

## Detailed Description of the Writing Elements Used as Evaluation Criteria

### Evaluation Area 1:

#### Critical Thinking Demonstrated by Effectively Using Your Own Ideas

##### 1. Develop a clear central idea, hypothesis, or thesis throughout the whole essay.

After clearly summarizing, defining, analyzing, and evaluating the issues argued in the reading set, your work culminates in the formation of a reasoned central idea, hypothesis, or thesis. In other words, you must enter into the discussion of the problem in the reading set. First, take a position, which is summarized in your thesis, hypothesis, or central idea; and second, defend it through analysis of the readings, organization of evidence, and a clear sequence of reasoning.

*State the Thesis of your essay:*

The traditional advice, which you have probably heard before, is to state your thesis, hypothesis or central idea in the first paragraph of your essay. By doing so, you give your readers a signpost that states your answer clearly; then, you can concentrate on explaining or proving your point, from paragraph to paragraph. However, especially in timed-essays, writers often only announce their essay's focus or identify the problem to be discussed in the introduction, and then they write their way to a thesis, which usually becomes clear and explicit in the conclusion. If you are writing a portfolio essay, you may want to make a global revision if you recognize that your thesis has emerged at the end of your essay, and revise your introductory paragraph so that it includes and frames your thesis.

Whatever introductory format you adopt, the rest of the essay should follow logically from your introduction and clearly articulate and define your position.

##### 2. Integrate “source” materials into your argument.

Select quotations that are relevant to your argument. Use the readings to provide evidence and support for your central idea, hypothesis, or thesis. Quotations are evidence from the readings that support and substantiate your thesis. Use only as much of an author's idea as you need to support your specific point, and if you can phrase the author's idea more economically by summarizing or paraphrasing than by quoting, do so. Use quotations to provide a key definition or to support an aspect of your argument. Analyze all quotations to show how they support your ideas; remember, if you do not analyze the quote, then it may be interpreted by the reader in a way that is different from your intent.

If you have an excessively long quotation and you thoroughly analyze it, then you may be sidetracked into a digression. Every quote should focus the reader's attention on the evidence that supports your thinking. *Remember, you must analyze, frame and interpret the evidence to persuade your reader of the reasonableness of your central idea, hypothesis, or thesis.*

Also, remember you must attribute ideas to the appropriate sources; if you are reading with (in agreement) or against (in disagreement) an author, make sure you credit his or her idea, and *why you agree or why you disagree* with his or her point of view. While summary condenses, paraphrase accurately translates an author's ideas into your own words. Although paraphrase is helpful, remember to cite a paraphrase just as if it

were a quotation because it is the author's idea even though you express it in your own words.

If you are summarizing or paraphrasing, you may use a signal phrase such as "according to Lewis Thomas," or "in Thomas's view," to name the author, and add the page number in parenthesis. For example, "In Thomas's view, doctors would be more effective if ..." (4). Or, you may include the author's name in the citation: "doctors would be more effective if ..." (Thomas 4).

*Rules of thumb:*

1) For every quotation you should have a minimum of two or three sentences that set up the context for the quote. The quote should not be more than three or four sentences. And, you should have a minimum of two to three sentences that analyze the quote.

2) Normally, you do not cite your personal experience as proof or evidence unless the question calls for you to do so. However, that does not mean you cannot respond to the question with interest. Writers often respond to authors that they are reading as if they are having a conversation with them. In order for a conversation to develop, you must articulate your response in terms of your self-interest; if you are not interested, what usually happens to a conversation? However, self-interest does not mean that you simply assert your supported "opinion"; rather, it means that you care enough to support your position by developing reasons, weighing evidence, and carefully considering and evaluating what others are saying.

### **3. Organize your argument in a clear and appropriate sequence to support your thesis, hypothesis or central idea.**

**Organization techniques:**

*Application:* Apply one definition, key term, or concept from one text to another as a critical tool to analyze and evaluate a problem, issue or concept. Application is a critical tool that works in two ways: it moves you to read the articles closely because you are following a particular detail with deep focus. For example, if one of the articles defines "traditional values": and then makes a claim about the importance of "traditional values" in society, you can use this as a starting point to read the other articles in the set with this concept as a measure. What do the other articles assume about "traditional values"? Do they address it explicitly or implicitly? Do they agree with each others' definition? Second, if you apply the concept of "traditional values" to the other readings, will it become an organizational tool that can structure your own analysis and position?

*Identify key assumptions in order to distinguish* one author's point of view from another's. What does one author assume about the issue that other authors find to be problematic? To continue our example, does one author assume that "tradition" is a positive force, while the others assume that it is a negative force? If so, what reasons ground their assumptions or values?

*Establish a sequence or identify important categories* that arise in the reading set. If you apply a concept, establish a sequence, or identify key categories or assumptions this will help you to organize your observations, make evaluations, and analyze the evidence that is presented in the reading set. In other words, your role as a writer is to identify a connection like these that run through the reading set. Then, use that

connection to organize your position by developing a thesis, hypothesis, or central idea about the connection throughout your essay.

## **Evaluation Area 2:**

### **Critical Reading Demonstrated by Effectively Using Multiple Sources**

#### **4. Identification, Summary, and Definition of the key terms or categories of classification that have been developed in the reading set.**

*Summary:* summary condenses complex ideas in order to make them more manageable both for you and your audience. The reading sets often present a variety of ideas about a complex topic; this requires that you actively select a narrow focus for your analysis. What you make of the issues that you summarize demonstrates your ability to evaluate key ideas; and, it is the first step in collecting evidence to support your thesis, hypothesis or central idea. Only summarize the ideas and information that are relevant to your thesis. As you work through the reading set, you should note when and why an author is summarizing; does one author's summary of the issue under consideration agree with another author's summary? Summary is not a passive reporting of facts; rather, it is used in so much academic writing because it is the active selection of the most important aspects of the issue under consideration.

*Note: The danger of unanalyzed summaries*

Often, writers have been taught to imagine that you are writing for an audience that has no knowledge of what they are reading; however, this is not often the case in academic writing. Generally, the purpose of critical academic writing is to persuade an informed audience of the reasonableness of your position rather than to give information to an uninformed audience. Do not assume that your audience knows nothing about the topic of the reading set. The faculty readers have read the material; although they may not be "experts" on the topic, they are knowledgeable readers who are reading your essay with a purpose: to evaluate whether or not you are reading, writing, and thinking critically at an intermediate level. It is best to avoid long and unanalyzed summaries of the readings ("book reports"). Do not simply summarize the contents of each reading in the set and think that you have analyzed the issues or developed a critical position.

*Definition:* Another commonly used skill in academic writing is the definition of key terms. For example, if you are asked to discuss the "practical" solutions to a particular problem that is analyzed in a set of readings, you should analyze how "practical" is used by each author to determine and identify their different interpretations of the concept. Your position on the debate will vary depending on how you interpret the phrase. If a term in the question is ambiguous, or if you want to refine the definition in ways that are different from the authors, you must establish a clear definition of the term as you mean it in your argument. Similarly, if the authors in the reading set all use the same terms but they use the terms in different ways, you will need to make these distinctions clear.

*Note:* Inserting a dictionary definition probably will not help because it will not necessarily explain the concept as you are using it or as the authors are using it in the readings. If necessary, consult the dictionary for a basic definition, and then form a definition that is specific to the context of the readings.

### **5. Analysis and Evaluation of the key ideas and or arguments in the multiple sources.**

If you can effectively summarize, identify key terms, and define it will increase your ability to analyze and evaluate the arguments in the readings. After you have analyzed and evaluated the arguments in the readings, you can start to develop a thesis of your own. However, before you can make a reasonable claim of your own, you need to analyze and evaluate the claims that others have made.

*Analysis:* critical thinkers often move back and forth between two equally effective ways of considering an issue, entity, or problem: by looking at the whole object in its context; and by looking at how it works, or what it is made from, in other words, by looking at its parts. Moving between understanding something as a “whole” and understanding how when, where, and why its “parts” work is a typical critical thinking strategy.

*Note:* When a person analyzes a problem it is from a certain point of view or perspective. The reading sets often present contending or at least various perspectives on a problem. Analysis often starts from a reader identifying with or against a perspective. If you identify with a perspective of a particular author in the reading set, then you can use it to “frame” your analysis of the other readings. Remember, however, that resisting or embracing an idea in the readings should be done as a way of demonstrating your position, and advancing your perspective on the issue.

*Evaluation:* Another important habit of mind is to ask if the parts of an argument make sense? Are there faults in the how an author presents evidence, in the reasoning or in the values of an author? Can you distinguish between facts or factual claims and opinions? Are the counter-claims that one author makes in response to another reasonable? Is there a flaw in an author’s analysis of the evidence, or in the conclusions that are drawn by an author? Is an author asking the right questions, or observing the most relevant aspects of the problem?

### **6. Synthesize a key theme or idea that is developed in the multiple sources.**

*Synthesis:* When you are working with a reading set, you have a series of readings that are related by topic. One of your key tasks is to be able to pull together the various positions to demonstrate your ability to reading critically. A way to demonstrate that you can synthesize is to develop your own perspective that compares, classifies, and orders an idea, issue or concept that connects the readings in the set. In other words, synthesis identifies and investigates the connections between readings and sets the stage for you to be able to draw conclusions, make judgments, and establish your central idea, hypothesis, or thesis.

## **Evaluation Area 3: Elements of Writing Demonstrated by Effective Use of Paragraphs and Sentences**

### **7. Organize your paragraphs both globally and locally.**

**Global:** There should be an understandable structure to your essay. The structure should be visible to your audience; in other words, have signposts that point

the audience to next step. Each paragraph signals a new idea that supports or develops a point about your central idea.

*Transitions or Signposts:* In moving from paragraph to paragraph, you must help your readers follow the sequence of your argument by using transitional language that signals your organizational plan. As you shift from one author to another or from one element to another, words and phrases like “Similarly,” or “However,” or “To a degree,” or “Additionally,” provide useful signals about how you are relating one viewpoint to another-- whether you are suggesting a likeness or opposition, a qualified agreement, or an added emphasis. In general, the last sentence or two moves to connect the idea in the paragraph to the idea that will be developed in the next paragraph (transition or signpost sentences).

Transitions between paragraphs show signals a relation between paragraphs. There are many types of transitions: you can repeat ideas, key terms, or phrases occasionally to highlight links from one supporting paragraph to another; or you can enumerate a series of key ideas, i.e. “There basic problems with Smith’s solution to this problem.” And, then start each section (a group of paragraphs unified by each problem) with a signal phrase such as, “The first problem ....” Ect. By guiding the audience with transitions you can show readers that you have a clear chain of reasoning that you want them to understand.

*Local structures:* the main job of a paragraph is to focus, unify, and develop one idea. Every sentence should have a clear relation to the topic of the paragraph. If a new idea arises as you are writing a paragraph, split it in two, and develop each idea fully.

*A few words about paragraph length:* an average paragraph is six to twelve sentences. A reader needs paragraph divisions to separate the various elements of your argument into digestible chunks. Single sentence paragraphs do have a particular function: to emphasize a key transition in your argument. In general, lengthy paragraphs tend to lose focus and develop several ideas rather than one. Each of your paragraphs should develop one idea about your thesis and provide some supportive evidence (summarized or quoted evidence).

## **8. Sentence level effectiveness and clarity:**

Sentences establish a clear, precise relationship between the idea of the paragraph and the supporting details which demonstrate the logic or reasonableness of the idea. Arrange the words within each sentence grammatically. Abide by the rules of spelling and punctuation. Use appropriate diction. Avoid using clichés, which express “commonly” accepted understanding; again, you want to demonstrate you are able to critically understand a topic, that you can think independently, rather than in a “commonly” accepted manner.