

ANALYZING TEXTS

WHAT IS ANALYSIS?

An analysis is a kind of argument in which you closely examine the different elements of a text—a piece of writing, work of art, advertisement, speech, image, etc. When you analyze a text, you will examine how different elements or features work together and what effect these have on their intended audience. Your goal may be to show the various features of a text or you might need to convince readers to agree with your perspective about whatever you are analyzing.

THE PROCESS OF ANALYSIS

Take a close look

After you select a text to analyze, think about its components like puzzle pieces. Ask questions that help you look more deeply into your subject or topic. Your answers to these questions will become the **claims** (statements which must be supported by evidence) that you make in your analysis essay.

When analyzing a speech, an essay, or another piece of writing, describe the writer's/speaker's purpose, the response they want from their audience, and what techniques they use to achieve their goal. Some questions you might ask include the following:

- What seems to be the text's purpose?
- What strategies does the writer/speaker employ to convey their central purpose and achieve a particular effect on readers?
- How does the content, style, tone, etc. of the text seem to affect its audience?
- Do you think the writing is effective in achieving its purpose? Why or why not?

Consider what response the writer or speaker wants to elicit in their audience. Make sure to explain why you think this is the case. For example, it may be that certain language is intended to elicit an emotional response. The writer might intend to make readers feel sympathetic, angry, fearful, or inspired to act.

Examine specific components, such as

- The organization of ideas
- The type of language or images used (descriptive, blunt, metaphoric, etc.)
- The forms of evidence provided (personal experience, references to outside sources, statistics, interviews, etc.)
- Particular phrases or choice of words
- The introduction and conclusion
- The writer's tone of voice

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WHEN WRITING AN ANALYSIS ESSAY

Write a clear thesis statement

If you are tasked with writing an essay in which your main purpose is to analyze a text, you will need to have a clear thesis statement. The thesis statement is where you present the central argument that you intend to make about your subject. (See The Writing Center's Thesis Statements handout for more details.)

When writing an analysis of a speech or an essay, you might make an argument in the thesis statement about what strategies the writer/speaker uses to create their central meaning and what effect these have on the audience.

Use specific examples to support your thesis

Support your thesis by making specific claims about each of the elements or components of the text that you chose to focus on.

In an analysis of a text, use features, such as quotations, paraphrases, screenshots of images, and specific references to the original text to support the claims that you make about each component. This evidence from the original text can also be used to show how the writer uses techniques such as organization of ideas, emotional appeals, and evidence (personal stories, statistics, quotes or references to other sources, etc.) to convey their message(s). Describe how each feature you reference helps develop your point.

For example, an analysis of "The Gettysburg Address" by Abraham Lincoln might quote specific instances of patriotic language to support a thesis about how Lincoln aims to inspire his audience to keep up their efforts in the Civil War, and to end slavery.

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