WRITING ANALYTICALLY

SEVENTH EDITION

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CHAPTER 1

The Analytical Frame of Mind

Overview In this chapter we define analysis and explain why it is the kind of writing you will most often be asked to do in college and beyond. We explain the characteristics that college teachers look for in student writing and the changes in orientation this kind of writing requires: the analytical frame of mind. The chapter identifies the counterproductive habits of mind most likely to block good writing and offers in their place the book's first set of strategies for becoming a more observant and more confident writer: NOTICE & FOCUS, Free-writing, ASKING "SO WHAT?" and THE METHOD. These strategies are embedded in a discussion of what we call The Five Analytical Moves.

Writing as a Tool of Thought

Learning to write well means more than learning to organize information in appropriate forms and to construct clear and correct sentences. Learning to write well means learning ways of using writing in order to think well.

Good writing does, of course, require attention to form, but writing is not just a container for displaying already completed acts of thinking; it is also a mental activity. Through writing we figure out what things mean.

This book will make you more aware of your own acts of thinking and will show you how to experiment more deliberately with ways of having ideas—for example, by sampling various kinds of informal, exploratory writing that will enhance your ability to learn.

As this chapter will show, the analytical process consists of a fairly limited set of basic moves—strategies—that people who think well have at their disposal. *Writing Analytically* describes and gives names to these strategies, which are activities you can practice and use systematically in order to arrive at better ideas.

Our attempt to formulate these moves is not without precedent. Long before there were courses on writing, people studied a subject called rhetoric—as they still do. Rhetoric is a way of thinking about thinking. It offers ways of generating and evaluating arguments as well as ways of arranging them for maximum effect in particular situations. This book is a rhetoric in

the sense that it offers methods for observing all manner of data and arriving at ideas. The division of rhetoric devoted to the generation of ideas is called "invention." *Writing Analytically* is an invention-oriented rhetoric.

In classical rhetoric, procedures and forms that served as aids to discovery were called *heuristics*. The term comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, which means "to find out" or "to discover." This book's analytical methods, such as the ones you will find in this chapter, are heuristics.

You know how in the cartoons when a character gets an idea, we see a light bulb go on over his or her head? That's the point of view this book opposes, because that scenario dooms you to waiting for the light bulb to go on. Heuristics are more reliable ways of turning on that light bulb than lying around waiting for inspiration.

Why Faculty Want Analysis

For over two decades we've co-directed a Writing Across the Curriculum program in which writing is taught by our colleagues from all of the other disciplines. They have helped us to see why analysis is what they expect from student writing. They want analysis because of the attitudes toward learning that come along with it—the way it teaches learners to cultivate curiosity, to tolerate uncertainty, to respect complexity, and to seek to understand a subject before they attempt to make arguments about it.

Overall, what faculty want is for students to learn to do things with course material beyond merely reporting it on the one hand, and just reacting to it (often through like-dislike, agree-disagree responses) on the other (see Figure 1.1). This is the issue that *Writing Analytically* addresses: how to locate a middle ground between passive summary and personal response. That middle ground is occupied by analysis.

Analysis Defined

To analyze something is to ask what that something means. It is to ask how something does what it does or why it is as it is. Analysis is, then, a form of detective work that typically pursues something puzzling, something you are seeking to understand rather than something you believe you already have

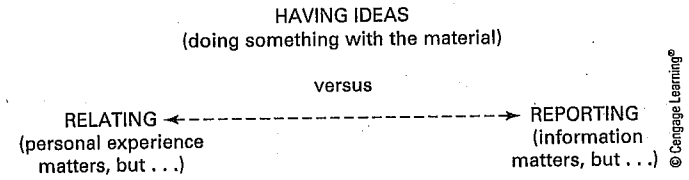


FIGURE 1.1
What Faculty Want from Student Writing

the answers to. Analysis finds questions where there seemed not to be any, and it makes connections that might not have been evident at first. Analysis is, then, more than just a set of skills: it is a frame of mind, an attitude toward experience.

Analysis is the kind of thinking you'll most often be asked to do in college, the mainstay of serious thought. Yet, it's also among the most common of our mental activities. The fact is that most people already analyze all of the time, but they often don't realize that this is what they're doing.

If, for example, you find yourself being followed by a large dog, your first response—other than breaking into a cold sweat—will be to analyze the situation. What does being followed by a large dog mean for me, here, now? Does it mean the dog is vicious and about to attack? Does it mean the dog is curious and wants to play? Similarly, if you are losing at a game of tennis or you've just left a job interview or you are looking at a large painting of a woman with three noses, you will begin to analyze. How can I play differently to increase my chances of winning? Am I likely to get the job, and why (or why not)? Why did the artist give the woman three noses?

Analysis Does More than Break a Subject into Its Parts

Whether you are analyzing an awkward social situation, an economic problem, a painting, a substance in a chemistry lab, or your chances of succeeding in a job interview, the process of analysis is the same:

- divide the subject into its defining parts, its main elements or ingredients
- consider how these parts are related, both to each other and to the subject as a whole.

In the case of the large dog, for example, you might notice that he's dragging a leash, has a ball in his mouth, and is wearing a bright red scarf around his neck. Having broken your larger subject into these defining parts, you would try to see the connection among them and determine what they mean, what they allow you to decide about the nature of the dog: possibly somebody's lost pet, playful, probably not hostile, unlikely to bite me.

Analysis of the painting of the woman with three noses, a subject more like the kind you might be asked to write about in a college course, would proceed in the same way. Your end result—ideas about the nature of the painting—would be determined—as with the dog—not only by noticing its various parts, but by your familiarity with the subject. If you knew little about painting, scrutiny of its parts would not tell you, for instance, that it is an example of the movement called cubism. You would, however, still be able to draw some analytical conclusions—ideas about the meaning and nature of the subject. You might conclude, for example, that the artist is interested in perspective or in the way we see, as opposed to being interested in realistic depictions of the world.

One common denominator of all effective analytical writing is that it pays close attention to detail. We analyze because our global responses, say, to a play or a speech or a social problem, are too general. If you try, for example, to comment on an entire football game, you'll find yourself saying things like "great game," which is a generic response, something you could say about almost anything. This "one-size-fits-all" kind of comment doesn't tell us very much except that you probably liked the game.

In order to say more, you would necessarily become more analytical—shifting your attention to the significance of some important piece of the game as a whole—such as "they won because the offensive line was giving the quarterback all day to find his receivers" or "they lost because they couldn't defend against the safety blitz." This move from generalization to analysis, from the larger subject to its key components, is a characteristic of the way we think. In order to understand a subject, we need to discover what it is "made of," the particulars that contribute most strongly to the character of the whole.

If all analysis did was take subjects apart, leaving them broken and scattered, the activity would not be worth very much. The student who presents a draft to his or her professor with the encouraging words, "Go ahead, rip it apart," reveals a disabling misconception about analysis—that, like dissecting a frog in a biology lab, analysis takes the life out of its subjects.

Analysis means more than breaking a subject into its parts. When you analyze a subject you ask not just "What is it made of?" but also "How do these parts help me to understand the meaning of the subject as a whole?" A good analysis seeks to locate the life of its subject, the aims and ideas that energize it.

Distinguishing Analysis from Summary, Expressive Writing, and Argument

How does analysis differ from other kinds of thinking and writing? A common way of answering this question is to think of communication as having three possible centers of emphasis: the writer, the subject, and the audience. Communication, of course, involves all three of these components, but some kinds of writing concentrate more on one than on the others (see Figure 1.2). Autobiographical writing, for example, such as diaries or memoirs or stories about personal experience, centers on the writer and his or her desire for self-expression. Argument, in which the writer takes a stand on an issue, advocating or arguing against a policy or attitude, is reader-centered; its goal is to bring about a change in its readers' actions and beliefs. Analytical writing is more concerned with arriving at an understanding of a subject than it is with either self-expression or changing readers' views.

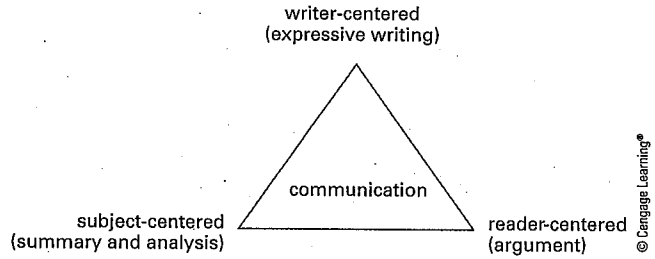


FIGURE 1.2
The Communication Triangle

These three categories of writing are not mutually exclusive. So, for example, expressive (writer-centered) writing is also analytical in its attempts to define and explain a writer's feelings, reactions, and experiences. And analysis is a form of self-expression since it inevitably reflects the ways a writer's experiences have taught him or her to think about the world. Similarly, analysis is a close cousin of argument in its emphasis on logic and the dispassionate scrutiny of ideas ("What do I think about what I think?"). But as we shall see, analysis and argument are not the same.

Analysis and Summary

One of the most common kinds of writing you'll be asked to do in college, in addition to analysis, is summary. Summary differs from analysis, because the aim of summary is to recount in reduced form someone else's ideas. But summary and analysis are also clearly related and usually operate together. Summary is important to analysis, because you can't analyze a subject without laying out its significant parts for your reader. Similarly, analysis is important to summary, because summarizing is more than just shortening someone else's writing. To write an accurate summary you have to ask analytical questions, such as:

- Which of the ideas in the reading are most significant? Why?
- How do these ideas fit together? What do the key passages in the reading mean?

Like an analysis, an effective summary doesn't assume that the subject matter can speak for itself: the writer needs to play an active role. A good summary provides perspective on the subject as a whole by explaining, as an analysis does, the meaning and function of each of that subject's parts. So, summary, like analysis, is a tool of understanding and not just a mechanical task. But a summary stops short of analysis because summary typically makes much smaller interpretive leaps.

Laying out the data is key to any kind of analysis, not simply because it keeps the analysis accurate, but also because, crucially, it is *in the act of carefully*

describing a subject that analytical writers often have their best ideas. The writer who can offer a careful description of a subject's key features is likely to arrive at conclusions about possible meanings that others would share.

Here are two guidelines to be drawn from this discussion of analysis and summary:

1. Describe with care. The words you choose to summarize your data will contain the germs of your ideas about what the subject means.
2. In moving from summary to analysis, scrutinize the language you have chosen, asking, "Why did I choose this word?" and "What ideas are implicit in the language I have used?"

Analysis and Expressive Writing

At their extremes, analysis and expressive writing differ significantly in method and aim. The extreme version of expressive writing focuses on the self, with other subjects serving only to evoke greater self-understanding. The extreme version of analytical writing banishes the "I" and, although its insights may derive from personal experience, it foregrounds the writer's reasoning, not his experiences.

In practice, though, the best versions of analysis and expressive writing can overlap a lot. Although most analytical writing done in the academic disciplines is about some subject other than the self, all writing is, in a sense, personal, because there is an "I" doing the thinking and selecting the details to consider. Writing about the self, about one's own memories and defining experiences, is a useful way to stimulate our thinking about words and about the role of detail in shaping our ideas about things.

Virtually all forms of description are implicitly analytical. When you choose what you take to be the three most telling details about your subject, you have selected significant parts and used them as a means of getting at what you take to be the character of the whole. This is what analysis does: it goes after an understanding of what something means, its nature, by zeroing in on the function of significant detail.

Two Examples of Description as a Form of Analysis In the two passages below, think about what it is that each writer is analyzing through the use of description. Which sentences and which details reveal the implicit analysis contained in the description?

First student description

22 Green Hill Road was the most beautiful house I had ever seen. The bricks a light brown, and the ivy growing along the sides reflected the sun with such perfection every afternoon. Everything about it was magnificent, but the best part about it was how it never changed—even from the moment I moved in when I was three, the house itself had always been there for me to come back to.

It was junior year in high school and I was visiting 22 Green Hill Road to pick up a few things, when I noticed something different under the clock that wasn't there when I moved out with my mom months earlier. It was a frame filled with pictures of a woman in the process of rolling down a luscious light green hill. I couldn't stop staring at her: her hair was dark brown and her jeans were a size too big. I had never met her before, and she certainly did not belong in my kitchen—the kitchen that was once so familiar I could recall every detail on every wall. My father walked in.

I turned to him. "Who . . . is this?" I asked him. It took him a while to figure out what to say. He sighed and answered, "That's my friend Beth." He had an ultimate innocence in his voice that never went away; I could never stay mad at him for long.

"Oh," I replied. Then I asked what I wished I had not for a long time afterward. "Did you take this?" He backed away from me.

Whenever I stopped by, from that moment on, he turned the frame around so I could not see the images of a strange yet now so familiar woman in what used to be my kitchen.

Second student description

I wish I could tell you more about that night, but it's kind of blurry. What do I remember? My father's voice, "Mommy passed away." I know I cried, but for how long I don't remember. My boyfriend was there; he only heard my end of the conversation. He drove me home from college. I guess that took a couple of hours. There was a box of tissues on my lap, but I didn't use any. He smoked a cigarette at one point, and opened up a window. The black air rushed in and settled on me like a heavy cloak.

The following assignment treats the writer's self as the subject of an analysis and calls for the writer to conduct that analysis through the careful selection and arrangement of telling detail.

TRY THIS 1.1: Writing the Self

Write a brief (two-page) descriptive piece about yourself that you would be willing to read out loud to others engaged in the same exercise. Do this by offering a narrative of some revealing and representative "moment"—perhaps a kind of moment that tended to recur—in your life. Sometimes the most telling moments, those that play a significant role in how we come to be who we are, are subtle, small moments, rather than "big" life-changing experiences. Some of these small but significant moments are barely remembered until we start looking for them with writing. Thus, they engage readers in the writer's process of discovery, which is what good writing should do. Your piece will necessarily be a blend of showing and telling, of description and more explicit analysis, but make sure not to substitute telling readers how you felt for re-creating the experience that made you feel as you did.

Analysis and Argument

Analysis and argument proceed in the same way. They offer evidence, make claims about it, and supply reasons that explain and justify the claims. In other words, in both analysis and argument you respond to the questions "What have you got to go on?" (evidence) and "How did you get there?" (the principles and reasons that caused you to conclude what you did about the evidence).

Although analysis and argument proceed in essentially the same way, they differ in the kinds of questions they try to answer. Argument, at its most dispassionate, asks, "What can be said with truth about x or y?" In common practice, though, the kinds of questions that argument more often answers are more committed and directive, such as "Which is better, x or y?"; "How can we best achieve x or y?"; and "Why should we stop doing x or y?"

Analysis, by contrast, asks, "What does x or y mean?" In analysis, the evidence (your data) is something you wish to understand, and the claims are assertions about what that evidence means. The claim that an analysis makes is usually a tentative answer to a *what*, *how*, or *why* question; it seeks to explain why people watch professional wrestling or what a rising number of sexual harassment cases might mean or how certain features of government health care policy are designed to allay the fears of the middle class.

The claim that an argument makes is often an answer to a *should* question: for example, readers should or shouldn't vote for bans on smoking in public buildings or they should or shouldn't believe that gays can function effectively in the military. The writer of an analysis is more concerned with discovering how each of these complex subjects might be defined and explained than with convincing readers to approve or disapprove of them.

Analysis versus Debate-Style Argument Many of you may have been introduced to writing arguments through the debate model—arguing for or against a given position, with the aim of defeating an imagined opponent and convincing your audience of the rightness of your position. The agree/disagree mode of writing and thinking that you often see in editorials, hear on radio or television, and even practice sometimes in school may incline you to focus all of your energy on the bottom line—aggressively advancing a claim for or against some view—without first engaging in the exploratory interpretation of evidence that is so necessary to arriving at thoughtful arguments. But as the American College Dictionary says, "to argue implies reasoning or trying to understand; it does not necessarily imply opposition." It is this more exploratory, tentative, and dispassionate mode of argument that this book encourages you to practice.

Adhering to the more restrictive, debate-style definition of *argument* can create a number of problems for careful analytical writers:

1. By requiring writers to be oppositional, it inclines them to discount or dismiss problems on the side or position they have chosen; they cling to the same static position rather than testing it as a way of allowing it to evolve.

2. It inclines writers toward either/or thinking rather than encouraging them to formulate more qualified (carefully limited, acknowledging exceptions, etc.) positions that integrate apparently opposing viewpoints.
3. It overvalues convincing someone else at the expense of developing understanding.

As should now be clear, the aims of analysis and argument can sometimes be in conflict. Nevertheless, it's important to remember that, in practice, analysis and argument are inevitably linked. Even the most tentative and cautiously evolving analysis is ultimately an argument; it asks readers to accept a particular interpretation of a set of data.

Similarly, even the most passionately committed argument is an analysis. If you approach an argument with the primary goals of convincing others that you are right and defeating your opponents, you may neglect the more important goal of arriving at a fair and accurate assessment of your subject. In fact, you will be able to argue much more effectively from evidence if you first take the time to really consider what that evidence means and, thereby, to find valid positions to argue about it.

***Ethos* and Analysis** Analysis, as we have been arguing, is interested in how we come to know things, how we make meaning. This focus privileges not just conclusions about a subject, but also sharing with readers the thought process that led to those conclusions. Rather than telling other people what to think, the best analytical writers encourage readers to think collaboratively with them. This is true of the best writers in the civic forum as well as in colleges and universities.

It follows that the character of the speaker (*ethos*) in an analysis will serve to create a more collaborative and collegial relationship with readers than might be the case in other kinds of writing.

Classical rhetoric thought of the impact that writers/speakers had on audiences in terms of three categories: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. They are very useful, especially as you go about trying to construct a written version of yourself that will allow you to succeed and grow as a college writer. The word *logos* (from Greek) refers to the logical component of a piece of writing or speaking. *Pathos* refers to the emotional component in writing, the ways that it appeals to feelings in an audience. *Ethos* will be familiar to you as a term because of its relation to the word ethics. In classical rhetoric, *ethos* is the character of the speaker, which is important in determining an audience's acceptance or rejection of his or her arguments.

Much of this book is concerned with the *logos* of academic writing, with ways of deriving and arguing ideas in colleges, universities, and the world of educated discourse. *Ethos* matters too. The thinking you do is difficult to separate from the sense the audience has of the person doing the

thinking. In fact, the personae (versions of ourselves) we assume when we write have a formative impact on what we think and say. *Ethos* is not just a mask we assume in order to appeal to a particular audience. The stylistic and thinking moves prescribed by the *ethos* of particular groups become, with practice, part of who we are and thus of how we think and interact with others.

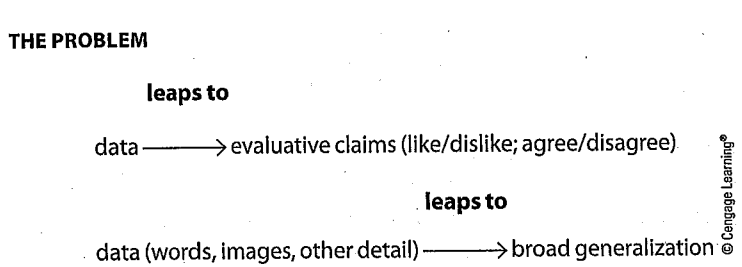
Eventually, college writers need to learn how to adopt different self-representations for different academic disciplines. So the acceptable *ethos* of a chemistry lab report differs in significant ways from the one you might adopt in a political science or English paper. Nevertheless, in most academic disciplines *ethos* is characterized by the following traits:

- nonadversarial tone—not looking for a fight
- collaborative and collegial—treats readers as colleagues worthy of respect who share your interest
- carefully qualified—not making overstated claims
- relative impersonality in self-presentation—keeps focus primarily on the subject, not the writer.

Counterproductive Habits of Mind

Analysis, we have been suggesting, is a frame of mind, a set of habits for observing and making sense of the world. There is also, it is fair to say, an anti-analytical frame of mind with its own set of habits. These habits shut down perception and arrest potential ideas at the cliché stage. Having ideas depends on noticing things in a subject that we wish to better understand rather than glossing things over with a quick and too-easy understanding.

The nineteenth-century poet, Emily Dickinson, writes that "Perception of an object/Costs precise the object's loss." When we leap prematurely to our perceptions about a thing, we place a filter between ourselves and the "object," shrinking the amount and kinds of information that can get through to our minds and our senses. The point of the Dickinson poem is a paradox—that the ideas we arrive at actually deprive us of material with which to have more ideas. So we have to



be careful about leaping to conclusions because if we are not careful, this move will lead to a form of mental blindness—loss of the object.

Habit: The Judgment Reflex

In its most primitive form—most automatic and least thoughtful—judging is like an on/off switch. When the switch gets thrown in one direction or the other, the resulting judgment predetermines and over-directs any subsequent thinking we might do. Rather than thinking about what X is or how X operates, we lock ourselves prematurely into proving that we were right to think that X should be banned or supported.

The psychologist Carl Rogers has written at length on this problem of the judgment reflex. He claims that our habitual tendency as humans—virtually a programmed response—is to evaluate everything and to do so very quickly.

When people leap to judgment, they usually land in the mental pathways they've grown accustomed to traveling, guided by family or friends or popular opinion. The fact that you liked or didn't like a movie probably says more about you—your tastes, interests, biases, and experiences—than it does about the movie. What makes a movie boring: that it doesn't have enough car chases? that its plot resembles half the plots on cable channels? that the leading man was miscast or the dialogue was too long-winded? At the very least, in such cases, you'd need to share with readers your *criteria* for judgment—your reasons and your standards of evaluation.

This is not to say that all judging should be avoided—only delayed. A writer needs to take into account how his or her judgment has been affected by the details of a particular situation (context) and to acknowledge how thinking about these details has led to restricting (qualifying) the range of the judgment: X is sometimes true in these particular circumstances. Z is probably the right thing to do but only when A and B occur.

As a general rule, try to figure out what your subject means before deciding how you feel about it. If you can break the judgment reflex and press yourself to analyze before judging a subject, you will often be surprised at how much your initial responses change.

Cures for the Judgment Reflex

- Become conscious of the like/dislike switch in your own thinking and try to avoid it altogether.
- Neither agree nor disagree with another person's position until you can repeat that position in a way the other person would accept as fair and accurate. Carl Rogers recommends this strategy to negotiators in industry and government.
- Try eliminating the word "should" from your vocabulary for a while. Judgments often take the form of *should* statements.
- Try eliminating evaluative adjectives—those that offer judgments with no data.

"Jagged" is a descriptive, concrete adjective. It offers something we can experience. "Beautiful" is an evaluative adjective. It offers only judgment. Sometimes the concrete-abstract divide is complicated. Consider for example the word "green," a literal color with figurative associations (envious, innocent, ecological, etc.).

TRY THIS 1.2: Experiment with Adjectives and Adverbs
Write a paragraph of description—on anything that comes to mind—without using any evaluative adjectives or adverbs. Alternatively, analyze and categorize the adjectives and adverbs in a piece of your own recent writing, a book review, or an editorial.

Habit: Naturalizing Our Assumptions (Overpersonalizing)

The word *naturalize* in this context means we are representing—and seeing—our own assumptions as natural, as simply the way things are *and ought to be*. Writers who naturalize their own assumptions—a version of the judgment reflex—tend to make personal experiences and prejudices an *unquestioned* standard of value.

It is surprisingly difficult to break the habit of treating our points of view as self-evidently true—not just for us, but for everyone. The overpersonalizer assumes that because he or she experienced or believes X, everyone else does too. But what is "common sense" for one person and so not even in need of explaining can be quite uncommon and not so obviously sensible to someone else. More often than not, "common sense" is a phrase that really means "what seems obvious to me and therefore should be obvious to you."

VOICES FROM ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Arguments vs. Opinions: A Political Scientist Speaks

Writers need to be aware of the distinction between an argument which seeks support from evidence, and mere opinions and assertions. People too often assume that in politics one opinion is as good as another. (Tocqueville thought this was a peculiarly democratic disease.) From this perspective any position a person might take on controversial issues is simply his or her opinion to be accepted or rejected by another person's beliefs/prejudices. The key task, therefore, is not so much the substitution of knowledge for opinions, but substituting well-constructed arguments for unexamined opinions. An argument presupposes a willingness to engage with others. To the extent that a writer operates on the assumption that everything is in the end an opinion, they have no reason to construct arguments; they are locked into an opinion.

— JACK GAMBINO, PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Habit: Generalizing

What it all boils down to is . . . What this adds up to is . . . The gist of her speech was . . . We generalize from our experience because this is one way of arriving at ideas. The problem with generalizing as a habit of mind is that it removes the mind—usually much too quickly—from the data that produced the generalization in the first place.

Most of us tend to remember our global impressions and reactions. The dinner was dull. The house was beautiful. The music was exciting. But we forget the specific, concrete causes of these impressions (if we ever fully noticed them). As a result, we deprive ourselves of material to think with—the data that might allow us to reconsider our initial impressions or to share them with others.

The problem comes when generalizations omit any supporting details. Consider for a moment what you are actually asking others to do when you offer them a generalization such as "The proposed changes in immigration policy are a disaster." Unless the recipient of this observation asks a question—such as "Why do you think so?"—he or she is being required to take your word for it: the changes are a disaster because you say so.

What happens instead if you offer a few details that caused you to think as you do? Clearly, you are on riskier ground. Your listener might think that the details you cite lead to different conclusions and a different reading of the data, but at least conversation has become possible.

Cures for the Problem of Generalizing

- The simplest antidote to the problem of generalizing is to train yourself to be more conscious of where your generalizations come from. *Press yourself to trace your general impressions back to the particulars that caused them.* Deciding to become more aware of your own responses to the world and their causes counteracts the inevitable numbing that takes place as habit takes control of our daily lives.
- Here's another strategy for bringing your thinking down from high levels of generality. Think of the words you use as steps on an abstraction ladder, and consciously climb down the ladder from abstract generalization to concrete detail.

"Mammal," for example, is higher on the abstraction ladder than "cow." A concrete word appeals to the senses. Abstract words are not available to our senses of touch, sight, hearing, taste, and smell. "Peacekeeping force" is an abstract phrase; it conjures up a concept. "Submarine" is concrete. We know what people are talking about when they say there is a plan to send submarines to a troubled area. We can't be so sure what is up when people start talking about peacekeeping forces.

TRY THIS 1.3: Distinguishing Abstract from Concrete Words
Make a list of the first ten words that come to mind and then arrange them from most concrete to most abstract. Then repeat the exercise by choosing key words from a page of something you have written recently.

VOICES FROM ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Habits of Mind in Psychology: A Psychologist Speaks

Psychologists who study the way we process information have established important links between the way we think and the way we feel. Some psychologists, such as Aaron Beck, have identified common "errors in thinking" that parallel the habits of mind discussed in this chapter. Beck and others have shown that falling prey to these counterproductive habits of mind is associated with a variety of negative outcomes. For instance, a tendency to engage in either/or thinking, overgeneralization, and personalization has been linked to higher levels of anger, anxiety, and depression. Failure to attend to these errors in thinking chokes off reflection and analysis. As a result, the person becomes more likely to "react" rather than think, which may prolong and exacerbate the negative emotions.

— MARK SCIUTTO, PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

Get Comfortable with Uncertainty

Most of us learn early in life to pretend that we understand things even when we don't. Rather than ask questions and risk looking foolish, we nod our heads. Soon, we even come to believe that we understand things when really we don't, or not nearly as well as we think we do. This understandable but problematic human trait means that to become better thinkers, most of us have to cultivate a more positive attitude toward not knowing. Prepare to be surprised at how difficult this can be. Start by trying to accept that uncertainty—even its more extreme version, confusion—is a productive state of mind, a precondition to having ideas. The poet John Keats coined a memorable phrase for this willed tolerance of uncertainty. He called it *negative capability*.

> I had not had a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.
>
> — LETTER TO GEORGE AND THOMAS KEATS, DECEMBER 1817

The key phrases here are "capable of being in uncertainties" and "without any irritable reaching." Keats is not saying that facts and reason are unnecessary and therefore can be safely ignored. But he does praise the kind of person who can remain calm (rather than becoming irritable) in a state of uncertainty. He is endorsing a way of being that can stay open to possibilities longer than most of us are comfortable with. Negative capability is an essential habit of mind for productive analytical thinking.

Tell yourself that you don't understand, even if you think that you do. You'll know that you are surmounting the fear of uncertainty when the meaning of your evidence starts to seem less rather than more clear to you, and

perhaps even strange. You will begin to see details that you hadn't seen before and a range of competing meanings where you had thought there was only one.

Habit: The Slot-Filler Mentality (Five-Paragraph Form)

Can a format qualify as a counterproductive habit of mind? Yes, if you consider how many high school students have naturalized five-paragraph form as the structure for organizing the writing they do in school.

The shift from high school to college writing is not just a difference in degree but a difference in kind. The changes it requires in matters of form and style are inevitably also changes in thinking. The primary change in thinking for many students demands saying good-bye to five-paragraph form.

Of course it can be anxiety-producing to bid farewell to this one-size-fits-all writing format and replace it with a set of different forms for different situations. But it's essential to let go of this particular security blanket.

So, what's wrong with five-paragraph form? Its rigid, arbitrary, and mechanical organizational scheme values structure over just about everything else, especially in-depth thinking in depth.

The formula's defenders say that essays need to be organized and that the simple three-part thesis and three body paragraphs (one reason and/or example for each) and repetitive conclusion meet that need. They also say that five-paragraph form is useful for helping writers to get started.

But the problem with treating five-paragraph form as a relatively benign aid to clarity is that—like any habit—it is very hard to break. The form actually discourages thinking by conditioning writers to be afraid of looking closely at evidence. If they look too closely, they might find something that doesn't fit, at which point the prefabricated organizational scheme falls apart. And it is precisely the something-that-doesn't-seem-to-fit, the thing writers call a "complication," that triggers good ideas.

We will return in Chapter 4 to the problems created by five-paragraph form and how to remedy them. For now, keep in mind that if you can't break the slot-filler habit, you'll remain handicapped because five-paragraph form runs counter to virtually all of the values and attitudes that you need in order to grow as a writer and a thinker.

Learn to Notice

Some people, especially the very young, are good at noticing things. They see things that the rest of us don't see or have ceased to notice. Growing up, we all become increasingly desensitized to the world around us; we tend to forget the specific things that get us to feel and think in particular ways.

But why is this? Is it just that people become duller as they get older? The poet William Wordsworth thought so: he argued that we aren't the victims of declining intelligence, but of habit. That is, as we organize our lives so that we can function more efficiently, we condition ourselves to see in more

predictable ways and to tune out things that are not immediately relevant to our daily needs.

You can test this theory by considering what you did and did not notice this morning on the way to work or class or wherever you regularly go. Following a routine for moving through the day can be done with minimal engagement of either the brain or the senses. Moving along the roadway in cars, we periodically realize that miles have gone by while we were driving on automatic pilot, attending barely at all to the road or the car or the landscape. Arguably, even when we try to focus on something that we want to consider, the habit of not really attending to things stays with us.

The deadening effect of habit on seeing and thinking has long been a preoccupation of artists as well as philosophers and psychologists. Some people have even defined the aim of art as "defamiliarization." "The essential purpose of art," writes the novelist David Lodge, "is to overcome the deadening effects of habit by representing familiar things in unfamiliar ways." The man who coined the term *defamiliarization*, Victor Shklovsky, wrote, "Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. . . . And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life" (David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*. New York: Penguin, 1992, p.53).

We all know the buzz phrase "thinking outside the box," which appears to mean getting beyond outworn ways of thinking about things. The phrase assumes that most of the time most of us are trapped inside the box—inside a set of prefabricated answers (clichés) and like/dislike responses.

In this context, we come to the Five Analytical Moves that thinkers regularly make when they analyze things. To become a more confident and observant writer, you will need to become more aware of these moves in your thinking and practice them systematically.

The Five Analytical Moves

The act of analyzing can be broken down into five essential moves:

Move 1: Suspend judgment.
Move 2: Define significant parts and how they are related.
Move 3: Make the implicit explicit. Push observations to implications by ASKING "SO WHAT?"
Move 4: Look for patterns of repetition and contrast and for anomalies (THE METHOD).
Move 5: Keep reformulating questions and explanations.

Move 1: Suspend Judgment

A lot of what passes for thinking is merely reacting: right/wrong, good/bad, loved it/hated it, couldn't relate to it, boring. As we noted in our discussion of Counterproductive Habits of Mind, responses like these are habits, reflexes of the mind. And they are surprisingly tough habits to break. Experiment:

eavesdrop on people walking out of a movie. Most of them will immediately voice their approval or disapproval, usually in either/or terms: "I think it was a good movie and you are wrong to think it was bad." And so on.

A first move in conducting analysis—in fact, a precondition—is to delay judgment, especially of the agree-disagree, like-dislike kind. In the opening pages of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway cites as the one piece of wisdom he learned from his father the following statement: "Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope." In analysis the goal is always to understand before you judge.

Move 2: Define Significant Parts and How They Are Related

In order to define significant parts and figure out how they are related, writers need to train themselves to attend closely to details. Becoming observant is not natural; it's learned. Toward that end, this book offers a series of observation and interpretation strategies to equip you to see more and to make more of what you see.

The first of these is a strategy we call NOTICE & FOCUS, which will help you to stay open longer to what you can notice in your subject matter. Do this by starting not with "What do I think?" or, worse, with "What do I like/dislike?" but with "What do I *notice?*" This small shift in words will engineer the major conceptual shift this chapter asks you to make: to locate more of your time and attention in the observation stage, which necessarily precedes formulating a thesis.

NOTICE & FOCUS (Ranking)

NOTICE & FOCUS: SLOW DOWN

Not "What do you think?" &
Not "What do you like or dislike?"
but
"What do you notice?"

A few prompts:

What do you find most INTERESTING?
What do you find most STRANGE?
What do you find most REVEALING?

This exercise is governed by repeated return to the question, "What do you notice?". Most people's tendency is to generalize and thus rapidly move away from whatever it is they are looking at. The question "What do you notice?" redirects attention to the subject matter, itself, and delays the pressure to come up with answers (see Figure 1.3).

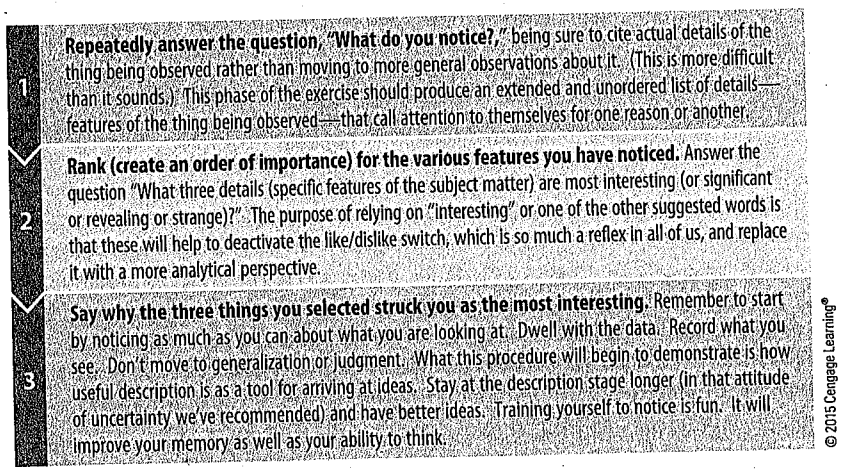


FIGURE 1.3
NOTICE & FOCUS + Ranking

Remember to start by noticing as much as you can about what you are looking at. Dwell with the data. Record what you see. It will improve your memory as well as your ability to think.

"Interesting," "Revealing," "Strange"

These three words are triggers for analysis. Often we are interested by things that have captured our attention without our clearly knowing why. To say that something is interesting is not the end but the beginning of analysis. If you press yourself to explain why something is interesting, revealing, or strange, you will be prompted to make an analytical move.

Revealing (or *significant*) requires you to make choices that can lead to interpretive leaps. If something strikes you as revealing or significant, even if you're not yet sure why, you will eventually begin producing some explanation.The word *strange* gives us permission to notice oddities and things that initially seem not to fit. *Strange*, in this context, is not a judgmental term, but one denoting features of a subject that aren't readily explainable. Where you locate something strange, you have isolated something to figure out—what makes it strange and why.

TRY THIS 1.4: NOTICE AND FOCUS Fieldwork

Try this exercise with a range of subjects: an editorial, the front page of a newspaper, a website, a key paragraph from something you are reading, the style of a favorite writer, conversations overheard around campus, looking at people's shoes, political speeches, a photograph, a cartoon, and so forth. (The speech bank at americanrhetoric.com is an excellent source.) Remember to include all three steps: notice, rank, and say why.

Noticing and Rhetorical Analysis

When you become attuned to noticing words and details rather than registering general impressions, you inevitably focus not only on the message—what gets said—but on how things get said. To notice how information is delivered is to focus on its rhetoric. To analyze the rhetoric of something is to assess how that something persuades or positions us as readers or viewers or listeners.

Rhetorical analysis is an essential skill because it reveals how voices in the world are perennially seeking to enlist our support and shape our behavior.

Everything has a rhetoric, not just political speeches and not even just words: classrooms, churches, supermarkets, department store windows, Starbucks, photographs, magazine covers, your bedroom, this book. Intention, by the way, is not the issue. It doesn't matter whether the effect of a place or a piece of writing on its viewers (or readers) is deliberate and planned or not. What matters is that you can notice how the details of the thing itself encourage or discourage certain kinds of responses in the "consumers" of whatever it is you are studying.

What, for example, does the high ceiling of a Gothic cathedral invite in the way of response from people who enter it? How might the high ceilings make people feel about their places in the world? What do the raised platform at the front of a classroom and the tidy rows of desks secured to the floor say to the students who enter there?

To get you started on rhetorical analysis, here is a brief example on the layout of our college campus.

> The campus is laid out in several rows and quadrangles. It is interesting to observe where the different academic buildings are, relative to the academic departments they house. It is also interesting to see how the campus positions student housing. In a way, the campus is set up as a series of quadrangles— areas of space with four sides. One of the dormitories, for example, forms a quadrangle. Quadrangles invite people to look in—rather than out. They are enclosed spaces, the center of which is a kind of blank. The center serves as a shared space, a safely walled-off area for the development of a separate community. The academic buildings also form a quadrangle of sorts, with an open green space in the center. On one side of the quadrangle are the buildings that house the natural and social sciences. Opposite these—on the other side of a street that runs through the center of campus—are the modern brick and glass structures that house the arts and the humanities....

What might these details lead us to conclude about the rhetoric of the campus layout?

- that the campus is inward-looking and self-enclosed
- that it invites its members to feel separate and safe
- that it announces the division of the sciences and the social sciences from the arts and humanities, so the campus layout arguably creates the sense of a divided community.

TRY THIS 1.5: Doing NOTICE & FOCUS with a Room
List a number of details about it, then rank the three most important ones. Use as a focusing question any of the three "trigger" words: interesting, revealing, or strange. Or come up with your own focus for the ranking, such as the three aspects of the room that seem most to affect the way you feel and behave in the space.

Doing Exploratory Writing in the Observation Stage: Freewriting

What is especially useful about so-called "prewriting" strategies such as NOTICE & FOCUS is freedom—freedom to experiment without worrying about readers saying that you are wrong, freedom to just pay attention to what you notice and to see where these observations might lead you. But NOTICE & FOCUS and other forms of listing can also arrest you in the list stage: you have your column of ranked observations, but now what?

The answer to that last question is to start writing consecutive sentences explaining why you found particular details especially interesting and revealing. Your goal at this stage is not to produce a finished paper, but to start some trains of thought on features of your subject that seem worth writing about.

The name that is most often attached to this kind of exploratory writing—which can, by the way, happen at various points in the writing process, not just at the beginning—is "freewriting."

"How Do I Know What I Think Until I See What I Say?" Freewriting is a method of arriving at ideas by writing continuously about a subject for a limited period of time without pausing to edit or revise. The rationale behind this activity can be understood through a well-known remark by the novelist E.M. Forster (in regard to the "tyranny" of prearranging everything): "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" Freewriting gives you the chance to see what you'll say.

The writer Anne Lamott writes eloquently (in *Bird by Bird*) about the censors we all hear as nasty voices in our heads that keep us from writing. These are the internalized voices of past critics whose comments have become magnified to suggest that we will never get it right. Freewriting allows us to tune out these voices long enough to discover what we might think.

Freewriting opens up space for thinking by enabling us to catch different thoughts as they occur to us, without worrying prematurely about how to communicate these to a reader. The order in which ideas occur to us is not linear. Things rarely line up in a straight, forward-moving sequence. As we try to pursue one thought, others press on our attention. The act of writing allows us to follow our mental trails and to experiment with alternate routes without losing track of where we've been. Without writing, in all but the most carefully trained memories, the trails keep vanishing, sometimes leaving us stranded.

In paper-writing, you are required to develop ideas sequentially. In freewriting you have the freedom to make sudden, often unanticipated leaps. These frequently take you from a bland, predictable statement to an insight. You learn what you think by seeing what you say.

Freewriting seeks to remove what the rhetorician Peter Elbow saw as the primary cause of much poor writing: the writer's attempt to conduct two essentially opposed activities—drafting and editing, inventing and arranging—at the same time. Freewriting helps you to separate these activities until you've generated enough material to actually be worth arranging for an audience.

In general, only the most practiced analytical thinkers can arrive at their best ideas before they begin to write. The common observation, "I know what I want to say, I'm just having trouble getting it down on paper," is a half-truth at best. Getting words on paper almost always alters your ideas, and leads you to discover thoughts you didn't know you had. If you expect to have all the answers before you begin to write, you are more likely to settle for relatively superficial ideas. And, when you try to conduct all of your thinking in your head, you may arrive at an idea, but not be able to explain to your readers how you got there.

When you make the shift from freewriting to writing a first draft, you may not—and most likely will not—have all of the answers, but you will waste significantly less time chasing ill-focused and inadequately considered ideas than might otherwise have been the case.

The Rules for Freewriting There aren't many rules to freewriting.

The first is: pick a concrete starting point. Find *something specific* to be interested in. Notice & Focus works well for locating that focus as do "interesting" and "strange."

Write your focus at the top of the page—a few lines or a short list of details or a short passage. Then launch the freewrite from there.

Commit to an allotted time in which you will write continuously. Ten minutes is a minimum. You may be surprised at how much you can find to say in this amount of time. The more you do freewriting, the better you will get at it, and the longer you will be able to go.

Most importantly, keep your pen (or fingers on the keyboard) moving. Don't reread as you go. Don't pause to correct things. Don't cross things out. Don't quit when you think you have run out of things to say. Just keep writing.

Move 3: Make the Implicit Explicit. Push Observations to Implications by Asking "So What?"

NOTICE & FOCUS, "interesting" and "strange," as well as freewriting—these moves aim to keep writers dwelling longer in the observation phase of analysis, to spend more time exploring and amassing data before they leap to making some kind of claim. It's time now to shift our focus to the leap, itself.

One of the central activities and goals of analysis is to make explicit (overtly stated) what is implicit (suggested). When we do so, we are addressing such questions as "What follows from this?" and "If this is true, what else is true?" The pursuit of such questions—drawing out implications—moves our thinking and our writing *forward*.

MOVING FORWARD

Observation —> So what? —> Implications
Implications —> So what? —> Conclusions

This process of converting suggestions into direct statements is essential to analysis, but it is also the feature of analyzing that, among beginning writers, is least well understood. The fear is that, like the emperor's new clothes, implications aren't really "there," but are instead the phantasms of an overactive imagination. "Reading between the lines" is the common and telling phrase that expresses this anxiety. Throughout this book we will have more to say about the charge that analysis makes something out of nothing—the spaces between the lines rather than what is there in black and white. But for now, let's look at a hypothetical example of this process of drawing out implications, to suggest not only how it's done, but how often we do it in our everyday lives.

Imagine that you are driving down the highway and find yourself analyzing a billboard advertisement for a particular brand of beer. Such an analysis might begin with your noticing what the billboard photo contains, its various "parts"—six young, athletic-looking and scantily clad men and women drinking beer while pushing kayaks into a fast-running river. If you were to stop at this point, you would have produced not an analysis but a summary—a description of what the photo contains. If, however, you went on to consider what the particulars of the photo imply, your summary would become more analytical.

You might say, for example, that the photo implies that beer is the beverage of fashionable, healthy, active people, not just of older men with large stomachs dozing in armchairs in front of the television. Thus, the advertisement's meaning goes beyond its explicit contents; your analysis would lead you to convert to direct statement meanings that are suggested but not overtly stated, such as the advertisement's goal of attacking a common, negative stereotype about its product (that only fat, lazy, male people drink beer).The naming of parts that you do in analysis is not an end unto itself, is not an exercise in making something out of nothing; it serves the purpose of allowing you to better understand the nature of your subject. The implications of the "parts" you name are an important part of that understanding.

The word *implication* comes from the Latin *implicare*, which means "to fold in." The word *explicit* is in opposition to the idea of implication. It means "folded out." An act of mind is required to take what is folded in and to fold it out for all to see. This process of drawing out implications is also known as making inferences. *Inference* and *implication* are related but not synonymous terms. The term *implication* describes something suggested by the material

PUSHING OBSERVATIONS TO CONCLUSIONS: ASKING SO WHAT?

(shorthand for)
What does the observation imply?
Why does this observation matter?
Where does this observation get us?
How can we begin to theorize the significance of the observation?

itself; implications reside in the matter you are studying. The term *inference* describes your thinking process. In short, you infer what the subject implies.

Asking "So What?"

ASKING "SO WHAT?" is a universal prompt for spurring the move from observation to implication and ultimately to interpretation. ASKING "SO WHAT?"—or its milder cousin, "And so?"—is a calling to account, a way of pressing yourself to confront that essential question, "Why does this matter?" The tone of "So what?" can sound rude or at least brusque, but that directness can be liberating. Often writers will go to great lengths to avoid stating what they take something to mean. After all, that leaves them open to attack, they fear, if they get it wrong. But ASKING "SO WHAT?" is a way of forcing yourself to take the plunge without too much hoopla. And when you are tempted to stop thinking too soon, ASKING "SO WHAT?" will press you onward.

Asking "So What?" in a Chain

Experienced analytical writers develop the habit of "ASKING SO WHAT?" repeatedly. That is, they ask "So what?," answer, and then ask "So what?" of that answer, and often keep going (see Figure 1.4). The repeated asking of this question causes writers to move beyond their first attempt to arrive at a claim.

By sustaining their pursuit of implications, seasoned writers habitually reason in a chain rather than settling prematurely for a single link, as the next example illustrates.

The following is the opening paragraph of a talk given by a professor of Political Science at our college, Dr. Jack Gambino, on the occasion of a gallery

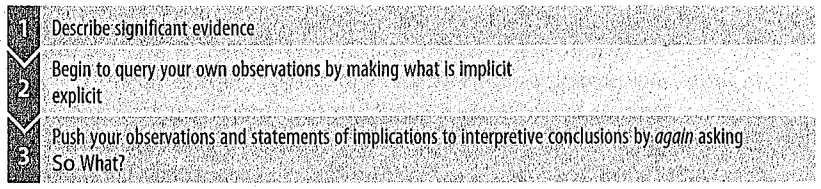


FIGURE 1.4
ASKING "SO WHAT?"

opening featuring the work of two contemporary photographers of urban and industrial landscapes. We have located in brackets our annotations of his turns of thought, as these pivot on "strange" and "So what?" (Note: images referred to in the example are available from Google Images—type in Camilo Vergara fern street 1988, also Edward Burtynsky.)

> If you look closely at Camilo Vergara's photo of Fern Street, Camden, 1988, you'll notice a sign on the side of a dilapidated building:
>
> **Danger: Men Working**
>
> **W. Hargrove Demolition**
>
> Perhaps that warning captures the ominous atmosphere of these very different kinds of photographic documents by Camilo Vergara and Edward Burtynsky: "Danger: Men Working." Watch out—human beings are at work! But the work that is presented is not so much a building-up as it is a tearing-down—the work of demolition. **[strange: tearing down is unexpected; writer asks "So what?" and answers]**
>
> Of course, demolition is often necessary in order to construct anew: old buildings are leveled for new projects, whether you are building a highway or bridge in an American city or a dam in the Chinese countryside. You might call modernity itself, as so many have, a process of creative destruction, a term used variously to describe modern art, capitalism, and technological innovation. The photographs in this exhibit, however, force us to pay attention to the "destructive" side of this modern equation. **[strange: photos emphasize destruction and not creation; writer asks "So what?" and answers]**
>
> What both Burtynsky and Vergara do in their respective ways is to put up a warning sign—they question whether the reworking of our natural and social environment leads to a sustainable human future. And they wonder whether the process of creative destruction may not have spun recklessly out of control, producing places that are neither habitable nor sustainable. In fact, a common element connecting the two photographic versions is the near absence of people in the landscape. **[writer points to supporting feature of evidence, about which he will further theorize]**
>
> While we see the evidence of the transforming power of human production on the physical and social environment, neither Vergara's urban ruins nor Burtynsky's industrial sites actually show us "men working." **[writer continues to move by noticing strange absence of people in photographs of sites where men work]** Isolated figures peer suspiciously out back doors or pick through the rubble, but they appear out of place. **[writer asks a final "So what?" and arrives at a conclusion:]** It is this sense of displacement—of human beings alienated from the environments they themselves have created—that provides the most haunting aspect of the work of these two photographers.

The Gambino opening is a good example of how ASKING "SO WHAT?" generates forward momentum for the analysis. Notice the pattern by which the paragraph moves: the observation of something strange, about which the writer asks and answers "So what?" several times until arriving at a final "So what?"—the point at which he decides what his observations ultimately mean. We call the final "So what?" in this chain of thinking the ultimate "So what?" because it moves from implications to the writer's culminating point.

TRY THIS 1.6: Track the "So What?" Question

The aim of this exercise is to sensitize you to the various moves a writer makes when he or she presents and analyzes information. Locate any piece of analytical prose—perhaps an article from *Arts & Letters Daily* online (aldaily.com)—and identify in the margins the writer's moves as we have done for the Gambino example.

TRY THIS 1.7: Inferring Implications from Observations

Each of the statements below is rich in implication. Write a list of as many plausible implications as you can think of for each of the statements. After you have made your list of implications for each item, consider how you arrived at them. You might find it useful to do this exercise along with other people, because part of its aim is to reveal the extent to which different people infer the same implications.

1. The sidewalk is disappearing as a feature of the American residential landscape. [Here are a couple of implications to prime the pump: people don't walk anywhere anymore; builders lack much sense of social responsibility.]
2. New house designs are tending increasingly toward open plans in which the kitchen is not separated from the rest of the house.
3. "Good fences make good neighbors." — Robert Frost
4. An increasing number of juveniles—people under the age of eighteen—are being tried and convicted as adults, rather than as minors, in America, with the result that more minors are serving adult sentences for crimes they committed while still in their teens.
5. Neuroscientists tell us that the frontal cortex of the brain, the part that is responsible for judgment and especially for impulse control, is not fully developed in humans until roughly the age of twenty-one. What are the implications of this observation relative to observation four?
6. Shopping malls and grocery stores rarely have clocks.
7. List as many plausible implications as you can for this statement (which has been contested by other researchers).

"In the eye-tracking test, only one in six subjects read Web pages linearly, sentence by sentence. In this study, Nielsen found that people took in hundreds of pages 'in a pattern that's very different from what you learned in school.' It looks like a capital letter F. At the top, users read all the way across, but as they proceed their descent quickens and horizontal sight contracts, with a slowdown around the middle of the page. Near the bottom, eyes move almost vertically, the lower-right corner of the page largely ignored."

— MARK BAUERLEIN, "ONLINE LITERACY IS A LESSER KIND," *THE CHRONICLE REVIEW*

Move 4: Look for Patterns of Repetition and Contrast and for Anomalies (THE METHOD)

We have been defining analysis as the understanding of parts in relation to each other and to a whole. But how do you know which parts to attend to? What makes some details in the material you are studying more worthy of your attention than others?

The procedure we call THE METHOD offers a tool for uncovering significant patterns. Like NOTICE AND FOCUS, THE METHOD orients you toward significant detail; but whereas NOTICE AND FOCUS is a deliberately unstructured activity, THE METHOD applies a matrix or grid of observational moves to a subject. In its most reduced form, THE METHOD organizes observation and then prompts interpretation by asking the following sequence of questions.

In virtually all subjects, repetition and close resemblance (strands) are signs of emphasis. In a symphony, for example, certain patterns of notes repeat throughout, announcing themselves as major themes. In Shakespeare's play *King Lear*, references to seeing and eyes call attention to themselves through repetition, causing us to recognize that the play is about seeing. Binary oppositions, which often consist of two strands or repetitions that are in tension with each other, suggest what is at stake in a subject. We can understand *King Lear* by the way it opposes kinds of blindness to ways of seeing.

Along with looking for pattern, it is also fruitful to attend to anomalous details—those that seem not to fit the pattern. Anomalies help us to revise our assumptions. Picture, for example, a TV ad featuring a baseball player reading Dostoyevsky in the dugout. In this case, the anomaly, a baseball player who reads serious literature, subverts the stereotypical assumption that sports and intellectualism don't belong together.

People tend to avoid information that challenges (by not conforming to) views they already hold. Screening out anything that would ruffle the pattern they've begun to see, they ignore the evidence that might lead them to a better theory. Most advances in thought have arisen when someone has observed some phenomenon that does not fit within a prevailing theory.

The Steps of THE METHOD

THE METHOD of looking for patterns works through a series of steps. Hold yourself initially to doing the steps one at a time and in order. Later, you will be able to record your answers under each of the five steps simultaneously. Although the steps of THE METHOD are discrete and modular, they are also consecutive. They proceed by a kind of narrative logic. Each step leads logically to the next, and then to various kinds of regrouping, which is actually rethinking (see Figure 1.5).

QUESTIONS FROM THE METHOD

1. What repeats?
2. What goes with what? (strands)
3. What is opposed to what? (binaries)
   (for all of these) —> *SO WHAT?*
4. What doesn't fit? (anomalies) So what?

1. **List exact repetitions and the number of each (words, details).** For example, if forms of the word *seems* repeat three times, write "seems ×3." With images, the repeated appearance of high foreheads would constitute an exact repetition. Concentrate on substantive (meaning-carrying) words. Only in rare cases will words like "and" or "the" merit attention as a significant repetition. At the most literal level, whatever repeats is what the thing is about.
2. **List repetitions of the same or similar kind of detail or word—which we call strands** (for example, *polite, courteous, decorous*). Be able to explain the strand's connecting logic with a label: *manners*.
3. **List details or words that form or suggest binary oppositions**—pairs of words or details that are opposites—and select from these the most important ones, which function as **organizing contrasts** (for example, *open/closed, ugly/beautiful, global/local*). Your goal here is not to engage in either/or thinking but to locate what is at stake in the subject, the tensions and issues that it is trying to resolve.
4. **Choose ONE repetition, strand, or binary as a starting point for a healthy paragraph** (or two) in which you discuss its significance in relation to the whole. (This ranking, as in Notice and Focus, prompts an interpretive leap.)
5. **Locate anomalies: exceptions to the pattern, things that seem not to fit.** Once you see an anomaly, you will often find that it is part of a strand you had not detected (and perhaps one side of a previously unseen binary).

FIGURE 1.5
THE METHOD

Expect ideas to suggest themselves to you as you move through the steps of THE METHOD. Strands often begin to suggest other strands that are in opposition to them. Words you first took to be parts of one strand may migrate to different strands. This process of noticing and then relocating words and details into different patterns is one aspect of doing THE METHOD that can push your analysis to interpretation.

It may be helpful to think of this method of analysis as a form of mental doodling. Rather than worrying about what you are going to say, or about whether or not you understand, you instead get out a pencil and start tallying

up what you see. Engaged in this process, you'll soon find yourself gaining entry to the logic of your subject matter.

Two Examples of The Method Generating Ideas

In the paragraph below you can see how the writer's noticing strands and binaries directs his thinking.

> The most striking aspect of the spots is how different they are from typical fashion advertising. If you look at men's fashion magazines, for example, at the advertisements for the suits of Ralph Lauren or Valentino or Hugo Boss, they almost always consist of a beautiful man, with something interesting done to his hair, wearing a gorgeous outfit. At the most, the man may be gesturing discreetly, or smiling in the demure way that a man like that might smile after, say, telling the supermodel at the next table no thanks he has to catch an early-morning flight to Milan. But that's all. The beautiful face and the clothes tell the whole story. The Dockers ads, though, are almost exactly the opposite. There's no face. The camera is jumping around so much that it's tough to concentrate on the clothes. And instead of stark simplicity, the fashion image is overlaid with a constant, confusing pattern. It's almost as if the Dockers ads weren't primarily concerned with clothes at all—and in fact that's exactly what Levi's intended. What the company had discovered, in its research, was that baby-boomer men felt that the chief thing missing from their lives was male friendship. Caught between the demands of the families that many of them had started in the eighties and career considerations that had grown more onerous, they felt they had lost touch with other men. The purpose of the ads—the chatter, the lounging around, the quick cuts—was simply to conjure up a place where men could put on one-hundred-percent-cotton khakis and reconnect with one another. In the original advertising brief, that imaginary place was dubbed Dockers World.
>
> — MALCOLM GLADWELL, "LISTENING TO KHAKIS"

First Gladwell notes the differences in two kinds of fashion ads aimed at men. There are the high fashion ads and the Dockers ads. In the first of these, the word "beautiful" repeats twice as part of a strand (including "gorgeous," "interesting," "supermodel," "demure"). The writer then poses traits of the Dockers ads as an opposing strand. Instead of a beautiful face there is no face; instead of "gorgeous outfit," "it's tough to concentrate on the clothes." These oppositions cause the writer to make his interpretive leap, that the Dockers ads "weren't primarily concerned with clothes at all" and that this was intentional.

In the student essay, below, Lesley Stephen develops a key contrast between two thinkers, Sigmund Freud and Michel Foucault, by noticing the different meanings that each attaches to some of the same key words. THE METHOD helps to locate the key terms and to define them by seeing what other words they suggest (strands).

> Freud defines civilization as serving two main purposes. The first is to protect men against nature, and the second is to adjust their mutual relations. Freud seems to offer returning to nature as a possible solution for men's sexual freedom. I think Freud might believe that returning to nature by rejecting civilization could bring about sexual freedom, but that sexual freedom does not necessarily equal happiness.
>
> Foucault completely defies Freud's idea that sexuality is natural and that repression exists as anti-sexuality. He believes that everything is created from discourse; nothing is natural. And because nothing is natural, nothing is repressed. There is no such thing as a natural desire; if the desire exists, it is because it is already part of the discourse.

By focusing on repetitions of the words "nature" and "natural" and then seeing what goes with what, the writer creates a succinct and revealing comparison.

Doing The Method on a Poem

Here is an example of how one might do THE METHOD on a piece of text—in this case—a student poem. We use a poem because it is compact and so allows us to illustrate efficiently how THE METHOD works.

> Brooklyn Heights, 4:00 A.M.
> Dana Ferrelli
>
> sipping a warm forty oz.
> Coors Light on a stoop in
> Brooklyn Heights. I look
> across the street, in the open window;
> Blonde bobbing heads, the
> smack of a jump rope, laughter
> of my friends breaking
> beer bottles. Putting out their
> burning filters on the #5 of
> a hopscotch court.
> We reminisce of days when we were
> Fat, pimple faced—
> look how far we've come. But tomorrow
> a little blonde girl will
> pick up a Marlboro Light filter, just to play.
> And I'll buy another forty, because
> that's how I play now.
> Reminiscing about how far I've come

Here are the steps of THE METHOD, applied to the preceding poem.

1. *Words that repeat exactly:* forty × 2, blonde × 2, how far we've (I've) come × 2, light × 2, reminisce, reminiscing × 2, filter, filters × 2, Brooklyn Heights × 2
2. *Strands:* jump rope, laughter, play, hopscotch (connecting logic: childhood games, the carefree worldview of childhood), Coors Light, Marlboro Light filters, beer bottles (connecting logic: drugs, adult "games," escapism?),
   Smack, burning, breaking (connecting logic: violent actions and powerful emotion: burning)
3. *Binary oppositions:* how far we've come/how far I've come (a move from plural to singular, from a sense of group identity to isolation, from group values to a more individual consideration)
   Burning/putting out
   Coors Light, Marlboro Lights/jump rope, hopscotch
   How far I've come (two meanings of *far*?, one positive, one not)
   Heights/stoop
   Present/past
4. *Ranked repetitions, strands and binaries plus paragraph explaining the choice of one of these as central to understanding.*
   Most important repetitions: forty, how far we've/I've come
   Most important strands: childhood games and adulthood games
   Most important binaries: Burning versus putting out, open and laughter versus putting out
5. *Anomaly:* Fat, pimple faced—
   This detail does not fit with the otherwise halcyon treatment of childhood.

ANALYSIS (HEALTHY PARAGRAPHS)

The repetition of *forty* (forty ounce beer) is interesting. It signals a certain weariness—perhaps with a kind of pun on forty to suggest middle age and thus the speaker's concern about moving toward being older in a way that seems stale and flat. The beer, after all, is warm—which is not the best state for a beer to be in, once opened, if it is to retain its taste and character. Forty ounces of beer might also suggest excess—"supersizing."

The most important (or at least most interesting) binary opposition is *burning versus putting out.* This binary seems to be part of a more intense strand in the poem, one that runs counter to the weary prospect of moving on toward a perhaps lonely ("how far *I've* come") middle-aged feeling. Burning goes with breaking and the smack of the jump rope, and even putting out (a strand), if we visualize putting out not just as fire extinguished but in terms of putting a cigarette out by pushing the burning end of it into something (the number 5 on the Hopscotch court). The poem's language has a violent and passionate edge to it, even though the violent words are not always in a violent context (for example, the smack of the jump rope).

This is a rather melancholy poem in which, perhaps, the speaker is mourning the passing, the "putting out" of the passion of youth ("burning"). In the poem's more obvious binary—the opposition of childhood games to more "adult" ones— the same melancholy plays itself out, making the poem's refrain-like repetition of "how far I've come" ring with unhappy irony. The little blonde girl is an image of the speaker's own past self (since the poem talks about reminiscing), and the speaker mourns that little girl's (her own) passing into a more uncertain and less carefree state. It is 4:00 A.M. in Brooklyn Heights—just about the end of night, the darkest point perhaps before the beginning of morning. But windows are open, suggesting possibility, so things are not all bad. The friends make noise together, break bottles together, revisit hopscotch square 5 together, and contemplate moving on.

Note: the reference to "Fat, pimple faced—" in the poem is an anomaly in the otherwise idealized representation of childhood in terms of games and laughter. The young women in the poem are sad that they can re-enact childhood games but they can't recover childhood's innocent happiness. The anomaly usefully reminds us of adults' desire to idealize the past by forgetting that the past has pimples as well as hopscotch. "Fat, pimple faced—" goes with what we might also be able to see as an anomaly—the open windows in what the poem otherwise describes as a steady closing down of hope.

Notice how this discussion moves from analysis of a key repetition and a key binary to a series of claims about the meaning of the poem as a whole. Writing about the data that THE METHOD has gathered leads us to see how the significant parts are related (Move 2 of the Five Analytical Moves).

TRY THIS 1.8: Doing THE METHOD on a Poem

Go online and locate "The Crowd at the Ballgame" by William Carlos Williams (a famous American poet). A useful site for finding poems is poetryfoundation .org. Do THE METHOD on the poem individually or in groups, using our treatment of "Brooklyn Heights, 4:00 A.M." as a model. Be sure to do the steps, including the healthy paragraph, in writing.

Troubleshooting THE METHOD

THE METHOD is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Deciding what goes with what is an analytical move. It's not just listing. One aim of THE METHOD is to induce you to pay more attention, and a different kind of attention, to what you are studying.

Don't let the procedure turn into tedious or superficial data-gathering. Look for the *interesting* repetitions, strands and binaries, not just the most prevalent ones. Let this activity generate ideas.

In applying THE METHOD to longer texts, don't try to cover everything, and don't start making your lists until you have done a chunk of the reading. After all, you can't be expected to recognize a repetition in an extended essay until

it has reappeared several times. Keep informal lists in the margins as you read, or in the inside cover of a book. When you become aware of an opposition, you can mark it with a +/– next to the paragraph where you were struck.

THE METHOD is designed to prompt thinking. You should be able to offer your reasons for why you think a given repetition or strand is most important. You should be able to express what issue you think is at stake in the organizing contrast you choose as most important.

As you look over your binaries, choose the binary that you think organizes the thinking in the subject as a whole—the *organizing* contrast. Which binary contains, implicitly or explicitly, the central issue or question or problem that is being addressed?

To make THE METHOD spark ideas, remember to ask So what? as a way of moving from observation to implication.

TRY THIS 1.9: Do THE METHOD on a Visual Image

We recommend using an image by Adrian Tomine, a frequent contributor to *The New Yorker* magazine and a graphic novelist. Use Google Images for "New Yorker covers + Tomine" to obtain a range of possibilities. We suggest his August 24, 2009 cover, "Double Feature"—an image of a crowd at dusk beneath the Brooklyn Bridge. Then, for homework repeat the exercise alone, using a second Tomine cover—we suggest the November 8, 2004 cover, "Missed Connection," featuring a man and a woman looking at each other from passing subway cars.

TRY THIS 1.10: Do THE METHOD on a Reading

Select any article from *Arts & Letters Daily* (aldaily.com), and do THE METHOD on it. Or use THE METHOD on the front page of the newspaper, a speech from the American Rhetoric website, or perhaps a series of editorials on the same subject. You can work with as little as a few paragraphs or as much as an entire article or chapter or book.

Move 5: Keep Reformulating Questions and Explanations

The preceding four analytical moves can be thought of in question form. The process of posing and answering such questions—the analytical process—is one of trial and error. Learning to write well is largely a matter of learning how to frame questions. Whatever questions you ask, the answers you propose won't always turn out to be answers, but may, instead, produce more questions. It follows that you need to keep the process of understanding open, often longer than feels comfortable. You do so by repeatedly reformulating your questions and explanations and going back to the original data for nourishment.

The following three groups of questions (organized according to the analytical moves they're derived from) are typical of what goes on in an analytical writer's head as he or she attempts to understand a subject. These questions will work with almost anything that you want to think about. As you will see, the questions are geared toward helping you locate and try on explanations for the meaning of various patterns of details.

Which details seem significant? Why?
What does the detail mean?
What else might it mean?
(Moves: Define Significant Parts; Make the Implicit Explicit)
How do the details fit together? What do they have in common?
What does this pattern of details mean?
What else might this same pattern of details mean? How else could it be explained?
(Move: Look for Patterns)
What details don't seem to fit? How might they be connected with other details to form a different pattern?
What does this new pattern mean? How might it cause me to read the meaning of individual details differently?
(Moves: Look for Anomalies and Keep Asking Questions)

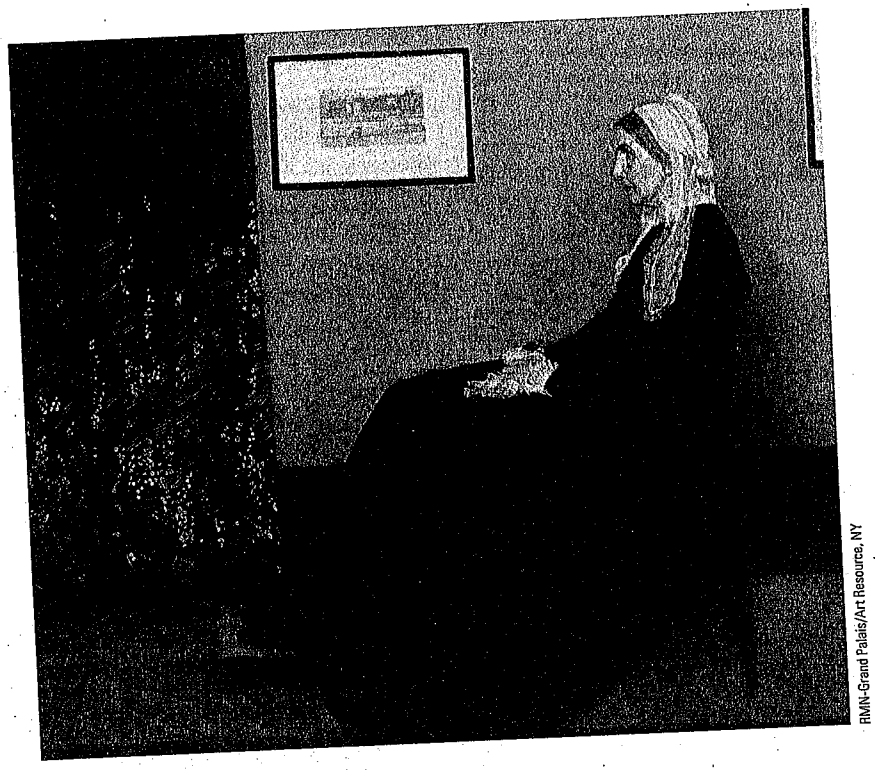
We conclude this chapter with an analysis of a famous painting that has come to be known as *Whistler's Mother*.

Summing Up: Analyzing *Whistler's Mother*

Throughout the chapter we have emphasized the importance of slowing down leaps to conclusions in order to spend more time dwelling with the data, carefully describing what you notice. We have stressed the importance of focusing on the details, looking for questions rather than answers, and telling yourself you don't understand even when you think you might. We've also said that summary and description are close cousins of and necessary to analysis, but that analysis provides more interpretive thinking—making the implicit explicit.

Key to any kind of analysis is laying out the data, not simply because it keeps the analysis accurate, but also because, crucially, it is in the act of carefully describing a subject that analytical writers often have their best ideas. What might an analysis of Whistler's painting include and why? (see Figure 1.6).

The first step is to describe with care. Look for the painting's significant parts and how they're related (Move 2) and for patterns of repetition and contrast (Move 4). The words you choose to describe your data will contain the germs of your ideas about what the subject means. In moving from description to analysis, scrutinize the language you have chosen, asking, "Why did I choose this word?" and "What ideas are implicit in the language I have used?" This attention to your own language will help you to make the implicit explicit (Move 3).



RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY

FIGURE 1.6
Arrangement In Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother by James Abbott McNeill Whistler, 1871

Data	Analytical Moves	Interpretive Leaps (So What?)
subject in profile, not looking at us	make implicit explicit (speculate about what the detail might suggest)	figure strikes us as separate, nonconfrontational, passive
folded hands, fitted lace cap, contained hair, expressionless face	locate pattern of same or similar detail; make what is implicit in pattern of details explicit	figure strikes us as self-contained, powerful in her separateness and self-enclosure—self-sufficient?
patterned curtain and picture versus still figure and blank wall; slightly frilled lace cuffs and ties on cap versus plain black dress	locate organizing contrast; make what is implicit in the contrast explicit	austerity and containment of the figure made more pronounced by slight contrast with busier, more lively, and more ornate elements and with little picture showing world outside
slightly slouched body position and presence of support for feet	anomalies; make what is implicit in the anomalies explicit	these details destabilize the serenity of the figure, adding some tension to the picture in the form of slightly uneasy posture and figure's need for support: she looks too long, drooped in on her own spine

FIGURE 1.7
Summary and Analysis of WHISTLER'S MOTHER Diagram

Figure 1.7 is a depiction of this analytical process in outline form.

What does this analysis tell us? It might tell us that the painter's choice to portray his subject in profile contributes to our sense of her separateness from us and of her nonconfrontational passivity. We look at her, but she does not look back at us. Her black dress and the fitted lace cap that obscures her hair are not only emblems of her self-effacement, shrouds disguising her identity like her expressionless face, but also the tools of her self-containment and thus of her power to remain aloof from prying eyes.

What is the attraction of this painting (this being one of the questions that an analysis might ask)? What might draw a viewer to the sight of this austere, drably attired woman, sitting alone in the center of a mostly blank space? Perhaps it is the very starkness of the painting, and the mystery of self-sufficiency at its center, that attracts us.

You may not agree with the terms by which we have summarized the painting, and thus you may not agree with such conclusions as "the mystery of self-sufficiency." Nor is it necessary that you agree, because there is no single, right answer to what the painting means. But the process of careful observation and description and repeated tries at interpretation by ASKING SO WHAT? has produced claims about what and how the painting communicates that others would at least find reasonable and fair.

Analysis and Personal Associations

Although observations like those offered in the "Interpretive Leaps" column in Figure 1.7 go beyond simple description, they stay with the task of explaining the painting, rather than moving to private associations that the painting might prompt, such as effusions about old age or rocking chairs or the character and situation of the writer's own mother. Such associations could well be valuable unto themselves as a means of prompting a searching piece of expressive writing. They might also help a writer to interpret some feature of the painting that he or she was working to understand. But the writer would not be free to use pieces of his or her personal history as conclusions about what the painting

communicates, unless these conclusions could also be reasonably inferred from the painting itself.

Analysis is a creative activity, a fairly open form of inquiry, but its imaginative scope is governed by logic. The hypothetical analysis we have offered is not the only reading of the painting that a viewer might make, because the same pattern of details might lead to different conclusions. But a viewer would not be free to conclude anything he or she wished, such as that the woman is mourning the death of a son or is patiently waiting to die. Such conclusions would be unfounded speculations, since the black dress is not sufficient to support them. Analysis often operates in areas where there is no one right answer, but like summary and argument, it requires the writer to reason from evidence.

Becoming a Detective

As we began this chapter by saying, analysis is a form of detective work. It can surprise us with ideas that our experiences produce once we take the time to listen to ourselves thinking. But analysis is also a discipline; it has rules that govern how we proceed and that enable others to judge the validity of our ideas.

A few rules are worth highlighting here:

1. The range of associations for explaining a given detail or word must be governed by context.

2. It's fine to use your personal reactions as a way into exploring what a subject means, but take care not to make an interpretive leap stretch further than the actual details will support.

3. Because the tendency to transfer meanings from your own life onto a subject can lead you to ignore the details of the subject itself, you need always to be asking yourself: "What other explanations might plausibly account for this same pattern of detail?"

A good analytical thinker needs to be the attentive Dr. Watson to his or her own Sherlock Holmes. That is what the remainder of this book will teach you to do. (See Chapter 5 for more on the rules governing interpretation, again using *Whistler's Mother* as a primary example.)

Assignments: The Analytical Frame of Mind

1. **Do THE METHOD on a Reading.** Look for repetitions, strands, and binaries in the paragraphs below, the opening of an article entitled "The End of Solitude" by William Deresiewicz, which appeared in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on January 30, 2009 and at http://chronicle.com/article/The-End-of-Solitude/3708. After selecting the repetition, strand, or organizing contrast that you find most important, try writing several paragraphs about it.

> What does the contemporary self want? The camera has created a culture of celebrity; the computer is creating a culture of connectivity. As the two technologies converge — *broadband* tipping the Web from text to image, social-networking sites spreading the mesh of interconnection ever wider—the two cultures betray a common impulse. Celebrity and connectivity are both ways of becoming known. This is what the contemporary self wants. It wants to be recognized, wants to be connected: It wants to be visible. If not to the millions, on Survivor or Oprah, then to the hundreds, on Twitter or Facebook. This is the quality that validates us, this is how we become real to ourselves—by being seen by others. The great contemporary terror is anonymity. If Lionel Trilling was right, if the property that grounded the self, in Romanticism, was sincerity, and in modernism it was authenticity, then in *postmodernism* it is visibility.

If you can, visit this article online and include the paragraph that follows as well in your analysis.

2. **Analyze an Image in Relation to Text.** The Adrian Tomine *New Yorker* covers that we referred to in TRY THIS 1.8 could produce a good short paper. You could either do THE METHOD on the two covers in order to write a comparative paper. Or you could do THE METHOD on the Tomine cover called "Double Feature" and the paragraph from "The End of Solitude" above, and write about them comparatively. (Note: the entire article is available online.)

   What do you think Tomine's cover says about the issues raised in "The End of Solitude" by William Deresiewicz? How might Tomine see the issues differently? And how might Deresiewicz interpret Tomine's cover, and So what?

3. **Analyze a Portrait or Other Visual Image.** Locate any portrait, preferably a good reproduction from an art book or magazine, one that shows detail clearly. Then do a version of what we've done with *Whistler's Mother*. Your goal is to produce an analysis of the portrait with the steps we included in analyzing *Whistler's Mother*. First, summarize the portrait, describing accurately its significant details. Do not go beyond a recounting of what the portrait includes; avoid interpreting what these details suggest.

   Then use the various methods offered in this chapter to analyze the data. What repetitions (patterns of same or similar detail) do you see? What organizing contrasts suggest themselves? In light of these patterns of similarity and difference, what anomalies do you then begin to detect? Move from the data to interpretive conclusions.

   This process will produce a set of interpretive leaps, which you may then try to assemble into a more coherent claim of some sort—a short essay about what the portrait "says."