

Essay Writing

Unit 1A – How to be Analytical: What is Analysis?

INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning Centre



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

This unit's place in the whole module:

**Unit 1A How to be analytical:
What is analysis?**

Unit 1B How to be analytical:
Setting up a taxonomy

Unit 2A How to structure an essay:
Developing an essay structure

Unit 2B How to structure an essay:
Writing introductions and conclusions

Unit 3A How to use evidence:
Developing an argument out of the evidence

Unit 3B How to use evidence:
Supporting your argument with the evidence

Unit 3C How to use evidence:
Avoiding plagiarism

Unit 4A How to develop an argument:
Being persuasive

Unit 4B How to develop an argument:
Being critical

INTRODUCTION TO THE ESSAY MODULE

There are many different types of written assignments that you might have to write during your academic career, including case studies, literary criticisms, seminar and tutorial papers, literature reviews and so on. Each one of these might be referred to as "an essay" and yet each one is obviously different. Some of them have a clearly defined and well-known structure which you can see at a glance, such as case studies. However, many essay writing tasks do not provide you with such a clearly defined structure, and so a very large part of your task is to create your own structure. This module is about those types of essay-writing tasks for which you have to work out the structure yourself.

When teaching staff in the University are marking their students' writing, their most common criticisms often focus on four main requirements:

- students need to be analytical
- students need to structure their essays logically
- students need to use evidence effectively
- students need to be critical and persuasive

In this module we will look at these four requirements and investigate what they mean and how to develop these skills in your own writing. The module is structured into units which are progressively sequenced. That is, you should begin at the beginning and work through the units in sequence, rather than selecting units in isolation.

Unit 1A	How to be analytical: What is analysis?
Unit 1B	How to be analytical: Setting up a taxonomy
Unit 2A	How to structure an essay: Developing an essay structure
Unit 2B	How to structure an essay: Making the structure transparent
Unit 2C	How to structure an essay: Writing introductions and conclusions
Unit 3A	How to use evidence: Developing an argument out of the evidence
Unit 3B	How to use evidence: Supporting your argument with the evidence
Unit 3C	How to use evidence: Avoiding plagiarism
Unit 4A	How to develop an argument: Being persuasive
Unit 4B	How to develop an argument: Being critical

UNIT 1A HOW TO BE ANALYTICAL: WHAT IS ANALYSIS?

OBJECTIVES OF THIS UNIT

After you have completed this unit, we hope you will be able to:

- recognise and understand the difference between analysis and description
- analyse some basic information and ideas

IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS WITH BEING ANALYTICAL

If you have been having difficulty in being analytical enough in your essays and assignments, your marker may have made a comment on your writing similar to these:

- *"You need less description and more analysis."*
- *"You've given lots of information but you haven't really analysed the material."*
- *"I want to see your own way of dealing with this topic."*

INTRODUCTION TO THIS UNIT

In general, academic study requires an analytical approach in investigating and learning about the world. This means that, in order to understand what something is or how it functions, we need to know about the parts that make it up, and how these parts are related to each other.

The process of writing a university essay is usually quite complex. The topic itself may be a very complex one; the instructions for the essay might also be complex. In this unit, we will be looking at one real essay question which is complex. But we will also look at an example which is easy to understand, just for the purpose of working out what happens when you are analytical.

1. ANALYSIS VERSUS DESCRIPTION

University essays are rarely just descriptive. Although they may contain sections which are descriptive, overall their structure is usually more analytical than descriptive. What does an analytical structure look like, and how is it different from a descriptive structure?

Exercise 1

This exercise is aimed to help you to identify the difference between a descriptive and an analytical essay. Here is the beginning of an essay written in a first-year course on politics. The essay question was: *"What is power in 'Lord of the Flies'?"* After reading it, answer the questions at the bottom.

(This essay topic and the two student essays over the page were kindly provided by Professor Michael Jackson, Department of Government, University of Sydney.)

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. Ralph is a weak leader. When his plans are challenged, when his leadership is challenged he appeals to the conch.

Piggy made himself a victim from the start when he told everyone what his nickname was. He also clung to the conch as though it were a lump of power. More by accident than anything else, he succeeds in establishing a relationship with Ralph.

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 capitalized 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...

Questions about Essay A

1. What is the essay about?
 - a) the characters in Lord of the Flies
 - b) power
2. What is the overall purpose and structure of the essay?
 - a) a description of the characters and what happens through the book
 - b) an analysis of the elements of power
3. Does the essay answer the question?

Exercise 2

Now read Essay B and answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

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, I 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

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Piggy</i>	<i>Ralph</i>
<i>Skills</i>	-	0
<i>Willingness</i>	0	+
<i>Resources</i>	+	++

Explanation of symbols:

+	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...

Questions about Essay B

1. What is the essay about?
 - a) the characters in Lord of the Flies
 - b) power
2. What is the overall purpose and structure of the essay?
 - a) a description of the characters and what happens through the book
 - b) an analysis of the elements of power
3. Does the essay answer the question?

😊 **Key**

Now check your responses with the notes in the Key before you go on to the next section.

2. MOVING FROM DESCRIPTION TO ANALYSIS

In this section, we will look at the process involved in moving from describing to analysing the material for your essay. To help focus on the process, we will first use a very simple example. The topic of the example is not very complex or abstract, so that you can really focus on the process of thinking.

Exercise 3 Part a.

Read the following short text about cars and buses. This text is a descriptive piece of writing. To help clarify what we mean by "descriptive", draw a diagram in the space below the text to show how the text is structured. The first paragraph has been done for you to get you started.

Text A

A car is a machine for transporting people. Cars usually can carry a maximum of 5 or 6 people. They use petroleum or diesel fuel although there are also some electric cars. Many people are killed or injured each year in car accidents. In Australia, most people drive cars and the roads of many urban centres are choked with this form of private transport.

A bus is a form of public transport. Buses generally operate on urban, suburban, or inter-urban routes. As well as buses operated by the government, there are some private bus companies, particularly for long distance travel. Many people can be transported in one bus, and so just one serious accident can claim many lives.

Structure of Text A

- | | |
|---|---|
| | - carry maximum 5-6 people |
| | - use petrol, diesel or electricity |
| CAR (a machine for transporting people) _____ | - kill or injure many people in accidents |
| | - most Australians drive cars |
| | - urban centres choked with private cars |
| | - |
| BUS (form of public transport) _____ | - |
| | - |

Exercise 3 Part b.

Now read this second short text, also about cars and buses. This piece of writing is analytical in its structure. It is not organised into two distinct paragraphs about cars and buses. Instead, it is organised into some analytical categories. To help clarify what we mean by "analytical", draw a diagram in the space below to show how this text is structured.

Text B

Two of the most common vehicles for transporting people are cars and buses. Whereas the capacity of the car is usually limited to about 5 or 6 people, the greater passenger capacity of the bus brings savings on fuel and other costs as well as reducing the amounts of traffic on the road. The ownership of buses is usually governmental or business which ensures that bus travel is generally safer than travel by privately owned cars, although just one serious accident can claim many lives. However, public ownership also means that buses are often not as convenient as private cars in terms of their accessibility to all areas.

☺ KEY

Now turn to key to see how the two texts are structured and how they are different, before you go on to the next section.

Exercise 3 Part c.

Imagine that you were the writer of Text A. You were supposed to write a short answer comparing cars and buses as forms of transport. You wrote this descriptive piece after you had done some basic research into the two topics of cars and buses. Now it is time to write your analysis. What process would you need to go through in order to write your answer analytically like Text B.? Make a list here of the way that you would have to reprocess your basic information in order to structure your answer like Text B. When you have finished, then go on to the next page.

3. THE PROCESS OF BEING ANALYTICAL

In the process of planning to write an analytical essay, starting from reading the essay question and continuing through all the reading and researching you do, there are a number of processes that should be going on simultaneously:

- a) You should be seeking to understand the characteristics of the individual parts of the topic you are exploring.
For example, the characteristics of cars and the characteristics of buses.
- b) You should be seeking to understand the relationships amongst the individual pieces of information and ideas.
For example, that cars carry 5 or 6 people, and buses carry many people.
- c) You should be trying to organise these pieces into some groups according to the relationships amongst them, and to give each group an abstract heading.
For example, there is a relationship between the number of people able to be carried in cars and buses, and we can refer to this by the abstract heading "capacity".
- d) You should be trying to establish some overall picture of how these groups relate to each other, of how they contribute to making a whole picture.
For example, capacity is just one kind of comparison between cars and buses. There are other ways in which we can compare them, such as ownership and accessibility.
- (e) And you should be as flexible as possible to the thought of changing this picture and its parts as often as it is necessary.
For example, you might compare cars and buses instead in terms of their economy (what type of fuel they use, how fuel-efficient they are), or even their contribution to pollution or social isolation.

Exercise 4

Now we'll go back to the two Lord of the Flies essays to see how we could move from the first descriptive essay (Essay A) to the second, more analytical essay (Essay B). Here is an assorted list of some of the characteristics described of the three boys and their actions in Essay A:

Ralph shares power with Jack by letting him command the choir
Ralph is a weak leader
Piggy made himself a victim from the start by telling his nickname
Piggy clung to the conch as though it were a lump of power
Piggy establishes a relationship with Ralph by accident
Jack becomes stronger
Jack was ready to enforce his rule with power
Ralph was not ready to enforce his rule with power
Ralph succeeded in getting the boys to follow him
Ralph's system and his intentions made the boys co-operate
Jack exploited the weakness of human nature by leading the boys into ...

If you had to answer this essay question, you might begin with a list something like this. However, for an academic essay at university, you cannot simply present each idea in a random order like this. Instead, you have to be more systematic: that is, you have to establish some kind of system for organising these ideas.

In order to be more systematic, you could try to follow the steps in "the process of being analytical":

- a) You should be seeking to understand the characteristics of the individual parts of the topic you are exploring.

We have already started to describe these characteristics by listing them.

- b) You should be seeking to understand the relationships amongst the individual pieces of information and ideas.

There are some ideas which are closely related in our list. For example, even though Ralph was a weak leader, he succeeded in getting the boys to follow him. But even seeing this possible relationship between the individual ideas is not enough. We need to ask more questions in order to probe the ideas more. For example, why did the boys follow him? Perhaps it was because the system that Ralph established was more acceptable to them, and perhaps they liked Ralph's manner.

- c) You should be trying to organise these pieces into some groups according to the relationships amongst them, and to give each group an abstract heading.

The essay question is about power, so your abstract groups should relate to power in some way. How can you explain Ralph's success in getting the boys to follow him. Perhaps he had some skills which they recognised, even though he didn't know what his own skills were. To help understand how Ralph was successful, you could look for a contrast in Jack. Jack was very different from Ralph because he was skilled in working out how to get the boys to follow him. He had the skill of knowing how to exploit the weakness of human nature. Piggy, in contrast, had no skills in exercising influence. He told them all his terrible nickname from the start and so they couldn't look up to him.

If you find that the idea of skills is a useful way of analysing the characteristics of the boys, then you should try to analyse every characteristic in terms of whether it is an example of a skill (either present or absent).

- d) You should be trying to establish some overall picture of how these groups relate to each other, of how they contribute to making a whole picture.

If you see that one idea is worth focussing on, such as skills as one part of the discussion of power, then you need to work out what the other parts are. For example, even though Ralph did not consciously use his skills in exercising power, he was very willing and had a lot of resources to make the others want to follow him. So you might arrive at an analysis of power into three elements: skills, willingness, and resources. And then you would inspect every characteristic in terms of which abstract category it fits into.

When you are going through this process of trying to build up a picture of the main parts of the topic, you might not have any idea about the topic, and so it is very difficult to imagine the parts of it. Indeed, many essay questions you will be set are likely to be on topics that you are not familiar with, and you cannot be expected to analyse the topic without doing some reading.

For this essay on Lord of the Flies, it would not be enough just to read the original book (the "primary" source). After all, the course in which this essay question was set was not a literature course. Instead, you are expected to read in the subject area itself - in this case, in political science - in order to find out how experts in this subject might think on such a topic. Because you are a student of the subject, you have to find out how the experts go about "doing" the subject. So you would be expected to read some "secondary" sources: textbooks and articles written by political scientists on the topic of power. As you read, you will discover what kinds of systematic ways political scientists usually use to analyse power. And all the time, you should be trying to work out how these systematic analyses of power are useful in explaining power in Lord of the Flies.

- (e) And you should be as flexible as possible to the thought of changing this picture and its parts as often as it is necessary.

As you read more and more on the topic, you should be trying to decide which system you will use to explain power in Lord of the Flies. Perhaps you will try using several systems before you discover the one which is best.

It is important to remember that for most essay questions, the answers will not be easy. Essay questions typically ask you to do either of these two things:

- i) *to find the relationships between things: and, in the case of the Lord of the Flies essay, to find the way that theories about power can help explain reality. Usually, the parts of the essay question which you have to relate to each other will not have been related together before, and so you are unlikely to find a book or article in which exactly this same question has been analysed and discussed before.*
- ii) *to explain the differences between two or more experts' views of how things relate to each other. In this type of essay question, the point is to understand controversy: how different pictures of the world are built up and how they can be used to explain the world. Once again, you might not be able to find any readings in which the same two (or more) are related to each other.*

Your lecturers are unlikely to set you an essay question that does not force you to think for yourself. This "thinking for yourself" about the relationships amongst parts is what we mean by your analysis of the topic. Your analysis is your own view of how things connect with each other.

Exercise 5

Think about an essay you have worked on recently, or that you are currently planning. What are the various parts of the topic of this essay question? For each part, do you have a list of

the characteristics that help to define it? How do these characteristics relate to each other across different parts of the topic? What are the abstract categories that emerge from trying to find these relationships?

For your next appointment

Bring some kind of diagram showing what are the parts of the essay topic that you have chosen to try out this exercise. Be prepared to explain the characteristics of the parts, how they relate to each other, and what abstract categories you identify.

ANSWER KEY

ESSAY MODULE

Unit 1A

How to be analytical: What is analysis?

Exercise 1

1. Essay A is about the characters in *The Lord of the Flies*, and in particular about Ralph and Jack. If you thought instead that it is about power, you are not really wrong. It certainly does talk a little about power. But it is *primarily* about the characters. You can see this in the way that so many of the sentences begin by talking about the characters, rather than by talking about power. These sentence beginnings are very important to show us what the writing is about, and what message the writer wants us to get. What we find out is exactly what the characters in the book did - for example "Ralph wins the election".
2. The purpose of Essay A is to describe the characters in the book and what happens to them in the story. The structure of the essay is similar to the structure of the book. Notice the way that the references are all from the book, and are given in the same sequence as they appear in the book. This structure shows that the writer only wants to tell us the story of the book, by telling us what happens to the characters.
3. The essay does not answer the question. It is a descriptive essay which tells us the story of the book, but does not analyse the significance of this story in terms of power.

Exercise 2

1. Essay B is about power in *The Lord of the Flies*. The table "elements of power" focusses us on the way the writer is analysing power.
2. The essay is structured according to the analysis of power presented in the table. After discussing the first element of power (skills), the rest of the essay goes on to discuss the other two elements (willingness, and resources).
3. This essay does answer the question. It analyses power in *The Lord of the Flies* in a way that we would expect in a university course in government or politics. Rather than telling us the story of the book, it restructures the world of the book for the purpose of explaining something else more abstract - the nature of power. To support this analysis, the essay also uses references to political writings rather than simply to *The Lord of the Flies* itself.

Exercise 3a

Diagram of Text A's structure:

- carry maximum 5-6 people

- CAR (a machine for transporting people) _____
- use petrol, diesel or electricity
 - kill or injure many people in accidents
 - most Australians drive cars
 - urban centres choked with private cars
 - operate on urban, suburban, inter-urban routes
- BUS (form of public transport) _____
- operated by governments and companies
 - carry many people so many lives at risk

Text A is organised into two distinct sections - cars and buses. Each section makes a list of their characteristics, with no relationships shown between cars and buses. This text is a descriptive piece of writing because the basic information has not been restructured in any way.

Exercise 3b

Diagram of Text B's structure:

- capacity
 - maximum 6 people by car
 - many by bus = fuel savings and less traffic
- CARS AND BUSES _____ - ownership
- buses usually government = better safety
 - more lives at risk in accidents
- accessibility
 - cars are convenient for reaching all areas

Text B is organised into three sections - capacity, ownership, and accessibility. Each section shows us how cars and buses are similar and different. The information is the same as the information that we had for Text A. However, we have restructured this information to show our analysis of it.