

Academic Article Breakdown

The goal of this assignment is to practice close and critical reading of an academic article, and to work on taking the next step of adding your own analysis.

The project consists of three parts:

- A one-paragraph summary of the article as a whole
- Three paragraphs of analysis of three “moments” in the article
- Your perspective/conclusion on the conversation

The Summary (“They Say”):

In this paragraph, you should give the title and author of the article, a clear statement of your article’s general topic, and identify the article’s main argument in a few sentences. You may want to quote a bit from the author’s “thesis” where you think he or she is most clear. However, you shouldn’t rely on large chunks of quotation in a summary paragraph—not more than a sentence-length quotation at a time.

You probably want to answer the following questions in a summary:

- What is the general topic of the article?
- What is the writer’s argument (thesis)? What particular aspect of the argument is most significant to you?
- Can you label the “slant” or perspective your article takes (if it focuses on gender, religion, psychological issues, economics, psychology, language, etc). In other words, tell your reader what element of the play is most important to the article’s author. There are lots of choices for a writer when deciding how to focus on a certain topic—what approach do they value?
- What sort of evidence does the writer focus on, generally speaking?

The Breakdown (Analysis):

For this part, you are looking at how the body of the article is put together—breaking it down. An analysis paragraph focuses on an item/moment/claim in the article that helps the author make their argument (or doesn’t).

Pick three moments/sections and analyze each one in a paragraph of its own. Pick moments from the article that stand out to you, and explore how you think they are helping the article to make its point (or, perhaps, detracting from that point if that is the case). You will have three analytical paragraphs, each looking at such things as terminology, logic, appeal to audience, or handling of evidence.

Below is a list of some types of analysis you could do. It’s not complete, but it covers most types of analysis you might choose to do. Be sure to focus on one type of analysis per moment/paragraph – don’t try to tackle more than one of these per paragraph.

Types of analysis:

- *Questions about the writer’s terms:* How do the author’s language choices in specific instances contribute to the argument? In other words, pick a key word from the article: some terminology, word-creation, or connotation of a word that draws a reader—you—into the writer’s perspective and supports the writer’s points. Explain how that terminology or language helps him or her to prove a specific point.
- *Questions about the author’s use of textual evidence:* How does the writer interpret a specific piece of evidence or type of evidence? How does that interpretation of evidence help him or her to make a claim? Is there anything else significant about the writer’s use of that textual evidence? Why is it compelling? Does it omit important evidence from the play in your opinion? (If it does, you’ll have room in the “conclusion” part of the paper to expound on it in more depth).

- *Questions about the appeal to logic:* What assumptions does the article rely on in order to make its argument? Is the point supported by the evidence, or not really? Does it leave anything out (if it does, you'll have room in the "conclusion" part to expound on it in more depth). Does it consider counterargument?

DO: in each analytical paragraph, try to explicitly reiterate the larger argument (the author's thesis) that the focal point you are analyzing is intended to support. In other words, how does the item you discuss aid or not aid the author's overarching argument?

DON'T: tell me the article does a "good job." That is a surface evaluation. You are not "grading" the article based on general rules of writing, you are analyzing how a specific argument is being (or not being) made. Don't tell me, for example, that the author "digresses from his/her main point" or uses "too few quotations."

The Conclusion ("I Say"):

This is where you offer a response and/or opinion on the text you've analyzed. Having worked through it, where would you take the conversation you've been analyzing? How do you respond to the writer? (This section should be 1-3 paragraphs)

In this section, you may choose to write about any (but not all) of the following that occurred to you as you wrote your analysis:

- Are there gaps in the argument that you want to "fill in"? Are there questions you feel are still unanswered? How would you begin to answer them?
- Are there passages and ideas in the play that pertain to the topic—and that seem important to include—but have not been included as evidence in these arguments so far? Or, passages from the play that the writers *do* address, but not in a way you would have? What passage are you thinking of? What does it add to the conversation?
- Are there counterarguments that need addressing? "Hot spots" where you disagree with an argument and want to explain your view and its significance in more depth? What passages of the play help you to construct these counterarguments?
- Was there something in the article that really changed the way you read certain sections of the play—sections they don't mention? What passage are you thinking of? What does it add to the conversation?
- In what other contexts can you see the usefulness of their argument?
- What new insights has the article given you? What is useful about the article and why? (If you fashion your response this way, please be sure to write your answer so that it sounds like your perspective, and not just the article's). You want to go into a reason why the article's topic matters that the article itself did not bring up.

This entire section should substantiate your point of view. Please do not simply re-summarize the article and then give only a sentence of your opinion. Have an opinion, then back up your opinion with examples, and spend the majority of this space making your own point, not the article's point.

A note about your audience

You should write as though you're giving a presentation for a college classroom. Your audience needs to know only the overall gist of the argument (in the summary paragraph) and your reasoning for why certain aspects of the article are important in making that argument (in the analysis). Think of your reader as someone who has read the article, but not as carefully or in as much detail as you have.