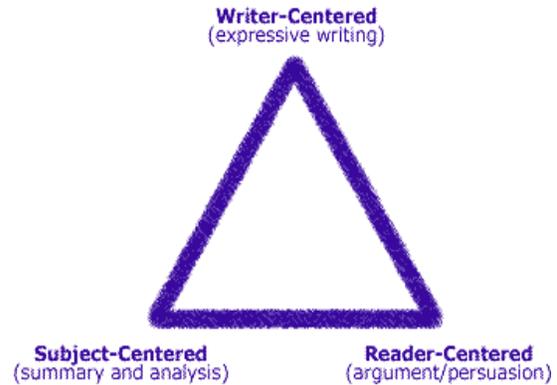


## What is analytical writing?

Although there is substantial overlap between expressive, analytical, and argumentative writing, each form has a distinct focus, purpose, and tools. In the interest of articulating a useful definition of analysis for teaching and designing assignments, some of the distinctions below are oversimplified; you will certainly notice ways in which each form blurs into the others.

One way to think about it is in terms of the **rhetorical triangle**. Expressive writing is focused on the writer and her experiences, memories, etc. Argument focuses on the reader, attempting to convince her of something. Analysis, however, focuses on the issue or topic at hand, seeking to understand it better.



## How else can we characterize analysis?

- The word literally means *to take something apart in order to understand it*; Aristotle described it as “illumination through disaggregation.” In this sense, analysis is the opposite of synthesis.
- It is the search for a meaningful pattern in data or evidence.
- It’s a kind of detective work a writer does about something that s/he finds puzzling.
- It begins with something one seeks to understand rather than something one already knows or believes.
- It focuses primarily on logic.
- It is exploratory, tentative and dispassionate.
- It encourages readers to think collaboratively with the writer; thus it takes a collegial, non-adversarial tone.
- It does not focus on the writer (beliefs, personal associations, feelings, or reactions) but rather on the topic. The author remains in the background.
- The claims it makes are carefully qualified rather than overstated or emphatic.
- It involves making interpretive leaps about evidence that are supported by logic.

| Analytical  | Argumentative   | Expressive   |
|---|---|--|
| Topic-centered<br><i>Logos</i>  | Reader-centered<br><i>Pathos</i>  | Writer-centered<br><i>Ethos</i>  |
| Offer evidence, make claims about it, and supply reasons that explain and justify the claims. |   |  |
| Aimed at understanding evidence. Makes claims about what evidence means.                      | Aimed at using evidence to influence readers. Makes claims about what should be done or believed. | Aimed at understanding oneself. Makes personal associations with evidence. |
| Define, explain, interpret  | Persuade, evaluate  | Narrate, describe  |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Asks <i>what</i> , <i>why</i> or <i>how</i> questions;<br>“What does x mean?”<br>“How does x do y?”<br>“Why is x the way it is?” | Asks <i>should</i> questions:<br>“What should readers believe about x?” |  |
| Writer is uncertain: begins with something s/he seeks to understand.   | Writer is relatively certain: begins with something s/he already knows. |  |
| Usually begins by laying out the data or details; focuses on a thought process.  | Usually begins with a position on an issue; focuses on conclusions.     |  |

## Questions to prompt analytical thinking

What does **X** mean?

What is the significance of **X**?

What conditions, influences or events caused **X** to be as it is? How or why did it become what it is?

What is the process that led to **X**? What were the steps in the process? How did that process take place? How could it have happened differently, and what might be the effects of changes to the process? What is the significance of this process?

Who is the audience for **X**? What is that audience’s expectations, and how are those expectations addressed?

How does the word “**X**” work in the text? Does it convey meanings other than its literal definition? Does it mean different things to different audiences? How would the text change if “**X**” were replaced with a synonym?

What caused x event to happen as it did? Where did it happen, who was involved and what was the outcome? What might have caused it to happen differently? What controversies surround the event?

What is the effect of **X** text/film/visual? How does it achieve that effect? What details contribute to the overall effect? Might it have different effects on different audiences? What choices did the author/artist make in order to achieve that effect?

What are the various opinions about **X**? What do they disagree about? Do they share any common assumptions? Is there any overlap between positions? What are the reasons for each opinion?