

WRITING ANALYTICALLY

SEVENTH EDITION

DAVID ROSENWASSER
Muhlenberg College

JILL STEPHEN
Muhlenberg College

The Five Analytical Moves

The act of analyzing can be broken down into five essential moves:

- Move 1: Suspend Judgment.
- Move 2: Define significant parts and how they are related.
- Move 3: Make the implicit explicit. Push observations to implications by ASKING "SO WHAT?" (THE METHOD).
- Move 4: Look for patterns of repetition and contrast and for anomalies.
- Move 5: Keep reformulating questions and explanations.

Move 1: Suspend Judgment

A lot of what passes for thinking is merely reacting: right/wrong, good/bad, loved it/hated it, couldn't relate to it, boring. As we noted in our discussion of Counterproductive Habits of Mind, responses like these are habits, reflexes of the mind. And they are surprisingly tough habits to break. Experiment

eavesdrop on people walking out of a movie. Most of them will immediately voice their approval or disapproval, usually in either/or terms: "I think it was a good movie and you are wrong to think it was bad." And so on.

A first move in conducting analysis—in fact, a precondition—is to delay judgment, especially of the agree-disagree, like-dislike kind. In the opening pages of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway cites as the one piece of wisdom he learned from his father the following statement: "Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope." In analysis the goal is always to understand before you judge.

Move 2: Define Significant Parts and How They Are Related

In order to define significant parts and figure out how they are related, writers need to train themselves to attend closely to details. Becoming observant is not natural; it's learned. Toward that end, this book offers a series of observation and interpretation strategies to equip you to see more and to make more of what you see.

The first of these is a strategy we call **Notice & Focus**, which will help you to stay open longer to what you can notice in your subject matter. Do this by starting not with "What do I think?" or, worse, with "What do I like/dislike?" but with "What do I notice?" This small shift in words will engineer the major conceptual shift this chapter asks you to make: to locate more of your time and attention in the observation stage, which necessarily precedes formulating a thesis.

Notice & Focus (Ranking)

Notice & Focus: SLOW DOWN

Not "What do you think?" &

Not "What do you like or dislike?"

But

"What do you notice?"

A few prompts:

What do you find most INTERESTING?

What do you find most STRANGE?

What do you find most REVEALING?

This exercise is governed by repeated return to the question, "What do you notice?". Most people's tendency is to generalize and thus rapidly move away from whatever it is they are looking at. The question "What do you notice?" redirects attention to the subject matter, itself, and delays the pressure to come up with answers (see Figure 1.3).

Move 2: Define Significant Parts and How They Are Related

17



1 Repeatedly answer the question, "What do you notice?," being sure to cite actual details of the thing being observed rather than moving to more general observations about it. (This is more difficult than it sounds.) This phase of the exercise should produce an extended and unordered list of details—features of the thing being observed—that call attention to themselves for one reason or another.

2 Rank (create an order of importance) for the various features you have noticed. Answer the question "What three details (specific features of the subject matter) are most interesting (or significant or revealing or strange)?" The purpose of relying on "interesting" or one of the other suggested words is that these will help to deactivate the like/dislike switch, which is so much a reflex in all of us, and replace it with a more analytical perspective.

3 Say why the three things you selected struck you as the most interesting. Remember to start by noticing as much as you can about what you are looking at. Dwell with the data. Record what you see. Don't move to generalization or judgment. What this procedure will begin to demonstrate is how useful description is as a tool for arriving at ideas. Stay at the description stage longer (in that attitude of uncertainty we've recommended) and have better ideas. Training yourself to notice is fun. It will improve your memory as well as your ability to think.

FIGURE 1.3

Notice & Focus + Ranking

Remember to start by noticing as much as you can about what you are looking at. Dwell with the data. Record what you see. It will improve your memory as well as your ability to think.

"Interesting," "Revealing," "Strange"

These three words are triggers for analysis. Often we are interested by things that have captured our attention without our clearly knowing why. To say that something is interesting is not the end but the beginning of analysis. If you press yourself to explain why something is interesting, revealing, or strange you will be prompted to make an analytical move.

Revealing (or *significant*) requires you to make choices that can lead to interpretive leaps. If something strikes you as revealing or significant, even if you're not yet sure why, you will eventually begin producing some explanation. The word *strange* gives us permission to notice oddities and things that initially seem not to fit. *Strange*, in this context, is not a judgmental term, but one denoting features of a subject that aren't readily explainable. Where you locate something strange, you have isolated something to figure out—what makes it strange and why.

MOVING FORWARD

Observation → So what? → Implications
Implications → So what? → Conclusions

This process of converting suggestions into direct statements is essential to analysis, but it is also the feature of analyzing that, among beginning writers, is least well understood. The fear is that, like the emperor's new clothes, implications aren't really "there," but are instead the phantasms of an overactive imagination. "Reading between the lines" is the common and telling phrase that expresses this anxiety. Throughout this book we will have more to say about the charge that analysis makes something out of nothing—the spaces between the lines rather than what is there in black and white. But for now, let's look at a hypothetical example of this process of drawing out implications, to suggest not only how it's done, but how often we do it in our everyday lives.

Imagine that you are driving down the highway and find yourself analyzing a billboard advertisement for a particular brand of beer. Such an analysis might begin with your noticing what the billboard photo contains, its various "parts"—six young, athletic-looking and scantily clad men and women drinking beer while pushing kayaks into a fast-running river. If you were to stop at this point, you would have produced not an analysis but a summary—a description of what the photo contains. If, however, you went on to consider what the particulars of the photo imply, your summary would become more analytical.

You might say, for example, that the photo implies that beer is the beverage of fashionable, healthy, active people, not just of older men with large stomachs dozing in armchairs in front of the television. Thus, the advertisement's meaning goes beyond its explicit contents; your analysis would lead you to convert to direct statement meanings that are suggested but not overtly stated, such as the advertisement's goal of attacking a common, negative stereotype about its product (that only fat, lazy, male people drink beer). The naming of parts that you do in analysis is not an end unto itself, is not an exercise in making something out of nothing; it serves the purpose of allowing you to better understand the nature of your subject. The implications of the "parts" you name are an important part of that understanding.

The word *implication* comes from the Latin *implicare*, which means "to fold in." The word *explicit* is in opposition to the idea of implication. It means "folded out." An act of mind is required to take what is folded in and to fold it out for all to see. This process of drawing out implications is also known as making inferences. *Inference* and *implication* are related but not synonymous terms. The term *implication* describes something suggested by the material

Noticing and Rhetorical Analysis

When you become attuned to noticing words and details rather than registering general impressions, you inevitably focus not only on the message—what gets said—but on how things get said. To notice how information is delivered is to focus on its rhetoric. To analyze the rhetoric of something is to assess how that something persuades or positions us as readers or viewers or listeners.

Rhetorical analysis is an essential skill because it reveals how voices in the world are perennally seeking to enlist our support and shape our behavior.

Everything has a rhetoric, not just political speeches and not even just words: classrooms, churches, supermarkets, department store windows, Starbucks, photographs, magazine covers, your bedroom, this book. Intention, by the way, is not the issue. It doesn't matter whether the effect of a place or a piece of writing on its viewers (or readers) is deliberate and planned or not. What matters is that you can notice how the details of the thing itself encourage or discourage certain kinds of responses in the "consumers" of whatever it is you are studying.

What, for example, does the high ceiling of a Gothic cathedral invite in the way of response from people who enter it? How might the high ceilings make people feel about their places in the world?

Move 3: Make the Implicit Explicit. Push Observations to Implications by Asking "So What?"

Notice & focus, "interesting" and "strange," as well as freewriting—these moves aim to keep writers dwelling longer in the observation phase of analysis, to spend more time exploring and amassing data before they leap to making some kind of claim. It's time now to shift our focus to the leap, itself.

One of the central activities and goals of analysis is to make explicit (overtly stated) what is implicit (suggested). When we do so, we are addressing such questions as "What follows from this?" and "If this is true, what else is true?" The pursuit of such questions—drawing out implications—moves our thinking and our writing forward.

Move 3: Make the Implicit Explicit. Push Observations to Implications by Asking "So What?" 21

PUSHING OBSERVATIONS TO CONCLUSIONS: ASKING SO WHAT?

(*short-hand for*)

What does the observation imply?

Why does this observation matter?

Where does this observation get us?

How can we begin to theorize the significance of the observation?

itsself; implications reside in the matter you are studying. The term *inference* describes your thinking process. In short, you infer what the subject implies.

ASKING "SO WHAT?"

ASKING "SO WHAT?" is a universal prompt for spurring the move from observation to implication and ultimately to interpretation. ASKING "SO WHAT?"—OR its milder cousin, "And so?"—is a calling to account, a way of pressing yourself to confront that essential question, "Why does this matter?" The tone of "So what?" can sound rude or at least brusque, but that directness can be liberating. Often writers will go to great lengths to avoid stating what they take something to mean. After all, that leaves them open to attack, they fear, if they get it wrong. But ASKING "SO WHAT?" is a way of forcing yourself to take the plunge without too much hoopla. And when you are tempted to stop thinking too soon, ASKING "SO WHAT?" will press you onward.

ASKING "SO WHAT?" in a Chain

Experienced analytical writers develop the habit of "ASKING SO WHAT?" repeatedly. That is, they ask "So what?," answer, and then ask "So what?" of that answer, and often keep going (see Figure 1.4). The repeated asking of this question causes writers to move beyond their first attempt to arrive at a claim.

1 Describe significant evidence

2 Begin to query your own observations by making what is implicit explicit

3 Push your observations and statements of implications to interpretive conclusions by *again* asking So What?

FIGURE 1.4

ASKING "SO WHAT?"

Move 3: Make the Implicit Explicit. Push Observations to Implications by Asking "So What?"

Move 4: Look for Patterns of Repetition and Contrast and for Anomalies (THE METHOD)

We have been defining analysis as the understanding of parts in relation to each other and to a whole. But how do you know which parts to attend to? What makes some details in the material you are studying more worthy of your attention than others?

The procedure we call THE METHOD offers a tool for uncovering significant patterns. Like NOTICE AND FOCUS, THE METHOD orients you toward significant detail; but whereas NOTICE AND FOCUS is a deliberately unstructured activity, THE METHOD applies a matrix or grid of observational moves to a subject. In its most reduced form, THE METHOD organizes observation and then prompts interpretation by asking the following sequence of questions.

In virtually all subjects, repetition and close resemblance (strands) are signs of emphasis. In a symphony, for example, certain patterns of notes repeat throughout, announcing themselves as major themes. In Shakespeare's play *King Lear*, references to seeing and eyes call attention to themselves through repetition, causing us to recognize that the play is about seeing. Binary oppositions, which often consist of two strands or repetitions that are in tension with each other, suggest what is at stake in a subject. We can understand *King Lear* by the way it opposes kinds of blindness to ways of seeing.

Along with looking for pattern, it is also fruitful to attend to anomalous details—those that seem not to fit the pattern. Anomalies help us to revise our assumptions. Picture, for example, a TV ad featuring a baseball player reading Dostoyevsky in the dugout. In this case, the anomaly, a baseball

QUESTIONS FROM THE METHOD

What repeats?

What goes with what? (strands)

What is opposed to what? (binaries)

(for all of these) → SO WHAT?

What doesn't fit? (anomalies) So what?

player who reads serious literature, subverts the stereotypical assumption that sports and intellectualism don't belong together.

People tend to avoid information that challenges (by not conforming to) views they already hold. Screening out anything that would ruffle the pattern they've begun to see, they ignore the evidence that might lead them to a better theory. Most advances in thought have arisen when someone has observed some phenomenon that does not fit within a prevailing theory.

The Steps of The Method

THE METHOD of looking for patterns works through a series of steps. Hold yourself initially to doing the steps one at a time and in order. Later, you will be able to record your answers under each of the five steps simultaneously. Although the steps of THE METHOD are discrete and modular, they are also consecutive. They proceed by a kind of narrative logic. Each step leads logically to the next, and then to various kinds of regrouping, which is actually rethinking (see Figure 1.5).

1 List exact repetitions and the number of each (words, details). For example, if forms of the word seems repeat three times, write "seems x 3." With images, the repeated appearance of high forehead would constitute an exact repetition. Concentrate on substantive (meaning-carrying) words. Only in rare cases will words like "and" or "the" merit attention as a significant repetition. At the most literal level, whatever repeats is what the thing is about.

2 List repetitions of the same or similar kind of detail or word—which we call strands (for example, polite, courteous, devious). Be able to explain the strand's connecting logic with a label: manner.

3 List details or words that form or suggest binary oppositions—pairs of words or details that are opposites—and select from these the most important ones, which function as organizing contrasts (for example, open/closed, ugly/beautiful, global/local). Your goal here is not to engage in either/or thinking but to locate what is at stake in the subject, the tensions and issues that it is trying to resolve.

4 Choose ONE repetition, strand, or binary as a starting point for a healthy paragraph (or two) in which you discuss its significance in relation to the whole. (This ranking, as in Notice and Focus, prompts an interpretive leap.)

5 Locate anomalies: exceptions to the pattern, things that seem not to fit. Once you see an anomaly, you will often find that it is part of a strand you had not detected (and perhaps one side of a previously unseen binary).

FIGURE 1.5
THE METHOD

Expect ideas to suggest themselves to you as you move through the steps of THE METHOD. Strands often begin to suggest other strands that are in opposition to them. Words you first took to be parts of one strand may migrate to different strands. This process of noticing and then relocating words and details into different patterns is one aspect of doing THE METHOD that can push your analysis to interpretation.

It may be helpful to think of this method of analysis as a form of mental doodling. Rather than worrying about what you are going to say, or about whether or not you understand, you instead get out a pencil and start tallying up what you see. Engaged in this process, you'll soon find yourself gaining entry to the logic of your subject matter.

Troubleshooting The Method

THE METHOD is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Deciding what goes with what is an analytical move. It's not just listing. One aim of THE METHOD is to induce you to pay more attention, and a different kind of attention, to what you are studying.

Don't let the procedure turn into tedious or superficial data-gathering. Look for the interesting repetitions, strands and binaries, not just the most prevalent ones. Let this activity generate ideas.

In applying THE METHOD to longer texts, don't try to cover everything, and don't start making your lists until you have done a chunk of the reading. After all, you can't be expected to recognize a repetition in an extended essay until

Move 4: Look for Patterns of Repetition and Contrast and for Anomalies (THE METHOD) 31

it has reappeared several times. Keep informal lists in the margins as you read, or in the inside cover of a book. When you become aware of an opposition, you can mark it with a +/- next to the paragraph where you were struck. THE METHOD is designed to prompt thinking. You should be able to offer your reasons for why you think a given repetition or strand is most important. You should be able to express what issue you think is at stake in the organizing contrast you choose as most important.

As you look over your binaries, choose the binary that you think organizes the thinking in the subject as a whole—the organizing contrast. Which binary contains, implicitly or explicitly, the central issue or question or problem that is being addressed?

To make THE METHOD spark ideas, remember to ask So what? as a way of moving from observation to implication.

Move 5: Keep Reformulating Questions and Explanations

The preceding four analytical moves can be thought of in question form. The process of posing and answering such questions—the analytical process—is one of trial and error. Learning to write well is largely a matter of learning how to frame questions. Whatever questions you ask, the answers you propose won't always turn out to be answers, but may, instead, produce more questions. It follows that you need to keep the process of understanding open, often longer than feels comfortable. You do so by repeatedly reformulating your questions and explanations and going back to the original data for nourishment.

The following three groups of questions (organized according to the analytical moves they're derived from) are typical of what goes on in an analytical

writer's head as he or she attempts to understand a subject. These questions will work with almost anything that you want to think about. As you will see, the questions are geared toward helping you locate and try on explanations for the meaning of various patterns of details.

Which details seem significant? Why?

What does the detail mean?

What else might it mean?

(Moves: Define Significant Parts; Make the Implicit Explicit)

How do the details fit together? What do they have in common?

What does this pattern of details mean?

What else might this same pattern of details mean? How else could it be explained?

(Move: Look for Patterns)

What details don't seem to fit? How might they be connected with other details to form a different pattern?

What does this new pattern mean? How might it cause me to read the meaning of individual details differently?

(Moves: Look for Anomalies and Keep Asking Questions)