

Analysis: What It Is and Isn't

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This handout will examine what analysis looks like on a page. Clearly, analysis has something to do with integrating quotations with your own writing. It also calls for integrating your argument with the text about which you are writing. Four basic problems tend to occur when beginning writers try to achieve such integration: oversimplified research-paper proof structure; directed paraphrase; letting the text speak for itself without making any attempt to analyze it; and tracing a metaphor, theme, or figure without making something of that tracing. The following pages take the same quotations and use them first in non-analytic ways and then in analytic ways. Try comparing sections of your own paper with the "Analysis is not" section. If you find any matches, turn to the corresponding example number in the "Analysis is" section. Write a note to yourself about your understanding of the difference between the relevant part of your paper and what you see in the "Analysis is" section.

Analysis is not:

1. The bad-research-paper proof structure in which you make a claim about what a piece of writing says and then illustrate that you are right with a quotation:

David Gross and Sophronia Scott claim that no one paid or pays any attention to what they call the twentysomething generation: "The twentysomething generation has been neglected because it exists in the shadow of the baby boomers . . . [Their] ordeal was loneliness" (1040-41).

2. Directed paraphrase whereby you place a quotation on the paper, and then use your own words to approximate what the quotation says:

In "Proceeding with Caution," David Gross and Sophronia Scott write that Absent parents forced a dependence on secondary relationships with teachers and friends. Flashy toys and new clothes were supposed to make up for this lack but instead sowed the seeds for a later abhorrence of the yuppie brand of materialism. "Quality time" didn't cut it for them either. In a survey to gauge the baby busters' mood and tastes, Chicago's Leo Burnett ad agency discovered that the group had a surprising amount of anger and resentment about their absentee parents. "The flashback was instantaneous and so hot you could feel it," recalls Josh McQueen, Burnett's research director; "They were telling us passionately that quality time was exactly what was not in their lives" (1041-42). In this passage, the authors contend that the twentysomethings abandoned their parents, rejected their offers to compensate with presents and "quality time," and eventually resented their parents entirely.

3. Letting the text speak for itself without any attempt to analyze it:

The writers say that the group has no heroes:

While 58% of those in the Time/CNN survey said that their group has no heroes, they failed to agree on any. Ronald Reagan was most often named, with only 8% of the vote, followed by Mikhail Gorbachev (7%), Jesse Jackson (6%) and George Bush (5%). (1046)

4. Tracing without making something of that tracing:

The writers compare the twentysomethings to animals throughout the article. In the original Time publication (7/16/90), they are described as "balking at work, marriage, and baby-boomer values" on the title page. The first paragraph in The Conscious Reader describes them as everything "normal" humans aren't: They have trouble making decisions. They would rather hike in the Himalayas than climb the corporate ladder. They have few heroes, no anthems, no style to call their own. They crave entertainment, but their attention span is as short as one zap of the TV dial . . . They possess only a hazy sense of their own identity. (1039)

Although these tactics look like analysis (each one features quotations and the writer's own words), they accomplish little more than summary. Summary has its place in an analytic paper, but it is not the central project or main issue. How do you know when you are not performing analysis? Here is a final checklist:

1. You are using block quotations (quotations of four or more lines of regular double-spaced type) and only concentrating on one line.
2. You start your analysis of a particular quotation with phrases like, "This passage is self-explanatory."
3. Your thesis is general -- "The text is symbolic."
4. You do not say something that is not already said in the text. An analysis must give the reader a new way to read the text. It must tell the reader that there is more going on than might have been thought. Good critics "tell stories about stories," so to speak.

Analysis is:

1. Paying attention to the language the text uses to say something:

There are at least three levels of neglect in "Proceeding with Caution." The first is the neglect of the twentysomething generation by parents, who structured their children's "ordeal" as "loneliness" (1041) by rarely being around. The second level is that of demographers and marketers who neglect the group "because it exists in the shadow of the baby boomers" (1040). The third is that of the writers themselves. They neglect the possibility that the group might have values in claiming that it has none.

2. Breaking the text into new parts and making something new out of it:

When the writers state that "absentee parents forced a dependence on secondary relationships with teachers and friends" (1041), they seem to be blaming the parents for what they see as problems. But are they problems? By using the word "dependence," the text seems to argue that these relationships are bad things rather than adjustments to a changing culture and socio-economic system. The relationships are further derogated by the use of the word "secondary" to define them. The writers structure the relationships as substitutes, and substitutes that should not be allowed to work. Moreover, in the sentence, "Flashy toys and new clothes were supposed to make up for this lack [of the parents' time and presence]" (1041), we catch the authors implying that time and presence are just as much things as the toys and new clothes they condemn. Therefore, the writers implicitly uphold thirtysomething values while allegedly attempting to explain the twentysomething generation's values. Even the name "twentysomething" tells us that this article is really about the thirtysomething generation's perception of people just below them in age.

3. Speaking for the text:

When the authors talk about the lack of heroes for the "twentysomething" generation, they are really talking about the lack of a hero, the lack of conformity the group demonstrates in its aspirations: "While 58% of those in the Time/CNN survey said their group has heroes, they failed to agree on any" (1046). What is important to the writers is not the group's having heroes, but its supposed failure to agree on any one particular hero. Again, we see value-laden language used to harm the group that the authors claim to be portraying in an objective manner.

4. Tracing and telling:

The article continually defines the "twentysomething" generation as everything "people" are not. The generation is described as "balking" (Time 56) like donkeys and "possess[ing] only a hazy sense of their own identity" (CR 1039). This last point is important because it fosters the perception that the people who make up the generation have no consciousness, no self, no right to make decisions or figure into the decisions of others. Like slaves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they count as five-eighths of a human being. The last point is also important because it reveals the bias of the text: a group made up of many individuals ("they") is supposed somehow to find one identity.