

Analytical Writing

The following comments are based on David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen, *Writing Analytically*, (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997), isbn 0-15-501889-2. I highly recommend this book to all students interested in refining their writing skills in graduate school.

Contents of the book include:

Creating Effective Topics; Finding and Developing a Thesis; Recognizing and Fixing Weak Thesis Statements; Introductions and Conclusions; Analyzing evidence;

Limited Summary of some of the points:

What is analysis: “To analyze something is to ask what that something means. It is to ask how something does what it does or why it is as it is.” (p. 1) Analysis requires breaking a subject into its constituent parts, but it involves more than that; analysis also involves determining the relationship between these parts between each other and to the whole. (p. 2)

p. 3 Analysis is different from judgement: judgement or evaluations generally have little significance about the subject, but reveal more about you and your preferences. Detach yourself from taking a position of judgement.

In most of your writing in graduate level work, you are asked to analyze and not merely summarize the material. Know the difference between these tasks. The authors of this book use the following example (p. 5): Imagine driving down the highway and you begin to analyze a billboard advertising beer. You notice the different parts of the billboard: 6 young men and women scantily clad and rushing into a river. If you stop here, you have stopped at merely summarizing the billboard. If you extend your thought to analysis, you will consider what the specific parts of the billboard imply.

p. 5: Analysis involves asking questions such as What does this mean? That is the significance of this detail? What does this pattern mean? What else might it mean?

Creating Effective Topics:

Begin with questions rather than preconceived notions or obvious answers. Avoid descriptive or summary questions like “what” and use questions involving “how”, “why”. Don’t just repackage what others have written. Analyze what has been written on your subject and look for preconceived assumptions. Always ask yourself “So what?” What is the significance of your topic?