

## NINE

# “Let’s Take a Closer Look”

## Writing Analytically



**ANALYZE THIS. ANALYZE THAT.** These are more than the titles of two movies starring Robert DeNiro and Billy Crystal. Analysis is a necessary step in much of the thinking that we do, and that we do every day. What should you wear today? T-shirt and hoodie? Sweatshirt? Your new red sweater? You look closely at the weather, what you will be doing, the people you will be with (and might want to impress or not), and then decide based on those factors. You may not consciously think of it as analysis, but that’s what you’ve done.

When you analyze something, you break it down into its component parts and think about those parts methodically in order to understand it in some way. Case in point: You want a new gaming system, but should you get a PlayStation 3? Nintendo Wii? Xbox 360? Or maybe something more portable, a Sony PSP-3000 or a Nintendo DSi? You might check websites like *TestFreaks*, which provide information based on expert analyses of each system, or you might conduct your own analysis. What kinds of games do you play? Party games? Arcade games? Online games? Which is more important to you? An easy-to-use interface or high-end HD graphics? Big-name titles or an all-purpose entertainment center? These are some of the ways you might analyze the various systems, first to understand what they offer and then to decide which one you want to buy.



Given the ever-increasing amount of news and information via the internet, good analytical skills have become vital. This screenshot from a *YouTube* video illustrates that point—and demonstrates how you can use images when you compose an analysis.

Since our world is awash in new information, the ability to read it closely, examine it critically, and decide how—or whether—to accept or act on it becomes a survival skill. To navigate this sea of information, we rely on our ability to analyze.

You have probably analyzed literary texts in English classes; perhaps you've analyzed films or song lyrics. In many college classes, you'll be expected to conduct different sorts of analyses—rhetorical, causal, process, data, and more. Analysis is critical to every academic discipline, useful in every professional field, and employed by each of us in our everyday lives. It's essential to understanding and to decision making. This chapter provides guidelines for conducting an analysis and writing analytically.

*THINK* about your own use of analysis. How many decisions—large and small—have you made in the last week? in the last month? in the last year? From small (what to have for breakfast) to major (which college to attend), make a chart listing a representative sample of these decisions and what areas of your life they affected; then note the information you gathered in each case before you decided. What does this chart tell you about you about your interests, activities, and priorities? You've just completed an analysis.

## Across Academic Fields

Some form of analysis can be found in every academic discipline. In a *history* class, you may be asked to analyze how Russia defeated Napoleon’s army in 1812. In *biology*, you might analyze the process of how the body responds to exercise. In *economics*, you might analyze the trade-off between unemployment and inflation rates. In a *technical communication* course, you might analyze a corporate website to understand how it appeals to various audiences. In your *composition* course, you’ll analyze your own writing for many purposes, from thinking about how you’ve appealed to your audience to how you need to revise a draft. So many courses require analysis because looking closely and methodically at something—a text, a process, a philosophy—helps you discover connections between ideas and think about how things work, what they mean, and why.

## Across Cultures and Communities

Human nature being what it is, communicating with people from other communities or cultures challenges us to examine our assumptions and think about our usual ways of operating. Analyzing something from (or for) another culture or community may require extra effort at understanding beliefs, assumptions, and practices that we are not familiar with. We need to be careful not to look at things only through our own frames of reference.

Sheikh Jamal Rahman, Pastor Don Mackenzie, and Rabbi Ted Falcon embody this extra effort. In their book, *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith: The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi and a Sheikh*, they have taken on the challenge of working toward interfaith understanding, saying that religion today “seems to be fuelling hatred rather than expanding love” and that in order to heal the divisions between us, we must “find ways of entering into conversation with those different from us.” And they say that analysis—what they call “inquiring more deeply”—is essential to their ongoing journey toward understanding issues central to each faith. They begin their presentations by sharing in turn what each values most in his religion—for the minister, “unconditional love; for the sheik, “compassion”; for the rabbi, “oneness”—but all agree it’s critical to discuss the difficult and contentious ideas in faith. For the minister, one “untruth” is that “Christianity is the only way to God.” For the rabbi, it is the notion of Jews as “the chosen people.” And for the sheik, it is the “sword verses” in

the Koran, like “kill the unbeliever,” which when taken out of context cause misunderstanding.

Their book embodies cultural sensitivity and describes the process of creating a text that’s respectful of their different faiths. Reading a sentence that the sheik had written about the security wall in Israel, the rabbi announced, “If that line is in the book, I’m not in the book.” Then they analyzed the sentence, discussing it vigorously, and Sheik Rahman revised the wording to be “respectful of [both] their principles.”

Having respect for the principles, values, and beliefs of others means being conscious of differences among cultures and respecting those differences. The best way to demonstrate cultural sensitivity is to use precise language that avoids negative descriptions or stereotypes about age, class, gender, religion, race, ethnicity, and such—in short, by carefully selecting the words you use.

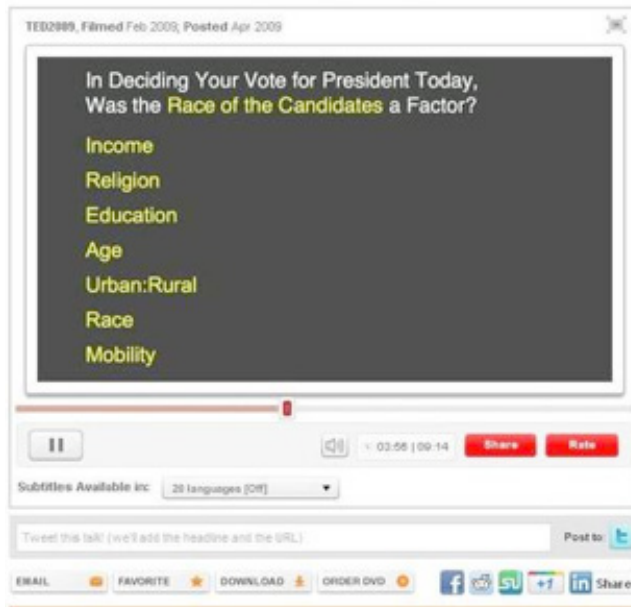
### Across Media

Your medium affects the way you present your analysis. In *print*, much of your analysis may be in paragraphs, but you might include photographs, tables, or graphs such as a flowchart to analyze a process. If you’re analyzing something in an *oral presentation* you might show data in a handout or on presentation slides—and you would need to add some signpost language to help your audience follow your analysis. A *digital text* allows you to blend paragraphs, charts, images, audio, and video—and does so in a way that lets readers to click on various parts as they wish. And some digital texts—blogs, listservs, tweets—allow readers to comment, in effect, to become authors themselves. You won’t always be able to choose, but when you do, you’ll want to choose the medium that enables you to most effectively make your point for the specific audience you are trying to reach.

### Across Genres

Seldom does any piece of writing solely consist of one genre; in many cases, it will contain multiple genres. You might use a short **NARRATIVE** as an introductory element in a **PROCESS ANALYSIS**, or you might begin a book review by analyzing its **POSITION**. And you’ll often need to do some analysis before you write. For example, if your assignment is to **ARGUE A POSITION** on

## Nate Silver: Does race affect votes?



Look at this grab from a talk by statistician Nate Silver on whether race affects voting. He includes slides with lists, bar graphs, photos, and maps—and note the space below the video inviting readers to comment. How much do the visuals contribute to his analysis? Go to [www.norton.com/web/everyonelinks](http://www.norton.com/web/everyonelinks) to view the video.

an issue, you'll need to analyze that issue before you can take a stand on it. You sometimes can't compose a **REPORT** until you have analyzed the data or the information that the report is to be based on. And a **REVIEW**—whether it's of a film, a website, a book, or something else—depends on your analysis of the material before you evaluate it.

*LOOK for analysis in everyday use. Find two consumer-oriented websites that analyze something you're interested in—laptop computers, cell phones, cars, places you might like to go, things you might like to do. Study the analyses and decide which one is more useful, and then try to figure out what makes it better. Is it the language? the images? the amount of detail? the format? How might you change the other one to make it more effective?*

## CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

While there are nearly as many different kinds of analysis as there are things to be analyzed, we can identify commonalities, elements that analyses share across disciplines, media, cultures, and communities:

- A question that prompts you to take a closer look
- Some description of the subject you are analyzing
- Evidence drawn from close examination of the subject
- Insight gained from your analysis
- Clear, precise language

### A Question That Prompts You to Take a Closer Look

If you look at the examples cited earlier in this chapter, you'll note that each is driven by a question that doesn't have a single "right" answer. Which gaming system best meets your needs? What should you wear? Which college offers the best education for the future you desire? How can we begin to achieve interfaith understanding? Each question requires some kind of analysis. While an author may not explicitly articulate such a question, it will drive the analysis—and the writing based on the analysis. In an essay about how partisan politics are driving opinions of President Obama, see how nationally syndicated columnist David Brooks starts by asking a question:

Who is Barack Obama?

If you ask a conservative Republican, you are likely to hear that Obama is a skilled politician who campaigned as a centrist but is governing as a big-government liberal. He plays by ruthless, Chicago politics rules. He is arrogant toward foes, condescending toward allies and runs a partisan political machine.

If you ask a liberal Democrat, you are likely to hear that Obama is an inspiring but overly intellectual leader who has trouble making up his mind and fighting for his positions. He has not defined a clear mission. He has allowed the Republicans to dominate debate. He is too quick to compromise and too cerebral to push things through.

You'll notice first that these two viewpoints are diametrically opposed. You'll, observe, second, that they are entirely predictable. Poli-

cal partisans always imagine the other side is ruthlessly effective and that the public would be with them if only their side had better messaging. And finally, you'll notice that both views distort reality. They tell you more about the information cocoons that partisans live in these days than about Obama himself.

—DAVID BROOKS, "Getting Obama Right"

To begin answering his opening question, Brooks offers brief summaries of both partisan opinions on Obama's leadership; then he takes a closer look, giving us a brief analysis of those opinions. You might not always start an analytical essay as Brooks does, by asking an explicit question, but your analysis will always be prompted by a question of some kind.

### Some Description of the Subject You Are Analyzing

You need to describe what you are analyzing. How much description you need depends on your subject, your audience, and the medium you've chosen to compose in. For example, if you are analyzing the *Twilight* novels and movies for a class on vampires in film and literature, you can assume that most of your readers will be familiar with them, but you'll need to add extra details for readers who may not have seen or read the specific texts you refer to. If you are writing a paper for a psychology class on the impact of the film on those who are "Twilight addicted," however, you will have to describe that impact, as Christine Spines does in a piece written for the *Los Angeles Times* in 2010:

Chrystal Johnson didn't think there was anything unhealthy about her all-consuming fixation with *The Twilight Saga*—until she discovered it was sucking the life out of her marriage.

"I found poems my husband had written in his journal about how I had fallen for a 'golden-eyed vampire,'" says Johnson, a 31-year-old accountant from Mesa, Arizona, who became so enthralled by the blockbuster series of young adult novels and movies that she found herself staying up all night, re-reading juicy chapters and chatting about casting news and the are-they-or-aren't-they romance between the stars of the films, Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson.

"*Twilight* was always on my mind, to the point where I couldn't function," Johnson says.

—CHRISTINE SPINES, "When *Twilight* Fandom Becomes Addiction"



After this introduction, Spines adds more descriptive detail about the addictive behavior. She cites a professor of communication studies who says that “getting up at 4 a.m.” to read or watch movies is “sacrificing marriage . . . [and] sounds like addictive behavior.” She also quotes one of the fans who slept for days outside the Nokia Theatre in Los Angeles, just hoping to see the stars at the premiere of *Twilight*: “This is the first time I’ve been this passionate about anything. . . . I’ve read each of the books at least eight or nine times and I’ve watched each of the movies over 300 times.”

Spines provides this detail because she is writing for a newspaper whose readers may know little or nothing about her subject and need it described in some detail in order to understand her analysis. Citing an academic expert and someone who has firsthand experience with the behavior gives her credibility. In a similar situation, when you’re composing a text that will be read by an audience that you don’t know well, you’ll also need to provide necessary description and details. If your analysis is going to appear on the internet, you might provide an image or graphic, embed a video, or include a link to a site offering more information on your subject.

### Evidence Drawn from Close Examination of the Subject

Examining the subject of your analysis carefully and in detail and then thinking critically about what you find will help you discover key elements, patterns, and relationships in your subject—all of which provide you with the evidence on which to build your analysis. For example, if you are analyzing a poem, you might examine word choice, rhyme scheme, figurative language, repetition, and imagery. If you are analyzing an ad in a magazine, you might look at the placement of figures or objects, the use of color, and the choice of fonts. Each element contributes something significant to the whole; each carries some part of the message being conveyed. Following are discussions and examples of four common kinds of analysis: rhetorical analysis, process analysis, causal analysis, and data analysis.

**Rhetorical analysis.** This kind of analysis can focus on a written text, a visual text, an audio text or one that combines words, images, and sound. All of these are rhetorical analyses; that is, they all take a close look at how an author, designer, or artist communicates a message to an audience. Whether they are using words or images, adjusting font sizes or colors, they all are trying to persuade a particular audience to have a particular reaction to a particular message—theirs.



See how the following example from an article in the online magazine *Macworld* analyzes the core of Apple's "exceptional advertising . . . that indefinable element of cool," something that "Dell, Microsoft, and Hewlett-Packard lack":

Despite their differences, Apple ads have in common at least one major advantage over many competitors' commercials: regardless of whether you love or hate the spots, you'll likely *remember* them, and that's the first step to building a successful image. . . .

Apple's current campaign for the Mac, "Get a Mac," conveys just as simple and straightforward a message as the name would suggest. It's a deliberate attempt to appeal to the vast majority of computer users who, as Apple sees it, are using a Windows machine either because they aren't aware they have an alternative or because they're nursing some erroneous preconceptions about Macs.

The ads, which first began airing in May 2006, feature actors Justin Long and John Hodgman as the Mac and PC, respectively—anthropomorphized versions of the long-warring computer platforms.

Aside from a brief shot at the end of the spots, you won't see any actual computers in the "Get a Mac" ads. And there's a good reason for that—computer features are hard to show off in a small space in 30-second segments. Instead, Apple illustrates features by putting the characters into humorous situations. For example, when the PC sports a leg cast due to someone tripping over his power cord, it gives the Mac a chance to bring up the detachable MagSafe adapter.

The result: The ad spells out the Mac's advantages in a way that's both accessible and memorable for the average user. . . .

Because of the "Get a Mac" campaign's reliance on dialogue, Apple has also localized them for other markets. Both the U.K. and Japan now have their own version of the "Get a Mac" ads, with native actors and situations tuned to the nuances of those cultures. It's all part of the attention to detail that Apple knows it needs in order to compete globally.

—DAN MOREN, "Analysis: The Many Faces of Apple Advertising"

In the rest of his article, Moren takes us methodically through the ad campaigns for other Apple products to provide more evidence for his opening claim that Apple's ads are inherently memorable. And because this article was written for an online publication, he can use multiple media to demonstrate his points. He includes hyperlinks to the online ads, so we can actually listen to the dialogue and see for ourselves that round-faced, balding,



John Hodgman and Justin Long as PC and Mac in Apple's "Get a Mac" campaign.

pudgy PC is a bit stodgy, dressed in a brown blazer and slacks with white shirt and tie, while lean, shaggy-haired Mac is quintessentially cool, in jeans and a casual shirt, hands tucked into his pockets. Moren also points out an example of how using actors allows for a humorous demonstration of an appealing gadget that's available with a Mac: "When the PC sports a leg cast due to someone tripping over his power cord, it gives the Mac a chance to bring up the detachable MagSafe adapter."

Note how the author moves from a broad statement—"Apple ads have in common at least one major advantage over many competitors' commercials: regardless of whether you love or hate the spots, you'll likely *remember* them, and that's the first step to building a successful image"—to the supporting evidence, discovered by looking closely at the ads and identifying their essential components and the way each one contributes to make the ads "one of the best campaigns of all time."

To see the ads, go to [www.norton.com/web/everyonelinks](http://www.norton.com/web/everyonelinks) and check out the "Get a Mac" Collection link.

**Process analysis.** The following example analyzes a process—how skaters make high-speed turns. This is the most critical element in speed skating, for being able to consistently make fast turns without slipping and losing ground can be the difference between winning and losing. This analysis from *Science Buddies*, a website for students and parents, closely examines the key steps of the process. Note how the author provides some information about the basic physics of speed and turns and then systematically explains how each element of the action—speed, angle, push-back force from the surface—contributes to the total turn.

Whether it's ice, wood, or a paved surface, the science that governs a skater's ability to turn is essentially the same. It's based on a couple of basic laws of physics that describe speed and the circular motion of turns. The first is Newton's *law of inertia* that says a body in motion will stay in motion unless there is some outside force that changes it. To skaters hoping to make a turn after they speed down the straightaway, that means the force of inertia would tend to keep them going straight ahead if there wasn't a greater force to make them change direction and begin turning.

The force that causes the change in direction comes from the skater's blades or wheels as they cross over at an angle in front of the skater leaning to make a turn. Newton's *law of reaction* explains that the push from the skater's skates generates an equal but opposite push back from the ice or floor. This push back force draws the skater in towards the track

Check out the link  
to the entire piece  
at [www.norton.com/  
web/everyonelinks](http://www.norton.com/web/everyonelinks)

and is described as a “center seeking” or *centripetal* type of force. It’s the reason why turns are possible in any sport. The wheels of a bicycle, for example, also angle into the road surface when the cyclist leans to begin a turn. As the road pushes back on both bike and rider, it supplies the inward centripetal force to generate the turning motion.

The more a skater leans into a turn, the more powerful the push from the skate, and the greater centripetal force produced to carry the skater through the turn. Leaning in also creates a smaller arc, or tighter turn, making for a shorter distance and a faster path around the turn. However, there’s a catch. As the skater leans more and more into the track, the balancing point of the body, or the skater’s *center of gravity*, also shifts more and more to the side. If it shifts too far, the skater no longer can maintain balance and ends up splayed out onto the rink rather than happily heading round the turn to the finishing line.

So success in turns, especially fast ones, means skaters must constantly find their center of gravity while teetering on the edge of their skates. To make the turn at all requires that the skater push the skates against the ice with sufficient power to generate enough inward centripetal force to counter the inertia of skating straight ahead. And to keep up speed in a race, a skater must calculate and execute the shortest, or tightest, turns possible around the track.

—DARLENE JENKINS, “Tightening the Turns in Speed Skating:  
Lessons in Centripetal Force and Balance”



Lee Jung-su, Lee Ho-suk, and Apolo Anton Ohno skate for the finish line during the last turn of the men’s 1,000-meter short track speed skating finals at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics.

This kind of close examination of the subject is the heart of analysis. Darlene Jenkins explains the key elements in the process of making a high-speed turn—speed, angle, push-back force—and also examines the relationships among these elements as she describes what happens in minute detail, revealing how they all combine to create the pattern of movement that leads to a successful high-speed turn. By including a photograph that shows skaters leaning into a turn, blades and bodies angled precariously, Jenkins emphasizes visually what her words convey, and readers actually see what she’s describing.

**Causal analysis.** You’ll often have occasion to analyze causes, to figure out why something occurs or once occurred. Why did the U.S. financial system almost collapse in 2008? What caused the 2004–5 National Hockey League lockout?

Behavioral ecologist Karen McComb, who studies communication between animals and humans, wanted to understand why cat owners so often respond to purring cats by feeding them. To answer the question of what the cats do to solicit food this way, McComb and a team recorded a number of domestic cats in their homes and discovered what the team termed “solicitation purring”—an urgent high-frequency sound, similar to an infant’s cry, that is embedded within the cats’ more pleasing and low-pitched purring and that apparently triggered an innate nurturing response in their owners. In an article presenting their findings, the team provided numerical data about the pitch and frequency of different kinds of purring, along with their conclusion about what the data showed: that the similarities in pitch and frequency to the cries of human infants “make them very difficult to ignore.”

Using data like these to support an analysis would be common in science classes, while in the humanities and social sciences, you’re more likely to write about causes that are plausible or probable than ones that can be measured. In a literature class, for example, you might be asked to analyze the influences that shaped F. Scott Fitzgerald’s creation of Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*—that is, to try to explain what caused Fitzgerald to develop Gatsby the way he did. In a sociology class, you might be asked to analyze what factors contributed to a population decline in a certain neighborhood. In both cases, these causes are probabilities—plausible but not provable.

**Data analysis.** Some subjects will require you to analyze data, as in the example below, in which blogger Will Moller analyzes the performances of

Go to [wwnorton.com/web/everyonelinks](http://wwnorton.com/web/everyonelinks) to link to the full article, “The Cry Embedded within the Purr.”



Andy Pettitte pitching against the Kansas City Royals in April 2009.

ten major league baseball pitchers to answer the question of whether New York Yankees pitcher Andy Pettitte is likely to get into baseball's Hall of Fame.

I prefer to look at Andy versus his peers, because simply put, it would be very odd for 10 pitchers from the same decade to get in (though this number is rather arbitrary). Along that line, who are the best pitchers of Andy's generation, so we can compare them? . . .

	Wins	Win%	WAR	ERA+	IP	K	K/BB	WAR/9IP
Martinez	219	68.7%	89.4	154	2827	3154	4.15	0.28
Clemens	354	65.8%	145.5	143	4917	4672	2.96	0.27
Johnson	303	64.6%	114.8	136	4135	4875	3.26	0.25
Schilling	216	59.7%	86.1	128	3261	3116	4.38	0.24
Maddux	355	61.0%	120.6	132	5008	3371	3.37	0.22
Mussina	270	63.8%	85.6	123	3563	2813	3.58	0.22

Smoltz	213	57.9%	82.5	125	3473	3084	3.05	0.21
Brown	211	59.4%	77.2	127	3256	2397	2.66	0.21
Pettitte	240	63.5%	66.9	117	3055	2251	2.34	0.20
Glavine	305	60.0%	67.1	118	4413	2607	1.74	0.14

	Postseason Wins	Postseason Losses	Saves
Martinez	6	4	
Clemens	12	8	
Johnson	7	9	
Schilling	11	2	
Maddux	11	14	
Mussina	7	8	
Smoltz	15	4	158
Brown	5	5	
Pettitte	19	10	
Glavine	14	16	

The above table tells the story pretty well. I've bolded the numbers that are particularly absurd, and italicized one in particular which should act as a veto. Though I imagine most of the readers of this blog know full well what these statistics mean at this point, for those of you who don't, a primer:

WAR stands for Wins Above Replacement, and is a somewhat complicated equation which estimates the true value of a pitcher, taking into account league, era, park effects, etc. For instance, a pitcher that wins a game but gives up 15 earned runs has probably lost value in their career WAR, even though they get the shiny addition to their win-loss record. We like WAR around these parts.

ERA+ is a normalized version of ERA centered on 100, basically showing how much better or worse a pitcher was compared to their league average (by ERA). 110, for example, would indicate that the pitcher's ERA was 10% better than average. 95, on the other hand, would be roughly 5% worse than average. This is a good statistic for comparing pitchers between different time periods—a 4.00 ERA in 2000 doesn't mean the same thing as a 4.00 ERA in 1920, for example.

K/BB is how many strikeouts a pitcher had per walk. More is better, less is worse.



As you can see, the above table doesn't do Andy any favors. He's 6th in wins and 5th in winning percentage, but he's 9th in ERA+ and dead last in WAR. His K/BB beats only Tom Glavine, who comes off looking pretty bad on this list. The only thing he has going for him is his playoff record—and frankly, the team he was on won a whole bunch of playoff games while he was on the team, even when he wasn't pitching. Besides, we're pretty much past the point of taking W/L record as a good indication of pitcher skill—why is it that when we slap the word “postseason” onto the statistic, we suddenly devolve 10 years to when such things seemed to matter?

—WILL MOLLER, “A Painful Posting”

Link to the entire  
piece at [wwnorton.com/web/everyonelinks](http://wwnorton.com/web/everyonelinks).

Moller's guiding question, “Should Andy Pettitte be in the Hall of Fame?” is unstated in this excerpt, but it is made clear earlier in the piece. He presents the data in a table for readers to see—and then walks us through his analysis of that data. It's critical when using numerical data like these not only to present the information but also to say what it means. That's a key part of your analysis. Using a table to present data is a good way to include numerical evidence, but be careful that you don't just drop the table in; you need to explain to readers what the data mean, as Moller does. Though he does not state his conclusions explicitly here, his analysis makes clear what he thinks—as does his URL:<http://itsaboutthemoney.net/archives/2011/02/04/sorry-andy/>. Just as Moller defines abbreviations some readers may not know, you should be careful to explain anything that your audience might not understand.

### Insight Gained from Your Analysis

Like all rhetorical acts, analysis has a purpose. One key purpose is to give your audience insight into the subject of your analysis. As you engage in the process of examining your subject, you come up with facts, data, and other specific information drawn from the subject—which will lead you to some insight, a deeper understanding of the subject you're analyzing. The insight that you gain as you analyze your subject will lead you to your thesis. When the “interfaith amigos” (p. 78) analyzed a sentence in their book that offended the rabbi, each gained insight into the others' principles that led them to further understanding. In “Getting Obama Right” (p. 80), these concluding lines make clear the insight David Brooks derived from analyzing the perceptions of Obama expressed by both liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans:

In a sensible country, people would see Obama as a president trying to define a modern brand of moderate progressivism. In a sensible country, Obama would be able to clearly define this project without fear of offending the people he needs to get legislation passed. But we don't live in that country. We live in a country in which many people live in information cocoons in which they only talk to members of their own party and read blogs of their own sect. They come away with perceptions fundamentally at odds with reality, fundamentally misunderstanding the man in the Oval Office.

—DAVID BROOKS, "Getting Obama Right"

From Brooks' insight that both Republicans and Democrats are misreading the facts and presenting a biased view, we get his message: such misperception is counterproductive to effective government.

Summarizing their study of the way cats manipulate humans (p. 000), Karen McComb and her team note parallels between the isolation cry of domestic cats and the distress cry of human infants as a way of understanding why the "cry embedded in the purr" is so successful in motivating owners to feed their cats. They conclude that the cats have learned to communicate their need for attention in ways that are impossible to ignore, ways that prompt caring responses from people. Thus, their work suggests that much can be learned by focusing on animal-human communication from both directions, from animals to humans as well as the reverse.

Remember that any analysis you do needs to have a purpose. In an analysis, your purpose—to discover how cats motivate their owners to provide food on demand, to understand how partisan misperceptions create roadblocks in government, to explain why a favorite baseball player's statistics won't get him into the Hall of Fame—needs to generate a clear point that you make for your audience; in most cases, that point will be the insight you gain from the analysis.

### Clear, Precise Language

Since the point of an analysis is to help an audience understand something, you need to pay extra attention to the words you use and the way you explain your findings. You want your audience to follow your analysis easily and not get sidetracked. In presenting your findings, you need to demonstrate that you know what you are talking about. You have studied your subject, looked at it closely, thought about it—*analyzed* it; therefore, you know it

well, but most important, you know what you want to say about it and why. Now you have to craft your analysis in such a way that your audience will follow that analysis and understand what it shows.

Analyzing the elements in a text or explaining an intricate process requires you to use precise language that your audience will understand, to describe anything that may be unfamiliar to them, to define terms they may not be familiar with, and to lay out the exact steps in a process.

The analysis of speed skating turns on p. 85 was written for an audience of young people and their parents who are interested in science and creating projects for science fairs. The language used to describe the physics that govern the process of turning is appropriate for such an audience—specific and precise but not technical. When the author refers to Newton’s law of inertia, she immediately defines *inertia* and then explains what it means for skaters. The important role of centripetal force is explained as “the more a skater leans into turns, the more powerful the push from the skate.” Everything is clear because the writer uses simple, everyday words—“tighter turn, faster path around the turn, teetering on the edge of their skates”—to convey complex science in a way that is concrete and to the point. Look also at the analysis of baseball statistics on p. 88; even though it was written for a blog targeting Yankees fans, the author includes a “primer” for those readers who may not understand the kinds of statistics he presents.

You need to consider what your audience knows about your topic and what information you’ll need to include to be sure they’ll understand what you write. You’ll also want to be careful about how you present information. In U.S. academic writing, you are expected to state your conclusions explicitly—in clear, specific language.

ROBERT CONNORS (1951–2000), distinguished rhetoric and composition scholar at the University of New Hampshire, wrote this essay about his encounter with a trapped wild animal for *Yankee* magazine in 1991. It’s a deceptively simple account of the process he uses to free the animal—but look closer, and you’ll see how Connors skillfully weaves his analysis of the process he used to free the skunk into the narrative account of the event. Look for the analysis characteristics; they’re all here—question, description, explicit evidence drawn from close examination of the subject, insight, and precise language.

## How in the World Do You Get a Skunk Out of a Bottle?

ROBERT J. CONNORS



*The question that prompts the author to “take a closer look”—and invites the audience to do the same.*

**T**HE SANDY DIRT OF CANTERBURY ROAD is just right as I pant my way past Johnson’s hayfield. The air cool enough for delight but not cold enough for long johns and stocking cap, the early sun slanting low. No sound but my labored breathing and the chunking noise of sneakers on dirt. Just another morning. Or so I think.

Then I see him, off to my right. Twenty-five feet or so from the road in a cut-over hayfield. A skunk. One of the kind that are mostly white, with the black mainly on their sides. From the cor-

*Specific sensory details, combined with the twist in the last sentence, engage the readers’ interest.*



“Then I see him, off to my right. Twenty-five feet or so from the road in a cut-over hayfield. A skunk. One of the kind that are mostly white, with the black mainly on their sides.”

ner of my eye I watch him turn, move. I detour to the other side of the road.

But something seems wrong, in the way he moves or the way that he looks. Some glint of strangeness. I slow my pace, looking over my right shoulder. The skunk moves through the stubble toward the road. I stop and shade my eyes against the low sunlight. The skunk comes closer. And then I see it.

A glass jar. About 4½ inches long, about 3 inches in diameter, with a pinched-in neck—a large baby-food jar, perhaps. It is jammed over the skunk’s head, completely covering it past the ears. Unable to hear or smell, the skunk raises his head in a clumsy, unnatural way. His dim eyes catch sight of my bright purple warm-up jacket. He begins, slowly but unmistakably, to come toward me.

As you probably know, this is not what skunks or any wild animals typically do. But as I stand on the bright, hard-packed road, this skunk is clearly coming toward me. More, I can’t help but feel that he is coming to me.

I begin to talk to him. Only later does it occur to me that he is

*The first four paragraphs provide the detail readers need to understand the process analysis that follows.*

*Clear, precise language: We see the skunk moving in “a clumsy, unnatural way” as his “dim eyes” catch the “bright purple” of the author’s jacket.*

*This paragraph begins the systematic analysis of the situation, taking us through the encounter step-by-step, exactly as Connors approached the skunk.*

probably unable to hear anything with the jar on his head, but the talk is more for my sake anyway.

“Oh, boy,” I say, as the skunk trundles closer, “if you aren’t a textbook case in conservation ethics, I’ve never seen one.” I back away a step. What if he’s rabid? He lifts his head, feebly, to the right, to the left. I can see the long white silky hairs of his back, the fogged translucence of the glass jar.

I have a sudden desire to turn, go, keep running, get home.

By this time, the skunk has reached the high grass at the edge of the road. And there he stops. His sides heave; the tight neck of the jar can hardly admit any air, and each breath is a struggle of seven or eight seconds’ duration. The skunk is shivering as well, slight tremors running through his whole body as he crouches, watching me. Clearly, the skunk is going to die and not of starvation. He is suffocating as I watch.

“What do you want me to do?” I say. “You’ve got to come to me. I can’t come to you. Who knows what mental state you’re in?” The skunk looks at me. “Look, I’d love to help you. But the covered end of you isn’t the end I’m worried about.” The skunk wags his head slightly, tries to breathe. “What were you looking for in there anyway, you dumb-head? That jar’s been out here empty for years.”

By now I realize that the skunk is my responsibility. The police would probably kill him in order to save him. Getting someone from Fish and Game would take hours. I am the one here, now.

Maybe I can throw a big rock and break the jar. Not get close enough to be sprayed, but break the glass. Let the skunk breathe.

No. Any rock heavy enough to break the glass from a distance couldn’t be thrown accurately. It might hit the skunk and injure him. Even if the glass broke, the edges might slash the skunk’s face or get into his eyes. And with that kind of jar, the neck might not break with the bottle part, leaving the skunk with a jagged necklace of razor-edged glass that would sooner or later kill him. No, the rock idea is out.

Perhaps I can find something to throw over him—a coat or a blanket so he can’t spray me—and grab the jar. But all I have is this warm-up jacket—too small to cover him and too light to keep him from turning.

*Here the author signals that this analysis is about more than just how to get a skunk out of a bottle.*

*Narrative details show us what was happening.*

*This sentence marks the point in the analysis where the author starts to have insight into the larger significance of the situation.*

“I don’t know, old skunkoid,” I say, moving slightly closer to 15  
where he sits, motionless except for the shivering. “There’s no  
way that I’m just going to go over to you and pull that jar off.”  
One step closer. I have no idea what I *am* going to do. Hunkering  
down, I keep on talking. “You understand my position. I have to  
go teach today. If you spray me, you will seriously undercut my  
efficiency.” He is still not moving. Stand up, move one step closer.  
Squat down again.

“I’m not going to hurt you. I present no threat. I’m scared to  
death of you and you probably are of me.” Stand up, one step  
closer, squat down.

I can see the bloody scratches along the skunk’s neck where he  
tried with claws to free himself from the jar. I keep on talking, just  
to make noise, piling nonsense on nonsense.

Stand, step, squat, and I am three feet from the skunk. He re-  
gards me. Deep breath. Then, very slowly, I reach out with my  
right hand. “Don’t worry now, bubba. I’m not here to hurt you.  
This jar is the problem.” Slowly, slowly, reaching, the skunk still  
quiet, then *got it!* My hand clamps down on the warm rigidity of  
the jar.

Suddenly the skunk, until now motionless, is galvanized. He  
pulls back in panic, his paws scrabbling at the grass, at my hand. I  
pull hard on the jar. Now it will come off and he will run away. One  
way or another, this is it.

But this is not it. Pulling hard, I find I am dragging the skunk, 20  
who pushes frantically backward, onto the dirt road. His head is  
*impacted* into the jar. It will not come out.

“Oh, boy, come *on*.” The skunk is now completely in the road,  
struggling furiously to get away, twisting and turning, as I hold the  
jar tight. The one good thing at this point is that he is so com-  
pletely wedged that he can’t turn and fire, although there is little  
doubt that he regrets this keenly. As long as I have his head, I’m  
safe. I pull again and am only able to drag the skunk farther. “Oh,  
*great*. Now I get to take you home.” He grunts audibly, pulls again,  
scrabbling up packed dirt.

There’s nothing for it. I have to grab him with one hand and try  
to pull the jar off with the other. With my left hand, I grasp him  
around the shoulder blades. His hair is soft. He would be nice to



stroke. “Come on come on come on. . . .” I twist the jar hard to the left, and his head insides assumes a crazy angle, but he stops struggling. I pull hard on the jar. It does not move. “Come on, you . . . .” The jar is *really* socked onto his neck, which has swollen in some way. Grabbing hard at his shoulder blades, I twist and pull harder.

I am exerting all my strength now. And I see the threads of the jar turn, slowly, then more quickly. “Okay, something moving, heads up,” then more movement, an upward sliding, and then with an audible *pop* the jar is off.


Without any thought except *escape*, I jump up, whirl, run. Unscathed. Unsprayed. At a safe distance, I stop and look back. The skunk stands in the middle of the road. He breathes deeply, several times, shakes himself from stem to stern, takes a few tottering steps across the road.

On the other side, he halts, then turns to look at me. I look 25 back. For perhaps 30 seconds, we regard each other with great benignity. Then I hold up my index finger in a tutorial fashion.

“Next time you see me,” I say, “don’t spray me.” He watches me gravely a moment more, then turns and plods off into a cemetery across the road.

There is something in my hand. An empty jar. Starting to run up the long hill to Main Street, I pitch it as hard as I can, sidearm, way out into a swamp. I hear it splash as I run up the hill into a sunny morning whose colors are joy, joy, joy.

*Instead of running away from the skunk, the author runs into the morning with a joy that gives readers insight into why this encounter between a man and a skunk matters—to him and to all of us.*

 *FIND a short analytical article in a newspaper or magazine or on a website. Look at the list of five characteristic features of analysis on p. 80 and, using the Connors essay as a model, annotate the essay to point out these features. Then evaluate how successful the article’s analysis is. For example, can you identify the question that drove the analysis? Has the author provided enough description for you to follow the analysis? Is the language clear and precise? Has the author clearly stated the insight the analysis led to? Does he or she provide evidence to support that insight?*

## WRITING ANALYTICALLY / A Roadmap

### Find a topic that matters to you— and that should matter to your audience

Whether you can choose your topic or have to respond to a specific assignment, make the project interesting—to you and your audience. Find an angle that appeals to your interests, that engages you. No audience will want to hear about something you are not interested in writing.

**If you can choose your topic**, begin by considering your own interests: What do you like to do? What issues catch your interest? What do you value? If you value courage, you might want to analyze how a particular literary character manifests that trait: Is Harry Potter courageous when he repeatedly confronts Voldemort alone, or is he foolhardy? An interest in sports could lead you to analyze statistical data on a favorite athlete (as Will Moller does on p. 88) or to analyze the process of doing something in a particular sport (as Darlene Jenkins does on p. 85). Concern about climate change could lead you to analyze the costs and benefits of alternative energy sources.

**If you've been assigned a topic**, say to analyze the Gettysburg Address, you might consider the way President Lincoln appealed to his audience. To make the analysis more interesting, you might imagine that Lincoln was giving this speech to an audience of college students today: What advice would you give him about revising? Or perhaps you've been assigned to analyze a physical process—the process of sleeping, for example. You might examine your own sleep habits and see how they compare with the norm for your age group.

### Make your topic matter to your audience

Some topics matter to everyone, or nearly everyone; you can identify those by checking the media for what's being debated and discussed. But when you're writing about something that may not appeal to a wide audience, it's your responsibility as the writer to make the topic matter to them. Think about Robert Connors' essay on the skunk (p. 93)—not an inherently interesting topic or one that matters widely, but he involves us by showing how he came to care—and analyzing the situation in a way that engages our interest and makes us care, too.

## Consider your rhetorical situation

Keep in mind the elements of your particular situation—your audience, your specific purpose, your stance, and so on—and how they will or should influence the choices you make in your writing.

**Identify your audience.** Who do you want to reach, and how can you shape your analysis so that you get through to them? Karen McComb’s analysis of cats purring, summarized on p. 87, was for an audience of scientific peers, whereas Robert Connors wrote his piece for *Yankee*, a New England “lifestyle” magazine with articles on travel, home, and food. Very different audiences, very different purposes, very different analyses. In each case, the author could target a specific audience.

However, if you are writing for the web, you will likely reach a broader audience than either of these, and one whose characteristics you can’t predict, so you need to keep in mind what additional information you might need to provide—just as Will Moller does in his blog about Andy Pettitte. Even though his primary audience is Yankees fans, he knows that many of them won’t know much about statistics, so he provides the definitions they need to understand his analysis. To identify your target audience, you might consider the following questions:

- Who are you trying to reach? And what do you know about them—their age, gender, cultural and linguistic background? Anything else?
- What are they likely to know about your subject, and what background information will you need to provide?
- How will they benefit from the analysis and insight you hope to offer?
- Will your subject matter to them—and if not, how can you make them care about it?

Keeping your likely **AUDIENCE** firmly in mind will help you craft an analysis that connects with them.

**Articulate your purpose.** The likelihood is that you won’t be the first or only one to write on your topic, so one broad **PURPOSE** for writing will be to add your voice to a larger conversation. Following are some questions that can help you narrow your focus and articulate more specific purposes:

- What are you analyzing? A text? A process? Causes? Data?
- What has motivated you to write? Are you responding to some other text or author?
- What do you want to accomplish by analyzing this subject? How can you best achieve your goals?
- What do you want your audience to take away from your analysis?

**Think about your stance.** What is your attitude toward the subject, and how do you want to come across as an author? Objective? Passionate? Something else? How can your writing reflect that **STANCE**? If your subject is surfing and you're writing on a surfers' blog about how to catch a wave, for an audience of beginners, your stance might be that of an experienced surfer, or a former beginner. Your language would probably be informal, with little or no surfing jargon. If, on the other hand, you're writing an article for *Surfing Magazine* analyzing the process Laird Hamilton developed to ride fifty-foot waves, your stance might be that of an objective reporter, and your language would need to be more technical for that well-informed audience. No matter what your stance or target audience, you need to consider what kind of language is appropriate, what terms need to be defined, and how you can establish your authority as an author.

**Consider the larger context.** If you are analyzing an ad for a composition class, you will want to look at relevant information about the original **CONTEXT**. When was the ad created, and who was the target audience? What were the social, economic, and political conditions at the time? All of that is contextual information. If you are preparing a load analysis for an engineering class, you'll need to consider such factors as how, when, and where the structure will be used. Much of the contextual information comes from what others have said about your subject, and your analysis adds to the conversation.

**Consider media.** Will your analysis be delivered in print? on a website? in an oral presentation? Are you writing for the opinion pages in your campus newspaper? Or are you assigned to give an oral presentation incorporating audio and images? If you get to choose your medium, the choice should depend on how you can best present your subject and achieve your purpose

with your intended audience. Whether you have a choice or not, the **MEDIA** you use will affect how you organize and design your analysis.

**Consider matters of design.** Think about how to best present your information and whether you need to follow any disciplinary conventions. Does your information include data that easiest to understand in a chart or graph? Would headings help readers follow your analysis? Does your subject require illustrations? What fonts are most appropriate for your subject, your medium, and your audience? Like all of your other writing choices, the **DESIGN** decisions you make can help you achieve your goals.

### Analyze your subject

What kind of analysis is needed for your subject and purpose? You may be assigned to conduct a certain kind of analysis, or you may be inspired by a question, as Will Moller was in analyzing data to determine whether Andy Pettitte is likely to be elected to the Hall of Fame. But sometimes you may be asked simply to “analyze *x*”—an ad, a game, a historical event, several hedge funds—and then you’ll need to determine what kind of analysis you’ll do. The kind of analysis you need to do—rhetorical analysis, process analysis, causal analysis, data analysis—will determine the way you study your subject.

**If you’re analyzing rhetoric,** you need to look at what the text you’re examining says and how it supports its claims.

- What question has led you to analyze this text? What specifically are you looking for?
- What **CLAIM** is the text making—and how does it support that claim?
- If you’re analyzing a written text, what **REASONS** and **EVIDENCE** does the author provide for the claim—and do they convince you?
- Does the writer acknowledge or respond to other opinions? If so, are they presented fairly?
- If you’re analyzing a visual text, how does it make its point? Where does your eye go first? What’s in the foreground, and what’s in the background?

- Are there any words that indicate what the author thinks—or wants you to think?
- How does the author establish credibility to address the topic?
- Does the text appeal to your emotions? If so, how?

If you're analyzing a process, you'll need to decide whether your analysis will be *informational* or *instructional*. An informational analysis tells how something works; an instructional one tells how to do something. Writing about how solar panels generate energy would be informational, whereas writing about how to install solar panels would be instructional—and would need to explicitly identify all materials and conditions needed and then tell readers step-by-step exactly how to carry out the process. Once you've determined what kind of process you're analyzing, you might then consider questions like these:

- What question is prompting your analysis?
- If the process is instructional, what materials are needed?
- What are the steps in the process?
- What order do the steps follow?

Some processes follow a set order (throwing a curve ball, parallel parking a car), whereas others have no fixed order (playing Sudoku). Remember that whatever the process, you'll need to present the steps in some kind of order.

If you're analyzing causes, you're looking for answers to *why something happened*. Why, for instance, did the Penn State University Board of Trustees fire legendary football coach Joe Paterno? Questions about causes can rarely be answered definitively, so if you're writing a causal analysis, you'll usually be **ARGUING** that certain causes are the most plausible or the most important ones, and that other possible causes are secondary or less likely. In addition, although an *immediate cause* may be obvious, less obvious *long-term causes* may also have contributed.

In the Paterno case, the Penn State trustees initially said only that they felt it “was necessary to make a change in leadership.” At the time, however, some people speculated that Paterno was being blamed for not having done more in light of the sexual assault accusations about a for-

mer coach. Others argued that the immediate cause was damage control, that in light of the accusations the trustees felt they needed to “protect the brand” (football brings in \$72 million a year to Penn State). Still others pointed out that Penn State had been trying to get Paterno to retire for many years—perhaps a contributing cause. Months later, the trustees named additional reasons, but the initial speculations serve as a good example of the kind of analysis that goes on when people want to know why something happened.

You also need to keep two other considerations in mind when analyzing causes. First, don’t confuse coincidence with causation. That two events—such as a new police-patrol policy in a city and a drop in the crime rate—occurred more or less simultaneously, or even that one event preceded the other, does not prove that one *caused* the other. Second, you need to consider all possible causes and provide evidence to support the ones you identify as most plausible. If the city also experienced an economic boom around the same time that the new policy and the drop in crime began, for example, you would need to show (perhaps using evidence from other cities) that good economic conditions do not usually seem to reduce crime rates.

As the preceding example suggests, you’ll often need to do some **RESEARCH** to be sure you understand all the possible causes and whether they are primary or contributing causes, immediate or long-term causes. Here are some questions that can guide your analysis:

- What question is prompting your analysis?
- List all the causes you can think of. Which ones seem like the primary or main causes? Which seem to be contributing causes?
- Is there an immediate cause, something that directly set off whatever happened?
- Think about underlying causes, ones that originated long ago but are ultimately responsible for what happened.
- Might any of the causes on your list be merely coincidences?
- Which are the most plausible causes—and why?
- Do you need to do research to help answer any of these questions?

**If you’re analyzing data**, you’re trying to identify patterns in information that you or someone else has gathered. The information collected by the U.S.



Census is data. Social scientists might classify that data according to certain criteria, such as numbers of families with children in urban areas, and then analyze those data looking for patterns on which to make claims or predictions about population trends.

In his piece on Andy Pettitte (p. 88), Will Moller provides readers with numerical data on ten pitchers' performances, data he analyzes to determine whether Pettitte is likely to be nominated to the Hall of Fame. Moller's analysis expressly states his guiding question—"Who are the best pitchers of [Andy Pettitte's] generation, so we can compare them?"—and then answers it by considering each element of the data as it relates to the pitchers' performances.

Although the mathematical nature of some data analysis can often make it more straightforward than other kinds of analysis, identifying statistical patterns and figuring out their significance can be challenging. Here are some questions to consider when analyzing data:

- What question are you trying to answer?
- Are there any existing data that can help you find your answer? If so, will they provide sufficient information, or do you need to find more?
- Is the data be up-to-date? trustworthy? Who collected the data, and why?
- Are there other data that tell a different story?
- Do you need to conduct any **RESEARCH** of your own to generate the data you need?
- Can you identify patterns in the data? If so, are they patterns you expected, or are any of them surprising?

### Determine what your analysis shows

Once you've analyzed your subject, you need to figure out what your analysis shows. What was the question that first prompted your analysis, and how can you now answer that question? What have you discovered about your subject? What have you discovered that interests you—and how can you make it matter to your audience? Write out a tentative **THESIS**, noting what you've analyzed and why, and what conclusions or insights you want

to share. Your thesis is your point, the claim you want to make about your subject. Let's say you're writing a rhetorical analysis of the Gettysburg Address. Here's how one author analyzed that speech:

Following Edward Everett's two-hour oration, President Lincoln spoke eloquently for a mere two minutes, deploying rhetorical devices like repetition, contrast, and rhythm in a way that connected emotionally with his audience.

This sentence tells us that the writer will describe the event, say something about the length of the speech, and explain how specific words and structures resulted in an eloquently simple but profoundly moving speech.

As you formulate your thesis, begin by stating it several different ways and then look for the one that is most interesting to you. Think about your audience and how you can make your analysis most compelling to them. Then list the **EVIDENCE** you found that supports your analysis—examples, quotations, quantitative or qualitative data, and so forth. Which ones will be most persuasive to your audience? Consider other analytical perspectives and how you can account for them. Do you have everything you need, or do you need to do any further research?

### Organize and start writing

Think about how you want to start, where you want to end up, and how you want to get there. For your first draft, just focus on writing down your ideas, beginning with a brief description of *what* you're analyzing and *why*, explaining what question prompted you to take a closer look at your topic and providing any background information your audience might need. State your thesis; then give the evidence that supports it—examples, data, and so on taken from the subject itself as well as from any other sources you've consulted. But remember: Your audience wants to read *your* voice and *your* insights, along with evidence from the subject and any relevant sources. Remember to acknowledge and account for perspectives other than your own, but no one wants to read a mash-up of information from outside sources. You might end by reiterating what you've learned from your analysis, what you want your audience to understand. And as always, be sure they know why it matters, both to you and to them.

## Think critically about your draft, seek response— and revise

Read your draft slowly and carefully to see if whether you've made your guiding question clear, described your subject sufficiently, offered enough evidence to support your analysis, and provided your audience with some insight about your subject.

Then ask some others to read and respond to your draft. If your school has a writing center, try to meet with a tutor, taking along any questions you have. Here are some questions that can help you or others read over a draft of analytic writing:

- *Is the guiding question behind your analysis clear?* Is it a question worth considering?
- *How does the introduction capture the audience's interest?* Does it indicate why this analysis matters? How else might you begin?
- *Is the subject described in enough detail for your intended audience?* Is there any other information they might need to follow your analysis?
- *What insights have you gained from the analysis?* Have you stated them explicitly? How likely is it that readers will accept your conclusions?
- *Is the point of your analysis clear?* Have you stated the point explicitly in a **THESIS**—and if not, do you need to?
- *What evidence is provided to support your point?* Is it sufficient?
- *If you've cited any sources, are they credible and convincing?* Have you integrated them smoothly into your text—is it clear what *you* are saying and where (and why) you are citing others? And have you **DOCUMENTED** any sources you've cited?
- *Have you acknowledged and addressed other viable perspectives?*
- *How would you describe your tone,* and does it accurately convey your **STANCE**? Is it an appropriate tone for your audience and purpose? If not, how could it be improved?
- *How effectively is the analysis designed?* Have you included any images or other visual data—and if so, how do they contribute to the analysis?

If not, is there any information that might be easier to understand if presented in a table or chart or accompanied by an image?

- **How is the analysis organized?** Is it easy to follow, with explicit **TRANSITIONS** from one point to the next? Are there headings—and if not, would they help? If you're analyzing a process, are the steps in an order that your audience will be able to follow easily?
- **Consider style**—is it appropriate for the audience and purpose? Look at the choice of words and kinds of sentences—are they appropriately formal (or informal)? Could the style be improved in any way?
- **How does the draft conclude?** Is the conclusion forceful and memorable? How else might the analysis conclude?
- **Consider the title.** Does it make clear what the analysis is about, and will it make your intended audience interested in reading on?

Revise your draft in light of your own observations and any feedback you get from others, keeping your audience and purpose firmly in mind. But remember: *You* are the analyst here, so you need to make the decisions.

## *Mad Men*: Stillbirth of the American Dream

HEATHER HAVRILESKY



**A**MERICANS ARE CONSTANTLY in search of an upgrade. It's a sickness that's infused into our blood, a dissatisfaction with the ordinary that's instilled in us from childhood. Instead of staying connected to the divine beauty and grace of everyday existence—the glimmer of sunshine on the grass, the blessing of a cool breeze on a summer day—we're instructed to hope for much more. Having been told repeated stories about the fairest in the land, the most powerful, the richest, the most heroic (Snow White, Pokémon, Ronald McDonald, Lady Gaga), eventually we buy into these creation myths and concede their overwhelming importance in the universe. Slowly we come to view our own lives as inconsequential, grubby, even intolerable.

Meanwhile, the American dream itself—a house, a job, a car, a family, a little lawn for the kids to frolic on—has expanded into something far broader and less attainable than ever. Crafty insta-celebrities and self-branding geniuses and social media gurus assert that submitting to the daily grind to pay the mortgage constitutes a meager existence. Books like *The 4-Hour Work Week* tell us that working the same job for years is for suckers. We should be paid handsomely for our creative talents, we should have the freedom to travel and

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live wherever we like, our children should be exposed to the wonders of the globe at an early age.

In other words, we're always falling short, no matter what our resources, and we pass this discontent to our offspring. And so millions of aspiring 3-year-old princesses hum "Someday my prince will come!" to themselves, turning their backs on the sweetness of the day at hand.

Maybe this is why AMC's hit series *Mad Men* . . . resonates so clearly at this point in history, when the promise of the boom years has given way to two wars, a stubborn recession and a string of calamities that threaten to damage our way of life irreparably. Somehow *Mad Men* captures this ultra-mediated, postmodern moment, underscoring the disconnect between the American dream and reality by distilling our deep-seated frustrations as a nation into painfully palpable vignettes. Even as the former denizens of the Sterling Cooper advertising agency unearth a groundswell of discontent beneath the skin-deep promises of adulthood, they keep struggling to concoct chirpy advertising messages that provide a creepily fantastical backdrop to this modern tragedy. Don (Jon Hamm) sighs deeply and unlocks the door to his lonely apartment, Peggy (Elisabeth Moss) whiles away her waking hours trading casual quips with



Don Draper (Jon Hamm) packages the American dream for mass consumption.

co-workers, but happiness is still just a shiny kitchen floor or a sexy bikini or a cigarette away.

As the American dream is packaged for mass consumption, these isolated characters find themselves unnerved by its costs. Alternating between befuddled breadwinner and longing lothario, Don has finally put his ambivalence toward Betty (January Jones) behind him: He's leaving his marriage and focusing on the new ad firm as his true passion, just as we saw at the end of the third season. But can someone as conflicted as Don commit wholeheartedly to anything? Not surprisingly, the premiere seems to suggest that Don may not feel comfortable yielding his entire life to his career. And now that he's free to pursue any woman he wants, instead of focusing on a woman whose intellect matches his own (like so many of his lovers, from Midge to Rachel to Abigail the schoolteacher), Don appears likely to be drawn in by the same manipulative style of femininity that Betty embodied.

Of course, Roger Sterling (John Slattery) has always provided a sort of an omen of where Don was headed, hence their volatile relationship. Roger also has a somewhat childish habit of falling for anyone who makes him feel powerful. First there was Joan (Christina Hendricks), whose standoffish charms sometimes obscure the fact that she's the most adaptive, resilient and personally effective character on the show, and next there was Jane (Peyton List), a character who could just as easily be called That Crying Girl, who's developed into more of a high-maintenance daughter to Roger than a real partner.

Roger and Don may represent the wildly fluctuating fortunes bequeathed to the masters of the universe: Told that they can have everything they want, these two are haunted by a constant desire for *more*. But what variety of *more* will suit them this time? The answer typically—and somewhat tragically—seems to spring out of impulse and ego and fear more often than any real self-reflection or wisdom.

Betty represents the female version of this lack of foresight, and as the fourth season develops, the arbitrary nature of her recent decisions starts to become more apparent. Showing her usual startling lack of insight, Betty smooths over bumps in the road with Henry Francis (Christopher Stanley) while lashing out at her daughter, Sally (Kiernan Shipka). Betty has always had a life that's built around men, but she entirely lacks Joan's wisdom, survival instincts and compassion, and instead tends to resort to the foot-stomping of a petulant child. But what else can you expect from someone whose closest relations—overbearing father, paternal but deceitful husband—have consistently rewarded her for quietly, obediently playing along with their games?





Joan Holloway (Christina Hendricks) is the most resilient and effective character on the show.

Having taken the opposite path in life, Peggy represents the victories (and defeats, and insults) of the single career girl. At the start of Season 4, Peggy appears more committed to this path than ever, and she's growing much more resilient and unflappable in the face of her co-workers' personal slights. Nonetheless, we'll surely see many of the fairy tales Peggy has been forced to give up along the way. Likewise, selling a kittenish flavor of femininity and sex while asserting your own power can't be an easy tightrope to walk for Peggy, and it's this uncomfortable spot that makes her one of the show's most riveting characters.

The ambition and conflicted desires of these characters in their pursuit of happiness is what makes *Mad Men* such a singular and resonant reflection of a particularly American puzzle. But even as it strains to capture the transformation of the American dream into a commodity that can be bought and sold, *Mad Men* itself is the ultimate, endlessly marketable über-brand: Everyone and everything is gorgeous to the point of luminosity, a pitch-perfect reflection of the times that's been polished to such a high gloss that it upstages our hazy memories of that era completely. The terse exchanges, the sly banter, even the lighthearted quips dance over the mundane drudgery of workplace interactions like mean-spirited sprites. Bourbon glistens among ice cubes in immaculate glasses, fire engine red lipstick frames heartbreakingly white teeth, fingers tap perkily on typewriters as young men amble by, their slumped shoulders hidden behind the heroic cut of their tailored suits. Don Draper's unmoving cap of hair gleams like a beacon, sending some Morse code straight to female brain stems, stirring long-buried childhood notions about one day having a husband who looks just like a Ken doll.

Behind the impeccable facade, of course, we see the longing in Pete Campbell's (Vincent Kartheiser) tired face, we see the fear in Betty's eyes as she sits down to dinner with her brand-new mother-in-law. The lovely details of this fantasy—the hairstyles, the costumes and the props that come with the dream—occasionally fail to obscure the confused humans who straighten their shoulders and dry their eyes and take the stage day after day, dutifully mouthing lines about the thrills of work and family, all of it the invented, peppy rhetoric of laundry detergent jingles.

This is the genius of *Mad Men*, its dramatic reenactment of the disconnect between the dream of dashing heroes and their beautiful wives, living in style among adorable, adoring children, and the much messier reality of struggling to play a predetermined role without an organic relationship to your sur-

roundings or to yourself. We're drawn to *Mad Men* week after week because each and every episode asks us, *What's missing from this pretty picture?*

What's missing on both a personal and a broader scale is empathy, of course—embodied most gruesomely in the lawn mower accident last season, but also wrapped up in the sharp edicts Don and Betty issue to their children, in the distracted insults Don aims at Peggy, in the self-involved funk of Joan's doctor fiancé, in the cruelty that springs from Pete's existential desperation. While *Mad Men's* detractors often decry the empty sheen of it all, claiming that it has no soul, clearly that's the point. The American dream itself is a carefully packaged, soulless affair. *This is the automobile a man of your means should drive. This is the liquor a happy homemaker like yourself should serve to your husband's business guests.* As absurd as it seems to cobble together a dream around a handful of consumer goods, that's precisely what the advertising industry did so effectively in the 50s and 60s, until we couldn't distinguish our own desires from the desires ascribed to us by professional manipulators, suggesting antidotes for every real or imagined malady, supplying escapist fantasies to circumvent the supposedly unbearable tedium of ordinary life. In show creator Matthew Weiner's telling, the birth of the advertising age coincides directly with the birth of our discontent as a nation—and what got lost in the hustle was our souls.

### Thinking about the Text

1. What is Heather Havrilesky's main conclusion about *Mad Men*? How can you tell? Point to specific passages that reflect this conclusion.
2. How does Havrilesky establish her authority to write about this show?
3. How does she appeal to readers' emotions? Identify specific passages where she does so.
4. If you were familiar with *Mad Men* before you read this essay, is this an accurate description of the show and of its impact on viewers? If you weren't familiar with it, do you now understand its basic premise—and has Havrilesky made you want to watch it? Explain.
5. Write an essay analyzing Havrilesky's own argument about *Mad Men*. What question guides her analysis, what insights does she offer, and what evidence does she provide to support her conclusions?

## Advertisements R Us

MELISSA RUBIN



**A**DVERTISEMENTS ARE WRITTEN to persuade us—to make us want to support a certain cause, buy a particular car, drink a specific kind of soda. But *how* do they do it? How do they persuade us? Since the beginning of modern consumer culture, companies have cleverly tailored advertisements to target specific groups. To do so, they include text and images that reflect and appeal to the ideals, values, and stereotypes held by the consumers they wish to attract. As a result, advertisements reveal a lot about society. We can learn a great deal about the prevailing culture by looking closely at the deliberate ways a company crafts an ad to appeal to particular audiences.

This ad from the August 1950 *Coca-Cola Bottler* magazine, a trade magazine for Coca-Cola bottlers (fig. 1) features a larger-than-life red Coca-Cola vending machine with the slogan “Drink Coca-Cola—Work Refreshed” (1950 Coca-Cola Ad). Set against a bright blue sky with puffy white clouds, an overlarge open bottle of Coke hovers just to the right and slightly above the vending machine, next to the head of “Sprite Boy,” a pixie-ish character and onetime Coke symbol, who sports a bottle cap for a hat. Sprite Boy’s left hand gestures past the floating Coke bottle and toward a crowd congregating before the vending machine. The group, overwhelmingly male and apparently all white, includes blue-collar workers in casual clothing, servicemen in uniform, and

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Fig. 1. 1950 Coca-Cola ad from *The Coca Cola Bottler* magazine.

businessmen in suits in the foreground; the few women displayed are in the background, wearing dresses. The setting is industrialized and urban, as indicated by the factory and smokestacks on the far left side of the scene and by the skyscrapers and apartment building on the right.

Practically since its invention, Coca-Cola has been identified with mainstream America. Born from curiosity and experimentation in an Atlanta pharmacy in 1886, Coke's phenomenal growth paralleled America's in the industrial age. Benefiting from developments in technology and transportation, by 1895 it was "sold and consumed in every state and territory in the United States" (Coca-Cola Company). In 2010, Diet Coke became the second-most-popular carbonated drink in the world . . . behind Coca-Cola (Esterl). In the immediate post-war world, Coke became identified with American optimism and energy, thanks in part to the company's wartime declaration that "every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca-Cola for 5 cents, wherever he is, and whatever it costs the Company" (Coca-Cola Company). To meet this dictate, bottling plants were built overseas with the result that many people other than Americans first tasted Coke during this war that America won so decisively, and when peace finally came, "the foundations were laid for Coca-Cola to do business overseas" (Coca-Cola Company).

Given the context, just a few years after World War II and at the beginning of the Korean War, the setting clearly reflects the idea that Americans experienced the increased industrialization and urbanization as a result of World War II. Factories had sprung up across the country to aid in the war effort, and many rural and small-town Americans had moved to industrial areas and large cities in search of work. In this advertisement, the buildings surround the people, symbolizing a sense of community and the way Americans had come together in a successful effort to win the war.

The ad suggests that Coca-Cola recognized the patriotism inspired by the war and wanted to inspire similar positive feelings about their product. In the center of the ad, the huge red vending machine looks like the biggest skyscraper of all—the dominant feature of the urban industrial landscape. On the upper right, the floating face of Coca-Cola's Sprite Boy towers above the scene. A pale character with wild white hair, hypnotic eyes, and a mysterious smile, Sprite Boy stares straight at readers, his left hand gesturing toward the red machine. Sprite Boy's size and placement in the ad makes him appear god-like, as if he, the embodiment of Coca-Cola, is a powerful force uniting—and refreshing—hardworking Americans. The placement of the vending machine in the center of the ad and the wording on it evoke the idea that drinking



Coca-Cola will make a hardworking American feel refreshed while he (and apparently it was rarely she) works and becomes part of a larger community. The text at the bottom of the ad, “A welcome host to workers—*Inviting you to the pause that refreshes with ice-cold Coca-Cola*”—sends the same message to consumers: Coke will refresh and unite working America.

The way that Coca-Cola chooses to place the objects and depict men and women in this ad speaks volumes about American society in the middle of the twentieth century: a white, male-dominated society in which servicemen and veterans were a numerous and prominent presence. The clothing that the men in the foreground wear reflects the assumption that the target demographic for the ad—people who worked in Coca-Cola bottling plants—valued hard workers and servicemen during a time of war. White, uniformed men are placed front and center. One man wears an Army uniform, the one next to him wears a Navy uniform, and the next an Air Force uniform. By placing the servicemen so prominently, Coca-Cola emphasizes their important role in society and underscores the value Americans placed on their veterans at a time when almost all-male Americans were subject to the draft and most of them could expect to serve in the military or had already done so. The other men in the foreground—one wearing a blue-collar work uniform and the other formal business attire—are placed on either side of and slightly apart from the soldiers, suggesting that civilian workers played a valuable role in society, but one secondary to that of the military. Placing only a few women dressed in casual day wear in the far background of the image represents the assumption that women played a less important role in society—or at least in the war effort and the workforce, including Coke’s.

The conspicuous mixture of stereotypical middle-class and working-class attire is noteworthy because in 1950 the U.S. economy had been marked by years of conflict over labor’s unionization efforts and management’s opposition to them—often culminating in accommodation between the two sides. The ad seems to suggest that such conflict should be seen as a thing of the past, that men with blue-collar jobs and their bosses are all “workers” whom Coca-Cola, a generous “host,” is inviting to share in a break for refreshments. Thus all economic classes, together with a strong military, can unite to build a productive industrial future and a pleasant lifestyle for themselves.

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, this ad is especially interesting because in significant ways it seems to be looking backward instead of forward. By 1950, the highly urban view of American society it presents was starting to be challenged by widespread movement out of central cities to the

suburbs, but nothing in the ad hints at this profound change. At the time, offices and factories were still located mostly in urban areas and associated in Americans' minds with cities, and the ad clearly reflects this perspective. In addition, it presents smoke pouring from factor smokestacks in a positive light, with no sign of the environmental damage that such emissions cause, and that would become increasingly clear over the next few decades.

Another important factor to consider: everyone in the ad is white. During the 1950s, there was still a great deal of racial prejudice and segregation in the United States. Coca-Cola was attuned to white society's racial intolerance and chose in this ad to depict what they undoubtedly saw as average Americans, the primary demographic of the audience for this publication: Coca-Cola employees. While Coke did feature African Americans in some ads during the late 1940s and early 1950s, they were celebrity musicians like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, or Graham Jackson (the accordion player who was a huge favorite of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's) or star athletes like Marion Motley and Bill Willis, the first men to break the color barrier in NFL football ("World of Coca-Cola"). The contrast between these extremes underscores the prejudice: "ordinary" people are represented by whites, while only exceptional African Americans appear in the company's ads.

In 1950, then, the kind of diversity that Coke wanted to highlight and appeal to was economic (middle-class and working-class) and war-related (civilian and military). Today, such an ad would probably represent the ethnic diversity missing from the 1950 version, with smiling young people of diverse skin colors and facial features relaxing with Cokes, probably now in cans rather than bottles. But the differences in economic, employment, or military status or in clothing styles that the 1950 ad highlighted would be unlikely to appear, not because they no longer exist, but because advertisers for products popular with a broad spectrum of society no longer consider them a useful way to appeal to consumers.

While initially the ads for Coca-Cola reflected the values of the time, their enormous success eventually meant that Coke ads helped shape the American identity. In them, Americans always appear smiling, relaxed, carefree, united in their quest for well-deserved relaxation and refreshment. They drive convertibles, play sports, dance, and obviously enjoy life. The message: theirs is a life to be envied and emulated, so drink Coca-Cola and live that life yourself.



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### Thinking about the Text

1. What insight does Melissa Rubin offer about the Coca-Cola ad she analyzes, and how does she support her analysis? Has she persuaded you to accept her conclusions—and if not, why not?
2. How does she incorporate historical context, and what does that information contribute to her analysis?
3. This Coca-Cola ad reflects the values of its era. Can you think of a contemporary ad that projects the values of the era we live in? How do the two ads compare?
4. Write an essay analyzing a current ad, looking specifically at how it reflects American values in the twenty-first century. Be sure to include the ad in your essay.