

WRITING THE ANALYTICAL ESSAY

One of the most frequently assigned essays in English 1101 and 1102 is the **analytical essay**. It can be one of the most challenging essays to write, but mastering its technique is very important. That is because students who advance in almost every academic field will be asked to write with an analytical focus.

What is an analytical essay?

The key to understanding its nature is in the word "analyze." To "analyze" the content of a poem, for example, one must break it into its components or parts in order to get a full understanding of its meaning. This may mean investigating the poem's structure, its language, its symbolism, and even its historical context. All this will help you as the writer and your reader understand what the poet was trying to say. Your analysis may not be identical to someone else's idea of the poem, but, if your investigation is logical, believable, and well defended, it will be well received.

What an analytical essay is not

An analytical essay is not a summary of the work. If you find yourself paraphrasing parts of the object of your investigation (an event, a piece of art, a work of literature) or "retelling the story," then you are not writing an analytical essay.

There is another pitfall that writers new to this type of essay may encounter. Let's return to the analysis of that poem. If you are merely telling "what" the poem means to you, you are falling short of the goal.

The true analytical essay

A true analytical essay explores "how" the poem emerges with a particular meaning. This "how" is investigated by explaining the relationship of the parts of the poem. The reader is shown how the meaning of the poem emerges from this relationship of parts. The analytical essay then helps the reader understand the relationship of the parts of the work being examined and how that relationship reveals the meaning of that work.

How do I start the analytical essay?

- If you have a choice, always choose to investigate something that inspires, fascinates, or speaks to you. You do not have to fully understand it, but if you are pulled by your interest into the work, you will be more motivated to figure out how the puzzle fits together.
- Do more than one thorough reading of the work. On the second reading, jot down ideas that occur to you in the margins. Don't be afraid to write ideas that seem to point to some aspect of the work that stand out or recur.

- Read background information on the author, on the historical context of the work, and the genre.
- Write down each of your ideas that seem to point to some aspect of the work that has a bearing on its overall impact. Eliminate any that seem weak after additional scrutiny.

The Analytical Essay Introduction

The purpose of your essay's introduction is to give a brief explanation of your topic and to give your paper direction that will be developed in the body.

You should:

- Include key information about the work (name, author, publication and so on) in the first sentences.
- Lead logically into your reaction to the work ending in a claim or assertion which is **your thesis statement**. Your thesis statement should contain a specific and well articulated point of view that will be defended in the paper.
- Include **direction sentences** which will explain to the reader how you will defend and support your point of view by explaining the parts of the work and their relationship to the whole work.
- The thesis should be long enough to give the reader confidence that he/she knows where your argument is going. This may be eight to ten sentences.

The Body of the Analytical Essay

The claims that you have presented in your thesis will be argued in the body of the paper. Make an outline using your direction sentences to be sure the body develops all the points mentioned in the introduction.

- Take each point mentioned in your directional sentences and develop it into a topic sentence. This topic sentence will be the main idea around which you will build your body paragraph.
- Use supporting points, at least four or five, to underscore your main idea in this paragraph. Use quotes and brief paraphrasing from the work or facts from outside sources to further support your point of view. Use proper MLA or APA documentation.
- Conclude with a sentence that wraps up the discussion of this point and do not return to discuss it again until your conclusion.

The Conclusion of the Analytical Essay

You've made your arguments and now you want to tie them to your thesis. The purpose of a conclusion is to stress the correctness of the positions you have taken and to summarize your arguments as you affirm the conclusions you have drawn from your analysis.

- Always express your points in different words than you have used earlier.
- Be sure your conclusion gives the reader a sense of finality and completeness.
- Leave the reader with a clear picture in his/her mind

Writing the analytical essay is challenging, but it can be one of the most rewarding forms of writing to master. It demands that the writer look deeply into the relationships between the parts of a work and decide how those relationships bring meaning to the entire piece.

(Prepared by Dava Tobey, CFCC Writing Specialist)