

ANALYTICAL WRITING

1. Introduction

Common criteria of undergraduate essay writing focus on the following requirements:

students need to be analytical and critical in their response

students need to structure their writing logically

students need to be persuasive writers

students need to answer the question

This booklet looks at the requirement to be analytical in your response. Other Learning Centre booklets in this series deal with the other aspects:

- Planning and structuring an Essay - deals with logical structure
- Developing an Argument - deals with persuasion
- Analysing the Essay Question - deals with answering the right question

2. Analysis Versus Description

Most students are already good descriptive writers when they arrive at university. But unfortunately university writing is rarely just descriptive. Although texts may contain sections which are descriptive (e.g. methodology sections in research reports), overall their structure is usually more analytical than descriptive. But what is the difference?

On page 2 and page 4, are two essay extracts written by two different student for a first year university course in the field of English Literature. The students were reading a novel by William Golding called "The Lord of the Flies". If an essay is a well structured and focussed response to the question, you should be able to generally guess the question.

⌘ Exercise 1:

- Read the Essay A extract.
- Fill in the multiple choice questions on the evaluation sheet on page 3, putting your answers in the column for Essay A. If you cannot work out your answers for every question, don't worry too much about it now because there will be time to come back and think about it at the end of Exercise 2.

ESSAY A

Power is a complex phenomenon which includes authority and coercion. A power struggle lies at the centre of William Golding's novel The Lord of the Flies. The principal characters in this book are Ralph and Jack. Jack is quick to claim the leadership and with it power by declaring that he can sing C sharp (p.23). However, Ralph wins the election for the chief. Ralph's size, attractive appearance, and stillness made him seem like an adult to the little ones and his accidental use of the conch to attract attention made him seem like the man with the megaphone that the boys can remember from before the crash (p.24).

Ralph shares power with Jack by letting him command the choir after the election. In fact, the election did not resolve the conflict over the leadership, but only defined the context within which it would occur.

Ralph's goal was rescue. He tried to govern according to that goal. Piggy advised him much as a political scientist employed by a politician would. (Is Piggy's fate what happens to students of political science?) Ralph is a weak leader. When his plans are challenged, when his leadership is challenged he appeals to the conch.

Jack becomes ever stronger. He wins over the boys with meat and manipulates the boys' desire for play (p.140). In time, he leads them to the murder of Simon (p.168). By then everyone is in Jack's power, except Piggy and Ralph. Jack was ever ready to enforce his rule with power, whereas Ralph was not.

While the recollection of their lives before the crash was strong with the boys, it was only natural that they would follow Ralph. His manner and the system he tried to establish was consistent with their previous lives. Because his intentions were logical and responsible, they naturally cooperated.

Jack exploited the weakness of human nature by leading the boys into play, hunting, and finally murder. He capitalised on the boys' excitement at doing things that were forbidden in their previous lives. Equally, he was able to exploit their fear of the beastie, because he understood that fear. He understood it, because he shared it. Jack's forceful personality kept the pressure on all the time

⌘ Exercise 2:

- Read the Essay B extract, page 4, which was written by a different student in response to the same assignment question.
- Put your answers to the questions on the evaluation sheet in the column for Essay B.
- If you want to, you can change some of your answers for Essay A.

Checklist for evaluation

Choose the best answer for each of these items:

	ESSAY A	ESSAY B
1. This type of essay is		
(a) A DESCRIPTIVE TYPE	[]	[]
(b) AN ANALYTICAL TYPE	[]	[]
2. This essay is about		
(a) THE LORD OF THE FLIES	[]	[]
(b) POWER	[]	[]
3. The essay's main point to be argued		
(a) IS CLEAR	[]	[]
(b) IS NOT CLEAR	[]	[]
4. The structure of the essay		
(a) IS CLEAR	[]	[]
(b) IS NOT CLEAR	[]	[]
5. The writer substantiates the points with evidence from		
(a) PRIMARY SOURCES (the original)	[]	[]
(b) SECONDARY SOURCES (writings about the original)	[]	[]
6. The essay answers the question		
(a) WHAT IS POWER IN LORD OF THE FLIES?	[]	[]
(b) DESCRIBE THE CHARACTERS OF JACK AND RALPH IN LORD OF THE FLIES.	[]	[]

When you have filled in BOTH COLUMNS, check the Key (page 14) for the expected response. You may disagree with some of these. Look at the annotated versions of the essays on pages 5 & 6 for extra information.

ESSAY A

The focus of your essay is conveyed to the reader through the information you choose to put before the main verb in your sentence

The first two sentences focus on power.

Power is a complex phenomenon which includes authority and coercion. A power struggle lies at the centre of William Golding's novel The Lord of the Flies. The principal characters in this book are Ralph and Jack. Jack is quick to claim the leadership and with it power by declaring that he can sing C sharp (p.23). However, Ralph wins the election for the chief. Ralph's size, attractive appearance, and stillness made him seem like an adult to the little ones and his accidental use of the conch to attract attention made him seem like the man with the megaphone that the boys can remember from before the crash (p.24).

The focus moves to the main characters

The issue of power is secondary to the events and actions & motives of the main characters

Ralph shares power with Jack by letting him command the choir after the election. In fact, the election did not resolve the conflict over the leadership, but only defined the context within which it would occur.

Ralph - motives and failings

Ralph's goal was rescue. He tried to govern according to that goal. Piggy advised him much as a political scientist employed by a politician would. (Is Piggy's fate what happens to students of political science?) Ralph is a weak leader. When his plans are challenged, when his leadership is challenged he appeals to the conch.

Jack - strategies

Jack becomes ever stronger. He wins over the boys with meat and manipulates the boys' desire for play (p.140). In time, he leads them to the murder of Simon (p.168). By then everyone is in Jack's power, except Piggy and Ralph. Jack was ever ready to enforce his rule with power, whereas Ralph was not.

primary sources only - you need to demonstrate that you have read more than the primary text

Ralph

While the recollection of their lives before the crash was strong with the boys, it was only natural that they would follow Ralph. His manner and the system he tried to establish was consistent with their previous lives. Because his intentions were logical and responsible, they naturally cooperated.

Jack

Jack exploited the weakness of human nature by leading the boys into play, hunting, and finally murder. He capitalised on the boys' excitement at doing things that were forbidden in their previous lives. Equally, he was able to exploit their fear of the beastie, because he understood that fear. He understood it, because he shared it. Jack's forceful personality kept the pressure on all the time ...

This essay seems to be developed by alternating the main characters and their role in furthering the narrative - there is some insight into the characters and their motives, but the essay follows the narrative structure of the novel

Statement of purpose introducing abstract focus

Focus on

ESSAY B

The thesis of this essay is that Piggy and Ralph, the two central characters in Golding's novel The Lord of the Flies, stood in a relationship of reciprocal influence. Reciprocal influence exists when two (or more) actors influence each other. Influence exists when A causes B to perform an act X, or adopt an attitude X, that B would not otherwise have done or adopted but for the intervention of A. (Dahl, 1984: 34). To argue this thesis, this paper will analyse the elements of power available to Ralph and Piggy. These elements can be categorised as skills, willingness, and resources. It is because neither Piggy nor Ralph had much in the way of skills, willingness, and resources that they combined their efforts. In order to highlight the relationship between Ralph and Piggy, the skills, willingness, and resources of other characters will also be referred to.

The analysis of the skills, willingness, and resources of Ralph and Piggy can be outlined using a table to indicate their scores on these elements:

Table 1: Elements of Power

Rating: + a high degree of the element
0 average degree of the element
- absence of the element

Lacking in the skill of exercising influence, Piggy made himself a victim from the start by needlessly revealing his dreaded nickname. This revelation indicated the poor judgement he showed on other occasions, such as when he clung to the conch as though it were a lump of power (Wright, 1982: 129). In more general terms, he does succeed in establishing a relationship with Ralph, although this cannot be described as being through his skill but rather by accident.

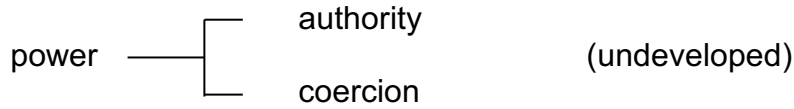
In comparison, the skills that Ralph possesses meant that he was able to influence the boys, even though he neither realised what the skills were nor developed them (Hanson, 1982: 21). Here he is in contrast to Jack who perceived which skills and resources could be used to influence the boys and set out to develop those that he could, for example he learned how to hunt despite his fear.

Similarly, Piggy and Ralph had different degrees of...

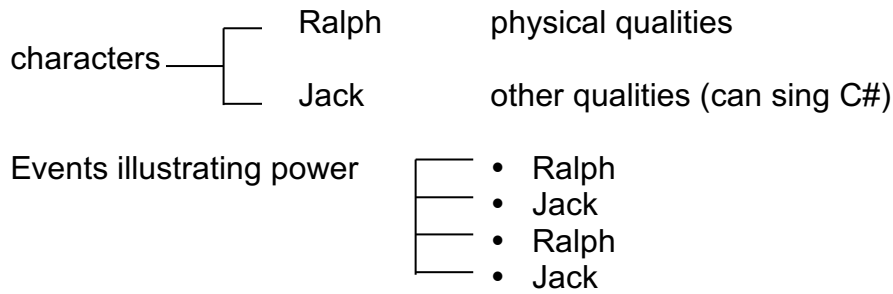
If we wanted to draw the structure of these two essays, we might produce something like this:

Essay A:

Introduction:



Body

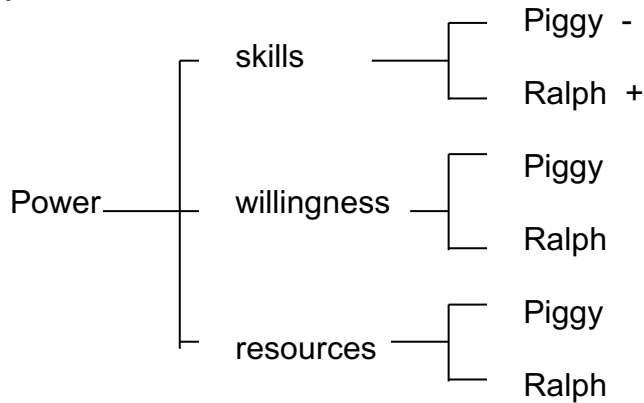


Essay B:

Introduction:

- Position statement - Piggy and Ralph = reciprocal influence
- Definition /explanation of reciprocal influence
- Purpose: to argue by analysing power

Body:



3. What is Analysis?

Analysis is the process of

- **breaking down a topic/concept/group of facts into components or categories**
- **looking for relationships between them**
- **understanding how each component contributes to the whole picture**
- **drawing conclusions about their significance**

⌘ Exercise 4:

- Read the following short texts about questionnaires and face-to-face interviews.
- Match each text with one of the following assignment questions:

- (1) Describe the characteristics of face-to-face interviews and questionnaires. Text
- (2) Analyse the differences between face-to-face interviews and questionnaires. Text

Check your answers in the Key, page 15.

Note that the information in each text is the same.

Text a)

Questionnaires and face-to-face interviews are methods of data collection in the social sciences. Questionnaires can be used to sample a large number of people over a wide geographical area. They can normally be conducted by just one person and the only major costs involved are stationery and postage. However, questionnaires do not allow the researcher to ask for extra information.

Face to face interviews, by contrast, are relatively small scale. They are labour intensive and time-consuming and consequently costly. But interviews have the advantage of allowing the researcher to clarify questions if necessary. Also, during interviews the researcher can ask additional questions.

Text b)

Two of the most common methods of data collection in social science research are the questionnaires sent by mail and the face-to-face interview. Whereas the sample size in face-to-face interviews is normally small, the questionnaire can be sent out to large numbers of people over a wide geographical area. Costs, both in labour and money, are high with face-to-face interviews, while questionnaires can be distributed quickly by just one person at a relatively low cost. However, in terms of quality of information, interviews are often superior to questionnaires as the researcher has the opportunity to ask additional questions and explain what questions mean if this becomes necessary. This is not possible with questionnaires.

A strategy for organising information: setting up a taxonomy:

A taxonomy is a type of organisational diagram which will help you see what is happening with your writing. The way you have organised your information affects the **structure** of your writing on the macro-level. The structure of the information and the **focus** of your ideas should provide an appropriate response to the assignment question, e.g. Text a) would not be an appropriate response to Question 2.

⌘ Exercise 5:

- Look again at the examples of organisational diagrams showing structures for Essay A and Essay B.
- Draw similar diagrams in the boxes to show the way that each of these two texts a) and b) (on face to face interviews and questionnaires) are structured.

Check the Key, page 15.

Diagram for Text a)

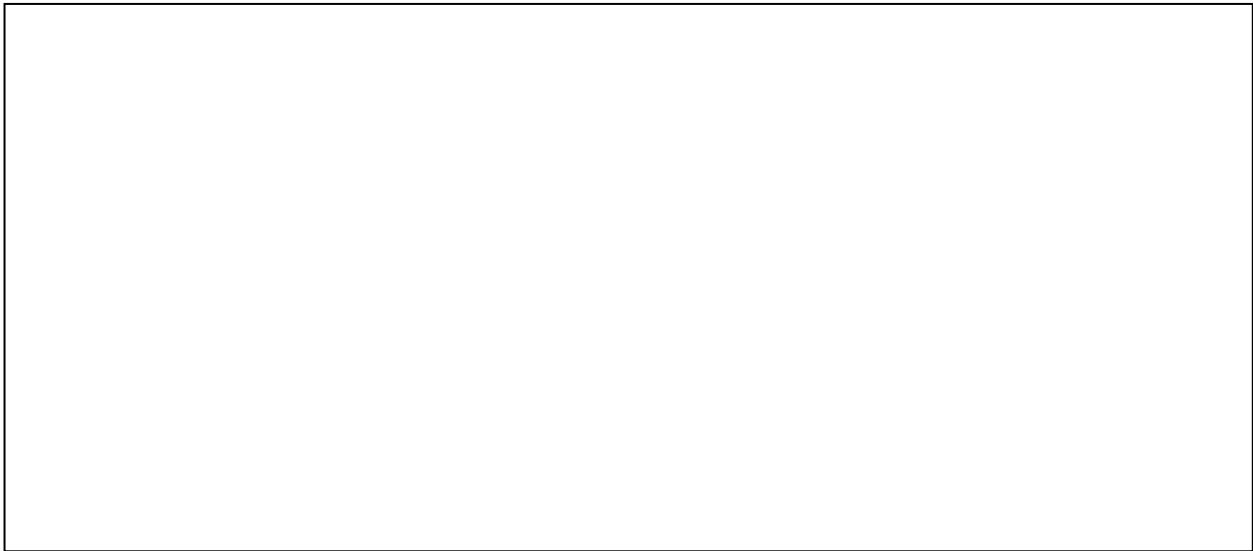


Diagram for Text b)



The taxonomy also reflects **the level of analysis** you have used for processing your information. The taxonomy for text a) is descriptive; text b) is more analytical. How can you move your focus from descriptive to analytical?

Consider the beginnings of the sentences from Text a) and Text b).

Text a)

Questionnaires and face-to-face interviews

Questionnaires

They

However, questionnaires

Face to face interviews, by contrast

Interviews

Also, during interviews, the researcher

Text b)

Two of the most common methods of data collection in social science research

Whereas the sample size in face-to-face interviews

Costs, both in labour and money,

However, in terms of quality of information, interviews

This

⌘ **Exercise 6:**

- What sort of information is the focus of the sentences in Text a)?
- Generally, what is different about the focus information in Text b)?

Check your answers in the Key, page 16.

For your reader, the **focus** of your writing at a sentence level is the information at the beginning of the sentence, i.e. in front of the main verb of the sentence. Generally speaking, academic writing values **abstraction** - ideas, categories, concepts and relationships - rather than people or simple facts: e.g. *sample size, quality of information* rather than *questionnaires, interviews*.

4. Processes Involved in Analysing Information and Ideas

In planning an assignment involving analytical writing, there are a number of processes that should be going on simultaneously. The processes should start from the moment of reading the assignment task and continue through all the reading and researching you do. Processes involve

- (a) seeking to understand **the relationships** amongst the individual pieces of information and ideas.
- (b) trying **to organise** these pieces into some groups according to the relationships amongst them, and to give each group **an abstract heading**.
- (c) trying to establish some **overall picture** of how these groups relate to each other, of how they contribute to making a whole picture. Your view of the whole picture will be affected by many things: for instance, how far you have got with your reading, how much you have reflected on the topic, your level of expertise in the field. **At this stage, using taxonomies is a very useful strategy.**
- (d) being as **flexible** as possible to the thought of changing this picture and its parts as often as it is necessary. Most people cannot find perfect solutions to complex problems on their first effort.

⌘ Exercise 7:

On page 12 is some information about the risk factors associated with heart disease.

- Decide how you might be able to group the information together into two, three, or four main groups, in order to write a persuasive essay (i.e. one with a particular position or argument.)
- Draw up a taxonomy to show how you would picture it. Remember there is no one correct way of doing this.

Check the Key for some possible taxonomies, page 16.

Risk Factors of Heart Disease

CIGARETTE SMOKING

(a major risk factor)

The risk of heart attack is doubled in heavy cigarette smokers. The risk of sudden death from heart attack is 5 times higher than for non-smokers. Fortunately, the risk for exsmokers decreases to almost the same level as for people who have never smoked.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION)

(a major risk factor)

People with high blood pressure have up to 4 times the risk of heart disease. Even moderately raised blood pressure leads to a higher risk. About 1 in 6 Australians has high blood pressure, often without knowing about it as there are no early warning symptoms

OBESITY

Obesity increases the risk of heart disease mainly by contributing to high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels and diabetes. People who are more than 20% overweight have 3 times the risk of those slightly underweight.

DIABETES

heart disease is more common in people with diabetes and often occurs at an earlier age. Most diabetes occurring later in life is triggered by obesity. Diabetics on high fat, low carbohydrate diets are at greater risk of heart disease than those on vegetarian-style carbohydrate diets.

HEREDITY, AGE AND SEX

A family background of heart disease or high blood pressure may increase the risk. The chance of heart disease increases with age. Before their change of life, women are less prone to heart attack. However, women taking 'the pill' especially those that also smoke, are at greater risk.

HIGH BLOOD CHOLESTEROL LEVELS

(a major risk factor)

While cholesterol in the body is essential to life, excess cholesterol and fats in the blood contribute to unhealthy arteries. Heart disease may result. Generally, the higher the level of cholesterol in the blood, the higher the risk of heart disease. Diet influences blood cholesterol levels.

SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE

Regular exercise strengthens the heart and improves the circulatory system. It also helps control other risk factors (e.g. raised blood fats, stress and blood pressure). Inactive males have a 2 to 3 times greater risk of heart attack than very active ones.

STRESS AND BEHAVIOR PATTERNS

Many heart attack victims are always rushed, over ambitious and easily agitated. This 'full speed ahead' or Type A behaviour may be an important factor in heart disease. Prolonged anxiety and depression which occur in distressed people may also increase the risk of heart disease, as well as other ailments

OTHER RISK FACTORS

There are probably some other risk factors that play a role in CHD. However, those so far identified are reliable indicators of CHD, and can predict who is likely and who is unlikely to develop CHD.

MULTIPLE RISK FACTORS

Combined risk factors do not simply add - they multiply the risk. A person with 3 major risk factors is about 10 times more likely to suffer heart disease than his 'normal' counterpart.

How can the information in this booklet help you?

We assume that you have a writing assignment in progress. Here is a checklist of questions to help you apply what you have learned today to

- Do you have any information about writing in the discipline area of the essay? What sort of writing is highly valued? (If you have no feedback on your own writing, think about the reading you have done in the subject.) Would you describe it as formal? abstract? analytical? if it is analytical, which sections of the writing are analytical?
- Look at the essay instructions. Are you required to write descriptively and/or analytically in order to respond adequately?
- Look at any writing you have already done for this assignment. Is it analytical enough?
- Can you make a taxonomy from the information you are using for your assignment?
- If you draw up a taxonomy, does this mean that the organisation of the assignment will have to be changed?
- Look at the beginnings of your sentences. Are you happy with the focus information? Are you focussing on more abstract ideas/qualities, or concrete objects/facts?
- Does the final structure of the response reflect the focus of the question?

Key to Exercises:

⌘ Exercises 1 and 2: Checklist for evaluation

Choose the best answer for each of these items:

	ESSAY A	ESSAY B
(1) This type of essay is		
(a) A DESCRIPTIVE TYPE	[✓]	[]
(b) AN ANALYTICAL TYPE	[]	[✓]
(2) This essay is about		
(a) THE LORD OF THE FLIES	[✓]	[]
(b) POWER	[]	[✓]
(3) The essay's main point to be argued		
(a) IS CLEAR	[]	[✓]
(b) IS NOT CLEAR	[✓]	[]
(4) The structure of the essay		
(a) IS CLEAR	[]	[✓]
(b) IS NOT CLEAR	[✓]	[]
(5) The writer substantiates the points with evidence from		
(a) PRIMARY SOURCES (the original)	[✓]	[]
(b) SECONDARY SOURCES (writings about the original)	[]	[✓]
(6) The essay answers the question		
(a) WHAT IS POWER IN LORD OF THE FLIES?	[]	[✓]
(b) DESCRIBE THE CHARACTERS OF JACK AND RALPH IN LORD OF THE FLIES.	[✓]	[]

⌘ Exercise 3:

- Essay A follows the narrative structure of the novel
- Essay B is structured around the writer's ideas.
- Essay B is more appropriate for a university course, because it is more abstract and analytical

⌘ **Exercise 4:**

1. Text a)
2. Text b)

⌘ **Exercise 5:**

Text a)

Questionnaires and face-to-face interviews are methods of data collection in the social sciences

Questionnaires can be used to sample a large number of people over a wide geographical area.

They can normally be conducted by just one person and the only major costs involved are stationery and postage.

However, questionnaires do not allow the researcher to ask for extra information.

Face to face interviews, by contrast, are relatively small scale.

They are labour intensive and time-consuming and consequently costly.

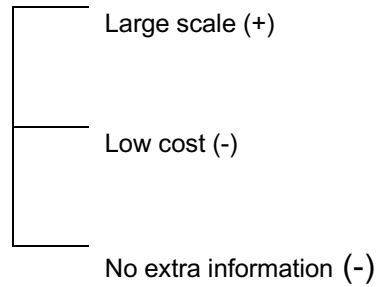
But interviews have the advantage of allowing the researcher to clarify questions if necessary.

Also, during interviews the researcher can ask additional questions.

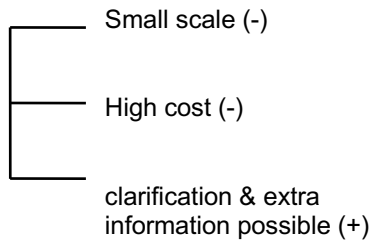
Structure of text

GENERAL DEFINITION

QUESTIONNAIRE --



INTERVIEWS --



Text b)

Two of the most common methods of data collection in social science research are the questionnaires sent by mail and the face-to-face interview.

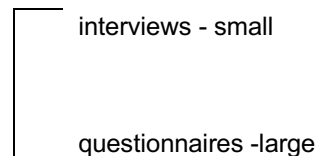
Whereas the sample size in face-to-face interviews is normally small, the questionnaire can be sent out to large numbers of people over a wide geographical area.

Costs, both in labour and money, are high with face-to-face interviews, while questionnaires can be distributed quickly by just one person at a relatively low cost.

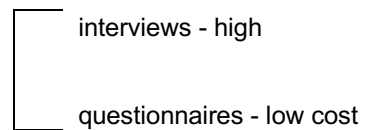
Structure of text

GENERAL DEFINITION

SAMPLE SIZE --

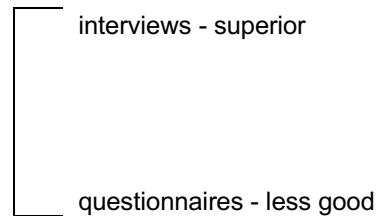


COSTS --



However, in terms of quality of information, interviews are often superior to questionnaires as the researcher has the opportunity to ask additional questions and explain what questions mean if this becomes necessary. This is not possible with questionnaires

QUALITY OF INFORMATION --

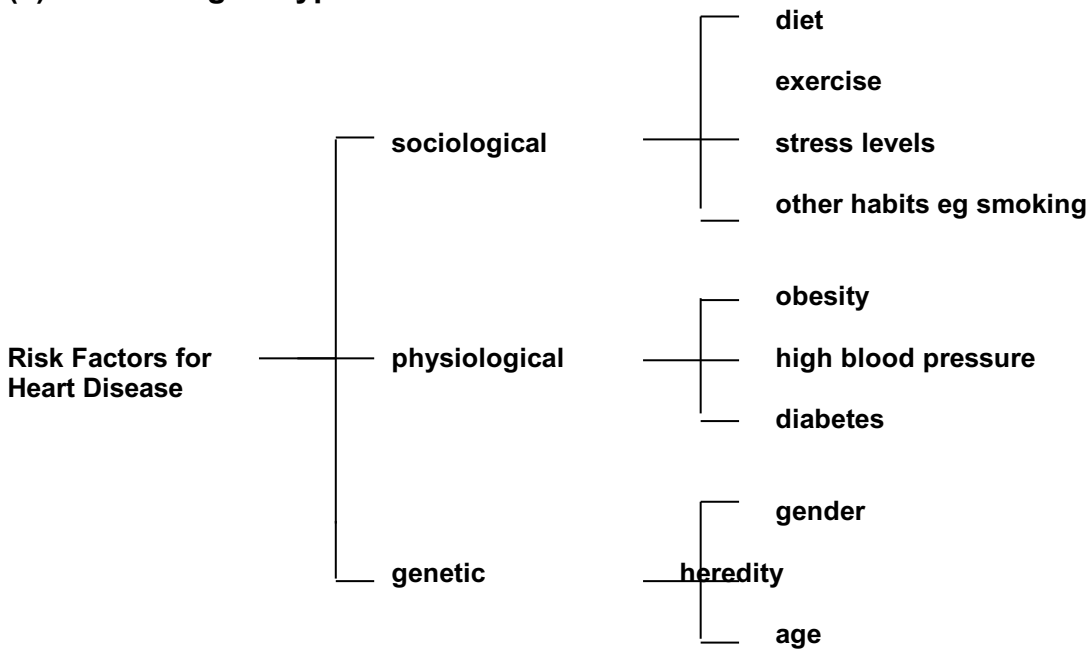


⌘ Exercise 6:

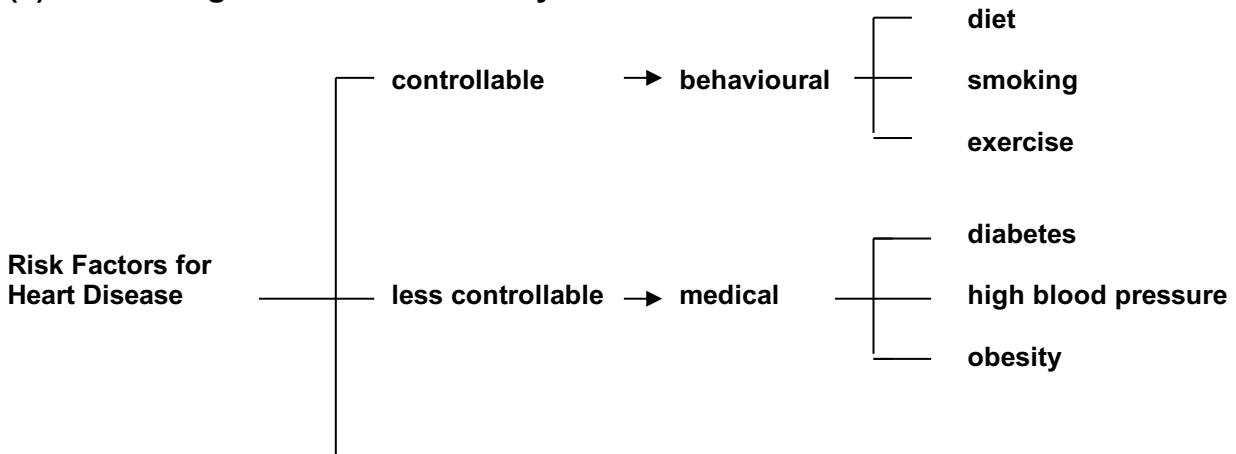
- Focus information in Text a) is factual - questionnaires and interviews repeated; some linking relationship signals: however, also; personal (the researcher)
- Focus information in Text b) is more abstract - methods of data collection, sample size, costs, quality of information; some linking relationship signals: whereas, however; Also, there is **more** information in the beginnings of the sentences for Text b).

⌘ Exercise 7: Two possible taxonomies of this information:

(1) Focussing on type of risk factor:



(2) Focussing on the controllability of the risk factors:





A third possibility might be based on the idea of major/minor risk factors