

Essays - 3

Division/Analysis Essay

- Each instructor develops her or his own assignments. Your instructor and the assignment sheet s/he has provided are the two best sources for guidance as you work toward a final draft. The handouts/tutorials for the types of essays feature general guidelines to help you write solid essays, but they should be treated only as supplements to your instructor and the assignment sheet.

Purpose

- To articulate a judgment about a topic and defend that judgment through a criteria-based analysis.

Topic

- Almost anything can be evaluated. Pick something you are interested in.
- Consider why evaluating this topic is significant.

Example: *When people shop for groceries, they decide which foods to buy and which foods to pass over. Limited budgets influence what choices some shoppers can make. Other factors include taste preferences and nutritional needs. Bananas are among the options that shoppers should seriously consider.*

Thesis

- The thesis for this paper is the value judgment. You will present an argument to support your claim that your specific topic is “good” or “bad.”

Example: *Because of their low cost, great taste, and beneficial nutrient profile, bananas rank among the best foods available to shoppers.*

Criteria

- Any “thing” has a set of categories with which you can evaluate it. Whatever your topic is, its quality can be assessed according to a list of features.
- Your specific topic belongs under a larger group of topics: Basketball under sports, Coke under soft drinks, bananas under food. The criteria with which you evaluate your specific topic is a list of categories with which you would evaluate any specific member of that group.

Example: *For food: cost, taste, nutrition. For a banana: cheap, delicious, healthy.*

- Define each criterion clearly and explain what success or failure would include for each. Your ideas of “good” may differ from another person’s ideas, so be explicit about your particular standards.

Example: *For food to be nutritious, it must provide healthful nutrients like vitamins, minerals, or protein and it must contain a minimum of unhealthful ingredients like processed sugar and saturated fat.*

- 👉 Be sure to consider all the important criteria for your topic. Even if your argument is that the specific movie or phone or whatever is good, do not neglect to discuss where it falls short.

Example: *Bananas do not keep for very long. Maybe shelf-life should be a criterion for bananas, one in which they will not fare well.*

Specifics

- 👉 Be precise. If you think your topic “performs” well in a category, support that claim thoroughly with specific examples.

Example: *For bananas, you could just say, “Everyone knows bananas are good for you,” but you are better off providing researched information: “A medium banana provides over 400 mg of potassium, a mineral that assists proper heart, muscular, and digestive functions (“Bananas, raw”; “Potassium”).”*

Structure

- 👉 You will almost certainly organize this essay according to your criteria.
- 👉 One option would be to list your criteria in the introduction, then take them one at a time. For each criterion, define and discuss it, then analyze your subject accordingly.

Example: *IV. Nutrition*
A. Define criterion: good nutrients with few bad nutrients
B. Vitamins and Minerals
1. data from NutritionData and UMM.edu
C. Fiber
D. Sugar
E. Summary of nutritional content of bananas

- 👉 Give some thought to the best order for your criteria. Is their one major issue you would think of first when analyzing this kind of thing. Like, for cars, do you think price or performance would be more important than variety of upholstery colors or number of cup holders?
- 👉 Consider a sort of “narrative” about how a person interacts with that item. You would not necessarily present this hypothetical story in the essay, but it can help you organize the information you present.

Example: *For bananas, first you buy one (“cost”), then you eat it (“taste”), then it gives your body good or bad stuff (“nutrition”).*

For more information on this topic see
Chapter 9 in The Bedford Reader.

“Bananas, raw.” Nutritiondata.com. Nutrition Data, n.d. Web. 22 June 2010.

“Potassium.” UMM.edu. University of Maryland Medical Center, n.d. Web. 22 June 2010.