The Rhetorical Analysis Essay

English 11AP
What is Analysis?

• For our purposes, taking apart a particular passage and dividing it into its basic components for the purpose of examining how the writer develops his or her subject.
Are There Different Types?

Analysis of:
- Structure
- Purpose
- Style
What is Rhetoric?

• All the strategies, modes, and devices a writer can employ to convince the reader to accept and understand his or her point of view.
What is a Mode?

• Exposition
  – Illustrates a point

• Narration
  – Tells a story

• Description
  – Creates a sensory experience

• Argumentation
  – Takes and defends a position
What Are Rhetorical Strategies? (also described as Patterns of Development)

• Example
• Comparison and Contrast
• Definition
• Cause and Effect
• Process
• Analysis and Division
• Classification
• Description
• Narration
What is Style?

• What makes one comedian different from another? One singer? One author?

• Consider
  – Subject matter
  – Selection of detail
  – Point of View
  – Diction (language)
  – Figurative Language/ Imagery
  – Attitude
  – Tone
  – Pacing/ Syntax
  – Organization
Writing About Style

**Organization**: The way in which a writer presents his or her ideas – patterns

- Chronological
- Spatial
- Specific to General
- General to Specific
- Least to Most Important
- Most to Least Important
- Flashback/Flash-Forward
- Comparison and Contrast
- Cause and Effect
Writing About Style

**Point of View:** The vantage point from which the narrative is told

- First person
- Third person objective
- Third person limited
- Third person omniscient
Writing About Style

**Diction:** Word choice – the conscious selection of words to further the author’s purpose

- Most appropriate, evocative, or precise word
- Sensitive to denotation, connotation, and symbolism
- You should be able to link examples of specific diction to the ideas, purpose, or tone of a passage.
- Diction IS, it is not USED!
Writing About Style

**Imagery and Figurative Language:** The creation of sensory experience, often through figures of speech or device of sound

- Analogy
- Sensory description

- Poetic Devices
  - Metaphor
  - Simile
  - Hyperbole
  - Onomatopoeia
  - Personification
  - Oxymoron
  - Metonymy
  - Synecdoche
  - Alliteration
  - Assonance
  - Consonance
Writing About Style

**Syntax:** Grammar – The deliberate structure the author chooses to make his or her point
- Phrases
- Clauses

- Types of Sentences
  - Declarative
  - Interrogative
  - Imperative
  - Exclamatory
  - Simple Sentences
  - Compound Sentences
  - Complex Sentences
  - Compound-Complex Sentences

- Punctuation
- Paragraphing
Writing About Style

**Tone and Attitude:** The author’s perception and presentation of the material and the audience

- Stance or relationship the author has with the subject
- Author’s attitude towards the reader
- Formal? Informal?
- **Use adjectives!!!!!!**
Writing About Style

- Bitter
- Sardonic
- Sarcastic
- Ironic
- Mocking
- Scornful
- Satiric
- Objective
- Naïve
- Joyous
- Spiritual
- Wistful
- Nostalgic
- Humorous
- Angry
- Idyllic
- Compassionate
- Reverent
- Lugubrious
- Elegiac
- Gothic
- Macabre
- Vituperative
- Scathing
- Confidential
- Factual
- Informal
- Facetious
- Critical
- Detached
- Sad
- Resigned
- Astonished
- Mock-serious
- Pedantic
- Didactic
- Inspiring
- Remorseful
- Disdainful
- Laudatory
- Mystified
- Reflective
- Maudlin
- Sentimental
- Patriotic
- Jingoistic
What is the Analysis Essay?

• You will be presented with a prose passage
• Tasks will vary from year to year
• They usually involve the analysis of language, including rhetorical strategies and stylistic elements
• You need to read, understand, and analyze challenging texts
• You need to effectively manipulate language to communicate your analysis
Types of Prompts

• Analyze an author’s view on a subject
• Analyze rhetorical devices used by an author
• Analyze stylistic elements and their effects
• Analyze the author’s tone
• Compare and contrast two passages
More Prompts

• Analyze an author’s purpose
• Analyze some of the ways an author recreates an experience
• Analyze how an author presents him- or herself
• Discuss the intended or probable effect of a passage
• Etc.
Complex Passages

Don’t be thrown by the complexity

YOU choose the references you want to incorporate!
How Do I Plan My Essay?

• Deconstruct the prompt
• Read the passage, marking it up and taking marginal notes
• Plan your essay
• Write your essay
• Proofread
Reading the Prompt

- Read the prompt carefully! Highlight the essential terms and elements:

The following paragraphs are from the opening of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. After carefully reading the excerpt, write a well-organized essay in which you characterize Capote’s view of Holcomb, Kansas, and analyze how Capote conveys this view. Your analysis may consider such stylistic elements as diction, imagery, syntax, structure, tone, and selection of detail.
Reading and Notating the Passage

• Either:
  – Read quickly to get the gist and then reread taking marginal notes and highlighting
  – Read slowly, using highlighting and marginal notes, then reread to confirm you have caught the full impact

• You MUST highlight and make marginal notes! PRACTICE THIS!!!
Sample Passage

Excerpt from the opening of *In Cold Blood*

The village of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call “out there.” Some seventy miles east of the Colorado border, the countryside, with its hard blue skies and desert-clear air, has an atmosphere that is rather more Far Western than Middle West. The local accent is barbed with a prairie twang, a ranch-hand nasalness, and the men, many of them, wear narrow frontier trousers, Stetsons, and high-heeled boots with pointed toes. The land is flat, and the views are awesomely extensive; horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them.

Holcomb, too, can be seen from great distances. Not that there is much to see—simply an aimless congregation of buildings divided in the center by the main-line tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad, a haphazard hamlet bounded on the south by a brown stretch of the Arkansas (pronounced “Ar-kan-sas”) River, on the north by a highway, Route 50, and on the east and west by prairie lands and wheat fields. After rain, or when snowfalls thaw, the streets, unnamed, unshaded, unpaved, turn from the thickest dust into the direst mud. At one end of the town stands a stark old stucco structure, the roof of which supports an electric sign—Dance—but the dancing has ceased and the advertisement has been dark for several years. Nearby is another building with an irrelevant sign, this one in flaking gold on a dirty window—HOLCOMB BANK. The bank closed in 1933, and it is one of the town’s two “apartment houses,” the second being a ramshackle mansion known, because a good part of the local school’s faculty lives there, as the Teacherage. But the majority of Holcomb’s homes are one-story frame affairs, with front porches.
Down by the depot, the postmistress, a gaunt woman who wears a rawhide jacket and
denims and cowboy boots, presides over a falling-apart post office. The depot, itself, with its
peeling sulphur-colored paint, is equally melancholy; the Chief, the Super Chief, the El Captain
go by every day, but these celebrated expresses never pause there. No passenger trains do—only
an occasional freight. Up on the highway, there are two filling stations, one of which doubles as a
meagerly supplied grocery store, while the other does extra duty as a café—Hartman’s Café,
where Mrs. Hartman, the proprietress, dispenses sandwiches, coffee, soft drinks and 3.2 beer.
(Holcomb, like all the rest of Kansas, is “dry.”)

And that, really, is all. Unless you include, as one must, the Holcomb School, a good-
looking establishment, which reveals a circumstance that the appearance of the community
otherwise camouflages: that the parents who send their children to this modern and ably staffed
“consolidated” school—the grades go from kindergarten through senior high, and a fleet of buses
transport the students, of which there are usually around three hundred and sixty, from as far as
sixteen miles away—are, in general, a prosperous people… The farm ranchers in Finney County,
of which Holcomb is a part, have done well; money has been made not from farming alone but
also from the exploitation of plentiful natural-gas resources, and its acquisition is reflected in the
new school, the comfortable interiors of the farmhouses, the steep and swollen grain elevators.

Until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans—in fact, few Kansans—
had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and
like the yellow trains streaking down the Santa Fe tracks, drama in the shape of exceptional
happenings, had never stopped there. The inhabitants of the village, numbering two hundred and
seventy, were satisfied that this should be so, quite content to exist inside ordinary life…
Notating the Passage

The following paragraphs are from the opening of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. After carefully reading the excerpt, write a well-organized essay in which you characterize Capote’s view of Holcomb, Kansas, and analyze how Capote conveys this view. Your analysis may consider such stylistic elements as diction, imagery, syntax, structure, tone, and selection of detail.

- How will you tackle this task?
- What is Capote’s view?
- How does he convey this view?
A Sample Process

1. The town is “Old West” and insignificant
2. The town is stark
3. The people reflect this setting
4. There is a contrast between the first three paragraphs and the last two
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The farm ranchers in Finney County, of which Holcomb is a part, have done well; money has been made not from farming alone but also from the exploitation of plentiful natural-gas resources, and its acquisition is reflected in the new school, the comfortable interiors of the farmhouses, the steep and swollen grain elevators. Until one morning in mid-November of 1959; few Americans—in fact, few Kansans—had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Sante Fe tracks, drama in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there. The inhabitants of the village, numbering two hundred and seventy, were satisfied that this should be so, quite content to exist inside ordinary life.
Develop Your Opening Paragraph

• After you have marked the passage, review the prompt
• Choose the elements you are able to identify and analyze those that support Capote’s view
• Which would you choose?
• For example: structure, tone, and selection of detail
Develop Your Opening Paragraph

• Your opening statement should catch the eye and set the tone for the essay
• Make sure the topic is clear
• Identify the text and author in the opening
• Now try it!
Which Do You Like Best?

A

In the opening of *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote presents a picture of the town of Holcomb, Kansas. Through structure, selection of detail, and a detached tone, he makes it clear that he views Holcomb as dull and ordinary.

B

Holcomb, Kansas. Holcomb, Kansas. Even the sound of the place is boring and uninteresting. Moreover, Truman Capote seems to agree with this in his opening to *In Cold Blood*. I, too, would be inclined to pass by this sleepy, bland, and undistinguished hamlet. This view is developed through the author’s tone, structure, and selection of detail.

C

“Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Sante Fe tracks, drama in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped here.” This is the town of Holcomb, Kansas. Using a reportorial tone, specific structure, and selection of detail, Capote introduces the reader to this unremarkable town in the opening of *In Cold Blood*.

D

*In Cold Blood* is a very appropriate title, because Capote presents a cold and unemotional view of Holcomb, Kansas. His tone, structure, and selection of detail create a distant and detached picture of this desolate farm community.
Writing the Body

- Present your analysis and the points you want to make related to the prompt
- Adhere to the question
- Use specific references and details from the passage (including paraphrasing and quotes)
- Regularly repeat the ideas from your prompt and opening
- Use synonyms (bland/ordinary/undistinguished)
- Use transitions between paragraphs
A

This paragraph develops **tone**.

Throughout the passage, Capote maintains a tone that resembles a detached reporter who is an observer of a scene. Although the impact of the passage is seeing Holcomb in a less than positive light, the author rarely uses judgmental terminology or statements. In describing the town, he uses words such as “float,” “haphazard,” “unnamed,” “unshaded,” “unpaved.” Individuals are painted with an objective brush showing them in “denim,” “Stetsons,” and “cowboy boots.” Capote maintains his panning camera angle when he writes of the buildings and the surrounding farmland. This matter-of-fact approach is slightly altered when he begins to portray the townspeople as a whole when he uses such words as “prosperous people,” “comfortable interiors,” and “have done well.” His objective tone, interestingly enough, does exactly what he says the folks of Holcomb do. He “camouflages” his attitude toward the reality of the place and time.
Sample Body Paragraphs

This paragraph develops structure.

Capote organizes his passage spatially. He brings his reader from “great distances” to the periphery of the village with its borders of “main-line tracks” and roads, river and fields, to the heart of the town and its “unnamed, unshaded, unpaved” streets. As the reader journeys through the stark village, he or she is led eventually from the outskirts to the town’s seemingly one bright spot—the prosperous Holcomb school. Capote develops our interest in the school by contrasting it with the bleak and lonely aspects of the first three paragraphs. He shifts our view with the word “unless” and focuses on the positive aspects of the town. Holcomb “has done well” despite its forbidding description. The passage could end now, except that Capote chooses to develop his next paragraph with the words, “until one morning,” thus taking the reader on another journey, one of foreshadowing and implication. Something other than wheat is on the horizon.
In selecting his details, Capote presents a multilayered Holcomb, Kansas. The town is first presented as stark and ordinary. It is a “lonesome area” with “hard blue skies,” where “the land is flat” and the buildings are an “aimless congregation.” The ordinary qualities of the village are reinforced by his references to the “unnamed” streets, “one-story frame” houses, and the fact that “celebrated expresses never pause there” (i.e., the “Chief, the Super Chief, the El Capitan”). Details portray the citizens of Holcomb in the same light. Ranch hands speak with “barbed” and nasal “twangs.” They wear the stereotypical “cowboy” uniform and so does the “gaunt” postmistress in her “rawhide jacket.” Once this description is established, the author contrasts it with an unexpected view of the town. He now deals with the appearance of Holcomb’s “camouflages,” the “modern” school, the “prosperous people,” the “comfortable interiors,” and the “swollen grain elevators.” If Capote chooses to illuminate this contrast, does it indicate more to come?
The Conclusion

• Don’t waste time worrying about it!!!
• It’s not necessary to repeat yourself.
• Avoid “In conclusion . . .”
• Not a paragraph, a sentence or two.
• If you want to make a final statement, try to link your ideas to a particularly effective line or image from the passage.
Other Types of Analysis Essays

• Identify the Author’s Intended Effect of the Reader
  – What is your personal reaction to the text?
• Analyze How an Author Re-creates an Experience
  – What makes the readers feel they are there?
• Compare and Contrast
  – Be organized!
For Example . . .

The letter below was written by Samuel Johnson in response to a woman who had asked him to obtain the archbishop of Canterbury’s patronage to have her son sent to the university. Read the letter carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Johnson crafts his denial of the woman’s request.

Florence Kelley (1859-1932) was a United States social worker and reformer who fought successfully for child labor laws and improved conditions for working women. She delivered the following speech before the convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in Philadelphia on July 22, 1905. Read the speech carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies Kelley uses to convey her message about child labor to her audience. Support your analysis with specific references to the text.

The passage below is from The Horizontal World, Debra Marquart’s 2006 memoir about growing up in North Dakota. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the strategies Marquart uses to characterize the upper Midwest.

The two passages below, both written by noted contemporary scientist Edward O. Wilson, appear in Wilson’s book The Future of Life (2002). In the passages, Wilson satirizes the language of two groups that hold opposing attitudes about environmentalism. Read each passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Wilson’s satire illustrates the unproductive nature of such discussions.
What Now?

- Choose one of the supplied prompts, and plan and write your own essay.