**What is an analytical essay?**

As a college writer, you'll be asked to write papers in which you analyze different kinds of texts, for example, essays, research data, journal articles, even advertisements. Your analysis is basically your interpretation of another writer's choices. To analyze, you'll separate a text and examine its parts to understand what they mean, both by themselves and collectively. Your analytical essay is your chance to share your understanding of what an author is saying, how they are saying it, and whether you think the author's choices are effective.

The key to the analytical process is to develop a questioning, curious mind. Writing annotations or marginal notes is one way to make observations and ask questions. This careful and critical reading lets you dissect the text and ask interpretive questions-- what, why, how-- in order to formulate your thesis. For a powerful analytical essay, you've got to build around a strong thesis.

So you're ready to get writing. Start your introduction with a brief summary of the purpose and main argument of the text you're analyzing. Now it's time to present your thesis, your judgment of the author's argument. Your thesis anchors your overall analysis but it can't stand alone. You have to support it with well-reasoned comments and evidence.

If you're evaluating an author's word choice, for example, give evidence of specific language in the text and comment on how or why the author is using it. Your analytical essay needs to maintain a balance of summary and analysis. It's important to recap for your readers what the author of a text says, and to explain how the author makes his or her point. Present and break down the author's argument once before presenting your thesis.

But don't stop there. Keep striking that balance between summary and analytical comments throughout the rest of your paper. When you analyze, you present a confident, informed judgment of another text. Just remember to read closely and carefully, craft a strong thesis, include evidence from the text, and maintain a balance of summary and analysis. And you'll be ready to take on any analytical essay assignment.