Writing Analytically

**Audience and Purpose**

Unless otherwise stated, imagine you are writing for an academic journal, whose readership consists of your fellow students. This means that you **do not** summarize or recount the events of the story - we already know it! Instead, you are to *enlighten* us about a story we have already read; share some original thinking about the text that we might not have considered before!

**Content**

* **Thesis / argument**:   
  Your essay should clearly *state* your position; everything else in the essay should support this argument.
* **Reasoning and evidence (whether direct quotes or paraphrase)**:   
  You need to *justify* your statements by using evidence from the text. This could be through direct quotation or simple paraphrase.

**Structure**

* **Overall essay structure**:
  + Generally an essay has about five or six paragraphs, including an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. See example essay structure below.
* **Paragraph structure**:
  + Start with a topic sentence that clearly and precisely indicates the topic of the paragraph. Good topic sentences will link the topic back to the thesis / main idea.
  + Follow with evidence. Evidence can be direct quotation or paraphrase.
  + After providing evidence, you should elaborate. Explain further how the evidence supports the point, provide further insights, pull out specific words from the quote to look at in more detail, and so on.
  + Conclude and link to the next paragraph.
* **General CEI Structure**:
  + *Claim:* State your point
  + *Evidence*: Evidence from the text (direct quote or paraphrase)
  + *Interpretation*: Explain how the evidence supports the point; elaborate further
  + Link discussion back to the main idea; link to the next topic

**Style**

* **Objectivity**:
  + The essay is about the text, not about you. Avoid first person pronouns and phrases such as “I think”. Focus on the text.
    - BAD: It seems to **me** that Hemingway uses the hot, arid side of the valley to symbolize sterility. (Personal pronouns - cut out the ‘It seems to **me’**)
    - BETTER: **Hemingway** uses the hot, arid side of the valley to symbolize sterility. (Author - can cut out to shift attention unto the text itself)
    - BEST: The hot, arid side of the valley symbolizes sterility.
* **Active verbs**:
  + You need to focus on what the text ‘does’. This means using active verbs. For example: *implies, suggests, connotes, demonstrates.* ([More examples here](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1DfjjwRoiU13ZoukK1iILrIA-fii9qA1yF2YJ3hYtyAs/edit#slide=id.g8e87c4424_070).) Also, check this [comprehensive vocabulary resource](https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B3BORrtzoiQuemdCOWo0T0MtQTg).
* **Present tense**:
  + Literature is *timeless* - the characters come to life again whenever someone reads the story. For this reason, we use present tense. (There may be some instances where you need to write in historical or future present tense. See examples [here](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1DfjjwRoiU13ZoukK1iILrIA-fii9qA1yF2YJ3hYtyAs/edit#slide=id.g8e87c4424_041).)
* **Connectives**:
  + Linking words that provide cohesion and flow to your work. You should be aiming to smoothly connect one sentence to the next (even across paragraphs). There are many categories of conjunctions. Check out some [here](https://www.tamiu.edu/uc/writingcenter/documents/TransitionsandConnectives.pdf).
* **Active sentences - (avoid passive sentence construction)**:
  + Good English is active, energetic and precise. Active sentences help to create this effect. Put your subject at the start of the sentence, followed by a ‘vivid verb’. This will help you create vigorous, verb-driven sentences.
    - E.g. BAD: The symbolism of the church **is** **about** redemption.
    - E.g. GOOD: The church (subject) **symbolizes** (action verb) redemption.
* **Sentence variation**:
  + You should still vary your sentences however! Try varying in terms of [length, type, and order](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ly9_uhWaOZ7jQ0TFN_CIVPxcmf6NUANDrxthqz0d4_w/edit#slide=id.g26ccfd334_063). (Although in essays you should use declarative sentences.) Also, you could combine multiple short sentences together to make them more interesting.
* **Other words and phrases to avoid**:
  + Don’t praise the text or the author with adverbs such as ‘cleverly’ and ‘beautifully’. You are not evaluating or critiquing a work but describing and analyzing it. Your praise sounds condescending.
  + Avoid wordy outlines such as “In order to understand X we must first examine Y” or “Z is a significant aspect of this work”. Just go ahead and say it!
  + Avoid speculation about what the story could have been. We focus on what a text *is*, not what it *could be*.
  + “Center around” - An impossible phrase. Something can’t ‘center around’ something!
  + “Just as” - Too precise. Instead use ‘similarly’.
  + Vague modal words, e.g ‘somewhat’ and ‘perhaps’ - not convincing!
  + “What the author is trying to say here is…” The author didn’t *try*. They did! There is no *try* - only *do*! Instead, use active voice - e.g. “The immolation of the church implies an end to innocence.”
  + Avoid phrases like “The fact that…” and “One of…” These phrases are characteristic of spoken language.
  + Avoid starting a sentence with “There is…” or “It is…” Instead, use a more meaningful subject.
  + [FURTHER EXAMPLES AND INFORMATION AVAILABLE HERE.](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1DK6Qa2HVEsX6UR_AmNOEvJNJBh5DjcnadaQ0fCFXIqs/edit#slide=id.p)

**Evidence**

* **Integrating quotes**:
  + Try to integrate quotes smoothly, inserting them into your sentences. Don’t just leave them sitting there by themselves! Refer to the [information / video outlined here](http://www2.ivcc.edu/rambo/eng1001/quotes.htm) for more information.
* **Using paraphrase**:
  + Sometimes the grammar of the quote will not match the grammar of your sentence. In these cases, you can simple paraphrase (write in your own words). Don’t rely on this form too much though! It is generally better to use direct quotations.

Example Essay Structure

**INTRODUCTION note: some people put the THESIS statement (theme in this case) at the end of the intro**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Interest statement** |  |
| **Introduce author and title** |  |
| **State THESIS** |  |
| **Outline points (optional; could also go before the thesis)** |  |

**BODY PARAGRAPH 1 -**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Topic sentence** |  |
| **Evidence and discussion** |  |
| **Concluding (and linking) sentence** |  |

**BODY PARAGRAPH 2 -**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Topic sentence** |  |
| **Evidence and discussion** |  |
| **Concluding (and linking) sentence** |  |

**BODY PARAGRAPH 3 -**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Topic sentence** |  |
| **Evidence and discussion** |  |
| **Concluding (and linking) sentence** |  |

**CONCLUSION**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Restate theme** |  |
| **Summarize points** |  |
| **Synthesize these three points: how do they combine to teach you something significant?** |  |
| **A powerful concluding sentence - something to stick in the minds of your readers!** |  |