

Academic Writing and Critical Analysis: What goes into getting an “A” on your paper

Academic writing is a genre of writing. It’s something we all have to develop and work on.

****Pick a topic/story/poem that you had a particular reaction to (be it “good” or “bad” or “loved it/hated it” or something that you didn’t quite understand at first and had to think through)....this will lead to a more interesting paper for you to write and for us to read! ☺**

****Also when picking a topic to write about, make sure you are picking something that is “do-able” for the particular assignment/class you are writing for. You might have a great idea, but it’s just not going to work for a particular assignment. Save it for another class/time. And, if you’re not sure you’re on track....ASK ☺**

1. Writing takes work. Good writing takes 10x that.

- a. **All-nighters and last minute writing shows. Take the time to do AT LEAST 1 draft. MAKE SURE YOU GIVE YOURSELF TIME TO FIND AN APPROPRIATE AND SCHOLARLY OUTSIDE SOURCE(S).** This will make you a happier writer and you will enjoy the assignment more because you aren’t rushing last minute.

b. Make an outline: put a tentative thesis at the top of the page.

- i. Underneath, identify the “points”/claims you would have to include to ‘prove’ your thesis/support your thesis
- ii. Then, think about what sections of the text (as well as outside sources if you are using them) would support those ‘points’
- iii. This is how you create your body paragraphs.

c. Make sure you have a DEBATABLE THESIS: Active verbs/language and something that is more than identifying a theme.

- i. **“The Hildebrandslied explores the importance of communication”**

=NOT A THESIS SETTING UP CRITICAL ANALYSIS. “Weak Thesis”
Why? Because at best, this sets up a surface level analysis.

- ii. **“While one may wish to sympathize with her situation, Kriemhild is ultimately guilty of abuse of power and letting feelings of revenge cloud better judgment. Her actions and**

destructiveness make her the most “evil” of all the characters in the Nibelungenlied.”

=Debatable stance. This is a thesis that sets up a critical analysis of the text. ***And, of course the body paragraphs must support this claim....you may have a debatable thesis, but fail to support it in the body.

2. MAKE SURE YOU CAN PROVE YOUR THESIS: BODY PARAGRAPHS MUST SUPPORT THE THESIS AND CITE THE TEXT DIRECTLY.

- a. Don't summarize. Analyze.
 - b. Cite appropriately: only what is needed. Don't take out of context. YOU MUST PROVIDE PAGE NUMBERS AND USE MLA OR APA FORMAT.
 - c. When using outside sources, remember: They are not doing the “thinking” or “arguing” for you. **They are support for your own original analysis.** DO NOT STRING TOGETHER A BUNCH OF QUOTES to make your paper. That is not analysis.
 - d. Make sure you take the time to consider the order of your body paragraphs (order of information) and have transitional statements between paragraphs which allow for readability of your claims. DO NOT simply write, “First.....Second.....Thirdly...” to start body paragraphs.
- 3. Formatting:** Please refer to the syllabus and the assignment description. Subject to change so be sure you are following the most up-to-date requirements.
- 4. ACADEMIC TONE/VOICE/DICTION:** Third person sentence structure:
- i. “The writer claims that_____.”
 - ii. “In this poem, the narrator explores issues of morality including_____.”
 - iii. Do not write like you would talk with your friends. This should be “formal”---you are the expert leading your reader through your topic. You must write using language that shows you are in charge.
 - iv. **DO NOT USE:**

1. "I think the author was trying to say that communication is important.
2. "I will argue in this paper that Kriemhild was wicked."
3. "We can see/you can tell....."

v. **Instead:**

1. **The author argues that communication is crucial to humankind's development.**
2. **Through analysis of her symbolic actions, it is clear that Kriemhild was ultimately a wicked character and responsible for everyone's death.**
3. **Close examination of the text reveals.....**

5. **STAY CALM AND PROOFREAD:** Give yourself time to have a final "read over" of your paper before submitting to class. Remember to submit both a hard copy in class and submit an electronic copy to the D2L dropbox.

i. **"Some people think that monkeys buy happiness."**

- ii. **"Hagen was able to tickle Kriemhild into revealing Siegfried's weakness."**