Critical Analysis Essay:
Assembly through Disassembly-
Breaking Down the Parts to Put Together the Whole
English 1301 Composition I | Fall 2011

Critical Analysis Essay: 20% of final grade
Length: 800 – 1,000 Words, 2.5 - 3 pages
Layout/format: follow MLA guidelines, see Purdue OWL online
Rough Draft Due: Thursday, Sept. 15, 2011
Final Draft Due: Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2011

PROMPT | Write an 800-1,000 word critical analysis on ONE of the following texts listed to the right:

- Mitford, Jessica “Behind the Formaldehyde Curtain” p. 308/p. 326
- Orwell, George “Shooting an Elephant” p. 634/p. 663
- Baker, Russell “The Plot Against the People” p. 384/p. 428
- Britt, Suzanne “Neat People vs. Sloppy People” p. 233/p. 255
- Del Toro & Hogan "Vampires Never Die" p. 372 (or online)
- David Sedaris "Remembering My Childhood …" p. 274 (or online)

Options not discussed in class from 10th ed.:
- Orozco, Daniel “Orientation” p. 319
- DeLillo, Don “Videotape” p. 468

A critical analysis should be a discussion wherein you explore the meaning of the text you choose and how that text works to convey that meaning. It is the process of recognizing the different pieces (literary elements and/or rhetorical strategies) that make a text “work.” It “often entails taking something apart and then putting it back together by figuring out how the parts make up a cohesive whole” (McGraw-Hill Handbook).

Successful critical analysis can only be achieved with thorough critical reading: spend time with the text you select. Question why the author addresses his or her topic in the way he or she does: What is the overall feel/tone of the piece? How did the author achieve this? Does the author use a specific sentence structure, language, or vary punctuation to create an effect?

Some of these “parts” or “pieces” include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Components</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Other Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Etc. See book or Learning Web</td>
<td>Narrative flow (vertical vs. horizontal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>for more</td>
<td>References (does the author refer to other figures, i.e. people, places, time period?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The title</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td></td>
<td>Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Citation of outside sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Discourse</th>
<th>Literary Elements</th>
<th>Etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compare/Contrast</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Citation of outside sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause and Effect</td>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Personal anecdotes/experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Process</td>
<td>Imagery</td>
<td>Etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Figurative language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characterization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irony, Etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Try to choose the parts/elements to analyze that best highlight your perspective of the author’s thesis. Which are the most effective in creating the author’s message? Consider, too, how these parts are
related to one another. Does the use of imagery develop the tone? Does the cause and effect structure influence the narrative flow? Do personal accounts deepen characterization? Are the themes byproducts of the historical context?

Major Due Dates:

Rough Draft Due: Thurs., Sept. 15, 2011
Final Draft Due: Tues., Sept. 20, 2011

The FINAL DRAFT should be submitted in HARDCOPY and UPLOADED to

TurnItIn.com  

TurnItIn.com instructions are posted on the Learning Web.

TurnItIn.com Course Information:

CRN: 53208 | TTH: 9:30 – 11 a.m. | RM. 360D | Class ID: 4246729 Password: Fall2011
CRN: 54618 | TTH: 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. | RM. 108 | Class ID: 4246701 Password: Fall2011

The HARDCOPY FINAL DRAFT should also include your prior rough draft. Staple these together. Without documentation there is no way for me to assess revision. If I can’t assess revision, you lose a whole letter grade.

Layout: MLA

• Typed on white paper (8 ½ x 11) with black ink (handwritten assignments not accepted)
• Double-spaced, with 1” margins, 12 pt font (Times New Roman)
• MLA heading (if you need a review of MLA paper format, visit: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)
• If multiple pages: Staple them and include your name and page number on each

Your paper will not be accepted until:

➢ it is submitted in both hardcopy and to TurnItIn.com.
➢ it is in the proper MLA format (it must be typed and have the correct heading)
➢ you include the WORD COUNT in your MLA heading.
➢ the essay is at least 800 words (word count does not include the heading).

Other items to remember:

• Stay in third person (Avoid first person: me, I, our, we. Do not use second person: you, your).
• You are evaluating and analyzing, not judging or offering opinions (this isn’t about how you feel about a piece, it’s about how you think it works and why).
• Refer to an author by his or her whole name when you first introduce and then only by last name. As in, don’t write, “According to George…”
• If you only cite the primary text there is no need to include a “Works Cited” page. However, if you should use secondary sources (which you may but are not required to) make sure to include the “Works Cited” per MLA guidelines.
• Remember to maintain an academic tone and consider your audience (me) as you write.
GETTING STARTED: SUPPORT MATERIALS

Thesis and Outline

Before you begin to write your essay it’s important to do some preliminary thinking—write down notes to yourself that address the thesis/claim and how you will structure the major components of your essay. Decide which modes of discourse/literary elements/rhetorical strategies you will be analyzing in the text you have chosen. Regarding outlining, there is no specific form—it is typically what works best for the individual student. However, most students prefer to use the traditional Roman numeral style. See the example below. You can make personal notes to yourself … as in, everything may not be decided just yet. It’s extremely common that components of the essay may not come together until you actually start writing. In addition, your thesis itself may change as you write. The thesis and the outline are there to help you get started – they are not strict guidelines.

Example:

Judy Brady’s Thesis: In Judy Brady’s piece, “I Want a Wife,” the author takes a jab at the endless and absurd list of duties a wife had to perform in the 60-70s era.

Couple this with what your essay will cover: Brady employs multiple writing strategies to deliver this scathing depiction of the “wife” some of which include the repetition of key words and phrases and a layer of humorous and challenging tones.

I. Introduction
   a. Opening to discuss the stereotypical roles in the family.
   b. Further development of ideas of the wife throughout time and the role of feminism … that feminism allows us to see the role of women through a different, more critical lens.
   c. Transition: Author and feminist Judy Brady attacks many of the stereotypical duties of a wife in her groundbreaking piece, “I Want a Wife.”

II. Summary
   a. Fully introduce Judy Brady: writer, feminist, mother and wife
   b. Discuss original publication of “I Want a Wife” in Ms. Magazine and the intended audience in the early 1970s.
   c. Provide quick summary of “I Want a Wife”
   d. Thesis: Brady employs multiple writing strategies to deliver this scathing depiction of the “wife” some of which include the repetition of key words and phrases and a layer of humorous and challenging tones.
   e. Transition: However, Brady’s key device in building this perspective of “Wife” is through her rigid listing of duties.
III. Body Paragraph I: Division Analysis
   a. Further explore Brady overall structure
   b. Make clear that “I Want a Wife” is an example of Division Analysis
   c. Discuss how D.A. is essential to understanding
   d. Transition: the “tell” for a new “division” of the wifely duties is signaled through Brady’s repetition of “I want …”

IV. Body Paragraph II: Anaphora
   a. Define Anaphora: the repetition of a word and/or phrase at the beginning of a line.
      i. Give examples of other famous works that demonstrate anaphora (i.e. The Declaration of the Independence **find one more)
   b. Provide evidence of “I want a Wife” phrase continually bridging the major sections of her essay.
      i. Include number of times when used
      ii. Discuss significance of “I”
      iii. Discuss significance of “want”
      iv. Discuss significance of “Wife”
   c. Provide evidence of other repetitive language: “mending,” “care,” ”need,” “children,” “sickness” etc.
   d. Transition: Touch on what words do NOT appear in this essay: “husband” and “father”

V. Body Paragraph III: Tone
   a. Discuss overall tone of “I Want a Wife”
      i. Hostile, Critical
      ii. Give evidence
      iii. Explain evidence
   b. Discuss other layers
      i. Humorous
      ii. Glib
      iii. Absurd
         1. Give Evidence
         2. Explain evidence
   c. Transition: Brady’s “Wife” is constructed of more than angry ranting against the subservient role. The overall piece is complex—a mixture of humor and vitriol that allows the reader to balk at the huge laundry list of accomplishments a woman must achieve every day.

VI. Conclusion
   a. It’s important for humans to question identity—it’s part of what makes us the creatures we are.
   b. Brady’s piece, whether we are men or women and in whatever time period, forces us to question roles …
The Body | How to build strong body paragraphs and fluidly transition

The body paragraphs will be the most challenging AND the most important component to your essay. These will focus on a various literary element/rhetorical strategy/mode of discourse and how the author of the text you chose uses it to achieve his or her story/article. Analytical body paragraphs should contain several parts – these do not necessarily need to go in this order:

- A topic sentence that includes the mode/strategy/element that will be analyzed.
- At least ONE textual example or summary of this mode/strategy/element in use (evidence/citation).
- Discussion on how the evidence is an example of the mode/strategy/element.
- Discussion on what that evidence might mean outside of the story/article. How would, say, the description of Orwell’s perspective of the Burmese register now? Would we find it racist/belittling?
- Discussion on how the mode/strategy/element is used throughout the text.
- Discussion on the purpose of the mode/strategy/element. For instance, why does Brady have repeating phrases? Or why does Orwell drop Latin into his prose? Consider the author’s thesis when you discuss.
- Discussion on how this component relates to the next one you will analyze. Consider the connection, say, between tone and imagery. For example, how does the imagery in “The Chase” create tone? Or how does the historical context of Orwell’s piece link to his overall themes?
The Bookends | How to write compelling introductions and conclusions

On Introductions:

Introductions typically begin broad and then work their way into introducing the reading/text and then your thesis. We’ve talked a lot about what the “topic” is of the various readings. Consider the values or controversies society in general may have over the topic of the piece you chose and begin there. For instance, the topic of Brady’s piece is stereotyping. Perhaps lure in your reader by convincing them they stereotype just as much as the next person. Then begin to address the more serious problem of stereotyping family structures wherein you introduce a defender of the concept of “wife”: Judy Brady.

DO NOT begin an introduction with, “In George Orwell’s story ‘Shooting an Elephant’ the writer …” It’s boring, uninteresting, flat, and reflects little interest in the piece on behalf of the writer.

On conclusions:

Analysis is like exploration. There should be a discovery at the end of all of your work. However, this is not always the case. Conclusions typically go one of two ways:

You can use a conclusion as a “wrap-up,” revisiting the thesis and the several steps you took in the body paragraphs to achieve it. Be careful if you go this route: you want to make sure you are simply repeating yourself. Make sure to vary your language and show expansion on now what has been discovered through your analysis.

You can also use the conclusion in a more meaningful way, discussing how these elements you’ve investigated might apply to the real world, or that perhaps they open the door to questions we should be asking ourselves every day.

Regardless, the conclusion should either inspire a sense of closure in the reader (as in the reader feels they have been walked through a text and now have a deeper understanding of it), or it should inspire a sense of renewed curiosity (as in the reader now has a series of questions to ask themselves and feels compelled to learn more).

There may be occasion to use first person in the introduction or conclusion, especially if you are relating a personal anecdote. However, avoid using second person throughout.
Lastly, remember that these two+ paragraphs do “bookend” your essay. Consider some stylistic devices to reflect this or return to a question you raise in the beginning that can now be answered in the conclusion thanks to your thorough and enlightening analysis.

Think about the exercise of *Christina’s World*. We begin by asking how this is done. In exploring this, we can find out what this piece is really about.

**Wednesday, Sept. 15: Full Revision Workshop**

**What’s due? ONE TYPED COPY of your entire essay (at LEAST 600 words – with a proper MLA heading; it should be two full pages)**

Try to push your essay as far as possible to a final draft. This will only help you create a tighter, more thoughtful essay. In addition, it allows you more time to focus on proofreading.

A complete essay should contain the following parts (though it is not limited to only these):

- A title
- A clear, explicit thesis
- An introduction
- A summary paragraph that formally introduces the text and author and provides any necessary information about publication and original audience.
- Two to three in-depth body paragraphs exploring how the author put his or her piece together (i.e. an analysis of either a mode of discourse/rhetorical strategy/and/or/literary element).
- A conclusion
- Strong grammar and syntax – NO TYPOS or spelling errors (do your best)
- Correct MLA format (do your best)
- A compelling, academic voice/tone:
  - Eliminate repetitive words and ideas – they weigh down the whole tone.
  - Heighten your language/word choice where appropriate – for instance, “Brady writes” is flat and doesn’t really tell me anything. “Brady defensively targets” tells me a lot about her and a lot about your interpretation.
  - Use your own set of rhetorical devices: play with imagery, description, figurative language, analogy, anecdote, etc.
  - Avoid informal language: “You know,” “dude,” “pissed,” “I feel,” “I think,” “a lot” (which is two words).
Avoid overly hostile/inflammatory language AND perspective that could create bias in your paper: “Brady rants and raves excessively without ever proving anything” is a little too biased versus “Brady creates a persona, a narrator, that walks us through all the things she could have or achieve in life if she had a wife.”

Find a way to be genuinely interested in your topic – it will show. Remember, tone is the attitude or feeling the writer has that’s reflected in his or her words. Your feeling or attitude creates a great deal of the success of the writing itself.

Be yourself.