

Writing an Analytical Paragraph

In most of your future English classes, you will encounter what many perceive to be quite a horrid thing...the analytical paragraph. In actuality, there is nothing horrid about it at all! Once you learn the key elements and practice the pattern, this process becomes second nature. Follow the guidelines below to creating an insightful piece of analytical writing.

- I. **The Topic Sentence** -- This is one of the most important parts of the paragraph because it is the first thing that the reader encounters and it creates a guideline for the rest of the paragraph.
 - A. If the paragraph is to stand alone, then it should specifically state what the paragraph is going to be about, but it should be straight to the point.
Example: Mama feels that the complications between her and Walter stem from their differences; however, these differences are actually a result of their common need for pride.
 - B. If the paragraph is to be part of an essay, the topic sentence should follow the guidelines above, but should also be directly connected to the thesis.

- II. **The Introduction of Evidence** – Although we often think that the quotes or examples we choose to back up our thoughts speak for themselves, they usually don't. We know what we are thinking, but the reader doesn't.
 - A. Provide the reader with context, a frame of reference, for the evidence you are going to provide. This should indicate who is involved in the quote/example, why this happened, what is going on in general, when this is all happening (in terms of the story), and/or where this is all taking place.
Example: *After Mama buys a house for the family, Walter is extremely upset with her. She believes that this is a result of a difference in values coming from quite different life experiences. Mama tells Walter,*
 - B. It isn't necessary to include who, what, why, when, AND where. Pick and choose what you believe is necessary to create a smooth flow for your readers.

- III. **The Support/Examples** – When choosing the proper piece of the text to support your topic sentence (and this is ALL about supporting the topic sentence), it is important to choose wisely.
 - A. Choose quotes that expand upon your main point (the topic sentence) and allow for elaboration or analysis. In other words, pick quotes about which you have something to say.
Example: "No...something has changed. You something new, boy. In my time, we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too....you my children—but how different we done become" (Hansberry 345).
 - B. **Avoid** quotes that simply repeat what has already been said, that are too complex to support one idea, that have parts removed in order to make your point, or that simply don't have much or anything to do with the topic sentence!

- IV. **Analysis**—This part of the paragraph is where your ideas come into play; therefore, this part is very important. This is where you tell the reader why you think the example/quote you have chosen supports your point—thus, proving it!
 - A. While analyzing your quote, clearly explain the connections that you see. Remember that the reader may not see this connection—your job is to make it as clear as possible!
Example: **Mama believes that since times have changed Walter doesn't understand the difficulty his parents had in creating a good life for their children. Because of this, the pride that his mother and father have for the family doesn't exist.**
 - B. When you analyze a quote, be sure NOT to simply re-state what the quote says. Also AVOID phrases like "this quote shows," "this proves that," etc. Unless you tell us, we don't know what it shows or HOW it proves.

- V. **Transition**- A good, solid, analytical paragraph should have at least 2 examples that support the topic sentence. While this is a good habit to get into, you simply can't plop another example down in the paragraph. It is important to show the connection between the previous example and the one you are about to provide.
 - A. Transitions may just be a word, a phrase, or even a sentence. As long as the relationship between example #1 and example #2 is indicated, you will be in good shape.
Example: What Mama doesn't realize is that Walter's struggles are a direct result of his search for pride as well.
 - B. It is important that the transitions you use express what you are trying to say. For instance, if you say "however" you are indicating an opposing idea or thought; therefore, you cannot follow it with an idea that is the same as the one before.

- VI. **REPEAT numbers II-IV with your next example.** Remember to follow the guidelines provided above!
Example: *Shortly after the check arrives, Walter presents his plan for the liquor store to the family. Much to his disappointment and anger, Mama will not hear of it. In an effort to explain why the liquor store is so important to him, Walter says, "Well, you tell that to my boy tonight when you put him to sleep on the living-room couch...Yeah—and tell it to my wife, Mama, tomorrow when she has to go out of here to look after somebody*

else's kids...and I have to watch *you* go out and work in somebody's kitchen" (Hansberry 343). **Clearly, it isn't the liquor store that is important to him, but his family's comfort and pride in what they do and how they do it. He wants the store so that they can be proud of him and the life he has provided for them.**

- VII. Concluding sentence – when you end your paragraph, you are leaving your reader with your ideas. Be sure to tie it all together for him/her so that he/she not only knows exactly what you are talking about, but also so that he/she has something to think about.
- A. This statement can be more specific than your topic sentence, but avoid repeating every idea you have just said.
Example: In the end, Walter doesn't get his liquor store, but he and Mama do resolve their problems. They come to an understanding that they each have a tremendous amount of pride, but that their pride each takes on a different form.
- B. It is very important that you do not simply re-state your topic sentence!

What should it look like in the end?

Mama feels that the complications between her and Walter stem from their differences; however, these differences are actually a result of their common need for pride. After Mama buys a house for the family, Walter is extremely upset with her. She believes that this is a result of a difference in values coming from quite different life experiences. Mama tells Walter, "No...something has changed. You something new, boy. In my time, we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too...you my children—but how different we done become" (Hansberry 345). **Mama believes that since times have changed Walter doesn't understand the difficulty his parents had in creating a good life for their children. Because of this, the pride that his mother and father have for the family doesn't exist.** What Mama doesn't realize is that Walter's struggles are a direct result of his search for pride as well. Shortly after the check arrives, Walter presents his plan for the liquor store to the family. Much to his disappointment and anger, Mama will not hear of it. In an effort to explain why the liquor store is so important to him, Walter says, "Well, you tell that to my boy tonight when you put him to sleep on the living-room couch...Yeah—and tell it to my wife, Mama, tomorrow when she has to go out of here to look after somebody else's kids...and I have to watch *you* go out and work in somebody's kitchen" (Hansberry 343). **Clearly, it isn't the liquor store that is important to him, but his family's comfort and pride in what they do and how they do it. He wants the store so that they can be proud of him and the life he has provided for them.** In the end, Walter doesn't get his liquor store, but he and Mama do resolve their problems. They come to an understanding that they each have a tremendous amount of pride, but that their senses of pride each take on a different form.