

# Analysis Essay Notes



## Overview of Your Process

1. Read the prompt carefully, circling key phrases and requirements.
2. Read the piece carefully, circling any interesting language (figurative elements, interesting diction, rhetorical devices, etc.) as you read. Try to pay attention to ideas and language that gets repeated throughout the piece.
3. Discern the author's purpose. What does she intend to accomplish in her piece?
4. Develop your organizational approach. Typically, each piece will naturally divide into 2, 3, or 4 body paragraphs.
5. Write a short introduction with a clear thesis statement. Intros are probably the least important part of a rhetorical analysis, but the thesis statement is crucial.
6. Write like the wind blows, weaving in evidence and text to support your arguments.

## Read the Prompt Closely and Carefully

- Make sure to look for the specific requirements of the prompt. Circle or underline them before you read the actual passage. If a prompt demands specific analysis of a particular device or strategy, you must do it. If it suggests a particular device, I recommend writing about that device.

## Write an Argument

- It's critical to remember that the analysis essays are still arguments. While your primary purpose is to demonstrate understanding of the author's rhetorical choices, your take is an argument, and your thesis and topic sentences should reflect that approach.
- Your purpose will never been to criticize the rhetorical style of the author. You may hate the piece; you may find it incredibly boring, but no one cares about that.

## Thesis Statement

- The thesis statement needs to be a clear statement of the author's purpose in the piece. It is an ARGUMENT.
- Don't merely restate the prompt, but answer the question it asks, with clear, direct language.
- You do not need to include devices, unless they are DOMINANT elements.

## Sample Thesis Statement

*Sanders critiques the very American myth of migration, arguing that the impulse to constantly move to new places, rather than embracing the homes we have, destroys both the physical environment and our sense of home.*

## Use the Natural Divisions of the Piece to Create Your Structure

- Have a clear structure. I would argue that 97.4% of the time the easiest approach will be to divide your essay based on the structure of the piece. Find its natural divisions and write your essay in those chunks.
- Common divisions include shifts in narrative, from cause to effect, in tone, in point of view/purpose, and in subject.
- We'll also discuss other organizational structures.

## Topic Sentences in Analysis Essays

1. The structure looks like this for analysis sentence topic sentences [TRANSITION] [AUTHOR NAME] [STRONG VERB] [PARENTHETICAL CITATION OF STRUCTURE] [SUBJECT/PURPOSE]
2. When you read the piece, look for logical places to make your divisions. In order, subject, tone, and chronology are the best places to look for division.
3. You DO NOT need to include specific devices in the topic sentences. In fact, unless they are dominant devices that you intend to discuss exclusively, don't list them.
4. You want to make the author of the piece the subject of the sentence, to stay in ACTIVE VOICE.
5. Note (parenthetically) the structural division you have chosen.
6. Keep it simple and clear. The body of the paragraph is where the intricate analysis takes place. It is an ARGUMENT.

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## Sample Topic Sentences

- Updike opens (paragraphs 1-2) with a depiction of the crowd at a baseball game on Opening Day, who are both nostalgic about the season past and nervously optimistic about the one to come.
- Next, Sanders further develops his argument (paragraph 3) against migration by suggesting it harms both the physical and cultural environment of a region.

## Focus on Purpose

- Assume that the author did everything in the piece deliberately.
- Effectively answering the analysis essay depends on moving past summary of what the author said. Your goal should be to move towards **analysis of her purpose**. As you are writing, two questions should always be on your mind and in your paper:
  - How does the author use language/strategies/devices to convey meaning?
  - Why does she make the particular choices she does?
- You should never focus on telling what the piece did, but rather why the author chose the language that she did.
- Don't ever say the effect of something is to catch the reader's attention. You can say that syntax affects the pacing of the piece, only if pacing directly affects how the message is presented.

## Use "Kernels" of Text" for Textual Support

- When you use specific text from the passage (and you should), resist the temptation to quote full sentences. Instead, use brief nuggets of text (properly embedded) inside your analytical sentences. A typical effective kernel of text is between 3-5 words, although they can be shorter.
- Embed the kernels of text inside sentences; don't ever drop them into a paragraph without introductory elements.

## Focus on Analysis of Details from the Passage

Use specific details to show the reader how smart you are, or to give the illusion of your intelligence. :) General, surface essays do not score as well. Details are the proof for your claims, and you can't leave them out.

- As good as detail analysis is, don't get carried away on any one particular detail. It's easy to slip into spending a whole paragraph on one detail--but that will not prove that you understand the whole passage. A 2-3 sentence limit on any one particular detail is a good guideline.
- You can combine details to give your analysis more depth. If two examples have similar function, including both, though you only have time to analyze one, will give your analysis more power.
- Avoid repeating the same kind of commentary for different pieces of evidence. If the same comment applies to several items, consider using them in "key quotes" and group them together.

## Writing about Tone is Delightful

- Remember, tone is the author's point of view towards his/her subject.
- Tone is often one of the easiest things to write about, because it will provide a tool for assessing a paragraph or section of the piece.
- When writing about tone, don't forget the **WILDS Model**. (Word choice, imagery, language, detail, syntax)

## Offer an Interesting Conclusion

Avoid the temptation to just summarize or restate your thesis. More interesting approaches include a) bookending the anecdote from the introduction, b) raising a thoughtful question, c) offering a future implication, or d) contextualizing the issue with a comparison to a current event.