

## ***Introduction to the Textual Analysis Essay: Finding a Thesis Focus & Organizational Pattern***

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Writing the Textual Analysis Essay will require you to draw upon the critical reading and analysis concepts you've been learning about and practicing all term. To help you understand the professional author's argument and purpose, you'll use the close reading and annotation skills you learned while studying the Annotated Bibliography and Summary and Response Essay. Likewise, to help you dissect the author's rhetoric and its impact on audience and purpose, you'll use the rhetorical analysis skills you learned while writing the Ad Analysis Essay.

In fact, the Textual Analysis Essay has a lot in common with both the Summary and Response Essay and the Ad Analysis Essay, and these similarities should help you immensely as you write the Textual Analysis Essay. However, the Textual Analysis Essay also differs in key ways from both of the essays you've written so far this term. To help you understand the requirements for and approach to writing the Textual Analysis Essay, we're going to look at the ways it's similar to and different from the Summary and Response and the Ad Analysis essays.

Let's start with the Summary and Response. You will organize the Textual Analysis Essay almost identically to the Summary and Response Essay. Just like the Summary and Response, this essay will have an introduction which leads us into the issue and narrows toward the topic of the professional essay, a summary paragraph which overviews the professional essay and ends with your thesis statement, a body which supports your thesis, and a conclusion which wraps up the essay and answers the question, "So what?"

However, while the overall structure of the Textual Analysis Essay may be identical to the Summary and Response, it will have an entirely different focus in both the thesis and the body. Whereas the Summary and Response Essay focused on agreeing or disagreeing with the author's overall point, the Textual Analysis essay will focus on analyzing the effectiveness of the author's rhetorical choices. In the Textual Analysis, your agreement or disagreement with the author's argument is beside the point. Instead, you'll be looking at his methods and the effectiveness of those methods. In some cases, you may completely disagree with an author's argument or purpose, but you may have to admit that he or she artfully crafted the argument to effectively accomplish a purpose or prove a point.

To help you think about the difference between an essay that responds and one that analyzes, let's look at the differences in thesis statements. Here's a sample thesis statement for a Summary and Response Essay:

In "The Smurfette Principle," Katha Pollitt jumps to conclusions about children's programming's impact on toddlers and makes pre-school entertainment seem much more sexist than it really is.

Clearly, the Summary and Response thesis takes a position in response to Pollitt's main point and disagrees with the argument. Now let's look at a sample thesis statement for a Textual Analysis Essay:

In "The Smurfette Principle," Katha Pollitt relies heavily on emotional appeals to convince her audience that children's programming enforces sexism; however, her argument lacks the logical support needed to persuade an academic audience.

While the Textual Analysis Essay's thesis takes a stance on the effectiveness of the methods used in Pollitt's essay, it does not take a stance on Pollitt's argument. That is, it does not agree or disagree about the presence or absence of sexism in children's entertainment.

Let's look at one more set of sample thesis statements. Here's another Summary and Response Essay thesis statement:

Contrary to Steven Johnson's argument in "Why Games Are Good for You," the potential negative effects of desensitization and learned violence resulting from playing video games far outweigh any cognitive or educational benefits of video games might offer.

Once again, you can see that this Summary and Response thesis statement takes a clear stance in disagreement with Johnson's overall argument. Here's a sample thesis statement for a Textual Analysis Essay on "Why Games Are Good for You":

Through his use of a conversational tone, well-explained concessions, and a balance of both academic research and real-world examples, Steven Johnson effectively uses ethos and logos to present a strong argument in "Why Games Are Good for You."

Once again, the Textual Analysis Essay doesn't take a position on the argument as to whether video games are good for us; instead, it makes a judgment about the methods used to put forward the argument and the effectiveness of those methods. When writing the working thesis, be sure to focus not on agreeing or disagreeing with the professional essay but on analyzing the rhetoric's role in the author's overall effectiveness.

Now that we've looked at how your thesis statement for the Textual Analysis differs from the Summary and Response Essay's thesis, let's look at some key similarities and differences between the body of both types of essays. By this point in the term, you know that each main point in the body must work to prove, explain, or illustrate the thesis statement. Thus, I'm sure you're aware that if the thesis statement is different in the Textual Analysis Essay, the body will need to be different as well. And, for the most part, it will be. In fact, the body of the Textual Analysis Essay will be more like the Ad Analysis Essay than the Summary and Response Essay.

You may remember that in the summary and response essay, you were asked to structure your body paragraphs in the following manner:

1. Topic sentence with transition
2. Explanation of the author's point (including a textual reference if possible)

3. Response to the author's point
4. Concluding sentence.

In the Ad Analysis Essay, you probably structured your body paragraphs more like this:

1. Topic sentence with transition
2. Reference to visual or textual element of the ad
3. Analysis of that element of the ad
4. Why it was chosen
5. How it impacts the audience
6. What explicit or implicit message it reinforces
7. Concluding sentence reiterating the topic sentence

The structure of individual paragraphs in the Textual Analysis Essay will probably look much like the structure of the body paragraphs in the other two essays you've written thus far, but be sure that rather than focusing on response (as the Summary and Response body paragraphs do), your body paragraphs focus on analysis (more like the ad analysis essay). Though your paragraph structure and content will depend upon the approach you take to analyzing the essay, an analysis paragraph might look something like one of these two templates:

Template A:

1. Transition and topic sentence about a method used by the author
2. One or more key quotes or summaries exemplifying the author's use of that method.
3. Analysis of the author's use of this method:
  - a. How does it appeal to pathos, ethos, or logos?
  - b. How and why does it impact the audience?
  - c. In what ways does it help or hurt the effectiveness of the overall argument?
4. Concluding sentence reiterating the topic sentence.

Template B:

1. Transition and topic sentence about a method used by the author
2. One specific example of the author's use of that method
3. Analysis of the first key example
4. A second specific example of the author's use of that method
5. Analysis of the second example
6. A third key example of the method being used in the essay
7. Analysis of the third example
8. Concluding sentence reiterating the topic sentence

Whether you choose to follow Template A or Template B would depend upon whether or not you wish to comment on one of the author's methods in general or whether you believe commenting on multiple examples of the author's use of a particular method will help you better explore the impact of the

author's rhetorical choices. Whatever organizational pattern you choose, be sure that you do not just summarize the professional essay and that you do not respond in agreement or disagreement with the author's argument. Your focus is analysis!

Now that we've looked at the ways you might structure individual paragraphs within the body of the Textual Analysis Essay, let's look at the organization of the body as a whole. For this essay, you have a couple of options for organizing the body, and the method you choose will depend upon your thesis statement and the points you would like to make. Here are the two organizational methods that would probably work best:

Method 1: Lay out two to four main points to support your thesis, and support each main point with examples and discussion. For example, if your thesis statement argued that the author's use of point of view, imagery, and personal narrative make his essay effective, your body would have a section illustrating and analyzing the author's use of point of view, a section illustrating and analyzing the use of imagery, and a section illustrating and analyzing the use of personal narrative. To prove each point, you'd provide examples from throughout the professional essay

Method 2: Move through the professional essay from beginning to end, analyzing the each section of the essay and emphasizing the ways the author uses particular rhetorical appeals and textual elements in each section. If you choose this approach, you'll likely also comment on the author's overall organization and the significance of the arrangement of points and rhetorical methods. Again, the focus will be to analyze how the author's rhetoric in each section impacts the audience and argument.

Be sure you take the time to look at the Sample Student Essay as you work on organizing the ideas for your own Textual Analysis Essay.