

CRITICAL ANALYSIS CONSIDERATIONS

1. INITIAL RESPONSE--Do you like or dislike what you've just read? Start by asking yourself this question. Whether you are amused or infuriated, confused or convinced, you are responding to either what is being said (interpretation) or how it is being said (technical analysis).
2. THESIS--In your critical analysis, a reader will find two theses: (1) the author's, which his or her essay is supposed to prove or accomplish* and (2) yours, which your critical analysis develops. In his essay "Who Killed Privacy?" Roger Rosenblatt says, "Privacy in our time has not only been invaded; it's been eagerly surrendered" (CR 378). This surrender, he asserts, "undermines individualism, that other basic notion of the Republic" (CR 382). This is his thesis (perhaps). Yours might be, "Though Rosenblatt's wealth of examples easily proves that too many people are too happy to be spied upon, his warnings are unreasonable and partisan, and his prognosis, though eloquent, is completely unsupported." Until you identify an essay's thesis, you will be unable to critique the author's logic; you're stuck. Overall, your thesis will address the what, the how and/or the why of the writer's piece.
3. ORGANIZATION--How is the essay structured? Why did the author order his topics and assertions this way? Look at the first sentence in each paragraph; what does it tell you about the author's organizational strategy? Is there an introduction, body and conclusion? Need there be? Where does the writer acknowledge the opposition? Where does the writer make his or her most important statements? Why?
4. LOGIC--Does the writer support his or her assertions? How? Do you detect any logical fallacies? Is the essay persuasive? Is the essay persuasive even if it is illogical? Is it unconvincing even though its argument is valid?
5. AUDIENCE--Does the writer attempt to ingratiate himself or herself to you? How? Does he or she appeal to your prejudices? Your fears? Your aspirations? Does the writer try to make you identify with him or her? With the plight of those about whom he or she writes? What tricks does the writer use? Are they effective? Are they fair?
6. LANGUAGE--How would you describe the author's sentence structure? Word choice? Tone? Is it stuffy? Slangy? Formal? Street-tough? Cynical? Eccentric? Does the writer's diction reveal personal bias? Does it elicit certain emotional responses? Look up every word that is either new to you or is used in a strange way. Read every sentence as slowly, and scrutinize it as carefully, as if you were writing it.
7. HISTORY—what can you say about when this was written or the timeliness of the topic?

**This is a simplified description of a complicated concept--PURPOSE--over which writers, readers, teachers, critics and student authors argue ad nauseam. A piece might well have a PURPOSE (to amuse, inform, instruct, swindle, frighten, instruct, seduce...) without a THESIS. Or it may serve an unintended purpose, one which would astonish or appall the author (who no longer has anything to say about it). Perhaps you prefer the analytical question, "What, in the essay, causes me to react this way?" rather than "Is this essay effective?"*