look closer.

UNDERSTANDING AND ANALYZING TEXTS