I have an increasing admiration for the teacher in the country school where we have a third-grade scholar in attendance. She not only undertakes to instruct her charges in all the subjects of the first three grades, but she manages to function quietly and effectively as a guardian of their health, their clothes, their habits, their mothers, and their snowball engagements. She has been doing this sort of Augean task for twenty years, and is both kind and wise. She cooks for the children on the stove that heats the room, and she can cool their passions or warm their soup with equal competence. She conceives their costumes, cleans up their messes, and shares their confidences. My boy already regards his teacher as his great friend, and I think tells her a great deal more than he tells us.

The shift from city school to country school was something we worried about quietly all last summer. I have always rather favored public school over private school, if only because in public school you meet a greater variety of children. This bias of mine, I suspect, is partly an attempt to justify my own past (I never knew anything but public schools) and partly an involuntary defense against getting kicked in the shins by a young ceramicist on his way to the kiln. My wife was unacquainted with public schools, never having been exposed (in her early life) to anything more public than the washroom of Miss Winsor’s. Regardless of our backgrounds, we both knew that the change in schools was something that concerned not us but the scholar himself. We hoped it would work out all right. In New York our son went to a medium-priced private institution with semi-progressive ideas of education, and modern plumbing. He learned fast, kept well, and we were satisfied. It was an electric, colorful, regimented existence with moments of pleasurable pause and giddy incident. The day the Christmas angel fainted and had to be carried out by one of the Wise Men was educational in the highest sense of the term. Our scholar gave imitations of it around the house for weeks afterward, and I doubt if it ever goes completely out of his mind.

His days were rich in formal experience. Wearing overalls and an old sweater (the accepted uniform of the private seminary), he sallied forth at morn accompanied by a nurse or a parent and walked (or was pulled) two blocks to a corner where the school bus made a flag stop. This flashy vehicle was as punctual as death: seeing us waiting at the curb, it would sweep to a halt, open its mouth, suck the boy in, and spring away with an angry growl. It was a good deal like a train picking up a bag of mail. At school the scholar was worked on for six or seven hours by half a dozen teachers and a nurse, and was revived on orange juice in mid-morning. In a cinder court he played games supervised by an athletic instructor, and in a cafeteria he ate lunch worked out by a dietitian. He soon learned to read with gratifying facility and discernment and to make Indian weapons of a semi-deadly nature. Whenever one of his classmates fell low of a fever the news was put on the wires and there were breathless phone calls to physicians, discussing periods of incubation and allied magic.
In the country all one can say is that the situation is different, and somehow more casual. Dressed in corduroys, sweatshirt, and short rubber boots, and carrying a tin dinner pail, our scholar departs at the crack of dawn for the village school, two and a half miles down the road, next to the cemetery. When the road is open and the car will start, he makes the journey by motor, courtesy of his old man. When the snow is deep or the motor is dead or both, he makes it on the hoof. In the afternoons he walks or hitches all or part of the way home in fair weather, gets transported in foul. The schoolhouse is a two-room frame building, bungalow type, shingles stained a burnt brown with weather-resistant stain. It has a chemical toilet in the basement and two teachers above the stairs. One takes the first three grades, the other the fourth, fifth, and sixth. They have little or no time for individual instruction, and no time at all for the esoteric. They teach what they know themselves, just as fast and as hard as they can manage. The pupils sit still at their desks in class, and do their milling around outdoors during recess.

There is no supervised play. They play cops and robbers (only they call it “Jail”) and throw things at one another—snowballs in winter, rose hips in fall. It seems to satisfy them. They also construct darts, pinwheels, and “pick-up-sticks” (jackstraws), and the school itself does a brisk trade in penny candy, which is for sale right in the classroom and which contains “surprises.” The most highly prized surprise is a fake cigarette, made of cardboard, fiendishly lifelike.

The memory of how apprehensive we were at the beginning is still strong. The boy was nervous about the change too. The tension, on that first fair morning in September when we drove him to school, almost blew the windows out of the sedan. And when later we picked him up on the road, wandering along with his little blue lunch-pail, and got his laconic report “All right” in answer to our inquiry about how the day had gone, our relief was vast. Now, after almost a year of it, the only difference we can discover in the two school experiences is that in the country he sleeps better at night—and that problem is more the air than the education. When grilled on the subject of school-in-country vs. school-in-city, he replied that the chief difference is that the day seems to go so much quicker in the country. “Just like lightning,” he reported.
DOING TEXTUAL RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: AN EXAMPLE

A text-based rhetorical analysis considers the issue that is taken up, of course—what the writer has to offer on a given subject to a particular audience. But it also considers, more basically, things that rhetorical advice offers by way of invention, arrangement, style, and delivery. Let me offer an extended example of text-based rhetorical analysis, one that employs the terminologies associated with ancient rhetoric, because it should clarify what I am talking about and should illustrate one approach to rhetorical analysis. The reprint in Appendix A is E. B. White’s (1944) well-known short essay, “Education.” Let us use the terms of classical rhetoric (terms that continue to be very influential in rhetorical studies) to understand it better.

What is the purpose of E. B. White’s essay? (If you haven’t read “Education” before, take time to do so now; that way, you can more easily follow the rest of this analysis.) Is it an argument—a piece of deliberative rhetoric or epideictic rhetoric or forensic rhetoric? Is it meant to influence public policy or to reinforce or form community values or to offer a judgment? White wrote the essay a half century ago, but you probably find it to be interesting and readable still, in part at least because it concerns a perennial American question: What should our schools be like? Is education better carried out in large, fully equipped, but relatively impersonal settings, or in smaller but intensely personal, teacher-dominated schools? Which should count for more: the efficiencies of an educational system that is “progressive” (the word comes from paragraph two), or the personal traits of the individual classroom teacher? In other words, you might easily look at the essay as deliberative in nature. On the other hand, maybe you find the essay to be less deliberative than epideictic; maybe, in other words, you see it as designed to shape values more than to persuade about specific public policy. The essay is a personal one (as opposed to public), after all, in that it is the education of his own son that White is “worried about” and writing about. And yet it is public matter, too. White published it in *Harper’s*, a magazine with a readership wide and influential. *Harper’s* is a magazine that people read for enjoyment too; it accommodates both deliberative and epideictic rhetoric. Or maybe you even consider “Education” to be forensic in nature—to make a judgment between two alternatives, as in a courtroom. After all, the essay is a comparison, and comparisons often are offered to provide a judgment or preference. Does White, in short, have a position on the issue of education? Is he recommending support for one kind of school?
Or maybe it is not an argument at all. At first it might seem that the author takes no sides, that he simply wishes to describe objectively the two alternatives, to record his son’s experiences in each circumstance, and to celebrate each as an expression of national values. He gives equal time to each school, he spends the same amount of space on concrete details about each, and he seems in firm control of his personal biases (“I have always rather favored public schools”). Through his light and comic tone White implies that all will be well for his son—and for our children too—in either circumstance, that the two schools each are to be neither favored nor feared by us. “All one can say is that the situation is different” (paragraph four), not better, in the two places.

Or is it? Many readers—I’m one of them—contend that “Education” is less an objective, neutral appraisal than it is a calculated, deliberative argument that subtly favors the country school and schools like it (with an epideictic undertone concerning the values that we want to sponsor through our education system). To such readers, White’s objective pose is only that—a created pose, an attempt to create a genial, sympathetic, and trustworthy speaker. By caring so obviously for his son (final paragraph), by confessing his biases, and by treating both schools with distance and detachment and reliable detail, White creates effective ethos—that quality of a piece of writing that persuades through the character and trustworthiness of the speaker or writer. By poking gentle humor at just about everything—his son “the scholar”; his wife the prim graduate of Miss Winsor’s private schools; himself “the victim of a young ceramicist”; and, of course, both schools—White makes himself seem enormously sympathetic and trustworthy: fair-minded and unflappable, balanced and detached.

But is this reliable speaker arguing or merely describing? Those who see the essay as a deliberative argument supporting the ways of the country school can point to the emotional aspects of White’s “Education”—to its pathos, in other words. The image of the one-room schoolhouse, for instance, is imprinted in positive terms on the American psyche, and White exploits that image for his argumentative purposes. The “scholar” walks through the snow to get his education; like the schoolhouse itself, he has the self-reliance and weather-resistance to care for himself and to fit into a class with children both younger and older; and he learns a practical curriculum—there is “no time at all for the esoteric”—“just as fast and as hard as he can.” It is all Ben Franklin and “Little House on the Prairie,” Abraham Lincoln and “The Waltons,” isn’t it? And the teacher who presides over the country school appeals to the reader’s emotions as only The Ideal Mother can (at least the “ideal mother” as some would stereotype her). This teacher—mother is not only “a guardian of their health, their clothes, their habits ... and their snowball engagements,” but “she has been doing this sort of Augean task for twenty years, and is both kind and wise. She cooks for the children on the stove that heats the room, and she can cool their passions or warm their soup with equal competence.”
No such individual Ideal Mother presides over the city school. Instead, that school is supervised by a staff of Educational Professionals—a bus driver, half a dozen anonymous teachers, a nurse, an athletic instructor, dietitians. The school itself is institutional, regimented, professionalized. There the scholar is "worked on," "supervised," "pulled." Like the one-room schoolhouse, the regimented institution is ingrained in the American psyche and in popular culture. But in this case **the emotional appeal is negative**, for The System is something that Americans instinctively resist. True, the city school is no prison; and true, the scholar in this school learns "to read with a gratifying discernment." But the accomplishments remain rather abstract. Faced with such an education, such a school, no wonder the students literally become ill. At least that is the implication of the end of paragraph three, where the description of the city school is concluded with an account of the networks of professional physicians that discuss diseases which never seem to appear in the country schools.

For all these reasons many readers see "Education" as an argument against the city school (and its "progressive" education) and an endorsement of the country one (and its "basics"). They see the essay as a comparison with an aim like most comparison essays: to show a preference. The evaluative aim is carried out by reference to specific criteria, namely that schools are better if they are less structured and if they make students want to attend (because motivated students learn better); a structured, supervised curriculum and facilities are inferior to a personalized, unstructured environment that makes students love school. Days at the country school pass "just like lightning"; to attend the country school the boy is literally willing to walk through snowdrifts, while to get to the city school he must be escorted to the bus stop—or be "pulled" to classes. The country school is full of "surprises" and "individual instruction," while the city school is full of supervision; there are no surprises in the "progressive" school. In a real sense, therefore, White persuades not only by the force of his personality or through emotional appeals (pathos) but also through hard evidence, or logos. "Education" amounts to an **argument by example** wherein the single case—the boy scholar—stands for many such cases. This case study persuades like other case studies: by being presented as representative. White creates through his unnamed son, who is described as typical in every way, a representative example that stands for the education of Everychild. The particular **details** provided in the essay are not mere "concrete description" but hard evidence summoned to support White's implicit thesis. The logic of the piece seems to go something like this: "Country schools are a bit superior to city ones because they generally make up for what they lack in facilities with a more personal, less authoritarian atmosphere that children readily respond to."
E. B. White, then, wins his reader’s assent by means of ethos, pathos, and logos. But the country-school approach is also reinforced by the essay’s arrangement, or dispositio. Notice, for example, that the essay begins and ends with favorable accounts of the country school. In other words, the emphatic first and final positions of the essay are reserved for the virtues of country schools, while the account of the city school is buried in the unemphatic middle of the essay. The article could easily have begun with the second paragraph (wouldn’t sentence two of paragraph two have made a successful opener?); but such a strategy would have promoted the value of the city school. By choosing to add the loving vignette of the Ideal Teacher in his opening paragraph, White disposes his readers to favor country schools from the very start. Notice too that the comparison of the two schools in the body of “Education” proceeds from city to country. Again, it didn’t have to be so; White could have discussed the country school first, or he could have gone back and forth from city to country more often (adopting what some handbooks call an “alternating” method of comparison as opposed to the “divided” pattern that White actually did use). By choosing to deal first with the city school, all in one lump, and then to present the country school in another lump, White furthered his persuasive aim. After all, most writers of comparisons usually move from inferior to superior, from “this one is good” to “but this other one is even better,” rather than vice versa. So when White opts to deal first with the city schools, he subtly reinforces his persuasive end through very indirect means.

A rhetorical analysis of “Education” that uses classical concepts must also consider style, or elocutio, those sentence and word choices that are sometimes equated with the style of a particular essay or author. Like most rhetoricians, I personally resist the idea that “style is the person”—that style is something inherent in a writer, that it amounts to a sort of genetic code or set of fingerprints that are idiosyncratic to each person, that it is possible to speak generically of Joan Didion’s style or Martin Luther King’s style or E. B. White’s style. It has always seemed to rhetoricians more appropriate to think of style as characteristic of a particular occasion for writing, as something that is as appropriate to reader and subject and genre as it is to a particular author. In other words, stylistic analysis is often highly contextual, as opposed to textual: Words and sentences are typically chosen in response to rhetorical circumstances, and those words and sentences change as the occasion changes. If it is sometimes possible to characterize E. B. White’s style or King’s style or Faulkner’s style in general (and I’m not even sure of that), then it is so only with respect to certain kinds of writing that they did again and again. For when those writers found themselves writing outside Harper’s or The New Yorker (in White’s case) or outside of fiction (in Hemingway’s), they did indeed adopt different stylistic choices. It is probably wiser to focus not on the idiosyncrasies associated with a Didion or a King or a Faulkner or an E. B. White, but on the particular word and sentence choices at work in a particular rhetorical situation.
Nevertheless, textual analysis of style is still quite possible. White's sentences are certainly describable. They move in conventional ways—from subjects and verbs to objects and modifiers. There are absolutely no sentence inversions (i.e., violations of the normal subject/verb/object order—what classical rhetoricians called anastrophe), few distracting interrupters (what classical rhetoricians called parenthesis; the parentheses and the "I suspect" in that one long sentence in paragraph two are exceptions), and few lengthy opening sentence modifiers that keep readers too long from subjects and verbs. Not only that, the sentences are simple and unpretentious in another sense: White comparatively rarely uses subordinate (or modifying) clauses—clauses beginning with "who" or "although" or "that" or because" or the like (what the ancients called hypotaxis). I count only two such modifying (or dependent) clauses in the first and third paragraphs, for instance, and just five in the second; if you don't think that is a low number, compare it to a 600-word sample of your own prose. When White does add length to a sentence, he does it not by adding complex clauses that modify other clauses, but by adding independent clauses (ones that begin with and" or "but"—what classical rhetoricians called parataxis) and by adding modifiers and phrases in parallel series. Some examples? The teacher is a guardian “of their health, their clothes, their habits, their mothers, and their snowball engagements”; the boy “learned fast, kept well, and we were satisfied”; the bus “would sweep to a halt, open its mouth, suck the boy in, and spring away.” And so forth. The “ands” make White’s essay informal and conversational, never remote or scholarly.

White uses relatively simple sentence patterns in “Education,” then, but his prose is still anything but simple. Some of his sentences are beautifully parallel: “she can cool their passions or warm their soup”; “she conceives their costumes, cleans up their noses, and shares their confidences”; “in a tennis court he played games supervised by an athletic instructor, and in a cafeteria he ate lunch worked out by a dietitian”; “when the snow is deep or the motor is dead”; “rose hips in fall, snowballs in winter.” These precise, mirror-image parallel structures are known as isocolons to rhetoricians. White delights in them and in the artful informality they create. He uses parallelisms and relentless coordination—“and” after “and” after “and”—to make his prose accessible to a large audience of appreciative readers. And he uses those lists of specific items in parallel series to give his writing its remarkably concrete, remarkably vivid quality.
That brings us to White’s word choices. They too contribute to White’s purposes. Remember the sense of detachment and generosity in White’s urrative voice, the ethos of involvement and detachment apparent in the reaker? In large measure that is the result of White’s word choices. For inance, White has the ability to attach mock-heroic terminology to his desriptions so that he comes across as balanced and wise, as someone who doesn’t take himself or his world too seriously. The boy is a “scholar” who allied forth” on a “journey” to school or to “make Indian weapons of a mi-deadly nature.” The gentle hyperbole and irony (to use more terms om classical rhetoric) fit in well with the classical allusion inherent in the ord “Augean” (one of Hercules’ labors was to clean the Augean stables): ere is a sophistication and worldly wisdom in the speaker’s voice that alifies him to speak on this subject. And remember the discussion of hether White’s aim was purely descriptive or more argumentative in char- ter? White’s metaphors underscore his argumentative aim: The city hool bus “was as punctual as death,” a sort of macabre monster that “would sweep to a halt, open its mouth, suck the boy in, and spring away with an angry growl”; or it is “like a train picking up a bag of mail.” At the country school, by contrast, the day passes “just like lightning.” If the metaphors do not provide enough evidence of White’s persuasive aim (see Eubanks, chap. 2, for more on metaphor and argument), consider the connotations of words—their emotional charges, that is—that are associated with the city school: “regimented,” “supervised,” “worked on,” “uniforms,” “fevers.” And then compare these with the connotation of some words White associates with the country school: “surprises,” a “bungalow,” “weather-resistant,” “individual instruction,” “guardian,” and so forth.

This analysis by no means exhausts the full measure of rhetorical sophistication that E. B. White brings to the composition of “Education.” You may have noticed other tactics at work, or you might disagree with some of the generalizations presented here. And the use of terms from an approach to rhetoric outside classical rhetoric would have yielded different results. But the purpose of this discussion is not to detail every aspect of the rhetoric of White’s “Education.” It is merely to illustrate a method of rhetorical analysis, or critical reading, that you might employ yourself. The point has been to offer a method for permitting someone to read not just for what is said—although this is crucial—but for how it is said as well. For reading is as “rhetorical” an activity as writing. It depends on an appreciation of how writer, subject, and reader are all negotiated through a particular document. The precise terms of this negotiation are often uncovered by means of contextual analysis.