

# English Analytical Essay

## Writing Guide

- Analytical essays are a very broad topic and comprise many different questions and prompts, as well as differing from subject to subject.
- There is no one way to go about them, however there are common threads between each analytical essay.
- This is particularly true for analytical essays regarding textual fiction and other story-based media, as can be seen in many Arts courses.

### ENGLISH COURSE ANALYTICAL ESSAY (COMMENTARY)

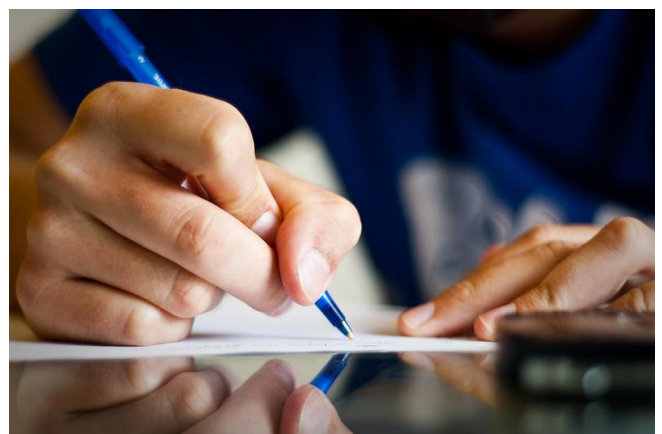
- Requires a writer to show knowledge, familiarity, and an academic appreciation for a piece of writing or other media.

### What does the text (or other medium) do? What are its functions? Does it try to...

- Show something (recurring imagery, motifs, etc.);
- Convey a message (themes, general goal, etc.);
- Set a particular environmental scene (atmosphere, setting, etc.);
- Develop characters (characterization);
- Construct some form of symbolism;
- Comparing or contrast two textual elements; or something else?

### How does the text (or other medium) achieve this? Does it use...

- Choice of particular words (diction);
- Singular imagery and motifs;
- Actions within the story (characters, events, etc.);
- How the text is sequenced, stylized, or physically presented (structure);
- Textual contrasts (foils, juxtapositions, etc.);
- References to other works (allusions);
- General story elements; or something else?



## Analytical Essay ≠ Summary

- An analytical essay evaluates a student’s ability to analyze a text and recognize what it does and how it achieves this.
- Usually, texts employ many of the above listed elements at the same time, and many textual elements work in tandem to develop greater textual functions.
- This causes a double-edged sword: while there is never a shortage of something to analyze, there can often be an overwhelming amount of content to focus on.
- It can be helpful to focus on textual aspects that stick out to you:
  - what are notable parts of the text?
  - what characters, images, scenes, words, or otherwise were noteworthy during your reading?
  - what was discussed in the class itself?
- From these, one can develop a thesis.
- Shown below is a skeletal thesis statement including only the necessary information:

Considering [textual element one], [textual element two] and [textual element three], how the text develops [its function] can be shown.

- Of course, the number of textual elements that are to be analyzed is flexible. For example, an analytical essay of Jeanette Winterson’s novel *Lighthousekeeping* (2004) could have the following thesis:

Allusions to Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* along with the protagonist Silver’s and her foils’ characterizations demonstrates the plurality in storytelling throughout *Lighthousekeeping*.

- An analytical essay on the film *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) might have the following thesis:

Through its desert setting, stylized visuals, and the contrasts between Furiosa and Max, *Mad Max: Fury Road* constructs a distinct post-apocalypse for its characters to wander within.

- The analytical essay is then structured around the thesis.
- Notably, these guidelines can be extended to non-fiction, article analysis, and otherwise.
- However, unlike an English analytical essay, the literary devices are not the primary focus and instead focus should be placed more generally on the content.



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