

Analytic Paragraphs

How to Make an Argument Using Logic Instead of Topics

You've probably learned that an essay should have a topical (or three-part, or tripartite) thesis. This means it has three topics or major points on which you elaborate in three paragraphs which have little to do with each other. An analytic paper isn't a statement backed by three other observations; it's an idea supported by logic. It's the difference between a politician who names off things she doesn't like and one who can deconstruct the other's logic and provide a rationale for decisions. (Here's a hint: most political debates are topical, not analytic.) Think of the difference between the following two thesis statements:

Thesis 1: Musicians are all scum because they drink, they smoke, and they have promiscuous sex.

In this example, your paragraphs are almost hopelessly doomed to becoming one paragraph about alcohol, one about smoking, and another about sex. This is boring, predictable, and not in any way a display of your own thought. It even suggests that you aren't thinking too strongly about your ideas because you don't show a connection in your logic.

Thesis 2: Musicians lead an exciting lifestyle of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll which causes them to be frowned upon amongst polite society.

This can be organized in several ways—but the most comprehensive would be to explain what is meant by "polite society," illustrate how polite society frowns upon those who associate with the "rock 'n' roll" lifestyle, and then how musicians are commonly associated with it. This isn't predictable, boring, or topical. It shows the steps you took to arrive at your argument.

Step One:

Now that you have a way to find a focus for your paragraphs, you need to draft a **focus statement**. Think of a focus statement as a mini-thesis for your paragraph. It takes one small step of logic and closely examines and supports this idea, then sets the foundation for the next paragraph (idea = atomic bomb, mushroom cloud = conclusion, giving rise to further analysis). Let's go back to our earlier example and draft up a focus statement for our first body paragraph.

Polite society is traditionally defined by conservative, older ideals based upon tradition and stands in silent judgment of progressive society.

This is a central, focused idea. It performs the three purposes of a focus statement: it **prepares** the reader for the information to be presented, it **elaborates** on the thesis, and it **illustrates** a step of logic.

Step Two:

The mini-thesis has to be divided up into little groups, or **claims**, to be proven. This is where personal experience, scientific and/or textual evidence, and scholarly analysis meet your own thoughts to form **evidence** that supports your claims. Here's a sample sentence from the essay we're drafting.

Polite society in America today gathers around tables set with meticulously ordered silverware and "polite" conversation, which strays from anything controversial or interesting.

This relates an aspect of polite society—social gatherings—to a definition and culture of polite society itself. If you struggle to decide where your evidence is—and we all do (think of how many times you've answered

“WHY?” with “BECAUSE”)—look at the claims and ask **why** a given subject is the way it is or **how** it supports your thesis. The answer is another piece of evidence.

Step Three:

Now that you’ve explained an idea and supported it thoroughly, you need to transition to the next paragraph. Here comes the toughest part: **transition statements**. They explain how one idea feeds into another. Think of it as this: **Given** the information I have presented, **this** conclusion can be drawn. The next focus statement takes **this** and supports it. Here’s a transition between paragraphs of our rockin’ essay.

The strict, unhappy, stuffy nature of polite society puts it at odds with the world of rock ‘n’ roll.

Given that polite society is stifling and dull, it clearly doesn’t understand the liberating, rebellious world of rock. The next paragraph begins the discussion on how polite society relates to rock ‘n’ roll.

Stuff to remember:

- You can, in fact, write a transition statement into your conclusion. It’s easier than you think.
- Everything you write down must relate to your thesis. If you can’t justify it furthering or narrowing your focus, then get it out of your essay.
- Transitions don’t have to happen at the end of every paragraph. Use creative license to discover where it works and sounds best for you.
- Use the steps of logic to guide the organization of your essay. If you simply cannot find a good way to organize your paragraphs, you might be missing a step, taking on too broad or narrow a topic, or over-thinking it. Stop, breathe, and objectively define the problem.

Happy Writing!

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