

INSTRUCTOR'S EDITION

Writing Analytically

David Rosenwasser

Jill Stephen

FIFTH EDITION



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Writing Analytically, Fifth Edition
David Rosenwasser
Julie Stephen

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Production Service: Graphic World Publishing
Services
Text Designer: John Rihaud
Composition: Graphic World Inc.
Cover Designer: Melissa Beasler
Cover Image: © The Authors/REXUSA Chapple/
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Printed in the USA
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

Library of Congress Control Number:
2007939118

ISBN-10: 978-1-412-1873-0-6
ISBN-13: 1-412-18731-5

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Writing Analytically focuses. That is, the book treats writing as a series of inquired and learned acts of inquiry and belief.

For some people, learning to write is a struggle. It's not just a matter of stringing words, sentences, and paragraphs together. It's a matter of good writing ideas, of clear thinking, of creative activity. Through writing we learn to think (and to analyze). The act of writing is the act of thinking about what we think and believe.

All the editions of *Writing Analytically* have been successful in establishing and directing a program of writing instruction at arts colleges (a program well known to the editors because of surveys we've found among our students; not issued on paper), not passive summaries of what we know, but into the meaning of information. This is a chapter, if that, to analyze.

The main discovery we've made in the last few years of reading we'd done about the writing process is that, as writers and teachers, we tend to present their static, inert statements that write to one. In practice, the relationship is dynamic.

In most good writing, the final draft is the best. In other words, the thesis acts as a lens. In turn, it creates pressure toward evidence. The process of writing and then in revision depends on and developing ideas rather than on a fixed set of ideas.

By the time we come to the end of the book, we have observation skills. We recognize the writing process as thought-strangling for the thesis. We begin to understand the writing process as a process that can be taught. The book advances the idea that the writing process is not before the writer becomes a writer, and too narrowly thesis-driven before they have done much.

The solution to this problem sounds easy to accomplish, but it isn't. As writers and thinkers, we all need to slow down—to dwell longer in the open-ended, exploratory, information-gathering stage. This requires specific tasks that will reduce the anxiety for answers, impede the reflex move to judgments, and encourage a more hands-on engagement with materials. *Writing Analytically* supplies these tasks for each phase of the writing and idea-generating process: making observations, inferring implications, and making the leap to possible conclusions.

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS EDITION

This edition of *Writing Analytically* marks the fourth time we've had the chance to revisit the book's initial thinking on writing. The difficult but also exciting thing about repeatedly revising the same book is that the writer must keep learning how to see the logic of the book as a whole, even as new thinking rises from earlier thinking and threatens to displace it. We believe that we have now succeeded at what we couldn't quite manage to do in the fourth edition—to integrate the early versions of the book, oriented largely toward thesis and evidence, with the later editions of the book, oriented toward observation and interpretation.

Here in brief (and in boldface) are the suggestions and criticisms to which this extensively rewritten and reorganized version of the book responds:

- **Put back the definition-of-analysis chapter containing the five analytical moves, which disappeared in the third edition.** This edition starts with a revised version of the older chapter, now called *Analysis: What It Is and What It Does*.
- **Make things easier to find! Make core ideas stand out more clearly.** And so . . . :
 1. We have organized the book into four units to make the book's arguments and advice clearer and more clearly incremental. These units are:
 - I. The Analytical Frame of Mind: Introduction to Analytical Methods
 - II. *Writing the Analytical Essay*
 - III. *Writing the Researched Paper*
 - IV. *Grammar and Style*
 2. We have created separate chapters on matters that were not adequately pulled together and foregrounded in previous editions.
 - The book's observational strategies, such as 30 on 1 and The Method, now appear prominently in a single chapter called *A Toolkit of Analytical Methods* (Chapter 3).
 - A revised chapter called *Interpretation: What It Is, What It Isn't, and How to Do It* (Chapter 4) reunites materials on interpretation that were split up in the fourth edition.
 - The book's advice on analyzing and producing arguments now appears in a single chapter called *Analyzing Arguments* (Chapter 5).

- A new chapter explicitly discusses the topic of the book's rhetorical modes.
- The book's advice is largely new chapters and Formats (Chapter 6) regarding paragraph form and paragraph form in terms of movement.

- **Get rid of the overstudied of counterproductive** that in the fourth edition, too often do—perhaps chapter have now been reorganized and revised, which now appears as that it is hard to develop what's wrong with our
- **Put the book's advice pared-down chapter** book's unit on research the book's strategies are particular to writing revised reading chapter
- **Make the book shorter sentence—in fact, even to the temptation to make the book more**

We continue to believe that thought process will make with complexity and to move give assembling of down-close media and verbal prompts for the role they can play in collaborative space. When a time, class discussion and we easily learn that good ideas

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Writing Analytically is designed as well as in more advanced

Though the book's chapters form a logical sequence, each can also stand alone and be used in different sequences.

We assume that most professors will want to supply their own subject matter for students to write about. The book does, however, contain writing exercises throughout that can be applied to a wide range of materials—print and visual, text-based (reading), and experiential (writing from direct observation). In the text itself we suggest using newspapers, magazines, films, primary texts (both fiction and nonfiction), academic articles, textbooks, television, historical documents, places, advertising, photographs, political campaigns, and so on.

There is, by the way, an edition of this book that contains readings—*Writing Analytically with Readings*. It includes writing assignments that call on students to apply the skills in the original book to writing about the readings and to using the readings as lenses for analyzing other material.

The book's writing exercises take two forms: end-of-chapter assignments that could produce papers and informal writing exercises called "Try This" that are embedded inside the chapters near the particular skills they employ. Many of the "Try This" exercises could generate papers, but usually they are more limited in scope, asking readers to experiment with various kinds of data-gathering and analysis.

The book acknowledges that various academic disciplines differ in their expectations of student writing. Interspersed throughout the text are boxes labeled Voices from across the Curriculum. These were written for the book by professors in various disciplines who offer their disciplinary perspective on such matters as reasoning back to premises and determining what counts as evidence. Overall, however, the text concentrates on the many values and expectations that the disciplines share about writing.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

We have had the good fortune to interest others enough in our work to stimulate attack, much of it, we think, the result of misunderstanding. In an effort to clarify our own premises and origins, we offer the following disclosure of our influences and orientations.

The book is aligned with the thinking of Carl Rogers and others on the goal of making argument less combative, less inflected by a vocabulary of military strategizing that discourages negotiation among competing points of view and the evolution of new ideas from the pressure of one idea against another.

The book is also heavily influenced by the early proponents of the process movement in writing pedagogy. Books such as Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* and Ken Macrorie's *Telling Writing* were standard fare in graduate programs when we began to teach. We came of age, so to speak, accepting that writing instruction should focus on writers' process and not just on ways of shaping finished products. As is now generally recognized, the inherent romanticism and expressivist bias of the process approach to writing limited its usefulness for people who were interested in teaching students how to write for academic audiences. Despite the social scientific approach that researchers such as Janet Emig, James Britton, and Linda Flower (to name a few) brought to the

understanding of students' writing, it suffered a decline in status and respectability (See, for example, the arguments of Bazerman, and others, who have criticized ethnographic research on the writing process).

We continue to believe that the process approach to writing, in its epistemological norms of working through, can go a long way toward making writing a more socially expressive activity, at least for the rich students' writing process that has a more mysterious-seeming nature.

The book has drawn some of its energy about our connection to process writing from people who think the book is uncritically aligned with the New Critical mind set. The New Criticism has come to be understood from the physical details that it focuses on and so on. This is not the place to discuss the impact of the New Criticism on writing theory (as our book explores extensively in Chapter 4), but, in turn, they also determine our assumptions about how best to work with these interpretive frames, though we have made clear the details beyond them.

We are aware that the book's organizing contrasts suggest their immediate successors, but they carry forward into the evolution of writing theory. We just say that the value assumptions (and ambiguity) and the ways of mind and culture) do not lead to thinking and writing that ignore the necessity of recognizing tenets and universal structures of mind and culture. We think that there is value in trying to understand the characteristic moves of writing and better able to arrive at a more sophisticated understanding.

Here are some other writing process understandings. Its employment of step-by-step procedures to evolve, should not be confused with the book does not prescribe a fixed

describe systematically what good thinkers do—as acts of mind—when they are confronted with data.

Our focus on words has also attracted critique. The theoretical orientation that has come to be called performance theory has emphasized the idea that words alone don't adequately account for the meanings we make of them. Words exist—their interpretations exist—in how and why they are spoken in particular circumstances, genres, and traditions. Our view is that this essential emphasis on the significance of context does not diminish the importance of attending to words. The situation is rather like the one we addressed earlier in reference to the New Criticism: Words mean in particular contexts. It is reductive to assume that attention to language means that only words matter or that words matter in some context-less vacuum. The methods we define in *Writing Analytically* can be applied to nonverbal and verbal data.

Interestingly, we were aware of, but had not actually studied, the work of John Dewey as we evolved our thinking for this book. Looking more closely at his writing now, we are struck by the number of key terms and assumptions our thinking shares with his. In his book *How We Think*, Dewey speaks, for example, of "systematic reflection" as a goal. He was interested, as are we, in what goes on in the production of actual thinking, rather than "setting forth the results of thinking" after the fact, in the manner of formal logic. On this subject Dewey writes, "When you are only seeking the truth and of necessity seeking somewhat blindly, you are in a radically different position from the one you are in when you are already in possession of the truth" (revised edition 1953, 74–75).

Dewey thought, as do we, that habits of mind can be trained, but first people have to be made more conscious of them. This is what *Writing Analytically* tries to accomplish. It begins with some of the same premises that Dewey and others have offered:

- The importance of being able to dwell in and tolerate uncertainty
- The importance of curiosity and knowing how to cultivate it
- The importance of being conscious of language
- The importance of observation

Dewey also said that people cannot make themselves have ideas. This we believe is not true. People can make themselves have ideas, and it is possible to describe the processes through which individuals enable themselves to make interpretive leaps. It is also possible (and necessary) for people to learn how to differentiate ideas from other things that are often mistaken for ideas, such as clichés and opinions—products of the deadening effect of habit (about which we have much to say in the book's opening unit). Although the interpretive leaps from observation to ideas can probably never be fully explained, we are not thus required to relegate the meaning-making process to the category of imponderable mystery.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen are Professors of English at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where they have co-directed a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program since 1987. They began teaching writing to college

students in the 1970s—David at William and Mary, and Jill at *Writing Analytically* has grown on writing and writing, first and at other colleges and un-

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Our greatest debt in this book is to rethink the book. Like all good explanations of our own thinking, it is missing a rare pleasure. Major Mary Beth Walden for her time and we work her ability to help us get good cheer. We are also very grateful for his frank talk and occasional

We have over the years had dedicated editors: Dickson Moustakas; Julie McBurney and and Mitchell Pfeifer and Karen and wife. And we remain grateful whose insight and patience

Christine Harris at Indiana its early days; we heard her and her colleagues John Sch a discerning audience. Emily of Ohio State University; and the pleasure of working with make many new friends just composition. Matthew John Ward at Calvin College has writing for many years. So I offer the benefit of their insights always learn something about George Kalamaras, inspiring stimulating conversations about

Among our mileages reference librarian Kelly Chapter 16. For writing throughout the book, thank James Marshall, Rich Niese Bruce Wightman. For their Adams, Jim Blum, Chris B. Em Peck, Jeremy Taisano, and Carol Pincus in the English

College, especially its provost, Marjorie Haas, for continuing to support our participation at national conferences.

We are indebted to our students at Mühlenberg College, who have shared their writing and their thinking about writing with us. Chief among these (of late) are Sarah Kersh, Robbie Seetz di Viteri, Laura Sutherland, Andrew Brown, Meghan Sweeney, Jen Epting, Jessica Szrocki, and Jake McNamara. Thanks also go to the following students who have allowed us to use their writing in our book (most recently): Jen Axe, Wendy Dichter, Theresa Leinker, and Kim Schmidt.

Finally, thanks to our spouses (Doborah and Mack) and our children (Lizzie, Lesley, and Sarah) for their love and support during the many hours that we sit immobile at our computers.

We would also like to thank the many colleagues who reviewed the book; we are grateful for their insight.

Dionn Ainsworth, *Weatherford College*

Jeanette Adkins, *Tarrant County College*

Juan Anderson, *California State University—San Marcos*

Canóce Harrington, *Central Connecticut State University*

Marie Bates, *Pierce College*

Karin Becker, *Fort Lewis College*

Laura DeHling, *Gustavus Adolphus College*

Stephenie Bennett, *Mekong University*

Tom Bowe, *Regis University*

Roland Eric Boys, *Oxnard College*

David Brantley, *College of Southern Maryland*

Jessica Brown, *City College of San Francisco*

Christine Bryant Cohen, *University of Illinois—Urbana-Champaign*

Alexandria Casey, *Graceland University*

Anthony Cavabuzzi, *Adirondack Community College*

Johnson Chen, *Michigan State University*

Jeff Confer, *Bellevue Community College*

Helen Connell, *Barry University*

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Don Ferguson, *Amarillo College*

Gina Franco, *Knox College*

Sue Frankson, *College of DuPage*

Anne Friedlman, *Borough of Manhattan Community College*

Tessa Garcia, *University of Texas—Pan American*

Susan Garrett, *Genesee College*

Edward Geisweidt, *University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point*

Nate Gordon, *Kishwaukee College*

Glenn Hutchinson, *University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point*

Habiba Ibrahim, *University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point*

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Sarah Newlands, *Fortland State University*

Eunmarud Nywang, *Mississippi State University*

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Adrienne Peck, *Modesto Junior College*

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John Robinson, *Diablo Valley College*

Pam Rooney, *Western Michigan University*

Linda Rosckrans, *The State University of New York—Canton*

Becky Ruéd, *Citrus College*

Arthur Saitzman, *Missouri State University*

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University of North Carolina—Charlotte

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Robbin Zeff, *George Washington University*

The Analytical Introduction

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Analysis: What It Is and
What It Does

CHAPTER 2
Counterproductive Habits
of Thought

CHAPTER 3
A Toolkit of Analytical
Skills

CHAPTER 4
Interpretation: What It
Is and What It Does

CHAPTER 5
Analyzing Arguments

CHAPTER 6
Topics and Modes of
Argument

Analysis: What

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Writing takes place now in computer and cell phone applications. Lists are replacing the classroom. If a and Google offer instant claims that we now inhabit a virtual sea. What is the future for writers and writing?

If what is meant by writing on a screen, then presumably the mission that characterize writing is of recording our thoughts in and mental habits that help at the center of what it means.

This book is primarily about its governing premise is to think well. This does not style, paragraphing, and organizing writing as a way of generating.

Although it is true that display their finished products arrive at their ideas in the form of thinking will finally take, for sustained act of reflection. It is an act of reflection in an age that will: information downloaded.

ANALYSIS DEFINED

We have seized upon analysis called for in college courses. We age analytical writing because

the like/dislike, agree/disagree variety and to the cut-and-paste compilation of sleek information. It is the kind of writing that helps people not only to retain and assimilate information, but to use information in the service of their own thinking about the world.

More than just a set of skills, analysis is a frame of mind, an attitude toward experience. It is a form of detective work that typically pursues something puzzling, something you are seeking to understand rather than something you are already sure you have the answers to. Analysis finds questions where there seemed not to be any, and it makes connections that might not have been evident at first.

Analyzing, however, is often the subject of attack. It is sometimes thought of as destructive—breaking things down into their component parts, or, to paraphrase a famous poet, murdering to dissect. Other detractors attack it as the reserved province of intellectuals and scholars, beyond the reach of normal people. In fact, we all analyze all of the time, and we do so not simply to break things down but to reconstruct our understandings of the world we inhabit.

If, for example, you find yourself being followed by a large dog, your first response, other than breaking into a cold sweat, will be to analyze the situation: What does being followed by a large dog mean for me, here, now? Does it mean the dog is vicious and about to attack? Does it mean the dog is curious and wants to play? Similarly, if you are losing a game of tennis, or you've just left a job interview, or you are looking at a painting of a woman with three noses, you will begin to analyze: How can I play differently to increase my chances of winning? Am I likely to get the job, and why (or why not)? Why did the artist give the woman three noses?

If we break things down as we analyze, we do so to search for meaningful patterns, or to uncover what we had not seen at first glance—or just to understand more closely how and why the separate parts work as they do.

As this book tries to show, analyzing is surprisingly formulaic. It consists of a fairly limited set of basic moves. People who think well have these moves at their disposal, whether they are aware of using them or not. Having good ideas is less a matter of luck than of practice, of learning how to make best use of the writing process. Sudden flashes of inspiration do, of course, occur; but those who write regularly know that inspirational moments can, in fact, be courted. The rest of this book offers you ways of courting and then realizing the full potential of your ideas.

Next we offer five basic "moves"—reliable ways of proceeding—for starting ideas analytically.

THE FIVE ANALYTICAL MOVES

Each of the five moves is developed in more detail in subsequent chapters; this is an overview. As we have suggested, most people already analyze all the time, but they often don't realize that this is what they're doing. A first step toward becoming a better analytical thinker and writer is to become more aware of your own thinking processes, building on skills that you already possess, and eliminating habits that get in the way. Each of the following moves serves the primary purpose of analysis to figure out what something means, why it is as it is and does what it does.

Move 1: Suspend Judgment

Suspending judgment is a considerable effort to break dislikes, with agreeing and reminded of how pervasive they are, judgments tend to be on judgments usually say about the subject being judged, especially revealing in this regard as if this assertion clearly says about the mind of the beholder.

Consciously leading writing about this is...") leads to a state of mind, one that is not of approval and disapproval. subject you are analyzing. See Reflex in Chapter 2, Current

Move 2: Define Significance

Whether you are analyzing a painting, a substance in a chemistry experiment, or a process in analysis.

- Divide the subject into parts.
- Consider how these parts relate to the whole.

In the case of analyzing a painting, he's dragging a leash, has a broken your larger subject into sections among them and determine the nature of the dog; appear unlikely to bite me.

Analysis of the painting kind you might be asked to do. Your result—ideas about why, Your result—ideas about why, with the dog, not only by you with the subject. If you know would not tell you, for instance, Cubism. Even without his analytical conclusions—ideas conclude, for example, that as opposed to realistic depiction.

Move 4: Look for Patterns

We have been defining analysis as the understanding of parts in relation to each other and to a whole, as well as the understanding of the whole in terms of the relationships among its parts. But how do you know which parts to attend to? What makes some details in the material you are studying more worthy of your attention than others? Here are three principles for selecting significant parts of the whole:

1. *Look for a pattern of repetition or resemblance.* In virtually all subjects, repetition is a sign of emphasis. In a symphony, for example, certain patterns of notes repeat throughout, announcing themselves as major themes. In a legal document, such as a warranty, a reader quickly becomes aware of words that are part of a particular idea or pattern of thinking; for instance, disclaimers of accountability.

The repetition may not be exact. In Shakespeare's play *King Lear*, for example, references to seeing and eyes call attention to themselves through repetition. Let's say you notice that these references often occur along with another strand of language having to do with the concept of proof. How might noticing this pattern lead to an idea? You might make a start by inferring from the pattern that the play is concerned with ways of knowing (proving) things—with seeing as opposed to other ways of knowing, such as faith or intuition.
2. *Look for binary oppositions.* Sometimes patterns of repetition that you begin to notice in a particular subject matter are significant because they are part of a contrast—the basic opposition—around which the subject matter is structured. A binary opposition is a pair of elements in which the two members of the pair are opposites; the word *binary* means “consisting of two.” Some examples of binary oppositions that we encounter frequently are nature/civilization, city/country, public/private, organic/inorganic, voluntary/involuntary. One advantage of detecting repetition is that it will lead you to discover binaries, which are central to locating issues and concerns. (For more on working with binary oppositions, see Chapters 3 and 5.)
3. *Look for anomalies—things that seem unusual, seem not to fit.* An *anomaly* (*n* = *not*, *nom* = *name*) is literally something that cannot be named; what the dictionary defines as deviation from the normal order. Along with looking for patterns, it is also fruitful to attend to anomalous details—those that seem not to fit the pattern. Anomalies help us to revise our stereotypical assumptions. A TV commercial, for example, advertises a baseball team by featuring its star reading a novel by Dostoyevsky in the dugout during a game. In this case, the anomaly, a baseball player who reads serious literature, is being used to subvert (question, unsettle) the stereotypical assumption that sports and intellectuality don't belong together.

Just as people tend to leap to evaluative judgments, they also tend to avoid information that challenges (by not conforming to) opinions they already hold. Screening out anything that would rattle the pattern they've begun to

see, they ignore the evidence in this process of “locking in” their opinions. (Chapter 9, Making a Thesis Statement) Often, then, the tendency to ignore information that challenges our preconceptions often leads to the formation of a thesis. For example, have arise not fit with a prevailing

Move 5: Keep Reformulating

Analysis, like all forms of inquiry, has a purpose or analytical writing. You know at the start of your work that the subject's parts fit together, but you are uncertain that there are procedures or methods to understand them with certainty to understand them.

The following three moves they're derived from) he or she attempts to understand the material that you want to think about. You locate and try to explain

Which details seem significant?

What does the detail mean?

What else might it mean?

(Move 5: Define Significance)

How do the details fit together?

What does this pattern of details mean?

What else might this same pattern of details mean? How is it explained?

(Move 6: Look for Patterns)

What details don't seem to fit the pattern? What details don't seem to form a different pattern?

What does this new part of the material mean? What does this new part of individual details differ from the rest?

(Move 7: Look for Anomalies)

The process of posing questions is often one of trial and error. Learning to ask good frame questions. One of the disciplines is knowledge of the subject. For example, an economics professor might ask about a phenomenon, such as a stock market crash, and its causes and significance in

Instructions for
Chapter 1: Analysis
Move 4: Look for
Patterns

benefits are financed and how changes in government policy and the country's population patterns might explain the declining supply of funds for the elderly. The sociologist might ask about attitudes toward the elderly and about the social structures that the elderly rely on for support.

ANALYSIS AT WORK: A SAMPLE PAPER

Examine the following excerpt from a draft of a paper about Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a collection of short mythological tales dating from ancient Rome. We have included annotations in blue to suggest how a writer's ideas evolve as he or she looks for patterns, contrast, and anomaly, constantly remaining open to reformulation.

The draft actually begins with two loosely connected observations: that males dominate females, and that many characters in the stories love the ability to speak and thus become submissive and dominated. In the excerpt, the writer begins to connect these two observations and speculate about what this connection means.

There are many other examples in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that show the dominance of man over women through speech control. In the Daphne and Apollo story, Daphne becomes a tree to escape Apollo, but her ability to speak is destroyed. Likewise, in the Syrinx and Pan story, Syrinx becomes a marsh reed, also a life form that cannot talk, although Pan can make it talk by playing it. (The writer establishes a pattern of similar detail.) Tygheion and Galathea is a story in which the male creates his conception of the perfect female. The female does not speak once; she is completely silent. Also, Fontana is referred to as "she" and never given a real name. This lack of a name renders her identity more silent. (How the writer begins to link the contrasts of speech/silence with the absence/presence of identity.)

Ocyroe is a female character who could tell the future but who was transformed into a mare so that she could not speak. One may explain this transformation by saying it was an attempt by the gods to keep the future unknown. (Notice how the writer's thinking expands as she sustains her investigation of the overall pattern of men silencing women; here she tests her theory by adding another variable—punishment.) However, there is a male character, Tiresias, who is also a seer of the future and is allowed to speak of his foreknowledge, thereby becoming a famous figure. (Interestingly, Tiresias during his lifetime has experienced being both a male and a female.) (Notice how the Ocyroe example has spawned a contrast based on gender in the Tiresias example. The pairing of the two examples demonstrates that the ability to tell the future is not the sole cause of silencing because male characters who can do it are not silenced—though the writer chooses to note that Tiresias is not entirely male.) Finally, in the story of Mercury and Herse, Herse's sister, Aglauros, tries to prevent Mercury from seducing Herse. Mercury turns her into a statue; the male directly silences the female's speech.

The woman silences the man in only two stories stated. (Here the writer searches out an anomaly—women silencing men—that grows in the rest of the paragraph into an organizing contrast.) In the first, "The Death of Orpheus," the women make use of "demonic shouting, Cithyrian flutes with curving horns, tambourines, the beating of breasts, and lyric howlings" (246) to drown out the male's songs, dominating his speech in terms of volume. In this way, the quality of power within speech is demonstrated: "for the first time, his words had no effect, and he failed to move them [the women] in any way by his voice" (247).

Next the women kill him, thereby destroying another of expressions: a "steeled murmur" (247), even if he is able to destroy his power completely through expression. (The writer learns from Ovid's *Orpheus*.)

The second story in which a male sees Diana naked, and she "he tried to say 'Aaa!'" but he was to fulfill his own hurting team death. (This example reinforces the Ovidian example.)

In some ways these four are discovering a workable idea. As the examples accumulate, the writer explains. We have not finished the draft is working to What we want to emphasize is to locate it in various patterns.

Try This 1.2: Applying 1.2

Speeches provide rich examples of emphasis. We especially recommend the URL. Locate any speeches in the texts of your results, focusing on the way of presenting it. Applying the moves cause you

DISTINGUISHING AN AND EXPRESSIVE WRITING

How does analysis differ from answering this question is to of emphasis—the writer, it involves all three of these categories more than the others. memoirs or stories about a desire for self-expression. Advocating or arguing against a change in the reader's with arriving at an understanding readers' views. (See

These three categories expressive (writer-centered) and explain a writer's feelings

1.2 Analyzing
 Applying 1.2
 Distinguishing Analysis from



FIGURE 1.2

Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother by James Albert McNeill Whistler, 1871.

because, crucially, it is in the act of carefully describing a subject that analytical writers often have their best ideas.

You may not agree with the terms by which we have summarized the painting, and thus you may not agree with such conclusions as “the mystery of self-sufficiency.” Nor is it necessary that you agree because there is no single, right answer to what the painting means. The absence of a single right answer does not, however, mean that all possible interpretations are equal and equally convincing to readers. The writer who can offer a careful description of a subject’s key features is likely to arrive at conclusions about possible meanings that others would share.

Here are two general rules to be drawn from this discussion of analysis and summary:

1. Describe with care. The words you choose to summarize your data will contain the germs of your ideas about what the subject means.
2. In moving from summary to analysis, scrutinize the language you have chosen, asking, “Why did I choose this word?” and “What ideas are implicit in the language I have used?”

ANALYSIS AND PERSONALITY

Although observations like Figure 1.3 go beyond simple painting, rather than moving such as efficiency about it. In the writer’s own mother. Such a means of prompting a sharp writer to interpret some features stand. But the writer would draw conclusions about what the subject also be reasonably inferred from.

Analysis is a creative act. Its scope is governed by logic. The reading of the painting that follows might lead to different conclusions anything he or she wishes.

Data

subject in profile, not looking at us

folded hands, lined face, cap, concealed hair, expresses grief

pattern of curtain, plain dress, full figure and blank wall; slightly filled face, cilia and toes on cap versus plain black dress

slightly stretched body position and presence of support for feet

FIGURE 1.3

Summary and Analysis of Whistler's 'The Artist's Mother'

is patiently waiting to die. Such conclusions would be unfounded speculations because the black dress is not sufficient to support them. Analysis often operates in areas in which there is no one right answer, but like summary and argument, it requires the writer to reason from evidence.

A few rules are worth highlighting here:

1. The range of assertions for explaining a given detail or word must be governed by context.
2. It's fine to use your personal reactions as a way into exploring what a subject means, but take care not to make an interpretive leap stretch farther than the actual details will support.
3. Because the tendency to transfer meanings from your own life onto a subject can lead you to ignore the details of the subject itself, you need always to be asking yourself: "What other explanations might plausibly account for this same pattern of detail?"

As we began this chapter by saying, analysis is a form of detective work. It can surprise us with ideas that our experiences produce once we take the time to listen to ourselves thinking. But analysis is also a discipline; it has rules that govern how we proceed and that enable others to judge the validity of our ideas. A good analytical thinker needs to be the attentive Dr. Watson to his or her own Sherlock Holmes. That is what the remainder of this book teaches you to do.

ASSIGNMENT: Analyze a Portrait or Other Visual Image

Locate any portrait, preferably a good reproduction from an art book or magazine, one that shows detail clearly. Then do a version of what we've done with *Whistler's Mother* in the preceding columns.

Your goal is to produce an analysis of the portrait with the steps we included in analyzing *Whistler's Mother*: First, summarize the portrait, describing accurately its significant details. Do not go beyond a recounting of what the portrait includes; avoid interpreting what these details suggest.

Then use the various methods offered in this chapter to analyze the data. What repetitions (patterns of same or similar detail) do you see? What organizing contrasts suggest themselves? In light of these patterns of similarity and difference, what anomalies do you then begin to detect? Move from the data to interpretive conclusions.

This process will produce a set of interpretive leaps, which you may then try to assemble into a more coherent claim of some sort about what the portrait "says."

Counterproductive

ANALYSIS, we have been saying, is a way of seeing and making sense of the world. It's a way of looking at things in a new frame of mind with its own potential ideas at the click of an analytical habit. Then, the more you practice your analytical skills, the more you sharpen your observational skills.

The meaning of observation is not always what we think. I've asked them to write down on a piece of paper a sure bet that many of the observations are like the one above: "It's a pigsty." And why do we tend to shut down the observations? We go for the quick interpretation.

Having ideas is dependent on the way that we wish to act on the world. It's not too easy understanding. The answers is that we are usually much more interested in the questions than in the answers.

The nineteenth-century philosopher John Dewey says that to observe an object/casts precise the object in a way that we place a filter on the world. The kinds of information that we get from the Dickinson poem is a function of the material with which to build our conclusions, about the sense of the world. If we are not careful, such moves will be counterproductive.

FEAR OF UNCERTAINTY

Most of us learn early in life that we are not sure. Rather than ask questions and try to find out, we come to believe that we understand the world as we think we do. This is a common reaction to uncertainty.

become better thinkers, most of us have to cultivate a more positive attitude toward not knowing. Prepare to be surprised at how difficult this can be.

Start by trying to accept that uncertainty—even its more extreme version, confusion—is a productive state of mind, a precondition to having ideas. The poet John Keats coined a memorable phrase for this willed tolerance of uncertainty. He called it *negative capability*:

I had not had a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously. I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.

—Letter to George and Thomas Keats, December 1817

The key phrases here are “capable of being in uncertainties” and “without any irritable reaching.” Keats is not saying that facts and reason are unnecessary and therefore can be safely ignored. But he does praise the kind of person who can remain calm (rather than becoming irritable) in a state of uncertainty. He is endorsing a way of being that can stay open to possibilities longer than most of us are comfortable with. Negative capability is an essential habit of mind for productive analytical thinking.

PREJUDGING

Too often inexperienced writers are pressured by well-meaning teachers and textbooks to arrive at a thesis statement—a single sentence formulation of the governing claim that a paper will support—before they have observed enough and reflected enough to find one worth using. These writers end up clinging to the first idea that they think might serve as a thesis, with the result that they stop looking at anything in their evidence except what they want and expect to see. Writers who leap prematurely to thesis statements typically find themselves proving the obvious—some too-general and superficial ideas—and worse, they miss opportunities for the better paper that is lurking in the more complicated evidence being screened out by the desire to make the thesis “work.”

Unit II of this book, Writing the Analytical Essay, will have much to say about finding and using thesis statements. But this unit (especially Chapter 3, *A Toolkit of Analytical Methods*) first focuses attention on the kinds of thinking and writing you’ll need to engage in before you can successfully make the move to thesis-driven writing. In this discovery phase, you will need to slow down the drive to conclusions to see more in your evidence.

Tell yourself that you don’t understand, even if you think that you do. You’ll know that you are surmounting the fear of uncertainty when the meaning of your evidence starts to seem less rather than more clear to you, and perhaps even strange. You will begin to see details that you hadn’t seen before and a range of compelling meanings where you had thought there was only one.

BLINDED BY HABIT

Some people, especially the young, are so used to seeing things a certain way that the rest of us don’t see. For example, people become duller as they age. One problem was not age but habit. Habit makes it more difficult to see things more efficiently, we can tune out things that are not familiar.

You can test this theory by driving on the way to work or class. Moving through the day can be like moving through the day with your eyes or the senses. Our minds are so used to seeing things a certain way that our eyes wander a few feet in front of us. Moving along the road by while we were driving on a car or the landscape. Arguing to consider, the habit of not

The deadening effect of habit on the perception of artists as well as poets. As defined the aim of art as “defining the novel,” novelist David Lodge, “is to make familiar things in unfamiliar ways.” Victor Shklovsky, wrote, “Unwittingly, and the fear of war. . . . (David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*)”

Growing up we all become used to seeing things a certain way. Instead we respond to our expectations. Often, these are false expectations.

A lot of what passes for art is just habit. It’s what you’ve seen before. If you’ve read it, couldn’t relate to it. And they are surprised when one for a description of a place. It will be a disaster. Offer a different opinion.” Why is this so?

We live in a culture of instant gratification. We are constantly assaulted with mind-numbing information. We never want anyone else’s. We want our own. And easy answers (“Be your own boss” can do away with homelessness).

That’s one reason for the “box”—which appears to me to be a box. But more than that, we are trapped inside the box. We have like/did-like responses. This

the philosopher David Hume, writing about perception, asserted that our lives are spent in “dogmatic slumbers,” so ensnared in conventional notions of just about everything that we don’t really see.

We turn now to three of the most stubbornly counterproductive habits of mind: the judgment reflex, generalizing, and overpersonalizing.

THE JUDGMENT REFLEX

It would be impossible to overstate the mind-numbing effect that the judgment reflex has on thinking. Why? Consider what we do when we judge something and what we ask others to do when we offer them our judgments. Ugly, realistic, pretty, wonderful, unfair, crazy; notice how the problem with such words is a version of the problem with all generalizations—lack of information. What have you actually told someone else if you say that something is ugly, or boring, or realistic?

In its most primitive form—most automatic and least thoughtful—judging is like an on/off switch. When the switch is thrown in one direction or the other—good/bad, right/wrong, positive/negative—the resulting judgment predetermines and overrides any subsequent thinking we might do. Rather than thinking about what *X* is or how *X* operates, we lock ourselves prematurely into proving that we were right to think that *X* should be banned or supported.

The psychologist Carl Rogers has written at length on the problem of the judgment reflex. He claims that our habitual tendency as humans—virtually a programmed response—is to evaluate everything and to do so very quickly. Walking out of a movie, for example, most people will immediately voice their approval or disapproval, usually in either/or terms: I liked it or didn’t like it; it was right/wrong, good/bad, interesting/boring. The other people in the conversation will then offer their own evaluation and their judgments of the others’ judgments: “I think that I was a good movie and that you are wrong to think it was bad,” and so on. Like the knee jerking in response to the physician’s hammer, such reflex judgments are made without conscious thought (the source of the pejorative term “knee jerk thinking”). They close off thinking with likes and dislikes and instant categories.

This is not to say that all judging should be avoided. Obviously our thinking on many occasions must be applied to decision-making: whether we should or shouldn’t vote for a particular candidate, should or shouldn’t eat French fries, should or shouldn’t support a ban on cigarette advertising. Ultimately, in other words, analytical thinking does need to arrive at a point of view—which is a form of judgment—but analytical conclusions are usually not phrased in terms of like/dislike or good/bad. They disclose what a person has come to understand about *X* rather than how he or she rules on the worth of *X*.

In some ways, the rest of this book consists of a set of methods for blocking the judgment reflex in favor of more thoughtful responses. For now, here are two moves to make in order to short circuit the judgment reflex and begin replacing it with a more thoughtful, patient, and curious habit of mind. First, try the cure that Carl Rogers recommended to negotiators in industry and government: Do not assert an agreement

data towards imm
leaps to
data

FIGURE 2.1
The Problems with Generalizing

or disagreement with another way the other person would because we are usually so busy what the other person is saying.

Second, try eliminating judgments take the form of *should* consider putting such feelings characterized by the words: new law? Why do laws of the rather than orders? How do

You might also try eliminating no data. “Green” is a descriptive. “Beautiful” is an evaluative.

Try this 2.1: Distinguishing

The dividing line between judgment is difficult to discern in practice. Use the following list as judgment reasoning: monstrous, delicious, tedious, pungent, unrealistic.

Try this 2.2: Experiment

Write a paragraph of description using any evaluative adjectives, adjectives and adverbs in a paragraph.

GENERALIZING

What it all boils down to: speech was...

Generalizing is not always or speeches to a reasonably skill. We generalize from our

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