



This is “The Analytical Essay: Expressing Your Points of View”, chapter 5 from the book [A Guide to Perspective Analysis \(index.html\)](#) (v. 1.0).

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Chapter 5

The Analytical Essay: Expressing Your Points of View

5.1 Focusing, Developing, and Synthesizing

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss how to focus and develop the essay.
2. Reveal how to convey an effective organization through transitions.
3. Suggest strategies for producing effective opening and closing paragraphs.

After discussing general strategies for analysis and applying these strategies to specific examples in class, I inevitably encounter a student asking, “This has all been well and good, but when are we going to actually learn how to write?” The student’s confusion most likely emerges from how he was taught in the past. In most school assignments, writing does not require thinking so much as the stuffing of obvious considerations or memorized material into formulated structures, like a five-paragraph essay or a short answer exam. However, in less restrictive writing situations the specific way we articulate our analysis emerges from what we think of it, and thus our best writing comes through our most careful considerations. The good news, then, is that if you have been following the advice I’ve given throughout this book about coming up with your analysis, then you will have already finished most of the work on your essay. The bad news is that there is no easy formula for putting it all together. However, we still can examine general strategies that successful analytical writers tend to use, though the specific way you enact these strategies will depend on the ideas that you have already discovered.

Focusing Your Analysis

If you have taken the time to examine your subject thoroughly and read what others have written about it, then you might have so much to say that you will not be able to cover your perspective adequately without turning your essay into a book. In such a case you would have two options: briefly cover all the aspects of your subject or focus on a few key elements. If you take the first option, then your essay may seem too general or too disjointed. A good maxim to keep in mind is that it is better to say a lot about a little rather than a little about a lot; when writers try to cover too many ideas, they often end up reiterating the obvious as opposed to coming up with new insights. The second option leads to more intriguing perspectives because it focuses your gaze on the most relevant parts of your subject, allowing you to discern shades of meaning that others might have missed.

To achieve a stronger focus, you should first look again at your main perspective or working thesis to see if you can limit its scope. First consider whether you can concentrate on an important aspect of your subject. For instance, if you were writing an essay for an Anthropology class on Ancient Egyptian rituals, look over your drafts to see which particular features keep coming up. You might limit your essay to how they buried their dead, or, better, how they buried their Pharaohs, or, even better, how the legend of the God Osiris influenced the burial of the Pharaohs. Next, see if you can delineate your perspective on the subject more clearly, clarifying your argument or the issue you wish to explore. This will help you move from a “working” thesis, such as “Rituals played an important function in Ancient Egyptian society,” to an “actual” thesis: “Because it provided hope for an afterlife, the legend of Osiris offered both the inspiration and methodology for the burial of the Pharaohs.”

Once you have focused the scope of your thesis, revise your essay to reflect it. This will require you to engage in what is usually the most painful part of the writing process—cutting. If something does not fit in with your perspective, it has to go, no matter how brilliantly considered or eloquently stated. In the course of writing this book, I’ve had to cut several sections simply because they no longer corresponded with the main perspective I wanted to convey. But do not throw away the parts you cut. You never know when you might find a use for them again. Just because a particular section does not fit well with the focus of one essay does not mean that you won’t be able to use it in another essay down the road.

Expanding

After cutting your essay down to the essential ideas, look it over again to make sure that you have explored each idea adequately. At this point it might help to recall the AXES acronym I introduced in the first chapter to ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there clear assertions throughout the essay that reveal your perspectives on the subject?
- Do you provide the specific examples that inspired these assertions?
- Do you explain how you derived your assertions from a careful reading of these examples?
- Do you explore the significance of these assertions as they relate to personal and broader concerns?

If any long sections seem lacking in any of these areas of AXES, you might explore them further by taking time out from your more formal writing to play with one of the heuristics recommended in various sections throughout this book (freewriting,

metaphor extension, issue dialogue, the Pentad, brainstorming, and clustering). You can then incorporate the best ideas you discover into your essay to make each section seem more thoughtful and more thorough.

Now that we've looked at each of these areas of analysis more carefully, let's go back to the main example from the first chapter, the passage from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. At the end, I provide an example of a paragraph that includes each aspect of analysis, but while these aspects are all present, none of them are developed fully enough for even a brief essay on the passage. Beginning with the examples, the paragraph makes brief reference to the "baseless fabric of the vision of cloud capped towers" and to the "great globe itself," pointing out how these phrases refer to items associated with Shakespeare's theater as well as the world outside of it. But we could also discuss other terms and phrases that appear in the quote. For instance, we could discuss the implications of the word "revels" in the first line. These days we probably wouldn't say "revels" but instead "celebrations," or, less formally, "partying," but the word clearly refers back to the play within the play that comes to an abrupt end. In this context, the implication is that above all, the purpose of plays should be for enjoyment, a sentiment reflected in the epilogue when Prospero speaks directly to the audience: "gentle breath of yours my sails/ Must fill, or else my project fails,/Which was to please."

As we further consider the implications, we might be reminded of past teachers who made reading Shakespeare feel less like a celebration and more like a task, as something to be respected but not enjoyed. We could then explain how the word "revels" serves as a reminder to enjoy his plays, and not because they are "good for us" like a nasty tasting vitamin pill, but because if we're willing to take the effort to understand the language, the plays become deeply entertaining. Looking back over the passage and seeing how plays are equated to our lives outside the theater leads to an even more significant insight. We should try to see life as a celebration, as something to be enjoyed before we too disappear into "thin air." In discussing the significance of this, we wouldn't simply wrap it up in a cliché like "I intend to live only for today," but explore more responsible ways we can balance fulfilling our obligations with enjoying the moments that make up our lives.

Now we can go back and expand the main assertion. Instead of simply writing, *In The Tempest, Shakespeare connects plays, lives and dreams by showing that while each contains an illusion of permanence, they're all only temporary*, we might also add, *But this does not mean that we should waste the time we have on earth or in the theater lamenting that it will all soon be over. Instead we should celebrate, in a responsible manner, our remaining moments.* And because all of these insights came about from examining the implications of only one word, "revels," the essay will continue to expand as we consider more details of the passage and consult related research. Eventually,

however, we will need to stop expanding our analysis and consider how to present it more deliberately.

Introducing the Essay

When revising your essay, you do not have to write it in the exact order that it will be read, as any section you work on in a given moment may appear anywhere in your final draft. In fact, many times it's best to write the first paragraph last because we may not know how to introduce the essay until we've discovered and articulated the main perspectives. However, eventually you will need to consider not only what your analysis consists of, but also the effect you want it to have. An essay that commands attention seems like a discussion between intelligent and aware people, in which ideas are not thrown out randomly but in a deliberate manner with each thought leading logically to the next.

For this reason, the **opening paragraph**¹ should be the place where you invite your readers into this discussion, making them want to read what will follow without delineating the main content in a rigid manner. Again, imagine being at a party, but this time instead of meeting someone who bores you by reciting irrelevant details of the past, he tells you exactly what will follow in the near future: "Over the next ten minutes we will discuss three things: work, politics, and leisure activities. During the course of our discussion, we will raise relevant personal experiences, draw from a bevy of beliefs and morals, and reflect on the current state of international affairs." Again, most likely you and everyone else this person approaches will find an excuse to move to the other side of the room as quickly as possible. Similarly when writers begin their essays with a step-by-step announcement of what will follow, we don't feel the sense of anticipation that we do when the perspective unfolds more organically. Successful analytical essay writers do not begin by blatantly spelling out the main points that they will cover, but rather create "leads," openings that hook the reader into wanting to read further.

One way to capture the reader's attention is to share a story or anecdote that directly relates to the main perspective. For instance, in the first chapter, I created a story about a hypothetical student named Jeff who was having difficulty writing an analytical paper on *The Tempest* in order to reveal a situation that not only was widely familiar but also allowed me to introduce the various components of analysis.

1. The part of your essay where you entice the reader to want to continue by leading her into the main perspective (as opposed to spelling out the main details in a rigid manner).

You can also capture your reader's attention with a quote: "*Oh what fools these mortals be*" has become one of my favorite Shakespeare quotes since I began working in a

restaurant. I am always amazed by the litany of ridiculous questions and requests I have to entertain during each of my shifts.

Or you might try a joke: Once there was a small boy who lost the key to his house. Though he dropped it in the front yard, he chose to look for it near the sidewalk because they light was much better there. Like him, many people look for the easiest solutions to their problems even when they know the truth is far more complicated and obscure..

Or perhaps you can startle the reader with an unexpected twist: The best day of my life occurred last summer. First, I was fired from my job, next my girlfriend dumped me, and finally I was kicked out of my parent's house. All this motivated me to find a better job, a better girlfriend, and a better place to live. History is full of days like this, ones that seem tragic yet turn out to have positive consequences in the long run.

Finally, you might begin with an analogy: Trying to write a perfect essay all at once is like attempting to ride a bike while juggling and singing opera. You are likely to crash unless you take on each task separately: invention, drafting, revising, and editing.

These are just a few suggestions for grabbing the reader's attention and many other possibilities exist (though try to avoid beginning with a dictionary definition unless you want to provide your own twist on it). Whichever way you decide to open your paper, make certain that you go on to relate your lead-in to the main perspective or thesis you have on your subject. For instance, you wouldn't want to start an essay by telling a joke that has nothing to do with the subject of your analysis, just to get an easy laugh. However, it would be fine if you were to write:

There's an old Sufi joke that points out that "the moon is more valuable than the sun because at night we need the light more." Of course the joke's humor arises from the fact that without the sun, it would be night all the time, and yet it does seem to be human nature to take advantage of that which is constant in our lives, the people and things that add warmth and light on a daily basis. In applying this to the television show, Mad Men, it's easy to see how Donald Draper, the main character, undervalues his wife Betty in order to chase after other women. Though these other women are as inconstant as the moon, disappearing and reappearing in new forms, they give him light during the dark times in his life when he needs it the most. His affairs, however, do not provide lasting satisfaction, but only a fleeting illusion of happiness, much like the advertisements he creates for a living.

Notice how this paragraph leads the reader from the hook to the main focus of the essay without spelling out what will follow in a rigid manner. The Sufi joke is not simply thrown out for a chuckle, but to set up the thesis that the main character of the show prefers illusions to reality in both his personal life and his work. As a result, this paragraph is likely to engage our attention and make us want to read further.

Organization of the Body Paragraphs

Once you've led your readers into your essay, you can keep their attention by making certain that your ideas continue to connect with each other by writing **transitions**² between your paragraphs and the main sections within them. At the beginning of a paragraph, a transition functions as a better kind of assertion than a topic sentence because it not only reveals what the paragraph will be about but also shows how it connects to the one that came before it. Take this paragraph you are currently reading as an example. Had I begun by simply writing a topic sentence like "A second strategy for effective writing is to develop effective transitions," I would not only have ignored my own advice, but also would have missed an important point about how transitions, like opening paragraphs, function to lead readers through various aspects of our perspectives.

Before you can write effective transitions, you need to make certain that your paper is organized deliberately throughout. To insure this, you might try the oldest writing trick in the composition teacher's handbook, the outline. But wait until after you have already come up with most of your analysis. To begin a paper with an outline requires that you know the content before you have a chance to consider it. Writing, as I've argued throughout this book, is a process of discovery—so how can you possibly put an order to ideas that you have not yet articulated? After you have written several paragraphs, you should read them again and write down the main points you conveyed in each of them on a separate piece of paper. Then consider how these points connect with each other and determine the best order for articulating them, creating a **reverse outline**³ from the content that you've already developed. Using this outline as a guide, you can then reorganize the paper and write transitions between the paragraphs to make certain that they connect and flow for the reader.

2. Assertions that link the main perspective of one paragraph to the paragraph that follows.

3. A method of organizing a paper in which you list the main points of a draft, organize these points into an outline, and reorganize the draft to reflect the outline.

An excellent method for producing effective transitions is to underline the key words in one paragraph and the key words in the one that follows and then to write a sentence that contains all of these words. Try to show the relationship by adding linking words that reveal a causal connection (however, therefore, alternatively) as opposed to ones that simply announce a new idea (another, in addition to, also). For example, if I were to write about how I feel about having to pay taxes, the main idea of one paragraph could be: *Like everyone else, I hate to see so much of my paycheck*

disappear in taxes. And the main idea of the paragraph that follows could be: Without taxes we wouldn't have any public services. My transition could be: Despite the fact that I hate to pay taxes, I understand why they are necessary because without them, we wouldn't be able to have a police force, fire department, public schools and a host of other essential services. If you cannot find a way to link one paragraph to the next, then you should go back to your reverse outline to consider a better place to put it. And if you cannot find any other place where it fits, then you may need to cut the paragraph from your paper (but remember to save it for potential use in a future essay).

This same advice works well for writing transitions not only between paragraphs but also within them. If you do not provide transitional clues as to how the sentences link together, the reader is just as likely to get lost:

I love my two pets. My cat, Clyde is very independent. My dog, Mac, barks if I leave him alone for very long. I can leave Clyde alone for four days. I'm only taking Clyde with me to college. I have to come home twice a day to feed Mac. Mac does a lot of tricks. Clyde loves to purr on my lap.

The reason that reading this can make us tired and confused is that we can only remember a few unrelated items in a given moment. By adding transitional phrases and words, we store the items in our memory as concepts, thus making it easier to relate the previous sentences to the ones that follow. Consider how much easier it is to read an analysis with transitions between sentences:

I have two pets that I love for very different reasons. For instance, I love when my cat, Clyde, sits on my lap and purrs, and I also love when my dog Mac performs many of the tricks I've taught him. But when I leave for college, I plan to take only Clyde with me. Unfortunately I can only leave Mac at home for a few hours before he starts to bark; however, Clyde is very independent and can be left in my dorm for days without needing my attention.

This revision not only is much easier to read and recall but also gives a sense of coherence to what previously seemed liked scattered, random thoughts.

Ending the Essay

Once you've led your readers all the way through to the **closing paragraph**⁴, try not to sink their enthusiasm by beginning it with the words "in conclusion." Not only is this phrase overused and cliché, but it also sends the wrong message. The phrase implies that you have wrapped up all the loose ends on the subject and neither you nor your readers should have any need to think about it further. Rather than close off the discussion, the last paragraph should encourage it to continue by stressing how your analysis opens up new avenues for thinking about your subject (as long as these thoughts emerge from your essay and are not completely unrelated to what you wrote about before). This is the place where you should stress the significance of your analysis, underscoring the most important insights you discovered and the implications for further thought and action.

However you choose to stress the importance of your analysis in your final paragraph, you can do so without simply repeating what you wrote before. If you have effectively led your readers through your paper, they will remember your main points and will most likely find a final summary to be repetitive and annoying. A much stronger choice is to end with a statement or observation that captures the importance of what you have written without having to repeat each of your main points. For example, in his book, *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis ends his discussion of how Southern Californians do not care to preserve their past by calling attention to a junkyard full of zoo and amusement park icons:

Scattered amid the broken bumper cars and ferris wheel seats are nostalgic bits and pieces of Southern California's famous extinct amusement parks (in the pre-Disney days when admission was free or \$1); the Pike, Belmont Shores, Pacific Ocean Park, and so on. Suddenly rearing up from the back of a flatbed trailer are the fabled stone elephants and pouncing lions that once stood at the gates of Selig Zoo in Eastlake (Lincoln) Park, where they had enthralled generations of Eastlake kids. I tried to imagine how a native of Manhattan would feel, suddenly discovering the New York Public Library's stone lions discarded in a New Jersey wrecking yard. I suppose the Selig lions might be Southern California's summary, unsentimental judgment on the value of its lost childhood. The past generations are like so much debris to be swept away by the developers' bulldozers. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 435.

4. The part of your essay where you stress the significance of your analysis by calling attention to what you hope the reader has learned from it or by challenging him to action or further thought (as opposed to simply summarizing what you've already covered).

Imagine, if instead of this paragraph, he had written: *In conclusion I have shown many instances in which Southern Californians try to erase their past. First I showed how they do*

so by constructing new buildings, concentrating especially on the Fontana region. Second I showed... Can't you just feel the air leaving your sails?

In light of this advice, you have probably already discerned that certain parts of your essay will emphasize various aspects of analysis. The beginning of the paper will announce your main assertion or thesis and the transitions in subsequent paragraphs will present corollary assertions. The bulk of your paper will most likely center on your examples and explanations, and the end will focus more on the significance. However, try to make certain that all of these elements are present to some degree throughout your essay. A long section without any significance may cause your readers to feel bored, a section without assertions may cause them to feel confused, and a section without examples or explanations may cause them to feel skeptical.

EXERCISE

Write a lead paragraph for a potential essay on a subject that you've already developed a strong perspective on. Begin with one of the strategies I mention in this section—an anecdote, a quote, an analogy, a story, an unexpected twist—and connect your lead to your thesis or question that you wish to explore. Consider, too, how you might end this essay. Think further about what you find to be the most significant aspect of your subject and what key images or thoughts you want to leave lingering in the minds of your readers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The writing process begins when we first start to consider a subject because we form, develop, and articulate our thoughts recursively.
- It is important to focus your analysis on the essential features of the subject and to make sure that each of these features receives adequate development.
- Effective essays subtly lead us into the key perspective, provide transitions between the main sections, and leave us with something important to consider.

5.2 Creating an Effective Style

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss ways to make the style more effective and compelling.
2. Discuss how to fix common mistakes in editing.
3. Provide two contrasting example essays for review.

Once you've adequately explored your subject and laid out your analysis with an effective structure, you can focus more deliberately on the style. Though content and style are difficult to separate, the focus of our attention tends to shift in later drafts from discovering new ideas to considering more effective ways to convey them. The process, however, is not linear but recursive—because a thorough analysis leads to clarity of expression and clarity of expression will in turn lead to a more thorough analysis. Often when you can find a more precise term, it will give you new insights on the entire section and lead to a more sophisticated approach in general.

Finding the Most Vivid Terms

For this reason, I recommend that after you've finished writing a draft of your essay go back and underline all the vague and general terms to see if you can replace them with more **precise diction**⁵, words that are clear and specific. Especially look out for the “s” word, and no, I do not mean the one that comes to almost everyone's lips when they look in the rear view mirror and see flashing police lights. I mean “society.” By itself it can mean anything—the entire world, the specific part of the country you live in, the people who make the rules, the counter culture that resists the people who make the rules, to name just a few. If you can specify which “society” you are referring to, you will not only clarify your analysis but also discover new insights concerning the significance of your perspective to a specific group. And also try to avoid all the variations of society that do not provide additional clarity, such as: “in today's society” or “in today's modern complex industrial society.”

Consider also looking out for these vague terms and phrases: “The Government.” Try to specify if this term refers to state, local, or federal representatives, the people who vote them in, or to those who get paid through tax dollars, such as public school teachers, policeman, and armed service personal. “Since the beginning of time.” Try to specify when something actually begins. Personal

5. Words that are not needlessly vague, archaic, or complicated, but accurately convey your perspective.

computers, for instance, have not been around since the beginning of time, as one of my students wrote, but only since the late 1970s. “All people want to have...” No matter how you finish that sentence, you probably won’t discover something that all people want to have. Again, specify which group of people and why they want to have it. You should also be on the lookout for words like, “stuff,” “things,” or “items,” if you can replace them with more concrete terms like, “scattered papers,” “empty oil cans,” or “half finished plates of food.”

Give the same care and attention to your choice of verbs. You should especially avoid overusing the passive voice, in which the subject of the sentence does not perform the action as in “Tina was asked to go to the prom by Jake.” Usually the active voice sounds more vivid and more compelling, “Jake asked Tina to go to the prom.” And it would be even better if you could replace the verb “asked” with one that gives a more specific account of the action: “Jake begged Tina to go to the Prom.” But don’t feel the need to eliminate the passive voice entirely. Sometimes you may not know who performed the action implied in the sentence, “my car was scraped” or you don’t want to admit responsibility for your own actions, “mistakes were made.” Just make certain that when you use a form of the verb “to be,” you do so for a reason and not in place of a verb that suggests a more vivid account.

Avoiding Wordiness

In advising you to find more precise and compelling words, I do not mean that you should search your thesaurus to find the longest and most complicated terms. Nothing makes students sound like they are trying too hard to impress their teachers than when they use words that appear unnecessarily complicated, dated, or pretentious to make the analysis seem more sophisticated. Though students often think that they impress their teachers by using the most complex term, it usually leaves the opposite impression that you are spending too much time with the thesaurus and not enough with the actual substance of the essay.

Along these lines, avoid the other common trick of adding unnecessary words just to lengthen the essay out to the required number of pages. Instead always look for ways to state your point of view more succinctly. Sometimes you can do this by using a term that implies several others. For instance, you do not need to write, “Sue is like those people who always put off doing what they are supposed to do until much later than they should have done it in the first place,” when you can simply say, “Sue procrastinates.”

Writing Compelling Sentences

Once your essay has a precise, natural diction, you can jazz it up even further by creating **sentence variety**⁶. A series of sentences of the same length and type tends to get hypnotic (in fact, hypnotists use rhythmical tones and repetitious phrases to put people into trances). Your essay should “flow” in the sense that the ideas connect to each other, but not in the sense that the style seems like listening to the waves of a lake lapping against the shore at steady intervals. A style that commands attention seems more like a river that changes at every bend. To achieve this effect, try to juxtapose sentences of various lengths and types. If you have a long sentence that is full of subordination and coordination, moving through the complexities of a section of your analysis, then try to follow it up with a short one. Like this.

An excellent way to achieve more variety, provide more coherence, and reduce wordiness is to combine some of the sentences. Take the following series: *I wanted some ice cream. There are ice cream shops downtown. I have to drive to get to downtown. I don't have time to drive downtown. I've been putting on weight lately. I decided to eat a carrot. Carrots are healthier than ice cream.* Even if these sentences were full of more intriguing observations, we would have to struggle not to fall into a hypnotic trance while reading them. Consider how much more engaging it is to read: *I wanted some ice cream. But when I realized I had to drive all the way downtown to get some, I decided to settle for a carrot instead, a much healthier choice for me anyway. I've put on weight lately.* The combination of short and long sentences keeps our attention by jolting us out of a monotonous flow; the elimination of excess words keeps us from having to sort through the clutter; and the coordination and subordination provides a sense of coherence to the previously scattered thoughts.

Editing

Once you have an effective structure and style, make sure to proofread your essay carefully. Try to imagine going out on a date, in which you took the time to work for the extra money to go to a nice restaurant and spent hours trying on outfits to look your best, but then when the food arrives, you dig into it with your hands, chew with your mouth open, and reach over to eat your partner's food, too. Sounds ridiculous, right? Then why do I often get papers from students who took the time to write engaging analyses but did not bother to eliminate similar distractions in editing etiquette? No matter how intelligently you express your point of view, no one will take your essay seriously if it is riddled with errors in punctuation, sentence structure, and spelling.

To avoid these problems, I recommend that when you finish your essay try **reverse editing**⁷, a method in which you check the essay a sentence at a time backwards. In other words, read the last sentence first and work your way back to the first. This

6. Syntax of differing lengths and types that helps keep the reader's attention.

7. A process in which you read your finished essay a sentence at a time backwards to focus more fully on the diction, grammar, and spelling.

way you will not get so involved in the content that you overlook the problems with grammar, spelling, and punctuation. If you have trouble recognizing these problems, I suggest that you get a hold of a handbook and dictionary instead of relying on your computer to solve all the problems for you. For instance, spell check cannot catch all errors, especially when you use the wrong homonym, or when a typo transforms the word you intend into one that's different, such as when you forget to type the "t" in "the" and it becomes "he."

Review

To underscore all the advice I have given throughout this book, consider the ways that you might revise and edit the following piece entitled "Those Misleading Manhattan Friends" that I wrote as a parody of bad essay writing. While producing it, I had the joy of ignoring every piece of advice I've given throughout this book. It contains no developed analysis; a five paragraph essay structure; vague, repetitive, archaic, and inappropriate terms; monotonous sentences of the same type and length; errors in punctuation, parallelism, and logic; and oodles of misspellings that spell check will not catch. Before you attempt to revise it, you might want to first review the advice given throughout this chapter about transforming topic sentences into transitions, choosing appropriate diction, combining sentences for variety, and editing the finished draft by reading it a sentence at a time backwards.

Those Misleading Manhattan Friends

Television. According to *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, television is a system for transmitting images and sound into a receiver. Television influences how we think. As part of the media, it shows us ways to consider the ways we see the world. In the show *Friends* three major contradictions can be found that can be seen by the desecrating viewer. As this paper proceeds each of these contradictions will be made more clearer.

The first of these contradictions has to do with the economics of the major characters within the show *Friends*. Manhattan is an expensive place to live. It is expensive because the rents are very high there. My friend lives in Manhattan. My friend pays a lot for rent in Manhattan. My friend pays over 2,000 dollars a month for a studio apartment in Manhattan. My friend has a good job in Manhattan and still has difficulty making ends meet in such an expensive city as Manhattan. Ross is a teacher. He teaches at the University. Ross lives in a nice apartment. Teachers make very little money. Even University teachers make very little money. Phoebe is a masseuse. She gets paid per job. She lives in a nice apartment. She makes 50 dollars per job. She is always at the coffee shop with her friends. How many jobs can she do in a week? Rents are just too high overall.

Another contradiction within the show *Friends* is their relationships. Ross and Rachel date each other. Ross and Rachel indubitably break up. This usually happens at the end of each season. They are still friends. I cannot be friends with anyone I break up with. My feckless girlfriend and I dated for six years. Then she changed 360 degrees into a different person. She broke my heart. I do not wish to talk to her anymore. Rachel and Ross have a kid together. Their kid is very cute. They were once married to each other. They still get together and go to two movies as if they simply have a causal relationship. This is a contradiction to. I think now Joey and Rachel are dating. I am sure that they will break up to.

Another contradiction within the show *Friends* has to do with the modern, complex, ever-changing, technological, fast paced world that we live in today. Few people stay in one place anymore. People move a lot. Only 1 friend from my high school still lives in the same area. Ross, Rachel, Joey, Chandler, Phoebe, and Monica never move. Except when they move in and out of each other's apartments. They also never make new friends. Except when they date other

people for about half a season and then get board and come back and end up dating each other again.

In conclusion, *Friends* is full of mini and varied contradictions. It is not a very realistic show. For one, the characters live in Manhattan and they would not be able to afford to live there especially Ross and Phoebe. For two they date each other and have kids together and then break up but they still remain friends. And for three and finally they never move or make new friends in eleven years!!! Yet the show is popular. I suppose there are many reasons why it is popular anyway.

This essay took less than an hour to write. I started with an outline for each of the five paragraphs and followed it precisely and quickly, throwing in the main ideas without further thought, revision, or editing (okay, I did challenge myself to include several common misspellings that spell check would not catch). Even still the piece is not completely hopeless. The notion that a show like *Friends* can lead audiences to accept false impressions of reality could have proven intriguing to explore, and if this essay were not written by me as a parody but by a student in earnest, I would try to help her to focus the paper around this theme and to further develop her relevant ideas.

When you respond to the writing of your peers, keep in mind that we all have to write drafts and that it is always better to focus on the positive, how the writing could become more effective, rather than the negative, explicating what is wrong with it at the moment. In fact, when running writing workshops, I insist that all the feedback be stated in terms of what we like (so the writer knows what to keep or expand in subsequent drafts) and how it can be improved (so the writer has specific advice as to how to make the essay better). This helps writers to get excited about the potential of their essays rather than depressed about their current shortcomings. Ultimately it's our attitude about our writing that causes us either to give up on it entirely or to continue to try to improve it.

The difference between the previous essay on *Friends* and the following one that I wrote on a strange museum in Los Angeles did not emerge from the potential interest of the subject matter but from the time and effort that I put into the writing of each. The piece that follows took several days and many drafts as I integrated experience, research, and critical examination to develop my analysis. When writing it, I used the advice I've given you throughout this book, so for the

sake of review, I will explain how I created it before providing you with the finished draft.

When I first visited The Museum of Jurassic Technology I was dumbfounded by what awaited me inside the building. Stumbling through the dark building, I discovered a series of dioramas on such odd and diverse subjects as spores that take over the brains of ants, bats whose radars can pierce through lead, artifacts found in American trailer parks, illustrations of archaic beliefs and superstitions, and a convoluted and bizarre theory of how memory functions by a man I'd never heard of named Geoffrey Sonneabend. Later, when I discovered that parts of the collection were made up (including both Sonneabend and his theory of memory) and other parts were simply unremarkable, I felt the need to write about the experience in my journal:

How could I have been so stupid? "Museum of Jurassic Technology?" There was no technology in the Jurassic period, just a bunch of dinosaurs stomping around. I let the word "museum" lead me to think that the rest of the title made sense. And I should have realized when I entered that the items in the collection have nothing in common with each other, have no remarkable characteristics, are scientifically impossible, or just don't make any sense. I consider myself a critical thinker but maybe I'm just as conditioned as everyone else to accept institutional authority.

As I reflected further on the significance of my visit, I decided that the museum is not the only place where questionable information gets passed off as objective and factual. In school, teachers often ask students to simply repeat information and seldom encourage them to critically examine it, a trend that has become even more common since standardized testing has dominated so much of the current curriculum. This emphasis on memorizing answers does not encourage us to think past the obvious, leading us to accept provisional theories as though they are universal truths. The museum makes us aware of this by using academic sounding phrases to get us to momentarily accept even the most ridiculous claims.

With this working thesis in mind, I set the stage for writing my essay. I researched the museum and related issues, evaluated each aspect of my visit in light of the Pentad, and brainstormed on the museum's wider significance. I then collated and reviewed all of my observations and notes into a first draft, focusing mostly on developing this thesis. I then wrote a second draft in which I included stronger transitions and more deliberate opening and closing paragraphs. Then I produced a third draft, in which I tried to make the style more accurate and varied. I showed

this draft to some of my colleagues who gave me excellent suggestions concerning other sources to consult, which parts I should cut and which I should develop, and how it might be reorganized. After this, I submitted it to the online journal, *Americana*, where, after completing more revisions suggested by their editors, it was originally published. When reading it, think about the process that went into creating it, how it didn't spring out of the blue but developed slowly through careful consideration and deliberate revision.

The Museum of Jurassic Technology

From Wonder into Wonder Experience Opens This article was first published in *Americana* by Randy Fallows. http://americanpopularculture.com/archive/venues/jurassic_technology.htm

The Museum of Jurassic Technology, located in Los Angeles, is a place that is easier to describe by its effect than by its content. According to Lawrence Weschler, who wrote about the museum in his highly acclaimed book *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*, a visit gives one a feeling of being “a bit out of order, all shards and powder.” This reaction springs from two opposing impulses; the first is to trust that everything in the museum is true (since after all it is a museum) and the other is a gnawing feeling that something doesn't seem quite right. The best reason for trusting the latter impulse is that most of the collection is, to varying degrees, false. To be specific, the museum consists of dioramas revealing different aspects of “life in the Lower Jurassic,” including some that are completely made up (a series on the life and theories of a fictional psychologist), some that are made up but believed true (a series on common superstitions), some that are true but unremarkable (a series on the European mole and the night flying moth), and a few that are both true and remarkable (a series on tiny carvings that fit into the eye of a needle).

Although there are no direct statements on the museum's walls which let the visitors in on the secret, the museum does have copies of Weschler's book available, so the extra confused and curious can discover the attraction's “true” nature. I was one of those who, after my first visit, purchased the book in the hopes that it would guide me out of my own confusion. It did, but it also left me repeating “of course” just as I do when I discover the solution to a riddle that seems simultaneously complicated and simple.

There is something fishy about a museum with an oxymoron in its title. Yet to be perfectly honest, I never even considered this a problem because in my mind the term “museum” eclipsed any notion to question the words that followed. I assumed that there must be a special use of the term “Jurassic” which was unfamiliar to me, a use that allowed it to be appropriately paired with the term “technology.” This tendency to ignore one's personal reasoning in favor of a greater authority is only partly a result of the respect we attribute to museums in general; it is even more a result of years of academic conditioning to accept that information offered from an acknowledged authority must be true,

significant, reasonable, and, in some way, good for us. Everything in the museum seems designed to make us feel uncomfortable with this trust.

At the entrance, there is a short video that introduces the visitor to the museum's mission, a mission placed within a historical context. On closer inspection, the video contains oblique expressions and historical inaccuracies; however because its style and narration has a "measured voice of unassailable institutional authority," as Weschler put it, and because there are truths mixed with the fiction, it seems reasonable enough on first examination:

The Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles, California, is an educational institution dedicated to the advancement of knowledge and the public appreciation of the Lower Jurassic. Like a coat of two colors, the museum serves dual functions. On the one hand, the museum provides the academic community with a specialized repository of relics and artifacts from the Lower Jurassic, with an emphasis on those that demonstrate unusual or curious technological qualities. On the other hand, the museum serves the general public by providing the visitor a hands-on experience of "life in the Jurassic."

The first thing that struck me was the strange use of the phrase "the Lower Jurassic." However, the claim that the museum serves the academic community led me to believe that there must be a new use of the phrase with which I was unfamiliar. I figured that if it were simply an error, someone long before would have informed the curator that he was confusing a term that describes an ancient time period for one that depicts a modern area. My inclination to trust was furthered by the second mission, to provide a "hands on experience" for the general public, which assured me that the museum was designed with models of effective learning in mind. The video goes on to describe the museum's place in the history of other such institutions, including what it claims to be the first natural history museum, Noah's Ark. This mixture of truth and legend is preparation for what lies in the main collection.

The first exhibits one encounters after leaving the video room are a series of dioramas which focus on the life and theories of Geoffrey Sonnabend. Don't bother looking him up, or you will end up just as frustrated as Weschler, who, after his first visit, looked for references to Sonnabend in several library databases, publishing houses and historical societies before realizing that he was chasing a phantom. Like Weschler, I too fully believed that Sonnabend was a real person, partly because of the vast amount of details about his life and

theories and partly because next to the dioramas of him is one of Marcel Proust tasting the tea soaked madeleine that invokes the memories of his childhood. My fondness for Proust increased my desire to learn about this more obscure theorist who also seemed to be interested in the nature of memory.

After looking through several dioramas that focus on a series of unremarkable events from Sonnabend's life, I finally got to the one that deals with his theory of memory, the gist of which is:

All living things have a Cone of Obliscence by which the being experiences experience. This cone is sometimes also known as the Cone of True Memory (and occasionally the Characteristic Cone). Sonnabend speaks of this cone as if it were an organ like the pancreas or spleen and like these organs its shape and characteristics are unique to the individual and remain relatively consistent over time. This cone (occasionally referred to as a horn) is composed of two elements—the Atmonic Disc (or base of the cone) which Sonnabend described as “the field of immediate consciousness of an individual” and the hollows (or interior of the cone). A third implied element of the Characteristic Cone is the Spelean Axis, an imaginary line which passes through the cone and the center of the Atmonic Disc.

Neither the explanation nor the equally obscure model that accompany it make any sense; however, both echo the rhetoric of academic discourse so well that I convinced myself that my confusion came from my inability to grasp the theory and not from the theory itself. In giving some of the parts different names, it seemed as if many other theorists had arrived at similar conclusions but quibbled with Sonnabend over terminology, and by using complex sounding terms with both certainty and consistency, I was inspired to trust those who were smart enough to invent and use this jargon. However, despite its impressive look, when summarized and translated into common usage, the whole theory boils down to an obvious point: events that affect us deeply are more likely to be remembered than those that are everyday occurrences.

Perhaps if the theory was written out and I had more time to consider it, I might have arrived at this conclusion. However, the recording speeds past with no accompanying text except for the above model. This results in an effort of silent desperation to make sense of the whole thing, an effort that for me went something like this: *Cone of Obliscence? I don't know this term but it sounds like it's related to "obsolescence," so I assume it has to do with memories we no longer need and*

discard into a what? Spelean Axis! This is completely unfamiliar, but maybe it only intersects the cone at an angle because most experiences are not kept with us as memories; perhaps that is why he calls this part “the Hollows” since these particular experiences do not have a lot of substance.

Though the exhibit did nothing to enlighten my understanding of the nature of memory as a concept, it did inspire a few memories from my early undergraduate days when I would sit in lecture halls and listen to a professor pontificate through jargon, graphs, models and theories which I did not understand but which I assumed made sense to those who were smart enough to use them. That I began to recall these classroom experiences was quite appropriate, for, as I discovered later, the whole Sonnabend spiel began in lecture form prior to the museum’s establishment when its eventual founder and curator, David Wilson, was explaining these “theories” to high school and university students in the Los Angeles area. One of these lectures was attended by art critic, Ralph Rugoff, who describes a classroom scene in which:

Everybody there was taking notes furiously, as if this were all on the level and was likely to be on the test--the Falls, the cones, the planes, the whole thing, It was amazing. And at one point I leaned over to Diana [David Wilson’s wife] and whispered, “This is the most incredible piece of performance art I have ever seen.” And she replied, “What makes you think it’s performance? David believes all this stuff.” Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 41.

Wilson’s belief notwithstanding, I know that many would consider it outrageous that he is passing off lies as truth in front of students who don’t know any better. I wonder, however, if the content of most lectures today will seem equally outrageous in a few years to come. Consider that a student in the early 1950s could come out of a day at school believing that a person will never walk on the moon, that Columbus was the first to discover America, and that the meaning of a literary text can be ascertained through codes completely contained within the piece itself. Isn’t it arrogant to believe that much of what currently gets taught won’t seem just as ridiculous in the not too distant future?

Wilson sees his museum as a filter through which layers of explanations become obscured, allowing us to acknowledge the mysterious nature of the subjects they attempt to explain. He states, “Certain aspects of this museum

you can peel away very easily, but the reality behind, once you peel away those relatively easy layers, is more amazing still than anything those initial layers purport to be.” In short, a large part of the Museum’s purpose is to inspire the kind of confusion that leads to a healthy skepticism of institutional truths. For it’s only when people question established knowledge that new ways of seeing the world can come into existence, or as Lao Tzu put it in the Tao Te Ching, “from wonder into wonder experience opens.”

Creating an essay like this takes time, but it is time well spent. Even if you never write another analytical essay after you finish school, the resulting mental stimulation will both enable and encourage you to think about your own life more deeply and help you discover ways to make it better. And analysis can also lead us to create a better world in general. Given the problems we face stemming from environmental damage, nuclear proliferation, and economic instability, we will need a massive amount of critical thinking spread throughout the entire world to insure our very survival. Because for many years I have studied just how creative and resourceful people can be, I believe we have the ability to solve these problems and live more fulfilling lives as we do so. This can only happen, however, when more of us take the time to slow down and analyze the world around us, so that we can add our perspectives to the written and spoken conversations that make up our culture, our history, and our lives.

EXERCISE

Consider the differences between the two essays in this section. List all of the problems with the “Misleading Manhattan Friends” piece and think of why these problems did not manifest in the piece on the “Museum of Jurassic Technology.” Now go back over the piece on *Friends* and consider how you could revise it. Begin with the content. How could the focus be more precise? What parts should be cut and which expanded? How could each aspect of analysis be further developed? Now think about the structure. How might you revise the opening and closing paragraphs? What transitions could be added? Finally, consider the style and editing. Try combining sentences for variety, finding more accurate terms, and fixing the problems in spelling and grammar.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- An effective style can be achieved through providing sentence variety, precise (but not needlessly complicated) diction, and a personal voice.
- Careful editing can best be achieved by reading the essay a sentence at a time backwards to see more clearly the errors in grammar and spelling.