

What does it mean to analyze an argument?



Analysis

Chapter 5 of the course textbook is titled “Writing an Analysis of an Argument.” This is what you will do for Essay 1.

As you can see from the chapter’s different categories of analysis, there a multitude of elements to analyze in any piece of writing.

For this essay, after writing a summary of the article or essay you are examining, you should turn your attention to the analysis of the piece. When analyzing you will examine the author’s thesis, persona, methods, claims, support, and evidence offered.

This presentation will offer more explanation of analysis and its place in writing and arguing.

Analyzing Tone in Writing

- Look for tone and nuance. When you are reading, annotate the text by *responding* to not only *what* is written but *how* it is written.
- Here, we can see the power of **tone**.
- Example 1: President Bush continues to defend the war in Iraq despite the considerable cost to stabilize that country and region.
- Example 2: Bush's stupid war drags on, costing unhappy taxpayers billions of dollars and stealing American and Iraqi lives when it is impossible to bring any calm to that country and region.
- How is **tone** determined in writing? Answer: By the **WORDS**: *diction determines tone*.

Attitude and Tone in Writing

- We can describe a writer's attitude toward the subject as positive, negative, or (rarely) neutral. Attitude is the writer's position on, or feelings about, his or her subject.
- Along with the words that are used, the way that writer's attitude is expressed—the voice we hear and the feelings conveyed through that voice—is also the writer's *tone*.
- If a writer is negative toward a subject, we might describe that tone as angry, mocking, sarcastic, peevish, or sad.
- If a writer is positive toward a subject, we might describe that tone as admiring, jovial, light, or enthusiastic.

Claims and Support in Arguments

- When looking at the logic of the argument you are analyzing, be sure to note what the major claims are check the support for those claims.
- For example, if a writer argues that “All English teachers are lazy,” there should be some evidence to back up such a statement. Whenever a major claim is offered, there should always be some form of evidence to back it up; for example, such evidence could come in the form of statistics or surveys, a factual example, historical data, or an interview from a reliable source.

Rhetorical Appeals in Arguments

- When examining an argument, check to see which rhetorical appeals are used.
- Is the writer using reason (logos), for instance, with statistics, the testimony of authorities, and personal experience?
- Is the writer using the emotions of the reader (pathos), for instance, by appealing to our sympathy or sense of obligation?
- Is the writer using their official authority or title (ethos), for instance, to gain our trust and respect?

Fallacies in Arguments

- Many arguments, no matter how well written or convincing they might appear, have gaping fallacies that muddy the validity of their arguments. When you encounter a text (visual or written) that is trying to convince you of something, always check for fallacies.
- The most common fallacy is the **hasty generalization fallacy**, which is essentially any instance of over-generalizing. The following is an example of this fallacy:

A life in politics leads many to excessive drinking because in the last six months, five members of Congress have either noted their alcoholism or been arrested on DUI charges.

(This is an example of a **hasty generalization** because five is not a large enough sample from which to generalize about *many*.)

The “Are You Convinced” Factor

- Every piece of writing serves a specific purpose. Sometimes writing can teach and inform us; other times, the writing is simply trying to delight and entertain us; and last, there is the writing that aims to convince and persuade us. The last category is the style essay you will be summarizing and analyzing for Essay 2.
- After reading an argumentative essay, the most important question to ask yourself is this: “Are you convinced?”
- Does the writer make a strong case about the subject at hand? Did you find yourself agreeing with some elements of the essay? If the answer is yes, then the writer has mostly succeeded with their goal, which is to convince you.