

MAKING EVIDENCE MEANINGFUL

How to write a paragraph

What is analysis? What is critical thinking?

Analysis involves critical thinking (i.e. choice thinking). You must choose how to use your interpretation of the evidence to answer the prompt (question). Analysis is that process.

In formal academic writing, evidence is presented in the body of the essay. Each time you present evidence, you must contextualize it, interpret it, and analyze it. As a result, each body paragraph should represent as a mini-analysis.

Sample Paragraph Structure

CLAIM/TOPIC SENTENCE	Make a claim that clearly identifies your argument in the paragraph. Since you must first analyze the evidence to formulate an argument, it is best to write your topic sentence after you have completed the analysis.
CONTEXT/BACKGROUND	Introduce the evidence that you are about to present by giving some context/background to the quote. What does the reader need to know about the immediate context of text to understand your chosen evidence?
EVIDENCE/QUOTE	Choose a short quote that relates to the topic of your paragraph/paper. Note: The longer the quote, the more explaining you will have to do in the next section.
INTERPRETATION/ EXPLANATION OF EVIDENCE	Provide your interpretation (explanation) of the quote. What does the quote mean? What do you want the reader to notice in the evidence that you have chosen? Clarify any words/terms that the reader may not know. Draw connections between parts of the quote. “In this example, the author is saying...” “In other words,...”
ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE	Explain how/why your interpretation of the evidence answers the prompt (question). <i>Your analysis should be specific to the quote and the document: What is so important about this quote? Help your reader understand why/ how your evidence answers the prompt.</i>

How to write a persuasive paragraph?

Formal analysis is like the scientific method. You should never start with a conclusion and then attempt to find evidence to support it. Rather, you should start with the evidence and draw your conclusion from it via analysis (i.e. experimentation).

Try using the analytical method to craft a paragraph:

1. Choose a quote
- 2-3. Contextualize and interpret the quote
4. Analyze the quote
5. Summarize your analysis in one sentence, i.e. make a claim

Now reorder the steps into a cohesive paragraph.

SAMPLE PARAGRAPH USING ANALYTICAL METHOD

PROMPT: According to <i>The Epic of Gilgamesh</i> , what makes a person heroic? What does this reveal about Sumerian society?	
ANALYSIS STEPS:	
Step #1: Choose a quote from the text that you think can be used to make an argument about Sumerian belief in heroes and heroic qualities. Write down the quote.	Gilgamesh heard the words of the senior advisers, he looked with a [laugh at] Enkidu ... : ['Now, my friend, how frightened I am!] [In fear of him shall I change my mind ?']
Step #2: Contextualize the quote: What does the reader need to know to understand this quote? What happened immediately before this quote? Who is speaking?	Gilgamesh and Enkidu are about to go battle Humababa, the guardian of the cedar forest who has been terrorizing the people of Sumer. The senior advisors of Uruk warn Gilgamesh that Humbaba is very strong and try to dissuade him from going on his quest. Even Enkidu claims that Humababa is among the most terrifying creatures on earth.
Step #3: In your own words, explain what is happening in this quote? This is your interpretation.	Gilgamesh listens to the advice of the senior advisors about Humbaba's strength but then explains to them and to Enkidu that he is not going to let that fear stop him from fighting. He even admits that he is afraid but laughs at Enkidu as a sign of not giving into his fears.
Step #4: Analyze the quote: What does this quote tell us about Sumerian belief in heroes? What qualities did Sumerians regard as heroic? What does this reveal about Sumerian society?	This quote tells us that the Sumerians believed that to be heroic one needed to continuously push forward despite fear. Bravery was a major quality of a hero. Gilgamesh showed his bravery by asking that question; "In fear of him shall I change my mind?" By asking Enkidu that question he is telling him that if he were to not go because he was scared, he would not be brave enough to be the hero that he was.
Step #5: In one sentence, summarize your analysis (step 4).	A hero is someone who does not give in to his fears even when he is faced with the most challenging obstacles.
FINAL PARAGRAPH: Reorder the steps to create a coherent paragraph. Add transitions if necessary. Step 5 → Step 2 → Step 1 → Step 3 → Step 4	
According to the Epic of Gilgamesh, a hero is someone who does not give in to his fears even when he is faced with the most challenging obstacles. As Gilgamesh and Enkidu are about to go battle Humababa, the guardian of the cedar forest who has been terrorizing the people of Sumer, the senior advisors of Uruk warn Gilgamesh that Humbaba is very strong and try to dissuade him from going on his quest. Even Enkidu claims that Humbaba is among the most terrifying creatures on earth. Gilgamesh does not give into fear. The text states, "Gilgamesh heard the words of the senior advisers, he looked with a [laugh at] Enkidu ... 'Now, my friend, how frightened I am! In fear of him shall I change my mind ?'." Gilgamesh listens to the advice of the senior advisors about Humbaba's strength but then explains to them and to Enkidu that he is not going to let that fear stop him from fighting. He even admits that he is afraid but laughs at Enkidu as a sign of not giving into his fears. This quote tells us that the Sumerians believed that to be heroic one needed to continuously push forward despite fear. Bravery was a major quality of a hero. Gilgamesh showed by telling Enkidu telling if he were not go because he was scared, he would not be brave enough to be the hero that he was. In Sumerian society, a hero was a man who could overcome his fear and follow his quest.	

Evaluation Criteria

1. Does the topic sentence effectively introduce the argument (not just the topic) of the paragraph?
2. Is the argumentative claim of the topic sentence specific enough to be adequately supported in one paragraph?
3. Is the quote properly contextualized? Would a reader that has never read the text be able to understand the evidence?
4. Does the explanation of the evidence (interpretation) address the entire quote? Are there any parts of the quote that are not addressed in the explanation/interpretation?
5. Does the analysis of the evidence follow logically from the explanation/interpretation? Does the explanation of the quote provide a logical link between the evidence and the analysis?
6. Does the analysis say something significant about the relationship between the evidence and the prompt?
7. Is the analysis directly related to the evidence? If not, what should be added/removed from the quote and/or analysis? Does the analysis only make conclusions supported by the quote/evidence?

Common Errors

1. Evidence/quote is too long and contains information unnecessary to the argument of the paragraph.
2. Quotes are used as context/background rather than evidence to be analyzed.
3. Topic sentence is descriptive rather than argumentative.
4. Topic sentence makes a claim that is not specific enough to be proven within the length of the paragraph or with evidence contained in the paragraph.
5. Evidence is not contextualized (dropped quote). Author does not specify where the evidence appears in the context of the source. As a result, the reader does not understand why the author has chosen to use the evidence.
6. Evidence is not explained/interpreted. As a result, the analysis does not make logical sense. When the author does not explain the chosen evidence and provides only a quote, the reader makes a conclusion about the meaning of the quote. If the reader's interpretation/conclusion about the quote is not consistent with the author's, the analysis does not make logical sense.