Writing an Analytical Essay

What’s the Big Idea?
An Analytical Essay is Meant to:
- Convince or persuade (aka, a persuasive essay)!
- Build an argument and take a position on something (This means it could be challenged by someone)!
- Take a critical stance on a topic or work of literature (aka, a critical essay)!
- Back up your thesis with research!

Don’t Just Make It Up As You Go Along!

Break Your Essay up into Manageable Parts
- Analyze your thesis and find ways to divide it into provable points
- Outline your essay and organize your thoughts
- Don’t start writing until you have a plan!

Get Argumentative!

It’s Ok to Take Sides:
- Think of writing analytical papers as practice for when you really need to make an argument, or really feel strongly about a subject
- The point is not to write something you believe wholeheartedly, but to write something that can be proven through evidence—citing research, showing evidence through primary documents, quoting others whose writing supports your own, etc.

What Good is a Second Look?

Revise, Revisit, Reap the Rewards
- Make sure each part of your argument has sources to back it up, and remember your citations
- Check for tangents; revise your thesis statement if your research has led you in a new direction than you originally started
- Acknowledge the opposing point of view, so that you can tell why yours is better

Turn the page for more
The Nuts and Bolts

The Thesis Statement

Getting There:

- Choose a topic and do some research
  - Sometimes you have to find articles and outside sources
  - Sometimes you just have to closely read a work of literature
- Organize your thoughts and impressions
- Take a position
- Write a thesis statement that:
  - Is one sentence
  - Expresses your position
  - Provides a basic series of explanations, arguments, or interpretations as part of your assertion, giving direction to your essay (see example Third Draft below)
- Re-write your thesis statement a few times to get the right wording
- Examples (from the UNC Writing Lab):
  
  First draft: Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* is a great American novel.
  
  Second draft: In *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore.
  
  Third draft: Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must leave “civilized” society and go back to nature.

  Which do you think does the best job at making an argument and supporting it?

Outlining

Use a Style or Writing Guide to Help You Make an Outline

- This is an example for a relatively short essay:

  1. Introduction
     A. Introduce topic
     B. Thesis Statement
  2. Supporting Argument 1 (make a new paragraph for each argument you have)
     A. Introduce argument
     B. Explain Argument, taking into account the opposing argument, if it exists
     C. Quote or paraphrase relevant source
     D. Transition to Argument 2
  3. Conclusion
     A. Summarize main arguments
     B. Restate thesis as proven

  Your introduction and conclusion will sound very similar, but your conclusion should take into account all the arguments you’ve just made.