

Analyzing an Academic Essay

Time: One class period

Required Materials

- Each student should have their copy of "[Stylistic Artistry of the Declaration of Independence](#)"
- Each student should have their copy of Harvey's "Elements of an Academic Essay"
- Each group (4-5 students) should have a copy of the worksheet

Optional Materials

It never hurts to have a computer/projector so the instructor can highlight specific passages mentioned in class discussion. Students will have their own copies, but this tends to help streamline everything.

How this relates to previous lesson

This lesson builds on three previous classes. By this lesson, students will have read the Declaration of Independence and discussed it in class/on a class forum for at least one class. They will have also read and discussed an excerpt from Jeremy Bentham's "Short Review of the Declaration" (which is critical of the document on philosophical and writerly grounds). Finally, they will have read and discussed Lucas' "Stylistic Artistry" article, which presents a glowingly positive view of the Declaration and emphasizes how the writers crafted it to meet their audience's expectations.

This activity asks students to analyze the rhetorical moves of Lucas' essay, mostly because it's a modern essay and so is more closely related to the writing students will be expected to produce than Bentham's. Before coming to class, they will have been assigned to read Gordon Harvey's "Elements of the Academic Essay."

Notes on this lesson

This lesson is meant to provoke conversation by, essentially, dropping them into the deep end and asking them to apply what they've learned from Harvey's essay. By having students work in groups, they'll help keep each other afloat and the instructor is able to swim around respond to students more individually. Importantly, it should help reinforce Harvey's vocabulary so that it can be used when responding to students' essays and focuses attention away from the essay's content to its structure. The benefits of this lesson come much more from the discussion the activity provokes in each group than it does from students getting all the answers "correct."

Generally, this lesson should take the entire class period (minus the recitation period). The instructor should first go over the worksheet (10 minutes) and then let groups work to complete it. After 10-15 minutes, the instructor should make sure to visit with each group for at least 5 minutes to answer questions, provoke discussion, encourage quiet students to engage with their group, and gauge progress (total time, at least 20 minutes).

In the remaining class time, the instructor should transition to a class-wide discussion by going over the worksheet. Each group should present their findings for each question and pause for discussion when there is disagreement on certain answers (such as the thesis statement) so the class can come to a consensus. Where groups are able to analyze their choice of passages, having each group present their analysis is a way of reinforcing Harvey's terms (such as in questions 5-8). This way the class will be clear about central elements of the essay (thesis, organization), and each group will be an "expert" on particular passages.

Certain questions are open and opinion based (such as describing Lucas' style). These are meant to help students get used to characterizing writing and acting as a writing critic. This relates to the theme of the course, Lucas' essay, and their own revision process.

Ideally, a peer review activity of their essay for Unit I will ask very similar questions to this sheet to reinforce that these skills of analysis are transferable to their own writing and revision.

Analyzing an Academic Essay

“The Stylistic Artistry of the Declaration of Independence” is a classic academic essay. It is a close reading of the Declaration of Independence. It states an arguable thesis and uses concrete evidence to support that thesis. Therefore, you should be able to locate in it all the parts Gordon Harvey identifies as crucial to academic writing in his essay “Elements of the Academic Essay.” In this activity, you will do just that.

1. Highlight or underline the thesis statement in Lucas’ essay.
2. Based on the thesis you’ve identified, is the title of Lucas’ article a good one? Does it “inform a general reader,” “give the subject and focus of the essay,” and does the title provoke interest? If not, what might be a better title?
3. Highlight or underline Lucas’ motive. Below, re-write it in your own words
4. In the first several paragraphs, Lucas hints at the structure of his essay. What path (which topics and in which order) does he suggest he will follow?
5. Draw a box around one of the pieces of evidence (data) Lucas cites.
6. Below, in your own words, summarize Lucas’ analysis of the data you identified in the previous step (a few sentences is fine).

7. Identify one section where Lucas is orienting the reader, or explaining specialized knowledge.

8. In a section in which Lucas describes the logic of the Declaration, he notes that the writing can't quite be considered a "sorites." Using Harvey's definition of "Reflecting," describe what Lucas is doing here.

9. Identify one piece of "stitching" that you think is particularly effective. Why is it effective?

10. Describe Lucas' style.