

Strategies for Teaching Analysis and Argument

From Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams' *The Craft of Research*:

Argument Heuristic:

1. What is my **claim**?
2. What **reasons** support my claim?
3. What **evidence** supports my reasons?
4. Do I **acknowledge** alternatives/complications/objections, and how do I **respond**?
5. What **principle (warrant)** makes my reasons relevant to my claim?

From David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen's *Writing Analytically*:

What's an Idea?

An idea usually starts with an observation that is puzzling, with something you want to figure out:

- Something smaller than most people suspect
- A subtle distinction
- A qualification
- An unearthed connection between two positions not previously linked
- Discovery of a question where there seemed not to be one
- Something that accounts for some dissonance, what seemed not to fit together

How does an Idea Become a Thesis?

1. The thesis of an analytical paper is an idea about what some feature or features of your subject *means*.
2. A thesis should be an idea that is in need of argument, which is to say it should not be a statement of fact or an idea with which most readers would readily agree.

Notice and Focus

1. Repeatedly ask the question, "What do I notice?"
2. Rank the features of your subject you noticed. Ask yourself, "What three details are most interesting, revealing, significant, or strange?"
3. Ask yourself, "Why are these three details the most interesting, revealing, significant, or strange?" This last step triggers interpretive leaps to the meaning of whatever it is that you find most interesting in your observations.

Narrowing Scope by Doing 10 on 1

Make 10 observations about a single representative issue or example instead of making one general point about 10 issues or examples. Keep asking what you notice and what it implies. Choose one observation to analyze in depth.

The Five Analytical Moves

Move 1: Suspend Judgment (understand before you judge)

Move 2: Define Significant Parts and How They're Related

Move 3: Look for Patterns of Repetition and Contrast and for Anomaly

The Method:

- Step 1: List all details (or words) that repeat exactly and the number of repetitions of each.
- Step 2: List all strands—groupings of the same or similar kinds of words, details.
- Step 3: List organizing contrasts—binary oppositions (e.g., open/closed, round/pointed).
- Step 4: Select and list the two most significant repetitions, the two most significant strands, and the two most significant binaries.
- Step 5: Select and list the one repeated detail, or one strand, or one binary that you take to be the most significant for arriving at ideas. Write one paragraph explaining your choice.

Move 4: Make the Implicit Explicit (convert to direct statement meanings that are suggested indirectly)

Move 5: Keep Reformulating Questions and Explanations

Six Steps for Making a Thesis Evolve:

1. Formulate an idea about your subject—a working thesis.
2. See how far you can make this thesis go in accounting for (confirming) evidence.
3. Locate complicating evidence that is not adequately accounted for by the thesis.
4. Make explicit the apparent mismatch between the thesis and selected evidence, asking and answering So What?
5. Reshape your claim to accommodate the evidence that hasn't fit.
6. Repeat steps 2, 3, 4, and 5 several times.

Five Kinds of Weak Theses and How to Fix Them:

Weak thesis statements:

1. make no claim
The Fix: Raise specific issues for the essay to explore.
2. are obviously true or are a statement of fact
The Fix: Find some avenue of inquiry—a question about the facts or an issue raised by them. Make an assertion with which it would be possible for readers to disagree.
3. restate conventional wisdom
The Fix: Seek to complicate—see more than one point of view on—your subject. Avoid conventional wisdom unless you can qualify it or introduce a fresh perspective on it.
4. offer personal conviction as the basis for the claim
The Fix: Try on other points of view honestly and dispassionately; treat your ideas as hypotheses to be tested rather than obvious truths.
5. make an overly broad claim
The Fix: Convert broad categories and generic (fits anything) claims to more specific, more qualified assertions; find ways to bring out the complexity of your subject.