

Rhetorical Stases (singular *stasis*)

The *stasis* of an essay is the central kind of question it addresses. The principal advantage of identifying a piece's stasis is to know the range of its question. The advantage of focusing in on a single stasis in one's own writing is that it helps the writer remain focused on the principal question and not feel obliged to answer every other kind of question that comes to mind on the topic. This is not an exhaustive list.

1. Questions of fact or existence (did it happen? did she take the wallet?)
2. Questions of definition (what does "take" mean in this instance? borrow? steal? acquire for safekeeping?)
3. Questions of evaluation (if she stole the wallet, how serious a crime is it?)
4. Questions of cause (why did she take it? are there extenuating circumstances?)
5. Questions of proposal (what should be done about the theft? what will the sentence be?)

In the context of a research project, and using the example of my topic, encounters between King Arthur and famous saints, here are some sample stases the project could address:

1. Fact: Is there a voice against warrior violence in these texts?
2. Definition: Are we talking about protesting warrior violence or protesting war? Protesting violence, or protesting Arthur's unique actions? What could a discourse of non-violence look like in texts about medieval saints' lives?
3. Evaluation: How has ignoring medieval non-violence (assuming it was there) misled us in our understanding of the Middle Ages?
4. Cause: Why have the voices of medieval non-violence been ignored in most kinds of Arthurian literature and in critical commentary?
5. Proposal: If we establish that there were medieval voices protesting warrior violence, what further re-evaluation of the medieval evidence needs to happen?

Two studies done on professional research papers in literary criticism, one in the early 1990s and the other earlier this decade, found that scholars in this discipline mostly write about questions of definition and fact. Other academic disciplines can be expected to specialize in certain kinds of questions as well.

What are the stases of the principal secondary sources you are using in your research project? What is your principal stasis in your research paper?

Adapted from Joanna Wolfe, "A Method for Teaching Invention in the Gateway Literature Course," *Pedagogy* 3 (2003): 399 – 425. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/pedagogy/v003/3.3wolfe.html>

Special Topoi (singular *topos*) in Academic Writing

A rhetorical *topos* in academic writing is a *strategy for argumentation* that is useful in a particular context. You have no doubt been using some of these already; get to know the others to increase your repertoire. The following is not an exhaustive list.

1. Appearance/Reality. Example: *On first glance* the ending of *Peredur* simply makes no sense. However, *if one carefully traces* the theme of family honor, the tale's ending brings about a complex and satisfying resolution.
2. Paradox. A paradox involves two apparent opposites that are actually reconcilable or actually form part of a larger whole. It is a special case of the Appearance/Reality topos.
3. Paradigm. Here one uses a body of knowledge or theory to interpret the text under consideration. Examples: By applying postcolonial theory, we see in *Branwen* a response to Norman domination of Wales and Ireland. By applying mythological analysis, we find that *The Wooing of Étaín* is an instance of the Celtic sovereignty myth and it criticizes the character Echu.
4. Ubiquity. Using this topos one takes up the fact that a certain motif seems to be everywhere present in the primary text. Example: In *Peredur* the hero runs into two of his uncles. The hermit who catechizes him also turns out to be one of his uncles. Unknown to Peredur until the end, most of the key characters are either uncles or children of uncles. Since this relationship is so pervasive in the tale, it must be a key to understanding it.
5. Context/Intention. Here one makes an argument based on a careful analysis of context: where does the text fit into a given background, and how does that background help illuminate a particular point in the text? Example: The law texts of early Ireland help us understand that Étaín isn't commodified by the naming of a bride price; instead, the bride price marks her social equality to the groom, whose degree of social honor is also measured in the same price. Professional critics no longer do much with *intention*, which involves making an argument about the original intent of the author or text.
6. Social Justice. This can be considered a political form of the Appearance/Reality topos; it is often used in conjunction with the evaluation stasis. An argument using the social justice topos analyzes from the point of view of a perceived injustice in the text.
7. Mistaken Critic. Here one argues that the other scholars one has read on the topic have not yet come up with the correct reading. By contrast, the writer of the present essay *has*.

Which of the topoi appear in your draft? What other topoi might be as effective or more effective in deploying your arguments?

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