

Analytical and Critical Writing

Analytical and critical writing are common types of writing in college, and most professors will expect you to respond to their prompts with in-depth responses. While explaining evidence and stating your opinions is helpful, it doesn't usually cover the entire prompt. This handout will define and explain the terms "analytical" and "critical" in the academic sense and will also walk you through how to approach and respond to these writing assignments.

Defining Analytical

In the context of academia, analytical writing is the evaluation of writing elements, structure, and reasoning. This type of writing is important because it thoroughly explains aspects of the topic, article, or claim. Therefore, analytical writing is necessary when responding to or evaluating other articles and readings, but it can also be used when explaining large abstract concepts or complicated topics.

Brentson states in his article from *Ocean Ecosystems* that "plastic pollutants in the ocean have caused a 26% increase in death rates among clownfish due to the poisonous toxins from ingesting small plastics" (Brentson). Here, Brentson not only suggests that plastics are harming clownfish, but that their increased death rates are directly correlated to plastic toxins. Additionally, Jones' article highlights the contributions of sea turtles to marine ecosystems considering their wide diet. Due to their significant impact, their increased death rate is alarming. Jones explains that "58% of sea turtle deaths are caused by consuming plastic toxins or strangulation by plastic waste" (Jones). Again, Jones' article demonstrates that plastic is directly harming marine life and negatively impacting the functionality of marine ecosystems.

In this example, the writer evaluated the quotes and sources, adequately explained the significance of the quotes, and finally, explored the overall impact of these quotes in relation to their topic and/or thesis.

Essentially, analysis and "analytical" responses and writing, focus on three things: evaluation, explanation, and exploration.

Evaluation

Evaluation is when you review the given texts and evaluate how efficient and effective the argument is. This can be done by including phrases like "the author adequately," "the author effectively," and so on. Phrases like this demonstrate that you've read the content and have evaluated it.

Explanation

Explaining the situation helps the reader understand the significance of the quote or topic. By including phrases such as “this quote demonstrates” or “this passage displays,” you are showing your interpretation of the prompt. Additionally, you are explaining how this quote or topic relates to your main point.

Exploration

This part of analysis requires you to discuss how this text is significant to the overall issue or topic at hand. This would mean that you’re explaining your evidence and analysis, but also showing how your information or findings are important in the larger context of the topic.

Defining Analysis versus Summary

Keep in mind that analytical writing does not mean to summarize. Think of analysis as evaluation and commentary on a research article whereas a summary dives into every detail of the research article and simply notes what the article says (without any evaluation of it).

Sample Analysis

Brentson’s article is compelling, and it highlights some of the significant issues that have impacted ocean ecosystems. He states that “disposal and usage of plastics” is one of the main issues impacting ocean ecosystems, which displays how significant of an issue plastics are to the environment.

Sample Summary

Brentson’s article discussed the significant impacts of climate change, including how waste management systems, plastics, and chemical usage affect ocean ecosystems. The article explains how waste management systems create toxic chemicals and release toxins in the air, which eventually channel back to the ocean. Additionally, the high use and disposal of plastics adds an immense number of waste and harmful products in the ocean. Lastly, the use of toxic chemicals in cleaning products and machinery pollutes the air, which Brentson mentions harms other parts of the ecosystem. Ultimately, these toxins travel to ocean ecosystems and decrease survival rates and reproduction rates of various fish species.

Here you can see that the summary provides an overview of every part of the article, but it is simply a factual restatement of Brentson’s points. No evaluative statements are included. However, the analysis example highlights just what is significant to the writer for them to tie their evidence to their main point, and it also provides some evaluation of Brentson’s work.

Defining Critical

Critical writing is similar to analytical writing in that it evaluates and analyzes other writing. However, critical writing goes beyond analysis by also developing an argument. Critical writing is often used for evaluating the efficacy and quality of multiple sources, such as literature reviews and critical responses.

Brentson’s article on marine ecosystems provides an overview of the many significant issues that are impacting marine life. His article most importantly focuses on the issue with toxic plastics, but it also evaluates waste management systems and chemical usage. While Brentson’s article doesn’t discuss the impact of water crafts and vehicles on marine life, Smith’s article does highlight these issues and describes the sonar-related consequences of large vehicles like cruise ships and large cargo ships.

This example shows how the writer evaluated and commented on the sources, but then argued that one source provided more information on a topic. This claim demonstrates how the writer has not only read the articles at hand, but they have also critically reviewed the connections between research and information.

Critical writing shares some features of analytical writing, but it will have a different structure.

Evaluation

Evaluation is when you review the given texts and evaluate how efficient and effective the argument is. This can be done by including phrases like “the author adequately,” “the author effectively,” and so on. Phrases like this demonstrate that you’ve read the content and have evaluated it.

Commentary

Commentary is when the writer comments on the content of the quote or topic. These comments can be argumentative or opinionated but is usually still written in the third-person voice. These statements may include “While this quote does this, it doesn’t explain/describe this” or “this research effectively comments on this topic, but lacks a full explanation of this.” Commentary can also include a discussion of positives and negatives and impacts of the topic or work.

Argumentation

Commentary becomes argumentation when you elaborate on the significance of the missing information, gaps in information, or importance of the information present. You can also begin to argue your own stance on the given topic/issue. Argumentative phrases may include “this evidence portrays the significance of this larger issue by doing/explaining/revealing this.”

Approaching and Responding Activity

Below are some examples of assignment descriptions and explanations of what steps would be helpful to take when responding to them. Based on the above descriptions, you'll need to combine aspects of critical and analytical writing depending on the assignment.

Critical Analysis Assignment

Instructions

(The professor explains that the student will re-read some content for the essay. For the purpose of this activity, this portion has been removed.)

Write a Critique Essay (3-4 pages, approx. 1000 words) of the chapter, following these steps:

Step 1: Choose a rhetorical situation for your assignment, and write it at the top of your document. (Note: Please choose a rhetorical situation for this assignment that is a realistic situation you might encounter in your future academic and/or professional life!)

Step 2: Then, write a Critique Essay (3-4 pages, approx. 1000 words) of the article that reflects your rhetorical situation (e.g., uses rhetorical, organizational, and/or linguistic features that appeal to your audience) and includes the following sections.

An introduction paragraph that

- a) introduces the topic and rhetorical situation of the article;
- b) includes a thesis statement that states the author's purpose, whether or not they were successful in achieving it, and how/why (i.e., the specific rhetorical features and/or kind of evidence they used).

Summary paragraph(s) that

- a) paraphrases the main ideas of the chapter (use your summary assignment here!);
- b) uses reporting/signal verbs and phrases, transitions, quotations, and in-text citations (APA or MLA style).

Evaluation paragraph(s) that

- a) evaluates the quality of the evidence and/or rhetorical features used (use your evaluation assignment here!);

b) uses evaluative language, transitions, quotations, and in-text citations (APA or MLA style).

A conclusion paragraph that

a) restates the thesis statement from the introduction;

b) points to directions for future action or research needed.

(Levesque, Raina. “Critical Analysis Essay.” English 1A. San Jose State University, San Jose, CA, Fall 2023.)

1. Notice the words “rhetorical situation,” “paraphrases,” “evaluates,” and “evidence.” Even without the name of the assignment description, some of the key words in the prompt indicate that you'll be using critical and analytical writing.
2. This prompt graciously provides a clear structure of how to go about writing this paper. By following these steps and then keeping in mind those key action words, this structure should guide your writing.

Your turn! Try responding to this prompt, keeping in mind the previously stated tips and incorporating information from this handout.

Rhetorical Analysis Assignment

This essay should demonstrate your knowledge of the rhetorical tools, techniques, and appeals that we’ve been reviewing in class. As we’ve discussed, by examining the rhetoric of different writings and media, we are able to recognize more layers of information and better understand what we are reading. For this essay in particular, you will be analyzing an article or piece of media from the selection provided in-class.

In this essay, you will analyze your chosen article or media and explain how the author/artist has successfully communicated their message. To start, your essay should touch on the purpose of this article or media and then expand on the discussion of the rhetorical situation. Your essay should elaborate on the use of rhetorical tools, devices, and appeals.

For this essay, you will also need at least one other source that you use to support your analysis. This source **MUST** be approved by me. It can be an article on a related topic, a piece of art/media from an artist commenting on a similar theme, or a blog post that discusses the credibility of the author. You will use this source to support your work and further your rhetorical analysis of your chosen article/art/media.

Logistical Requirements

>> Your other source **MUST** be approved by me.

>> Essays should follow MLA guidelines. This includes a “Works Cited” page at the end of

the essay. Please use Ariel or Times New Roman in 10pt-12pt font, single spaced with half inch indentations. Please also include the standard MLA header that includes your name, class, professor name, and date. If you would prefer to use another formatting style, please let me know beforehand.

>> Should be approximately 1000-1500 words in length. The essay length may depend on your topic and resources.

>> Have a clear and cohesive structure and organization. This includes having a thesis statement with multiple topics that you touch on throughout the essay.

(La Framboise, Lana. "Rhetorical Analysis Essay." English 1A. San Jose State University, San Jose, CA, Fall 2023.)

1. Notice the words "analyze," "explain," "rhetorical situation," and "support." Even without the name of the assignment description, some of the key words in the prompt indicate that you'll be using analytical writing.
2. After reviewing the prompt and the action words, write out what each part of your paper is going to do.
 - a. Based on the words "explain" and "analyze," your thesis will briefly explain the material you're analyzing and then mention why this is significant.
 - b. You'll need to explain the rhetorical situation throughout your paper and then explain how you're using evidence to support your claims.
 - c. You still need to analyze though too, so make sure each time you provide a quote that you also give a sentence that explains the significance of your claim.
 - d. An extra source is also mentioned. Consider the words "support" and "further analysis." You will want to analyze this source as a piece of support for your explanations. This may also mean exploring the connections between information.

Your turn! Try responding to this prompt, keeping in mind the previously stated tips and incorporating information from this handout.