

Glossary of Rhetorical Terms*

Analyze To divide something into parts in order to understand both the parts and the whole. This can be done by systems analysis (where the object is divided into its interconnected parts), process analysis (where the object is divided into stages of development), and causal analysis (where the object is divided into the reasons that brought it into being, or into its consequences). The main purpose of analysis is to explain something, such as a concept, a text, an event, or a set of data, by examining its parts in detail. *See also* Content analysis; Textual analysis; Textual analysis, general categories for; Textual analysis, special categories for.

Causal analysis *See* Analyze.

Compare To show the similarities and differences between two things, or among more than two things, in order to reveal the qualities of each more clearly.

Comparison, basis of The common element in terms of which two or more things are compared. Topics that can be put in the form “Compare X and Y in terms of Z” specify the basis of comparison, Z. The basis of comparison tells you which features of the things you are comparing are relevant and thus gives you a focus for gathering information and writing your essay.

Comparison, methods of organizing The block method consists of organizing your middle paragraphs* so that you finish everything you have to say about one of the things you are comparing before taking up another. The point-by-point method consists of organizing your middle paragraphs so that in each paragraph or series of paragraphs you discuss only one aspect of each of the things you are comparing.

Conclusion The concluding paragraph in your essay provides

*Asterisks indicate terms defined elsewhere in the glossary.

the chance for both you and your reader to step back from the essay and survey the development of your thesis.* The conclusion should restate the thesis, tie together the points developed in the middle paragraphs,* and mention the wider implications of the discussion, if any.

Content analysis The analysis of behaviour, data, written works, and other sources of information without regard to the form in which the information is communicated.

Context The social, historical, and/or cultural situation in which a text is written or produced.

Deductive and inductive structure These terms provide the most common way of making a distinction between essays that begin with the thesis (deductive structure) and essays that lead up to a thesis at or towards the end of the essay (inductive structure).

Development, methods of The uses of evidence and detail to give substance to a point.

Diction A writer's level of word usage (formal, informal, colloquial) and particular word choices. An aspect of style* that also contributes to tone.*

Discuss An ambiguous term frequently used in essay topics. It does not mean “summarize the

relevant information.” Check the essay topic carefully to determine whether you are expected to analyze,* compare,* or evaluate* a body of information. “Discuss the significance of X in Y” means to analyze the relationship between X and Y; “discuss X and Y” means to compare X and Y; “discuss the validity of X” means to evaluate X.

Evaluate To determine the strengths or weaknesses of something—a plan, a performance, a work of art, or a theory, for example. Content evaluation usually asks you to evaluate an idea, position, argument, or viewpoint. Textual evaluation usually asks you to determine how effective the presentation of a theme* or thesis* is.

Evaluation, standard of A set of criteria based on accumulated judgments of things of the same kind that you can use as a standard against which to measure the material you are evaluating. The most common standards of evaluation are aesthetic (how effective is the relationship between form and content in the work?), logical (how convincing is the reasoning?), practical (will it work and is it useful?), and ethical (is it morally right or wrong?).

Evidence The factual information, examples, and references to

and quotations from authorities that you use to support your thesis.

Genre and subgenre We use the term *genre* to refer to the broad kinds of text (e.g., novel, play, film). We use *subgenre* to refer to more specific types within the form (e.g., Gothic novel, Greek tragedy, *film noir*).

Inductive structure *See* Deductive and inductive structure.

Introduction The introductory paragraph prepares your reader both intellectually and emotionally for the essay to follow. It establishes the context by defining necessary terms, giving historical background, and so forth, and indicates the structure of the essay by mentioning, in order, the main points you plan to cover. The introduction usually ends with your thesis.*

Middle paragraphs Paragraphs between the introduction and conclusion that explain and illustrate subpoints of the thesis.* The purpose of each paragraph is defined by a topic sentence* that links the paragraph to the thesis. Middle paragraphs usually contain both explanations of the point made in the topic sentence and specific details illustrating that point. Transitional words and phrases show how points, explanations, and details are related.

Middle paragraphs, order of

There are four common ways of organizing a sequence of middle paragraphs.

1. Chronological order: The arrangement of material according to units of time. The simplest chronological order starts with events furthest away in time and ends with events closest in time.
2. Spatial order: The arrangement of material according to locations in space. Spatial order may move from near to far, top to bottom, right to left, etc.
3. Logical order: The arrangement of material according to a chain of reasoning. The order in which material is presented is determined by the need to establish one point so that it will serve as the basis for the next.
4. Order of ascending interest: The arrangement of material to lead up to the most important or most interesting point. An order of ascending interest may also accommodate a chronological, spatial, or logical order. *See also* Comparison, methods of organizing.

Persona The mask or second self created by the author, especially in poetry and in ironic essays where the stated thesis and the implied thesis are completely different.

In “A Modest Proposal,” for example, Swift creates a persona who argues that eating the poor is the best way to solve the problems created by the poor. Swift’s real thesis is that his readers need to see the Irish poor as human beings and find a humane solution to their problems.

Primary source Any first-hand source of information, such as the literary work you are analyzing, a performance you have seen, your own observations and experience, the raw data from a scientific experiment, or the historical documents on which historians base their interpretations of events.

Process analysis *See* Analyze.

Research paper An extended analysis, comparison, or evaluation essay that includes information from secondary sources* as well as from primary sources.* A research paper is not merely a summary of other writers’ ideas; it is an essay in which you develop your own opinion on your subject and use your research material as part of your evidence to support that opinion.

Secondary source Material that provides information about, or criticism and analysis of, a primary source. A historian, for example, may write a book (secondary source) interpreting the meaning of historical documents (primary

sources). An anthropologist may collect data (primary sources) about various cultures and write an article comparing those cultures (secondary source). A literary critic may write a review (secondary source) of a new novel (primary source). In secondary sources, material is selected and presented to support a particular point of view.

Structure The selection and ordering of parts in a written work or performance. *See also* Middle paragraphs, order of.

Style The distinctive way of writing that belongs to a particular writer. For analytic purposes, it is helpful to see style as consisting of a writer’s use of diction,* image and symbol, figurative language and allusions, and sentence structure.

Subgenre *See* Genre and subgenre.

Subject The text, issue, theory, or proposal that a writer writes about. If your essay topic is “Assess the role of the peasants in the French Revolution,” the subject of your essay is the role of the peasants in the French Revolution.

Systems analysis *See* Analyze.

Textual analysis The analysis of written works or performances (such as plays, television programs,

and films) with attention both to what is being said and to how the work or performance is presented. Your purpose in analyzing a text is to determine the relation between the work's form (its manner of presentation) and its content.

Textual analysis, general categories for The parts into which you can divide the text you are analyzing if you are not familiar with the special categories appropriate to that particular kind of text (e.g., play, film, poem). The general categories of textual analysis are subject,* structure,* development,* tone,* and theme* or thesis.*

Textual analysis, special categories for The categories commonly used in literary criticism and related fields to analyze written works and performances.

Theme The main statement made about a subject in fiction, drama, poetry, film, and imaginative literature generally. A theme is usually implied, whereas a thesis* is usually stated directly.

Thesis The main statement made about a subject in nonfiction. The

purpose of the essay is to develop and confirm the thesis. In your essay, the thesis statement will consist of an opinion with one or more reasons to support it. Like the hypothesis in a scientific experiment, the thesis is the statement or assertion you are proving.

Tone The attitude a writer takes to a subject and to a reader, the equivalent of “tone of voice” in conversation. The tone of a work can be described as serious or light, witty or ponderous, condescending or apologetic, and in many other similar ways. In your own essays, think of tone as a product of diction* and pronouns of address.

Topic sentence The sentence in a middle paragraph,* usually at the beginning, that states the main idea of the paragraph and shows how the material in the paragraph supports the thesis* of the whole essay. Topic sentences are thus the bridge between the generalization you make in your thesis statement and the specific details you give in your middle paragraphs. An “umbrella” topic sentence covers points made in more than one paragraph.