**Introduction**

A rhetorical mode is a strategy—a way or method of presenting a subject—through writing or speech. Instructors have used rhetorical modes to teach writing or public speaking since ancient Greece. Knowing the modes can help us understand the organization—the methodology—of most kinds of writings or other presentations. The basic modes are presented below in alphabetical order.

**Analogy/Metaphor**

Analogy is basically a comparison. Using an analogy tends to be more poetic in style, and the use of an extended analogy demonstrates a writer's ability to see their subject from several different angles. By nature, a metaphor is a comparison, but the appropriate metaphor (or story used as an analogy) demonstrates sophisticated, critical, analytical paper.

A typical Analogy/Metaphor Paper starts with a definition of the metaphor or narration of the analogy. For example, think about writing a paper on poverty: "When I was a child, I used to walk home from school. Every day I walked past the ice cream man, and I was always tempted to stop, but I never had the money." The analogy/metaphor is not necessarily about poverty, but it personalizes your experience with wanting something you can’t have. From there, you can present a multi-dimensional view of your study.

Your paragraph, from there on, will reference back to your analogy/metaphor (called lyricism — pointing back to a singular point of reference), and it will create a strain of investigation which will give your paper coherence and unity.

**Argument**

Argument is one of the most basic forms of human thinking. When you use argument, you rise above the mere offering of a personal opinion precisely because an argument requires supporting reasons, preferably with specific supporting details, to justify the position you are taking. An “argument” is, simply, an educated guess or opinion, not a simple fact. It is something debatable: "Men have walked on the moon" is a fact, but “People will walk on Venus in the next ten years" is an opinion. Anything that reasonably can be debated is an argument.

A typical argument paper often has what is called a Thesis Structure (Click for an Example). As with all the other modes, argument is a thinking pattern or skill that is used in a number of types of college papers in shorter form. You will find it in any sentence, paragraph, or section of a paper in which an opinion is expressed, especially when one or more supporting reasons are given for the opinion.

**Cause and Effect**

"Cause and effect" simply means that you start with a subject (an event, person, or object) and then show the causes (reasons) for it, and/or the effects (results) of it. “Cause” means the reasons why or for something, or the source of something. "Effects" simply are results or outcomes. Cause-and-effect writing shows a chain of connected events, each the logical result of the one before it.

Typically a cause-and-effect paper has an introductory paragraph defining or clarifying the subject itself, and stating the nature of the paper (i.e., that your paper is a cause-and-effect paper); a body of several to many paragraphs; and a brief concluding paragraph. Assume, when you write a cause-and-effect paper, that you are explaining events to someone who may know a little about them but never has heard the entire story of how the events are linked by logical cause and effect. At the end of your cause-and-effect paper, add a final, concluding paragraph. It should summarize, very briefly, the most important cause and effect concerning your subject. And it might offer a final interesting thought or two about the subject.

**Classification**
"Classification" means that a subject—a person, place, event, or object—is identified and broken into parts and sub-parts. This type of paper is slightly more complex than others. For this reason, you might first want to learn to write "Extended Definition," "Comparison/Contrast," and "Description" papers.

For an example of a classification paper, imagine you want to classify a specific student. You might first start by identifying this student by name and briefly defining him or her. Second, you would choose a system by which to classify him: e.g., you could choose a system that would describe his looks, school classes, and after-school activities; or you might choose a biological system and describe him by his physical type, health, blood type, and other biological markings; or, perhaps, you might choose to describe the student by his psychological makeup, his family history, and/or even his medical history. Third, once you have chosen a system, you would then describe the person. As you do so, you would want to show how, in each part of our classification, he is similar to others like him and also how he differs from them—this is the heart of developing lengthy description in a good classification paper, to use comparisons and contrasts with each small element of our classification system.

Whenever you must break down a subject into its separate parts, you are classifying. Classification is almost as basic a way of thinking as are "Cause and Effect" (above) and "Description" (below).

**Comparison-Contrast**

"Comparison/contrast" means to show how subjects are alike and/or different. A simple comparison/contrast paper often has two subjects and describes how they are alike and then how they differ. In academic writing, comparison/contrast writing sometimes is used to show how two related viewpoints—two ideas or opinions—can be similar but different: for example, in the abortion controversy, some people believe that abortions are wrong; others believe that artificial birth control is wrong. These two positions are similar, but they also are different—leading to different arguments and different results at times. Comparison/contrast also can be useful in analyzing an author's argument by comparing it to someone else's argument (yours or another author's), showing points of similarity and points of difference. For example, if an author argues for a constitutional amendment preventing gender discrimination, you could analyze the argument by comparing and contrasting it to the reasons for other constitutional amendments which already exist.

Comparison and contrast both are commonly used in short form in many other types of papers, too. For example, you must use comparison and contrast to define something (see "Extended Definition"; you show what the subject is like; then you show how it differs or contrasts from others like it). You also use comparison anytime you explain that something is "like" something else; likewise, you use contrast whenever you want to show how something is different. Comparison/contrast is quite deeply and naturally imbedded in our everyday thinking and logic.

**Description**

"Description" means "Illustrative detail." A description paper often takes a person or object and then describes that person or thing in great illustrative detail. For example, a description paper about a close friend might describe his or her appearance, her actions, and her personality, both through direct descriptive words—like paintings of her in different situations—and through stories or vignettes showing him in action.

A description paper is organized very simply. You can start with a very short paragraph introducing or defining the subject, or a longer one that offers a particularly striking first description or overall summary. Next, you can write the body in as many or as few paragraphs as you need to fully describe the subject. Organizing these paragraphs according to one or more plans or systems often is helpful. Finally, you can write a concluding paragraph either briefly or at length, depending on whether you want to achieve an abrupt end or to provide some kind of especially strong final description that you have saved for the last.

This rhetorical mode is very common in shorter form, as well. When someone writes a story, for example, whether he or she is a famous story writer or a simple school child, he will use two main rhetorical modes: narration (the giving of a series of events, as above) and description. Even business reports must sometimes use description to provide an accurate and full account of the appearance of something. Description plays an especially important part in the teaching of writing, as writing instructors usually want their students to learn to write in great detail—the more specifics, the better.
Example

"Exemplification" means "the giving of an example." An exemplification paper usually starts with a main idea, belief, or opinion—something abstract—and then gives one extended example or a series of shorter examples to illustrate that main idea. In fact, an exemplification paper is a paper that illustrates an abstract idea. For example, if I wished to write an exemplification paper about "The Opposite Sex—Problems and Pleasures" (as a man or as a woman), there might be two ways I could go about this. One would be, after introducing my general idea, to tell several little stories about—give examples of—how the opposite sex can be both a problem to deal with and a pleasure to be with. The other way I might write the paper (and a stronger, more unified way of doing it) might be to pick out one person of the opposite gender I have dated or lived with and describe how this one person gave me both problems and pleasures in my overall relationship with him or her.

A typical short exemplification paper is written like most of the other rhetorical-modes paper. It usually starts with a single introductory paragraph that briefly defines your subject and states what you will do in the paper—exemplify. Then there are one or two to many paragraphs offering one or more extended examples of your subject. Finally, there is a brief closing paragraph restating what your subject is and offering some kind of final brief, strong example or some other kind of interesting ending. Your audience is anyone who might only have a partial understanding of the subject and to whom an example would be helpful: in fact, you choose your examples partly by deciding what the audience will easily understand.

Definition

An extended definition simply defines a subject in a fuller or more extended—more thorough—way than does a dictionary. Typically an extended definition has a brief introductory paragraph of a few sentences, a body of one or several paragraphs, and a brief concluding paragraph. Assume, when you write an extended definition, that you are defining something for a student or perhaps a foreigner who never has heard the term before.

A simple extended-definition paper usually starts with such simple dictionary-like definitions; then the definition is extended by writing a long body further describing the term. The body paragraph(s) may consist of any or all of the following:

- further description and/or details about the subject
- one or several excellent examples
- a description of the subject in action or use
- a background or history of the subject

The conclusion should simply summarize your subject or say something particularly interesting about it in a final paragraph. Try to make your conclusion relatively short—just several sentences, if possible.

Definition is a rhetorical mode that can be used in something smaller or shorter than a full paper. You can use extended definition for several paragraphs only in a paper of much greater length. You also can add to a paper a one-paragraph definition—like a brief encyclopedia definition. And you can use a short definition, dictionary style, in many types of writing situations that call for just a sentence or two of definition.

Narration

"Narration" or a "narrative" provides details of what happened. It is almost like a list of events in the order that they happened, except that it is written in paragraph form. A narration or narrative doesn't have to show any cause and effect; it only needs to show what happened in the order that it happened.

A typical short narration paper starts with a brief introductory paragraph consisting of two parts. The first is a sentence or two stating the event you are going to narrate; you might even want to include the who, what, where, and when of the event in this part. The second part is a simple statement that the paper you are writing is a narrative of this event. In the body of the narrative, you break the event into several parts—one part per
paragraph. Each paragraph would then further break down the event into sub-events and enough description of
them that your reader will know what you mean. The body may have just a few paragraphs or many, depending
on the length of paper and complexity you want. The conclusion can be very brief: just a final rewording of the
overall event you have narrated, and a final interesting comment or two about it, or perhaps a statement about
how, where, or when this event fits into the larger flow of history around it. Your audience is anyone who knows
little or nothing about the event but can understand it easily once you explain it.

Using the Modes

If you are working with the rhetorical modes, you sometimes can examine and even summarize the
structures of a reading by describing the rhetorical modes used in it. Often, for example, in the introductory
paragraph of a paper—or in the beginning of the body—you might find the rhetorical mode of definition, helping to
define the subject. Often you will find description or exemplification in a longer paragraph, helping to further
describe or give an example of the subject of that paragraph. Occasionally an entire paper might be developed
with just one primary mode, as discussed in this chapter. However, it is much more likely—and extremely
common—to find several of the modes used to develop a paper, especially if it is a college essay or professional
paper. This is because each of the modes represents a form of thinking that is very basic to writing, speaking,
and indeed thinking itself; each can be used in long or short form.

The most common major rhetorical-mode pattern you may find in college readings is argumentation. It is
common because many textbooks and other assignments you will read in college—especially in the humanities,
liberal arts, and social sciences—are arguing a point. Sometimes this point—this argument—is obvious. Often it
is less so, primarily because in these fields, most knowledge is based on speculation—on scholars’ intelligent
guesses—rather than on hard scientific fact. For this reason, a typical textbook chapter (or part of one) or
assigned short essay in these fields is set up as having a main argument and then a series of details helping to
prove it. With this in mind, we might look at the following pattern—or some parts of it—as being somewhat typical
for this kind of essay.

Conclusion

Each rhetorical mode is an excellent device to use for writing a paper. Such writing helps you practice the
pure form of the mode in an extended way. The other types of college papers and as you analyze and argue
about college reading assignments. It is possible to make the modes fun: practice, for example, narration by
telling the blow-by-blow account of an interesting or even silly event in your life; cause and effect by showing how
one part of your life inevitably leads to your doing or participating in another; comparison/contrast by comparing
and contrasting two activities, people, or activities you really like or dislike; etc. However you practice the modes,
your practice will have the serious purpose of helping you understand, use, and find in others these basic
methods of thinking.