In ENGL 1123 you learned about the principles of analytical writing and successfully applied those principles within your submitted work. In ENGL 1133 you will learn about a particular type of analytical writing called “academic writing.” Academic writing is composed by and for scholars within the various academic disciplines and is held to standards of honesty, objectivity, transparency, and rigor that do not always apply within the realm of commercial publication (newspapers, magazines, popular books, etc.). Academic writing is found in books and journals published by academic presses which are often associated with a particular university (e.g., Duke University Press) and generally use a process of peer review to ensure that their publications meet academic standards. When a work is peer-reviewed, it has been closely examined by other scholars within the same discipline who are qualified to judge its merits and faults.

In ENGL 1133 you will be introduced to the basic expectations for academic writing. In your writing for this course, you will be expected to demonstrate a strong understanding of these expectations and a strong effort to meet them in your own arguments. This means that you will be reading and analyzing academic material from various fields, finding academic sources to use in formulating your own arguments, and emulating the style and tone of these academic materials within your own essays. Below is an overview of the nature and goals of analytical writing, broadly considered, followed by a discussion of the nature and goals of academic writing as a specific subset of analytical writing.

**WHAT IS ANALYTICAL WRITING?**

The word *analyze* derives from a Greek term meaning “to unloose” or “to take apart.” Today we use the word to mean something like, “to examine methodically.” The reason for this evolution of the term is that when we examine something—we try to better understand something complex—we break it down into its component parts.

When we closely analyze any subject matter, we tend to complicate or even overturn the “common wisdom” about that subject matter. Sometimes, common wisdom is well-founded and accurate, but too often it is based on lazy assumptions, rigid political ideologies, or deeper impulses based on superstition, fear, envy, pride, etc. Consequently, when we, as individuals and communities, rely too heavily on common wisdom, we can find ourselves making poor decisions, pursuing questionable goals, or failing to recognize significant problems or opportunities when they arise. Herein lies the value of analytical observation and thought. When we engage in the systematic processes of analysis, we move beyond the false understandings that too often constitute common wisdom; in the process, we enrich our individual and collective lives.

Let’s consider briefly the issue of illegal immigration. Many Americans call for tighter border security in order to keep out undocumented immigrants who use public services without paying their fair share of taxes. This common view, however, is based on two assumptions that do not stand up well to close analysis. In 2002, for instance, a study by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) revealed that tighter border security is not very effective in preventing illegal immigration. In fact, the study found that tighter security...
encourages undocumented immigrants to settle permanently in the U.S. when they would otherwise migrate back and forth across the border in pursuit of seasonal labor. This actually enhances the problems associated with illegal immigration by creating a large class of permanent residents who are underemployed for a good portion of the year. A separate study by the Texas State Office of the Comptroller (TSOC) found that, rather than draining public funds, undocumented immigrants in 2005 contributed $400 million more in tax revenue than they cost the state in the form of public services. In addition, their labor contributed over $17 billion to the overall wealth of the state.

Taken together, the PPIC study and the TSOC study indicate that the “common wisdom” regarding illegal immigration is badly misleading. If we were to formulate federal and state policies on immigration based on this flawed wisdom, we would end up with bad policies that do more harm than good. The only way to develop smart and effective policies regarding such a complex issue is to engage in the type of close, objective analysis that can be found in the PPIC and TSOC studies.

Types of Analytical Writing

If you were to read the PPIC and TSOC studies, you would be reading analytical writing—writing that communicates the fruits of analytical processes. There are two main types of analytical writing: expository and critical.

**Expository Analysis:** The root word of *expository* is *expose*, meaning “to present to view” or “to exhibit openly.” Expository writing, therefore, is writing that exposes the component parts of its subject matter. Expository writing is descriptive; it presents something to the reader’s view. Expository discourse might, for instance, summarize another piece of writing, describe people or objects, or narrate a series of events.

**Critical Analysis:** Critical analysis differs from expository analysis in that it presents its subject matter as contestable, or disputable, rather than self-evident. In other words, a critical analysis makes arguments about its subject matter rather than simply describing it. Instead of just narrating a series of events, for instance, a critical analysis might argue that one event is the cause or the effect of another event. Instead of just summarizing another piece of writing, a critical analysis might put forth an argument about the meaning or quality of that piece of writing. Or instead of just describing an object, a
critical analysis might put forth an argument about the value of that object. The goal of critical analysis is to generate new understandings of its subject matter, and it accomplishes this through the processes of interpretation and evaluation.

**Read Examples of Critical Analysis**

This book identifies three types of argumentative claims: claims of fact, claims of value, and claims of policy.

- **Claims of fact** address the existence of a particular set of conditions or relationships. When we take up questions of fact, we are usually engaged in determining causes and effects.

  For an example of an argument centered around a claim of fact, read J. Noel Trapp’s “All for a Virtual Cause: The Reasons Behind MMORPG Success.” Trapp argues that MMORPGs (Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) have become so popular because they cater to our need for meaningful social contact in a modern world that tends to isolate individuals.

- **Claims of value** address the ways in which we value objects, people, behaviors, processes, ideas, etc. When we take up questions of value, we attempt to determine whether something is good or bad, efficient or inefficient, democratic or undemocratic, well-formed or distorted, and so on.

  For an example of an evaluative argument, read Rachel Schofield's “Isolated Community: Hidden Dangers of MMORPGs.” Schofield agrees with J. Noel Trapp that people play MMORPGs in order to join complex online communities but goes on to formulate a negative evaluation of these online communities. She argues that MMORPG communities, which she describes as “isolated communities,” do not meet the criteria for “true communities.”

- **Claims of policy** address courses of action that should or should not be pursued. Questions of policy overlap with questions of value because when we recommend or discourage a policy, we associate positive or negative values with it.

  For an example of a policy argument, read John Guillebaud and Pip Hayes’ “Population Growth and Climate Change: Universal Access to Family Planning Should Be the Priority.” After noting the close link between population growth and environmental damage, Guillebaud and Hayes argue that we must work toward universal access to family planning resources in order to slow the rate of environmental devastation.

**Opinion vs. Position**

An opinion is a stance that one takes without engaging in a systematic analysis of an issue while a position is a stance grounded in firm analysis. One might, for instance, hold the opinion that the Houston traffic system is poorly arranged and managed, but only a systematic analysis could really establish whether there are better alternatives. It is okay to hold opinions, but it is not okay to hold them sacred. When we take up any subject matter, we necessarily start with certain opinions about it, but the purpose of analysis is to get beyond opinion in order to arrive at understandings that are grounded in evidence and
sound reasoning. If we hold too closely to our initial opinions, we will not engage in responsible or thorough analysis.

**Academic Writing and Critical Analysis**

Academic writing is almost always in the critical mode. This is because the academic disciplines are built around the idea that all fields of knowledge are constantly evolving and constantly revealing new truths. This means that the accepted wisdom within a discipline is always contestable—capable of being challenged and debated—and that the most important statements within any field are those that open up new paths of inquiry. This is precisely the task of critical analysis which, at its best, calls into question established sets of knowledge and, in doing so, makes room for new types of insight to be explored and developed.

In most argumentative writing, the writer attempts to have the last word, or close off debate on a topic by making his conclusions seem so self-evident that they cannot be refuted or improved upon. By contrast, academic writers offer their works of critical analysis as stepping stones within the ongoing development of a field of knowledge. Good scholars recognize that their own conclusions are just as contestable as the old truths that they themselves have called into question, and they welcome the new insights that emerge from this ongoing process of argumentation. The good scholar, then, writes with a sense of humility and of respect for other scholars, even those with whom she disagrees vehemently. The very process of analysis teaches us this type of humility: when we closely analyze any subject, we disturb our own assumptions and preconceptions and are therefore confronted with the fact that our own knowledge is never definite or complete.

With this in mind, we should approach any academic writing project not with the goal of having the last, best word on a given topic but instead as an attempt to join an ongoing conversation and make a significant and original contribution to that conversation. When we write in the academic mode, then, we should try to position ourselves in relation to other scholars within the field. This means, first, doing enough research to be aware of the various arguments that others have put forth on a specific topic and, second, making clear exactly where and how we agree and disagree with those arguments. Through this process of clarifying our agreements and disagreements with other scholars, we are able to pinpoint for our readers our own unique position, which should of course be supported with evidence and sound reasoning. If that position is both original and compelling, then we have done our part to advance and enrich the conversation on the given topic.

Obviously you will not, in this course, be expected to stand toe-to-toe with accomplished scholars, but you will be expected to produce writing that approaches the standards of academic writing. Briefly, this means that you will need to demonstrate the ability to find, read, and comprehend academic source material; use that source material to develop your own intelligent positions on specific issues; and put forth those positions in clear, well-constructed essays. Your success on the major assignments in this course will be determined by how well you do these things.

**NOTE:** Because engaging in academic discourse means joining an ongoing conversation within a particular discipline, it involves working closely with complex source material. For this reason, one major point of emphasis in ENGL 1133 is the ability to integrate source references into your writing while also formulating your own arguments. The trick is to do this without unintentionally plagiarizing your sources!