Choice and Convention in Writing: What Can We Change, and What Are We Stuck With?

Thematic focus and Ideas: subject, mode of discourse (narration, description, argument, persuasion, etc) thematic design for generating and/or organizing ideas; integration of details and examples from observation, reading, etc.

Rhetorical Aims and Attitudes: have specific readers or audience in mind and their expectations regarding the subject and the writer; maintain a consistent point of view, tone, and style.

Genre or Type of Writing Project: Determine the kind of writing required for the subject, circumstances and audience (for instance, a simple personal note versus a sonnet).

Structural Format and Coherence: Use transitional devices, paragraphing, subsections, subheads, typeface, other reader-based structural devices, composition components, and manuscript conventions.

Syntax: Maintain logical word order, grammatical structure, coordination, subordination, and effective closure of sentences.

Diction: Choose words that convey meaning and style accurately and effectively.

Standard Written English: Use the dialect and conventions of standard written discourse as distinguished from idiom or the irregular patterns of speech.

Spelling and Punctuation: Use standard orthography and conventional graphic devices of mechanics and punctuation.

Copying and Proofreading: Use legible handwriting or accurate typing, the motor skills of written composition, and proofread the final draft or copy for errors.

Adapted from work of Professors Nold (Stanford) and Bracy (Beaver)
These gages are intended to help you generate a collection of specific details to use in your description paper, and to give you mastery of several different, powerful techniques for generating ideas. Some of the strategies will prove helpful for your description paper, some may not, but make a serious effort at trying each one. The important point is to have these methods in your repertoire, and to be able to use them when helpful.

Refer to Flower chapter 6 as necessary in completing this exercise. You may want to think of each approach in terms of a question (restate it to yourself in question form), as we began to do in class on Tuesday. If you do, please jot down any questions which you find helpful.

This exercise should be handed in with your description paper on Tuesday, 9/22.
1) Brainstorm on your topic: write without stopping for five to ten minutes.
Imagine a dialogue with a potential reader on your topic. Begin by giving your reader a nutshell summary of your topic. What questions would your reader ask? How would you answer them?
3) **Playing Aristotle**

   a) **Define the essentials of your topic for the reader who knows nothing.**

   b) **Compare and contrast your topic with relevant other things** (**This** will be an important strategy for description; see, for instance, the Agee piece on Buster Keaton).

   c) **Give some causes and effects of your topic.**

   d) **Give some evidence to support your topic.**
4) Tagmenics - Playing Physicist

a) Describe your topic as a particle - as a thing in itself.

b) Describe your topic as a wave - as a thing changing over time.

c) Describe your topic as a part of a field - as a thing in a context.
5) **Analogies: What's It Like?**

a) **Give a personal analogy** — imagine you are the topic or solution.

b) **Give a direct analogy** — compare the topic to something concrete (see Flower to discern how this differs from Aristotle's compare and contrast).

c) **Give a symbolic analogy** — compare your topic to an abstraction.

d) **Fantasy Analogy...**
Prewriting Strategies: Dialogue with the Reader

Examples:

Reader: **Is** he nice? Would you have pity for him or scorn him? What is his appearance? How did he get that way? **How does he find** enough food in garbage cans? What does he find? **Does** he have any friends?

Answers: Very nice, caring person. Have pity for him because he's a human being and nobody should live that way. Doesn't know how he got that way just unfortunate. **Doesn't find** enough food and is very hungry all the time. **Hopefully finds** a good meal somewhere. He finds the leftovers and garbage of the fortunate people, crusts of bread. **Doesn't have** many friends, it is a very lonely life. (Julie S.)

My grandmother serves everyone first she clears the table. (Does everyone wait?) Everyone starts eating. (Does she get time to eat?) She has time to eat. She usually waits until most of the family is satisfied before she gets her own plate... (Is she fat? chubby?) Grandmotherly! She has an apron around her waist - usually a dish-towel - (She sounds grandmotherly!) Yeah - she is. She eats a small portion of everything she made (Can you clarify that?) a spoon full of cooked vegetables, chicken or neat that was cooked in the soup... Usually the dishes are piled up - maybe some of the older grandchildren will offer to help. (Does she have to do this all herself or do you help her?) Usually help refused. (Do parents push you?) No... (Ruth E.)

(Yho did she eat with?) She ate with about ten friends. (Did her eating bother anyone else?) Yes, but I was the only one who could say anything... (Elisa)
Prewriting Strategies: Definition

Questions which definition answers:

- What are the essential elements of the topic?
- How would you describe it to someone who has never heard of it?
- Why is it a valid topic?

Examples:

Randy is at Legal Seafoods, located in Boston, which is an elegant, casual, moderately priced restaurant. He selfishly orders abruptly and loudly to the waiter who is trying to take the order from a couple sitting three tables away. Ten minutes later a plate of 20 shrimps and two bowls of thick, rich, tomato red sauce appears before him, with a liter of whole milk accompanying it. The eating utensils lay untouched on a white linen napkin which also lays untouched on the table. He hurriedly eats without stopping to chew one shrimp more than twice. (Julie H.)

Khalid is at a dumpy cafe in the desert town of Gaber — one that he picked out. He yells to the timid waiter to come take his order quickly, as we are in a hurry. The spotless table is a tornado site after we leave with the majority of the mess on Khalid's side. He eats very quickly and talks with food in his mouth the whole time. (Carrie)
Prewriting Strategies: Comparison and Contrast

Questions:
- What other things are similar to your topic?
- What would you say are the opposites to your topic?
- How would you categorize your topic? What like things would you class with it?

Examples:

Other people *eat* with a certain politeness, but ha *eats* to live and *its* is shown at the table when he *eats*. (Ron)

Totally unrelated to anything except possibly the Three Stooges. (Jonathan)

The *attention* she pays to the *function of eating* is comparable to a person eating while they are *asleep*. This *is* unless she *is* in some type of discussion with a second party, then her entire *attention turns to that person, watching that person as a football fan watches the last minute of a close game*. (Jamie)

Randy chews shrimp like a cow chews grass: unlike, an *elegant* French aristocrat who delicately savors each bite of super-cuisine...The bits of shrimp spear out of his mouth in tiny white bits mixed with saliva as the white pus squeezes out of a pimple in globs. (Julie H.)
**Prewriting Strategies: Cause and Effect**

Questions:

- Does anything directly cause the topic under discussion? How?
- Does it have any specific effects? How?

Examples:

She often times spills her food because she is so intent upon what she is thinking of that she forgets what she is actually doing at the time. (Jamie)

The green slimy snot at the tip of his nose caused him to wipe his hand across his lip to remove the stringy balls, and capture them in his finger tips which then return to his lap for a cleaning. (Julie)

**Prewriting Strategies: Evidence**

Questions:

- What do I know about the topic?
- What evidence, experience validates my claims? (Either personal experience or second hand knowledge)

Example:

I find that when I'm around people like Donny that I am totally repulsed. It seems as though he is part of a totally different civilization. But like a foreigner I am fascinated by such habits. (Ruth L.)
Prewriting Strategies, Rhetorics: See Topic as a Particle

Questions:
- What specific processes are involved in the topic?
- How do they function?

Examples:

She is a bubbly, yet intelligent girl. She is very outgoing yet she is a heavy thinker. She focuses her interest on one thing at a time. She is outgoing, considerate, critical, and sometimes has trouble expressing herself. Physically, she is a short brown-haired girl with large brown eyes. (Jamie)

Each strand of spaghetti is eaten differently by Khalid. Some are inhaled quickly while some are slopped in by his hands. (Carrie)

Every bite of shrimp enters his mouth whole and quickly nova from the right side to the left and then quickly down his throat with some whole milk trailing close behind. His hands appear dry and cracked with bits of black material under the tips of the fingernails. (Julie H.)

See Topic as a Wave

Questions:
- How does the topic change given tiara?
- How has the topic changed from a past point? Why?

Examples:

Shereen will do the same thing in college and in work after college too. (Elisa)

This guy will eventually be exposed to fast food because if we spend enough time together he is going to memorize two all beef patties in both fast food chains. (Debbie K.)

Shyness has different degrees, depending on how many friends one has or one could just be shy in a new crowd, or with girls or boys, one could be camera shy, however it all has to do with self-confidence and self-esteem. (Marc)

From the beginning he started out fine until he ordered the pizza. Then he became savage. But in the and he walked away calmly. (Ruth L.)

Randy starts off with a plate full of 20 shrimp, 2 bowls of thick, red sauce, and a liter of whole milk. As the shrimp, sauce and milk disappear, guzzle after guzzle and smack after smack. ... (Julie H)
Tagmemics: fee topic in a field

Questions:
- What contexts are appropriate for this topic? What do they tell us about the topic?
- How does this topic fit into "the big picture"?

Examples:

Context of the big city. There is a lot of happiness, but there is a lot of unhappiness as the man represents. (Julie S.)

Surrounding couples and families turn around and stare at the interesting lore individual who endlessly feeds himself and allows food to cover his face and hands as if they were only tools and not part of himself. People wonder why this individual is incapable of reaching for his napkin or even of using his utensils. Every few minutes the woman sitting directly beside him at the next table will feel a particle hitting her lip or cheek that came directly from Randy's mouth. (Julie H)

In the restaurant everyone is staring at Khalid because of his rude manners. When he belches it is like a fog horn on a silent ocean. All of the customers are appalled and voice their disapproval in whispers. When he drops his fork a single strand of pasta lies across the floor and lands on the shoe of a nearby patron. The red goop forever to leave a bloody stain on the shoe. (Carrie)

Shyness is a personal characteristic that one has in terms of dealing with things in the environment. One could feel comfortable and introverted, or shy, or a bully type person, or a follower, etc. Shyness is being uncomfortable and therefore refraining to associate with things around them. (Marc)

She is one of those multi-talented persons who can excel in academics, athletics, and as a human being in society. A person who would just as soon spill food on her new shirt than ignore the person with whom she is speaking in order to make sure she doesn't do just that. (Jamie)
Prewriting Strategies: Analogies

Personal Analogy

Questions:
- How do I personally relate to this topic? What is its significance to me?
- How would it feel to be this topic?

Examples:
I don't talk with people for a long time unless I'm interested, that is because I'm timers. That is why I pay such close attention to them. It's a bit funny when I spill something, and I usually don't do irreparable damage...Sometimes I get caught up in thought, and not such else matters. (Jamie)

Direct Analogy

Questions:
- What concrete image or process does my topic make me think of?
- What metaphor or simile would best represent my topic?

Examples:
Danny is like a lemon because on the outside it is pretty and yellow (a subtle color), but on the inside it is sour. (Ruth L)

Shyness is like a tape player playing friendly music that is just shut off with the press of a button. (Marc)
Symbolic Analogy

Questions:

- What abstract image of process best describes my topic?
- What abstract simile or metaphor represents my topic?

Examples:

It is like a war. A victory. They destruct everything, sparing nothing/ hog: • J eys wanting more and protecting what they have. (Ruth L.)

With her body and clothing as her canvas, and chance as her inspiration, she is like an artist. (Jonathan)

Fantasy Analogy

Questions:

- What wild fantasy best represents my topic to me?

Examples:

Jon should be forced to go to a convent for 20 years. (Larry)

She is so close to being perfect it would be great if just this once she could spill things all over herself and not look like her usual perfect self. (Jonathan)

It is like leaving your body there to eat as a mindless being, and letting your mind go wherever it wants to including into another place of only thought not physical being. (Jamie)
1. Subject matter-- choose an area of interest

Now, note as many categories of this subject as possible

2. Trial Topic-- select a topic out of your notes above

1. Is this topic likely to sustain my interest throughout the writing project?
   why?

2. Is it appropriate to my writing audience?
   How?

3. Can it lead to a thesis of the expected type?
   How?

4. Does it involve enough complexity for development at essay length?
   Where?

5. Do I have enough supporting material to work with?

3. Further definition of topic
   Who?

   What?

   When?

   Where?

   Why?

   How?
Papers can begin with either a specific instance or a generality. Either way, the lead paragraph must (1) attract the reader's attention, (2) make the subject of the paper plain and (3) suggest the writer's approach to the problem at hand. The first sentence should pull the reader into the dialogue. Sometimes the best way to begin a paper does not become apparent until the writer has warmed up his topic by composing several hundred words. First drafts rarely contain effective openers.

a. Make a Brief Thesis Statement
A simple declarative sentence plunging into the middle of the subject is always effective.

Supersonic flight will upset the economy of the aircraft industry.

The search for the origin of words can be fun.

The forbidding topic of etymology is made palatable.

b. Refer to Contemporary Events
In the past, few months, public health experts, working closely with teams of sanitary engineers, have uncovered an alarming incidence of yellow fever along the lower regions of the Central American coast.

The difference between an effective and ineffective opening question hinges on length and specificity.

Have you ever been to Tonganoxia?

What's the major characteristics of life in a medieval monastery?

What were the characteristic of the conduct of today's young people with alarm?

Is there a special reason for viewing the minority person on a campus such as this achieve a share of equality

d. Begin with a Quotation
For those without retentive memories, there are numerous handbooks of aphorisms, proverbs and witticisms, many of which can effectively arouse the reader's interest.

Good manners A gentleman is a person who never insults anyone unintentionally. -JOHN.

Death I am fear death as Little 'children fear to go into the dark. -SP. FRANCIS BACON
e. Open with a Newspaper Lead

Robert Flint, 19, of 116 Hubbard Street, a student at Municipal Junior College (who), died (when) last night about 8:00 P.M. (where) near the intersection of Vine and Route 40 (where) when his car skidded and overturned on slick pavement (how).

Although you will not be writing news pieces, the specificity of such a formula can be advantageous in an expository paper as well; much information is conveyed concisely.

f. Use Active Voice
No blanket rule can be laid down forbidding passive verbs in opening sentences. In some objective writing, a passive verb conveys the right nuance of scientific accuracy. If there is room for choice; use an active verb. It carries greater force and emphasis.

PASSIVE: The teaching of high school English has achieved new levels of sophistication.

ACTIVE: The teaching of high school English has achieved new levels of sophistication.

Avoid Over-reliance on the Title
The title of the paper cannot substitute for a clear statement of subject in the opening sentence or paragraph. Examine the two sentences below that, begin a theme called "The Parking Problem at Midwest University"

This is a big problem. Just last night I was forced to park my car...)

Avoid Vague Beginnings
Narcotics offers many kinds of problems. The problems are difficult to solve. Life can be hard as the experience of everyone shows. The problems we face and how we solve them are the way in which the world sees us.

Combine Beginning Devices
An introduction may include, for example, a first sentence consisting of a striking quotation, a second sentence offering a thesis, a third sentence of furnishing background material, and a fourth sentence employing an anecdote.

"All the world's a stage," says Jaques, the melancholy figure of Shakespeare's As You Like It. And he might also have added, so is the Globe Playhouse, the site of Shakespeare's dramatic triumphs.

Quote from Shakespeare arouses interest and also implies purpose of paper. 2nd sentence gives enough background information to bring the problem into focus and also offers a statement of purpose: to show the link between the theater of the
a little imitation of the world. A recent discovery of a forgotten book: on Elizabethan memory devices reinforces the belief that Jaques was employing more than a mere metaphor in his comparison between the world and the stage. Quite possibly the gulls and gallants, culled from the pages of Tom Dekker’s The Gull’s Hand- book, a guidebook to London low life, found inside the Globe playhouse a deliberate replica of the larger world of mar...

The closing paragraph of an essay can serve various purposes: to summarize, to synthesize, to restate, and to evaluate. The importance of the ending is in direct proportion to the length of the paper. A short essay of two or three hundred words does not need the same elaborate termination as a lengthy essay of several thousand words. Ideally the good ending will suggest itself; however, in the event of the lack of ideas, there are stock gambits to be employed.

- End with a Summary

And so the forces shaping the Tudor dynasty remained throughout the sixteenth century rooted deeply in religious, economic, and political issues. The establishment of a national church insured the triumph of English values over those of the Mediterranean; The increased tempo of trade brought new wealth to the middle classes who supported the crown against landowners; and the increased power of the city merchants in turn insured a reservoir of sentiment friendly to the queen, herself the descendant of a commoner.

- End by Using a Single Striking Statement

There seems little question that the United States has learned of tariff problems only by trial and error, at great pain and loss to herself.

The problem of seating priorities at Mid-west University basketball games still threatens faculty-student relationships.

- End with a Warning Note

A warning note indicating that the close is near would include such phrases as: finally, in conclusion, the solution then, as has been seen, to recapitulate, lastly, and to review the issue. Take sure not to use these indicators haphazardly; the material they precede must be conclusive in nature.
I. Some of the following would make acceptable theses and some would not because they lack restriction, unity or clarity. Find those that are not acceptable and explain why you reject them. **Rewrite** the theses you reject.

1. In the **following** essay I would **like** to tell you about VISTA.

2. Quaker education is essentially a religious education.

3. U.S. **involvement** in Indochina has had unfortunate results.

4. This essay **will** deal with the difference in salaries **between** teachers and professional athletes.

5. Our accomplishments in the space program are out of this world.

6. The popular conception of a schizophrenic as a person with a "split personality" is **inaccurate**.

7. Compared with other languages, English has a relatively **simple** grammar, but its spelling is complex and confusing.

8. Hawaii has a great future.

9. Student writing would be considerably improved if more attention were paid to **restricting** theses.

10. The use of drugs has increased significantly in the last ten years. Some drugs, such as LSD, are admittedly dangerous, but there is considerable disagreement about marijuana.

11. The use of drugs has increased significantly in the last ten years.

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71. You have begun reading *essays in Decker* by now and should have formed a few ideas for your first theme. Find a thesis for one of them that you think you could develop **adequately** in about three pages. This may involve some **prewriting**. Write down this thesis on a separate piece of paper and do not put your name on it. Be sure the thesis is restricted, unified and clear.
Introductions

1. attract reader's attention by relating topic to current event or controversy
   --censorship: the local controversy over *Teen Throat*

2. start with a statement making the reader take a new look at a familiar situation
   --We have all occasionally received parking tickets and cursed the policeman who gave them to us, but how many of us have stomped to consider what would happen if no more parking tickets were given?

3. limit subject by proceeding from a general situation to a specific instance
   --Today's American housewife has to put up with an inflation rate of 9% on food. 30 geographical area in the United States has escaped this alarming inflation of prices on everything from apples to zucchini. But one of the hardest hit areas is Urbana, IL.

4. use initial quotation as keynote for rest of paper
   --William G. Perry, a Harvard administrator, has noted that "the student who . . . ."
   CAUTION: Don't abuse this form by quoting material that is not crucial to the paper or by quoting from dictionaries.

5. dramatize an issue with striking facts or statistics
   --One out of every eight residents of Champaign-Urbana will be robbed or assaulted this year.

6. heighten the point with a striking contrast
   --Black Americans can expect to live roughly 9.3 fewer years than white Americans.

7. clarify a key term by an initial definition
   --A gentleman is one who never intentionally hurts another person and whose company one finds as comfortable as an old easy chair. Lydias S. Grant was no gentleman.

8. establish your qualifications for dealing with a subject by using a biographical or personal comment
   --After thirty-nine years of teaching rhetoric, I have come to the conclusion that the part of the semester spent on paragraph coherence is the most rewarding for both student and teacher.

3. assume the attack by denying a currently accepted assumption
   --For the last two years, two hundred million Americans have wearily followed the antics of politicians in Washington, D.C. Post viewers now cynically declare that the American dream has been shattered. Nevertheless, recent events in Washington do not in fact support this conclusion. Rather, the Watergate fiasco indicates a high level of 'morality in our government.'
wake up the apathetic reader with a well-phrased, controversial question: Is it the concerned citizen’s right to assassinate a President whose policies are leading the country to what the citizen believes to be destruction?

CAUTION: Avoid questions that are too obvious, too obscure, or too biased.

Conclusions. (Authors and page numbers refer to The Norton Reader.)

1. Honorable restatement of the central idea (Kennedy, 433)

2. Final anecdote that reinforces central idea without explicit restatement. (Perry, 249)

3. Careful estimate of the significance of the conclusions reached in the paper.

4. Forecast or warning based on facts developed in the paper (Rich, 358)

5. An essential condition for future progress (Bellow, 423)

6. A suggestion for corrective action (King, 674)

CAUTION: This action must develop logically from your paper and not be too sweeping or unreasonable.

7. A return from the specific to the general, relating the findings of the paper to a general trend or idea (Hoffer, 830–33)

Common Errors

1. Noncommittal platitude

—This problem deserves the serious attention of every right-thinking American.

2. Unfounded optimistic prediction

—But every cloud has a silver lining. (See also no. 5 below)

But the future looks bright.

3. Undeveloped panacea

—The restoration of proper discipline in the nation’s schools will make juvenile delinquency a thing of the past.

4. Conclusion—That raises problems that weaken or distract from the point of the paper

—Of course, a small car has obvious disadvantages for a family with numerous children or for the traveler in need of luggage space.

5. CLI clues
Some questions for comprehensive evaluation.

A. The Overall Essay.
1. Is the author's subject worth disputing? Is it a point of fact? A matter of personal taste? Does the piece have argumentative edge?
2. Do the thesis, structure, tone, style, and arguments fit together?
3. Is the author's appeal to emotion and/or logic appropriate to the subject and the audience?
4. Does the essay evidence consideration for its audience? Will it reach its intended audience? Will it alienate its intended audience?
6. If the author uses a special strategy of presentation, is it suitable to her subject and audience? Does the strategy have disadvantages, such as preventing the author from addressing opposing views or from solidly substantiating her thesis?

B. Authorial Image and Tone.
1. Is the author reliable? Does she seem qualified to write on her subject?
2. Does the author's assumed role work well to support her argument? Does it somehow contrast from it? Would another have worked better?
3. Does the image the author puts forth support or undermine her argument? Would another have worked better?
4. Does the author's tone work to support or undermine her stance? Would another have worked better?

C. Heat and Guts.

Content.
1. Are there flaws in the author's reasoning? Does she jump to unfortified conclusions? Make hasty generalizations? Assert anything as an objective statement of fact that is really a matter of opinion or taste? Are causal explanations adequately supported?
2. Are the unspoken assumptions you identified valid? Are they arguable? If you have some basis for doubting a conclusion, you should closely question the reason or conclusion that's based on it.
3. Are there alternate conclusions that are consistent with the author's strong reasons? Do these throw the author's conclusion into question?
4. Does the author use any of the following tactics -- tactics that may at first glance look like they provide solid support,
but that under critical examination fail to hold up? (Such tactics are often used to bolster a flimsy or incompletely-thought-out argument.)

a. Name-calling. Attacking an individual as opposed to arguing and disputing ideas or policies.
b. Appealing to group-approved attitudes. "Most people hold . . ."
c. Stating glittering generalities, versus solid facts, reasons, etc.
d. Extending an opponent's position to a clearly negative extreme in order to make attacking it easy and supporting the opposite view easy.
e. Making an argument into an either-or dilemma: oversimplifying an issue by stating only two choices.
f. Dragging in a "red herring": introducing a non-issue to divert attention from the real issue. "The mother demanded, 'Why are you late?' The daughter countered, 'Why are you picking on me?'

g. Using false analogies. "You can't educate people to be successful in marriage. To try to do so is like trying to teach someone how to swim without letting him near water."
h. Repeating the question: circular reasoning. "Pornography is undesirable because it is bad."

5. Does the author's evidence sufficiently support her argument? Is there enough? Is significant evidence omitted? Is it reliable? Does it ring true to you? Is one example or argument especially convincing? Unconvincing?

6. How well does the author anticipate and answer objections to her argument? Does she address those that her opponent is most likely to raise? Does she inadvertently undermine her position? Does she oversimplify or gloss over possible objections?

7. What words or phrases in her argument are ambiguous? Does the author use impressive-sounding words irresponsibly? (Wrestle with vague words. Make them pay up. If they don't, they may constitute a hole in the argument.)

**Writer's Style:**

1. Do the author's expository notes suit her purpose, subject, and audience? Do difficulties or disadvantages accompany them?

2. Does the introduction direct and focus attention? Provide necessary background. Identify the problem and specific issues?

3. Does the conclusion provide a sense of closure and leave the reader with a strong, clear sense of the author's viewpoint?

4. Is the use of figurative language appropriate to the author's purpose, subject, and audience? Is it successful?

5. Is comparative language appropriate and successful in furthering the author's viewpoint?

6. Are effective prose patterns appropriate and successful?
Wolff
A TOOL FOR ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Some questions for full and fruitful analysis.

A. The Overall Essay.

1. What does the author set out to do? What is her thesis?

2. Does the author base her appeal primarily on logic or emotion? Does she appeal to both? What specific tools does she use to make her appeal(s)? How do they function to support her appeal(s)?

3. What is the intended audience? How does the author try to appeal specifically to it?

4. What is the essay's pattern of organization? Does it closely follow, vaguely resemble, or deviate from the classical scheme of Introduction/Narration/Confirmation/Concession/Refutation/Conclusion?

5. Does the author use a special strategy of presentation throughout her essay? These strategies depart from straightforward argumentation in which conclusions are stated and then supported with facts and reasoning. Some examples of special strategies:
   - focusing on an incident or an anecdote that symbolizes the author's whole meaning at once
   - using irony or humor
   - instead of directly criticizing an action or practice, presenting it in a description or narrative that casts it in a negative light, letting the reader draw his own conclusions
   - adopting a mock or persona, pretending to say one thing while meaning another

B. Authorial image and tone.

1. What sort of role does the author take on? Is she an objective observer? An impassioned advocate? How does the role function to further the author's argument?


C. The content and goals of the essay.

1. Does the author provide a logical chain of reasoning in support...
of her stance? What are its elements?

2. What are the unstated assumptions on which her conclusions or claims rest?


4. Does the author anticipate and answer objections to and misunderstandings of her argument?

5. Does the author attend to opposing viewpoints and devise counter-arguments or reasons why they are less compelling than her own?

**Rhetoric, style.**

1. Does the author use any of the rhetorical modes (narrative, description, comparison/contrast, process analysis, causal analysis, definition) to develop her argument? How do they work to further her position?


3. What sort of conclusion does the author write? Does she tie things together? Summarize? End with a dramatic example? A rhetorical tour de force? Does she set her argument in a larger context that lends it broader significance? How does the conclusion support her stance?

4. Does the author use figurative language or imagery -- metaphor, simile, analogy -- to support her argument? How does it work to further her point of view?

5. Does the author use connotative language in support of her argument? (This device can convey an author's evaluations and ideals almost without our noticing it, unless we read critically and notice it.) How does it work to support her stance?

6. Does the author use allusive/price patterns to create a certain atmosphere or to sway the reader? Does she write rhythmic sentences? Does she employ alliteration or assonance? How do such patterns work to bolster her argument?
assignments. One of your most crucial tasks will be to organize the results of your analysis and evaluation into a persuasive, clearly-structured, coherent argument. Here are some suggestions:

* Early in the paper (in the introduction?) briefly (2-3 sentences at most) state the argument of the essay you are evaluating. Than assert your own evaluative thesis statement, forwarding not just your assessment of the essay, but the features of it you propose to analyze and evaluate.

* The body of your paper will amplify and support your thesis by analyzing and evaluating those specific features and strategies. The two most likely means of organizing the body seem these: 1) Analyze all the features; then evaluate them all. 2) Analyze and evaluate each feature one by one. My guess is that the second strategy might be easiest and clearest, since analysis and evaluation often Intermingle. In addition, the first strategy might tend toward choppiness.

* This essay, like all essays, will be most impactful if it includes a striking conclusion.

THE WRITING CYCLE.
Since this assignment is more open-ended and difficult (insofar as it asks you to engage in analysis -- a sophisticated intellectual activity! than some of the others, I suspect it will require long immersion and frequent re-immersion in the writing cycle. I encourage extensive prewriting and rewriting of this paper.

LASTS WORDS ON CONTENT.

* Your essay should include analysis in large, healthy servings (as opposed to a tiny spoonful of it aside a plateful of summary or evaluation). 

* The goal of this assignment is for you to analyze and evaluate another author's argument -- not for you to quarrel with the author's opinions. Your essay should be a vehicle of your opinions on the topics discussed in the essay. Your essay should be a vehicle of your (amply supported) conclusions regarding the coherence of the argument the author makes, and the appropriateness and effectiveness of the strategies the author uses to forward his claims. Think of the essay less as an appeal to you than as a specimen of argumentative wiring that it is your job to assess. Engage yourself in the essay's content only in the spirit of analyzing and evaluating it as a component of an argument.

THE FATE OF YOUR PAPER.
Not only will your paper earn you a grade; it will be grist for the analyzed and evaluated author's re-visionary mill. Hand in 2 copies: one for me, one for the author -- input toward his rewrite.
THESIS.
Completing these three tasks will lead you to your thesis. Compose an evaluative thesis statement—a statement of whether on balance the argument succeeds or fails, and a brief statement of why. If the essay combines strengths and weaknesses, feel free to address both in your essay. However, do decide whether the argument would sway its intended audience, and convey that decision in your thesis statement. Do its strengths outweigh its weaknesses? Do its weaknesses invalidate its strengths?

BREADTH.
I do not expect you to analyze and evaluate every aspect of the argument you are working with; that would require many more than 4 pages. Feel free to limit your scope to several of the argument's features: most logically, those that you perceive to constitute its major strengths and weaknesses. For instance, you might choose to address the argument's thesis, its evidence, its reasoning, and its attention to opposing viewpoints. Or, you might analyze and evaluate its appeals to emotion, its authorial image and tone, and its figurative or connotative language.

DEPTH.
No matter what features of the argument you address, be sure to analyze them in detail and in depth. Perhaps the most debilitating pitfall threatening the path to successful analysis and evaluation is skimpiness, incomplete analysis. Writers say, "The author's use of allusions is effective" and leave it at that. Do not leave it at that. Discuss in specific and painstaking detail why and how the allusions are effective. And do not leave it at that. Discuss in specific and painstaking detail why the effective allusions contribute to the success or failure of the essay. Discuss each feature you address at length, then link that discussion to your thesis statement by making clear how the feature helps or hurts the essay as a whole.

Remember that your paper is as much an argument as the one you're evaluating. You must support your conclusions. Document your position with specific references to the text. If you paraphrase or quote directly, give page numbers in parentheses. And again, analyze at length. Push your thinking. Badger yourself with these questions I've badgered you with in class: How does this aspect of the essay work? And how does that advance or hinder the argument as a whole?

STRUCTURE.
This assignment is less specific and structured than previous
- # **Analysis/Evaluation**

**Length:** 3-4 pages (750-1000 words)

**Audience:** An English instructor interested in both content (what you say about the essay you're working with) and the evidence you use to support your claims (the whole essay, title, paragraphs, sentences, etc.).

**Purpose:** To evaluate the essay to assert whether an argument will succeed or fail with its audience, and to back up your assertion with detailed analysis.

### SUMMARIZING, ANALYZING, AND EVALUATING

This kind of critical writing requires you to engage in three distinct tasks before you begin to write: Summation (figuring out what the essay says), Analysis (discerning how it says it), and Evaluation (judging how well it says it).

**Summary.** Before analyzing and evaluating can begin, you need to know exactly what the essay asserts. Perhaps the most important preliminary to writing this paper is reading the essay, carefully and repeatedly. Get thoroughly acquainted with the argument, so that you know sure answers to these questions: What is the subject of the essay? What is the thesis? Is it stated or implied? What are the main points of the essay?

**Analysis.** Now begin taking the essay apart and examining its parts. Think in terms of these types of questions: What is the essay's intended audience? How is the essay organized? What rhetorical modes does the author use? In what style does the author write? What is the author's tone? What kind of evidence does the author use to support his argument? Refer to the Analysis and Evaluation handout for a more complete list of cues to analysts. This process should not only gain you an understanding of how the essay works; it should help you isolate the essay's major strengths and weaknesses.

**Evaluation.** Assess whether the features you analyzed work, given the author's purpose, subject, and audience. Does the essay appeal to the intended audience? To any other audience? Is the style appropriate to its audience, subject, and purpose? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the essay's arguments and illustrations? Is there any evidence missing? Are examples well-chosen? Are counter-arguments refuted, or at least qualified? Is an argument or illustration particularly convincing? Especially unconvincing? Do the author's strategies work? Would his audience be convinced? (Again, see the Analysis and Evaluation handout for further ideas to Evaluation.)
According to the author, to what audience is the ad directed? Why would it (or would it not) effectively reach that audience? What anxieties/insecurities does the ad play to? Are these identified? ___ Do you agree?

Does the author delineate how color, design, typeface, lighting, image, and contrast are used in the ad? How do these contribute to making her central point?

What unspoken assumptions about both the advertisement and its audience does the author make? How do you know? What is the tone of the essay? How do you know the author’s attitude in relation to the ad? Is it effective or overbearing?

How well does the introduction both begin and establish the form of the essay? Does it arouse your interest?

What new insight does the conclusion afford or how does it tie all the threads of the essay together?

Does the author analyze the copy with regard to style, content, and desired effect? ____ Does the author describe the ad? ____ Name the magazine it’s from? ____ Are you convinced by the author’s argument about the ad’s purpose? ____ And how it achieves it? ____
Developing Thesis Statements

Many students make the mistake of thinking that having a “subjects the same” as having a “thesis” for an essay or research paper. However, the thesis of your writing is much more definite than the general subject.

A thesis statement is a specific declaration that summarizes the point of view you will express in your paper. It is the basic stand you take, the opinion you express and the point you make about your narrowed subject. It’s your controlling idea, tying together and giving direction to all other elements in your paper. Your primary purpose is to persuade the reader that your thesis is a valid one.

What is a good thesis?

1. A thesis is specific. If your ideas are vague, there is an excellent chance that your paper will be confusing. Although general terms can be narrowed and defined elsewhere in the paper, a good thesis supplies a specific subject and a clear direction for your paper. The specific facts, details and examples that you use will help to clarify the idea that you are trying to express.

   - Poor: Aerobic exercise is good for you.
   - Better: Aerobic exercise may be part of a weight loss program, but it is also the way to a healthy heart.

2. A thesis is restrictive. A good thesis deals with restricted bite-sized issues, issues that would otherwise require a lifetime of writing. Just as you need to narrow the subject of a thesis statement, so you will need to narrow the assertion about the subject. When you restrict the scope of your assertions in the thesis your writing will be more focused. The length of your paper will determine how restricted your thesis will be.

   - Poor: there are many advantages to having professional sports teams in Houston.
   - Better: Having professional sports teams in Houston has political, social and economic advantages.

3. A thesis is unified and expresses one major idea about items subject. A good thesis may sometimes include a secondary idea only if it is strictly subordinated to the major one. It is wise to write your thesis before you begin an outline and definitely before you begin writing.
A thesis statement is the standard for your paper. Where you place a thesis statement depends on your goals, your audience, the purpose of your essay or research paper, and how you intend to organize it. The most common position for the thesis statement is in the opening paragraph, but other locations in the paper can work and the thesis may even be implied. However, just remember to write a thesis statement as one of the first steps towards completion of your paper. It should focus the paper as well as be restrictive and specific enough to give the instructor a clear idea of the subject and direction of your paper.

A thesis statement is not:

- A promise or statement of purpose.
- A topic or subject by itself.
- A question.
- A few words added to title but not forming a complete sentence.
The Thesis

- An essay is a nonfiction composition on a single subject and with a central idea or thesis.

- A thesis is the central, controlling idea of an essay, to which all assertions and details relate. Your essay should be focused on a central idea, to which all the essay's paragraphs, all its general statements and specific information, relate. The thesis will not usually leap fully formed into your head. Even when you begin with an idea you want to communicate, you will need to refine that idea to fit the realities of the paper you write. A good thesis statement will neither state a fact (Mrs. Mallard dies soon after hearing that her husband has died) nor overgeneralize (The story is an insult to women).

THE THESIS: A good way to develop your thesis is to frame it in a thesis sentence.

The thesis statement gives you a vehicle for expressing your thesis at an early stage, and eventually it or (more likely) a revised version may be placed in the introduction of your final essay as a signal to your readers.

A good way to think about the thesis statement or sentence is to think of WHAT + WHAT ABOUT IT where "WHAT" is the topic/subject you are writing about and the "WHAT ABOUT IT" is the assertion or claim that you are making in your paper. For example, you are writing about the death penalty and your essay advances the argument that the death penalty should be legal in all states: WHAT = the death penalty; WHAT ABOUT IT = should be legalized in every state in the nation. THESIS SENTENCE = The death penalty should be legalized by virtue of federal order in every state in the nation.

OTHER EXAMPLES:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>WHAT ABOUT IT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal aid to college students</td>
<td>should be made available to any student who qualifies academically if the United States hopes to win the technological race.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strip-mining</td>
<td>should be tightly controlled in this region to reduce its pollution of water resources, its permanent destruction of the land, and its devastating effect on people's lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dynamics of single-parent families</td>
<td>is usually such that the boundaries between parent and child often disappear so that the two interact as siblings or as a married couple.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The functions of the thesis statement are:

- to narrow the topic to a single idea that you want readers to gain from your essay
- to name the topic and assert something about it, conveying your purpose, your opinion, and your attitude
- often to provide a concise preview of how you will arrange your ideas in the essay (as in example #3 above.)

http://visi.net/~joshzma/thesis.htm
To draft a thesis sentence, ask these questions:
- What central idea emerges from the work I have done so far?
- How can I frame that idea as an assertion about my topic?
- How can I convey my purpose and attitude in that assertion?

Checklist for revising the thesis sentence:
- Does it make an assertion about your topic?
- Does it convey your purpose, your opinion, and your attitude?
- Is it limited to an assertion of only one idea?
- Is the assertion specific?
- Is the sentence unified in that the parts relate to each other?

Examples — Here are some examples of thesis sentences revised to meet the checklist requirements:

THESIS 1: Television, newspapers, and magazines present contrasting views of the United States. (A position).
REVISION 1: The media image of the United States is unrealistic, and people are depicted as being either in ethnic conflict or blissful all the time.
FINAL THESIS: Judging from the unrealistic images projected by the media, the United States is a nation of either constant ethnic conflict or of untroubled homogeneity.

THESIS 1: Wearing fur is immoral. (A position)
REVISION 1: The wearing of fur for fashion should be banned, and protesters should demonstrate.
FINAL THESIS: To effectively bring about a ban of wearing fur for fashion, anti-fur protesters should target the designers, the manufacturers, and the wears of fashion fur garments.

THESIS 1: Gays and lesbians should be able to marry. (A position)
REVISION 1: A couple’s right to marry should be not be restricted based on sexual preference.
REVISION 2: Every couple who wishes to commit to each other in marriage should have the right to do so, regardless of sexual preference.
FINAL THESIS: Everyone, gay and straight, will benefit from extending the basic human right of marriage to all couple, regardless of sexual preference.

Exercise: Looping Toward a Thesis: This is a freewriting exercise that will help you to arrive at a thesis once you have decided on a topic and have done some research.

#1— Quickly reread your notes and glance at your most important sources. Now clear off your desk. Begin a ten-minute freewrite in which you narrate how your thinking about this topic has developed since you began. What did you think when you started? Then what did you discover? Then what? What did you think then? Write fast for ten minutes.

#2— Skip a few lines and freewrite for another ten minutes. This time focus on specific stories, anecdotes, people, case studies, observations, statistics, etc., that really stick with
you when you reflect on what you've learned so far from your reading and interviews. Write with as much detail as you can.

#3— Freewrite for another ten minutes, this time as a dialogue about your topic with someone you know. Begin with the question most commonly asked about your topic. Write this dialogue like a play, with you and your imagined partner each playing a part in the conversation. Sustain it for the full ten minutes.

#4— Finally, spend 5 minutes composing a one- or two-sentence answer to this question about your topic: So what?
How To Write a Thesis Statement

What is a Thesis Statement?

Almost all of us—even if we don’t do it consciously—look early in an essay for a one- or two-sentence condensation of the argument or analysis that is to follow. We refer to that condensation as a thesis statement.

Why Should Your Essay Contain A Thesis Statement?

- to test your ideas by distilling them into a sentence or two
- to better organize and develop your argument
- to provide your reader with a “guide” to your argument

In general, your thesis statement will accomplish these goals if you think of the thesis as the answer to the question your paper explores.

How Can You Write Good Thesis Statement?

Here are some helpful hints to get you started. You can either scroll down or select a link to a specific topic.

- How to Generate a Thesis if the Topic is Assigned.
- How to Generate a Thesis If the Topic is Not Assigned.
- How to Tell a Strong Thesis Statement from a Weak One.

How to Generate a Thesis Statement if the Topic is Assigned.

Almost all assignments, no matter how complicated, can be reduced to a single question. Your first step, then, is to distill the assignment into a specific question. For example, if your assignment is “Write a report to the local school board explaining the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class,” turn the request into a question like “What are the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class?” After you’ve chosen the question your essay will ‘answer, compose one or two complete sentences answering that question.

Q: “What are the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class?”

http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/thesis.html

6/7/2001
How to Write a Thesis Statement

A: "The potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class are . . ."

OR

A: "Using computers in a fourth-grade class promises to improve . . ."

The answer to the question is the thesis statement for the essay.

How to Generate a Thesis Statement if the Topic is Not Assigned.

Even if your assignment doesn’t ask a specific question, your thesis statement still needs to answer a question about the issue you’d like to explore. In this situation, your job is to figure out what question you’d like to write about.

A good thesis statement will usually include the following four attributes:

- take on a subject upon which reasonable people could disagree
- deal with a subject that can be adequately treated given the nature of the assignment
- express one main idea
- assert your conclusions about a subject

Let’s see how to generate a thesis statement for a social policy paper.

Brainstorm the topic.

Let’s say that your class focuses upon the problems posed by drug addiction. You find that you are interested in the problems of crack babies, babies born to mothers addicted to crack cocaine.

You start out with a thesis statement like this:

Crack babies.

This fragment isn’t a thesis statement, instead, it simply indicates a general subject. Furthermore, your reader doesn’t know what you want to say about crack kids.

Narrow the topic.

Your readings about the topic, however, have led you to the conclusion that not only do these babies have a difficult time surviving premature births and withdrawal symptoms, but their lives will be even harder as they grow up because they are likely to be raised in an environment of poverty and neglect. You think that there should be programs to help these children.

You change your thesis to look like this:

Programs for crack kids.

This fragment not only announces your subject, but it focuses on one main idea: programs. Furthermore, it raises a subject upon which reasonable people could disagree, because while most people might agree that something needs to be done for these children, not everyone would agree on what should be done or who should do it. You should note that this fragment is not a thesis statement because your reader
doesn’t know your conclusions on the topic.

Take a position on the topic.
After reflecting on the topic a little while longer, you decide that what you really want to say about this topic is that in addition to programs for crack babies, the government should develop programs to help crack children cope and compete.

You revise your thesis to look like this:

    More attention should be paid to the environment crack kids grow up in.

This statement asserts your position, but the terms more attention and the environment are vague.

Use specific language.
You decide to explain what you mean about “the environment,” so you write:

    Experts estimate that half of crack babies will grow up in home environments lacking rich cognitive and emotional stimulation.

This statement is specific, but it isn’t a thesis. It merely reports a statistic instead of making an assertion.

Make an assertion based on clearly stated support.
You finally revise your thesis statement one more time to look like this:

    Because half of all crack babies are likely to grow up in homes lacking good cognitive and emotional stimulation, the federal government should finance programs to supplement parental care for crack kids.

Notice how the thesis answers the question, “Why should anything be done for crack kids, and who should do it?” When you started thinking about the paper, you may not have had a specific question in mind, but as you became more involved in the topic, your ideas became more specific. Your thesis changed to reflect your new insights.

How to Tell a Strong Thesis Sentence from a Weak One.

1. A strong thesis takes some sort of stand.

Remember that your thesis needs to show your conclusions about a subject. For example, if you are writing a paper for a class on fitness, you might be asked to choose a popular weight-loss product to evaluate. Here are two thesis statements:

    There are some negative and positive aspects to the Banana Herb Tea Supplement.

This is a weak thesis. First, it fails to take a stand. Second, the phrase “negative and positive” aspects” are vague.

    Because Banana Herb Tea Supplement promotes rapid weight loss that results in the loss of muscle and lean body mass, it poses a potential danger to customers.

http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/thesis.html
This is a strong thesis because it takes a stand.

2. A strong thesis justifies discussion.

Your thesis should indicate the point of the discussion. If your assignment is to write a paper on kinship systems, using your own family as an example, you might come up with either of these two thesis statements:

My family is an extended family.

This is a weak thesis because it states an observation. Your reader won’t be able to tell the point of the statement, and will probably stop reading.

While most American families would view consanguineal marriage as a threat to the nuclear family structure, many Iranian families, like my own, believe that these marriages help reinforce kinship ties in an extended family.

This is a strong thesis because it shows how your experience contradicts a widely-accepted view. A good strategy for creating a strong thesis is to show that the topic is controversial. Readers will be interested in reading the rest of the essay to see how you support your point.

3. A strong thesis expresses one main idea.

Readers need to be able to see that your paper has one main point. If your thesis expresses more than one idea, then you might confuse your readers about the subject of your paper. For example:

Companies need to exploit the marketing potential of the Internet, and web pages can provide both advertising and customer support.

This is a weak thesis statement because the reader can’t decide whether the paper is about marketing on the Internet or web pages. To revise the thesis, the relationship between the two ideas needs to become more clear. One way to revise the thesis would be to write:

Because the Internet is filled with tremendous marketing potential, companies should exploit this potential by using web pages that offer both advertising and customer support.

This is a strong thesis because it shows that the two ideas are related. Hint: a great many clear and engaging thesis statements contain words like “because,” “since,” “so,” “although,” “unless,” and “however.”

4. A strong thesis statement is specific.

A thesis statement should show exactly what your paper will be about, and will help you keep your paper to a manageable topic. For example, if you write a paper on hunger, you might say:

World hunger has many causes and effects.

This is a weak thesis statement for two major reasons. First, “world hunger” can’t be discussed thoroughly in five or ten pages. Second, “many causes and effects” is vague. You should be able to

http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/thesis.html
identify specific causes and effects. A revised thesis might look like this:

**Hunger persists in Appalachia because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.**

This is a strong thesis because it narrows the subject to a more specific and manageable topic and it also identifies the specific causes for the existence of hunger.

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