

A Guide to Analysis and Explication

Analysis: The dissolution or breaking up of anything complex by separating the various simple elements.

Explication: The process of developing or bringing out what is implicitly contained in a notion, proposition, principle.

To put it another way: analysis divides something that looks like one thing and breaks it into little things. Explication expands each of the little things by assigning meaning, trying to unite lots of little things underneath one bigger thing.

Given the definitions of *analysis* and *explication*, this assignment presumes that you have engaged the reading closely and carefully. Your job here is to produce insight into the text, so choose a topic/idea/passage that will enable you to produce significant insight. You should pay attention to the scope of the idea you select to analyze—if it's too long, you run the risk of losing focus, or more likely, failing to produce the level of analysis I'm looking for (and just summarize). A 250 word analysis of *War and Peace* would be a pretty bad analysis. A 250 word analysis of two sentences of *War and Peace*, though, . . . Although this assignment does not *require* a thesis statement, it does require that you maintain consistent focus on the main idea governing your analysis. And you should weave a thesis into all your writing.

To succeed on this assignment

First, make sure you develop a thorough understanding of the object of analysis. Make sure you wrap your brain around the question and its scope. Your main task is twofold:

1. Analysis. Here you are thinking about your passage as something made up of parts that work together. You need to articulate what these parts are and how they interact to produce the meaning or argument embodied in the passage.
2. As you analyze, you'll also need to explicate. Rather than thinking about these as two separate acts, you need to see how analysis and explication work together. As you analyze, breaking apart the notion of definition making into its interactive parts, you will want to thoroughly describe what is significant and important about this notion.

Do not summarize the passage or respond personally (“this is what it means to me” or “I feel”). Although I want to know what you think about the passage, you should write about it in such a way that suggests that anyone would or should think about the passage as you do. (“The word ‘excrement’ suggests that . . .”)

Structurally, your analysis should consist of a sentence that introduces and specifies the object of analysis, followed by a well-developed paragraph (10-15 sentences indicate superior development; 5 or 6 sentences indicate insufficient development). You should have the same number of points to make as you have analytical paragraphs. Most prompts can receive an A if you have just one thing to say but perform a superior analysis. Quality, not quantity, of writing is the idea.

Evaluation

You will be evaluated along three main categories: Quality of Thought (Insight), Logical Cohesion (Organization and Development), and Rhetorical Sophistication.

1. Quality of Thought – Given the purpose of explication and analysis, you should aim for a full and complete understanding of the topic you write about. This understanding should be represented in such a way that denotes its importance. Having nothing to say about what you've read is unacceptable, having something to say which is wrong is just fine, and having something to say that is insightful and adds meaning to our understanding of the text and the issues of the class—that's the goal. Your biggest enemy this semester is the so what factor. You don't want someone—a peer in class, a member of your cohort, or me—to finish reading your analysis and say, “so what?”

2. Logical Cohesion – A good idea isn't enough; you need to develop the idea in a logical, cohesive manner that explains your insight to fellow experts. A coherent explanation is tough to develop, but once you develop the knack of it you'll find it easy to spot. A logically coherent analysis proceeds from idea to idea by connection, developing each idea fully and explaining itself adequately. It uses evidence to buttress its arguments and it tightly follows the text. Each main idea is separated into a discrete paragraph and is fully developed before pursuing other points. The overall paper follows a plan, without meandering into cul-de-sacs of thought.

3. Rhetorical Sophistication – You should speak with appropriate authority, resisting the temptation to qualify thoughts with “I think” or “I feel.” This is not a reading journal of first impressions, but rather the representation of careful and considered thinking.