

# 1

---

## CLOSE READING STRATEGIES THAT DEVELOP AN ANALYTICAL VOICE

*The student has to have tools to understand a story or a novel,  
and these are tools proper to the structure of the work,  
tools proper to the craft.*

*They are tools that operate inside the work and not outside it;  
they are concerned with how this story is made  
and with what makes it work as a story.*

“THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE,” FLANNERY O’CONNOR

## WHAT IS THE WRITER'S ANALYTICAL VOICE?

Flannery O'Connor, one of America's finest writers of fiction in the twentieth century, asserts an essential task of the teacher of English, a task that is the focus of this chapter: providing the student with "tools to understand a story or a novel." These tools ultimately become woven into **the voice of the student as writer, a writer's voice that contains a particular interpretive point of view, a writer's voice that explains how ideas emerge from the language and details in the chapter of a novel, the verses of a poem, or the paragraphs of an essay.**

To develop such a voice can be a challenge for the young writer. This voice does more than merely re-create or summarize the details in a work of literature the student-writer has observed; it requires the ability to analyze.

An ability to analyze a work of literature is a learned behavior. It entails a way of "seeing" what you are reading, and that way of "seeing" is primarily a method, or strategy, of thinking about it as you read. Such a strategy of thinking allows you to "see" beyond the mere details of the plot or poem and, instead, guides you toward a discoverable claim or argument about the text you have been reading.

The process of thinking about the literature being read is demonstrated in the following ANALYTICAL VOICE chart. The literary work under consideration can be a poem, a novel, a short story, an essay, a play, a speech—for any aesthetic form, the process, or way of "seeing," is the same.

## DEVELOPING AN ANALYTICAL VOICE

### LEVEL ONE

Identify the EVIDENCE observed by you, the reader.

DICTION: What types of words are used or repeated?

IMAGERY: How is the image created? What are its parts? What senses are provoked?

DETAILS: What's the setting? Who are the characters? What is the situation?

### LEVEL TWO

Identify the CONCEPTUAL ASSOCIATIONS [ideas, qualities, conditions] that emerge from the diction, imagery, and details of the literary work you are reading.

Examples of concepts that might be associated with diction, imagery, and details include, but are certainly not limited to, the following:

Fear. Excitement. Joy. Love. Disdain.  
Violence. Chaos. Control. Order. Arrogance.  
Submission. Humility. Confidence. Authority. Wisdom.  
Confinement. Freedom. Tyranny. Benevolence. Refinement.  
Skepticism. Faith. Greed. Penury. Parsimony.

### LEVEL THREE

Identify the RELATIONSHIPS among diction, imagery, and details, as well as the concepts associated with them, to the rest of the text.

#### REPETITION

similarity, analogy, recurrence, echo, parallelism

#### CONTRAST

incongruity, antithesis, opposition, tension

#### JUXTAPOSITION

contiguity, adjacency, proximity

#### SHIFT

turn, transformation, alteration

The RELATIONSHIPS you discover in your analysis should lead you to a CLAIM about one or more of the following with regard to the passage under consideration:

Tone. Attitude. Voice. Atmosphere.  
Character. Archetype. Theme. Purpose.

To demonstrate this process, I will first provide a discussion of each level of the ANALYTICAL VOICE chart; afterwards, I will examine two passages—one fiction and one nonfiction. As I discuss each passage, I will consider separately each level of thinking so that you understand the concept of each stage. After your skills increase, you will notice yourself simultaneously blending two or more of the levels as you read. Once you begin to write about the passages you have read, WHAT YOU WRITE WILL CONTAIN ALL THREE LEVELS SIMULTANEOUSLY. Now let's examine the ANALYTICAL VOICE chart and its components.

## LEVEL ONE

Level One of the ANALYTICAL VOICE chart directs you, as the reader, to observe carefully the passage's details and language (diction and imagery), the EVIDENCE that will later become part of a WRITTEN ARGUMENT. What often distinguishes effective arguments from mediocre ones is the writer's ability to point out details another reader may not have noticed.

### **Diction**

DICITION refers to the words used by the author, words that come in a variety of types, which the careful reader observes: Are these words *concrete*, *abstract*, *colloquial*, *formal*, *informal*, *jargon*, *figurative*, *foreign*? Do any of the words belong to a specific category (words related to religion, to education, to finance, to sports, to medicine, to the law, to marriage, to war, etc.)?

### **Imagery**

The careful reader will also want to notice how collections of words form mental pictures, IMAGERY that allows the reader to see more clearly a setting, a character, an action or situation. How is the image formed? What components or parts of the image seem prominent or significant? For example, many images of a broken-down car can be created by an author: one image may focus on a mangled hubcap dangling off the rim by one rusty screw; another image may center on the three-inch diameter dent in the driver's side door, the flakes of burgundy paint falling to the dirt.

### **Details**

Finally, what are the DETAILS—or facts—contained in the text? What is the setting: the city? the countryside? the schoolyard? Who are the characters: a parent and child? a teacher and student? two friends? two enemies? What is the situation: a Christmas dinner? an interrogation? a carriage ride to the country? a fist fight? All of these observations will influence what you ultimately say—your interpretative perspective—about the specific work of literature you are reading.

## LEVEL TWO

The next level of thinking, Level Two of the ANALYTICAL VOICE chart, involves attaching associations to the details and language we isolated above.

### **Conceptual associations**

So what are associations? While you read, whenever you interact with details, images, and words, your mind makes CONCEPTUAL ASSOCIATIONS. The image of an *infant's foot* may cause you to think of abstract concepts such as *innocence* or *vulnerability*. The repeated use of the word *red* may cause you to associate its use with the idea of *death* or *destruction*. The specific details involving a major character's living arrangements—that the character lives in a mansion with fifty rooms and drives a different sports car for each day of the week—will likely produce the associations related to *wealth*, *power*, and *extravagance*. Well-crafted speeches are often rich with conceptual associations. Patrick Henry, in his famous speech to the Virginia Convention in March 1775, spoke of the “insidious smile” of the British monarch in response to the colonists’ pleas for a respectful resolution of their claims. “Trust it not, sir; it will prove a snare to your feet. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss.” Certainly, the word *snare* evokes ideas of *treachery*, *entrapment*, and *deception*, as does the phrase *betrayed with a kiss*, a phrase that reminds those hearing—or reading—Henry’s speech of *the betrayal of Christ by Judas*.

### **Conceptual associations for the student-writer**

When you write about any work of literature, you want to move beyond plot summary—the mere re-telling of what happens in the story, poem, play, essay, or speech. You do that by explaining what concepts, or ideas, are anchored in—associated with—the details and language of the text, the details and language providing the EVIDENCE for the written argument you are making about the work of literature.

Not all conceptual associations are equal in value as not all such associations will make logical sense in the context of the work of literature you are reading and about which you are thinking. That’s why the student writing about a work of literature must make decisions, must, in other words, SELECT ASSOCIATIONS TO ATTACH TO THE EVIDENCE IN THE TEXT. Once you begin the process of selecting certain associations rather than others, you then begin to develop your ANALYTICAL VOICE, your way of seeing the details and language, your own perspective about the work of literature under consideration.

You cannot attach an associative concept to an image that doesn’t make logical sense. That image of an infant’s foot is not associated with the concept of evil or violence simply because you say it is or because you may recall another text where some evil act was committed against a child. While there are many ways to talk about a text, and many possible associative words a writer can use, these assertions must be grounded within the logical associations of its language and details. Attaching conceptual associations to textual evidence is not a random or arbitrary activity.

### **Writing about conceptual associations**

As a student-writer, you want to consider the precision of your associative word choices when you write your compositions analyzing a work of literature. Just as an author chooses specific words to form distinct images and to elaborate individual details, you too want to use appropriate diction to explain any of these images or details in the passage under consideration. For example, Lady Macbeth’s conversations with her husband, Macbeth, about pursuing the

throne of Scotland by murdering the king may be considered “bad,” “cruel,” “heartless,” or “ugly”; but more precise language on your part would find her conversation “shrewd,” “manipulative,” or “conniving,” just as her “crazy” arguments attempting to persuade her husband might be described more aptly as “hyperbolic” and “fallacious.” Your task as a writer, then, will also be to broaden your traditional vocabulary.

### **Selecting conceptual associations**

Let’s discuss an additional aspect of generating associations: Whenever you begin attaching various associations to parts of the text, some may later be discarded while others may be used to formulate the larger structure of your argument—a thesis statement or its topic sentences.

What associations would you disregard and why? Imagine an image of a stone wall. You may consider multiple and contradictory associations with such an image—on the one hand, walls may be associated with positive ideas such as security, stability, order, protection; on the other hand, they may be associated with negative attributes such as entrapment, concealment, restriction, imprisonment.

Which associations are more reasonable? The answer is to examine the other details contained in the text. Are more pieces of evidence positive or negative? Perhaps white light shines on the wall, whose stone is intricately and beautifully designed. Within the area encompassed by the wall sits a gentleman comfortably relaxing in a chair, his face reflective and at ease, gazing upon a child who is playing in the grass, smiling and gleeful. These additional details direct the TONE of the wall’s description and surroundings toward our positive list, particularly if no other details or images are negative. As a reader, you realize that those negative associations regarding a stone wall can be discarded, that the text you are reading contains positive conceptual associative elements.

The general reading principal here directs you to examine all other pieces of evidence in the text: THE ENTIRE COLLECTION OF IMAGES AND DETAILS SHOULD GUIDE A CONSISTENT AND PLAUSIBLE READING. In this case, since no details of the text point to a negative tone, you can disregard those associations that are negative.

### **Elaborate direct quotations with conceptual associations**

These conceptual associations will be used to elaborate on the directly quoted material you cite inside the body paragraphs of your analysis. Many beginning writers often wonder *What do I say next?* after having used a direct quotation from the literary work being analyzed. The answer is that *you discuss those associative ideas that are linked to the evidence you directly quote.* You can, as just one example of what to discuss, **comment on the significance of a single word, image, or phrase within that direct quotation, showing how the idea associated with that word, image, or phrase relates to other aspects of the literary work** (how the idea connects to the protagonist’s character traits, for instance, or how it underscores a general theme of the work, or how it establishes a specific contrast or similarity with another character or situation in that same work.) Many direct quotations will, of course, have more than one such word, image, or phrase whose conceptual associations call for thoughtful elaboration.

### **Option Two: Use Aristotle’s topics**

ARISTOTLE’S TOPICS provide a way for a writer to generate a topic for the paper as well as to create an actual thesis statement. Aristotle suggests these topics align with the natural way we think and argue any subject.

For our purposes in *Crafting Expository Argument*, ARISTOTLE’S TOPICS are limited to the following four categories: Argument by Definition, Argument by Classification, Argument by Comparison (comparison of similarities, comparison of differences, or comparison by degrees), and Argument by Relationship (the relationship of contraries as well as the relationship of cause and effect).

With each explanation of one of the categories of ARISTOTLE’S TOPICS, at least two examples have been provided. Each example consists of a possible thesis statement as well as the topic sentences for only two of the potential body paragraphs supporting each thesis statement. *Clearly, to be conscientiously argued, many of these thesis statements would require additional body paragraphs based on other topic sentences.*

Because the strategies for making an expository argument based upon a work of literature apply as well to other courses and fields of study, which also require expository writing by students, some of the following examples using categories of ARISTOTLE’S TOPICS have been applied to thesis statements not drawn from literary works.

#### **Definition**

WHEN WRITERS ARGUE BY DEFINITION, they assert that the details of the text, or the details of a contemporary or historical situation, provide examples for the definition of a concept (such concepts may, for instance, be justice, fatherhood, decision-making, evil, or friendship). Each concept contains multiple aspects, each aspect, then, serving as the central idea for each body paragraph’s topic sentence.

#### **DEFINITION ARGUMENTS FROM A LITERARY WORK**

Thesis: In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Roger Chillingworth mirrors various characteristics of evil.

[The writer will use each topic sentence to define a single quality of evil.]

TS: Chillingworth practices deception, the attribute of evil that conceals its identity.

[The writer will show multiple examples of how Chillingworth deceives by concealing his identity.]

TS: Chillingworth, like evil, manipulates the most vulnerable human characteristic—the heart.

[The writer will show multiple examples of how Chillingworth manipulates the emotions of others.]

Thesis: In the poem “Mending Wall,” the poet Robert Frost creates a specific situation that reveals the paradoxical nature of barriers in human relationships: what separates human beings physically is what allows us to live together

amicably. [Here, the writer will be defining the paradox of “the wall” in the poem by examining its apparently contradictory aspects.]

TS: The poem’s speaker is a “mischief”-maker, one who asserts the notion that the wall is an unnatural obstruction, a viewpoint likely shared at first by the reader.

TS: The actions of both characters in the poem, the speaker and his “neighbor,” demonstrate that, though the wall is man-made, it is in fact the natural, indeed instinctive, requirement of forming community.

#### **DEFINITION ARGUMENTS NOT BASED ON A LITERARY WORK**

Thesis: True friends respond selflessly, considering the needs of other human beings more paramount than their own.

[Here the writer defines friendship as selfless concern for the needs of others.]

TS: Authentic friends sacrifice their own time to help respond to someone else’s need.

[Here, the writer elaborates with examples showing how one or more friends have acted selflessly with their time.]

TS: Genuine friends offer the moral guidance needed to navigate successfully the difficulties of life.

[Here, the writer explores one or more specific examples of a friend providing such guidance.]

Thesis: Effective decision-making requires the ability to think logically, to seek wise counsel, and to recognize the limits of one’s knowledge.

TS: Reacting rationally to situations that arise, rather than reacting emotionally, is more likely to result in beneficial decisions.

TS: Consulting others who have experienced similar situations—so long as time allows it—can lead to more advantageous conclusions.

#### **Classification**

*WHEN MAKING AN ARGUMENT BY CLASSIFICATION*, writers recognize that several examples—or pieces of evidence—within a text have like characteristics and, therefore, these examples belong to a distinct category. Like items in one category, then, are grouped into a body paragraph whose topic sentence identifies the unifying category. Like items in another category are grouped into a separate body paragraph whose topic sentence identifies that unifying category.

#### **CLASSIFICATION ARGUMENTS FROM A LITERARY WORK**

Thesis: The government in the novel *1984* employs several methods for controlling its citizenry.

[The writer will explore and name in the topic sentence each of the “methods.”]

TS: Totalitarian governments often manipulate public information, both the details of history and the facts of the present.

[The method identified here deals with information control and all the examples from the novel elaborated in this paragraph will demonstrate such manipulation.]

TS: Totalitarian governments impose physical restrictions upon its citizens.

Thesis: Harry Potter demonstrates that the hero must overcome a variety of personal obstacles regardless of the physical powers of evil.

[In the following topic sentences, the writer will classify the types of challenges, other than physical, Potter confronts.]

TS: One of Harry Potter's challenges involves controlling his fear when confronting dangerous situations.

TS: Harry's own psychology must contend with memories of a painful past, which frequently prevent him from taking immediate action.

[Both paragraphs explore emotional challenges. Subsequent paragraphs might explore challenges that require the use of logic and quick rational thinking.]

#### **CLASSIFICATION ARGUMENTS NOT FROM A LITERARY WORK**

Thesis: Deception, or the deliberate concealment of the truth, can be justified when it protects the general well being of an individual or of society as a whole.

TS: When difficult situations arise involving one's child, deception shields innocence from the terror and cruelty of the outside world.

TS: During times of war, the government conceals certain details to protect its troops in battle.

Thesis: Friends fulfill a variety of needs, those which improve the body, the mind, and the soul.

TS: Friends on athletic teams urge their teammates to achieve physically that which others believe cannot be done.

TS: Friends, particularly those more gifted academically, help to teach us intellectual skills.

#### **Comparison: Similarity or Difference or Degree**

*WHEN MAKING AN ARGUMENT BY COMPARISON*, writers place two items side by side (characters, images, symbols, situations, setting, etc.). This side-by-side placement may yield any of three possibilities: that the two items are similar, that the two items reveal differences, or that the two items indicate a distinction of degree.

#### **SIMILARITY**

This comparison argument that focuses on similarity identifies the common features of two distinct items under discussion; in other words, the writer believes the two items placed next to each other are *analogous*. When crafting literary arguments, writers often explore this *ANALOGY*, which serves as a lengthy comparison, involving the resemblances discovered detail by detail between two items normally seen as distinctly different.

#### **SIMILARITY ARGUMENTS FROM A LITERARY WORK**

Thesis: The imagery Coleridge creates in "Kubla Khan" corresponds with his philosophy concerning how poetry is conceived and written.

TS: Coleridge uses archetypal images in "Kubla Khan" to portray the fertility of the imagination.

[The writer identifies the initial step in the writing process, the presence of a mind filled with ideas.]

TS: Coleridge's visual imagery in the poem demonstrates the selection