

Assignment packet

Anatomy of an analytical essay
based on Hacker, *The Pocket Style Manual*

To compose an analytical essay: (1) “formulate a **thesis** statement that is open to debate”; then, (2) “use one or more texts to build an argument around that **thesis**.” If a reader’s question upon beginning to read your paper is “Why should I read this paper? What’s the point?” its **thesis** is your reply. Your reader might next ask, “Why should I believe the claim that this **thesis** is making?” Throughout your essay, you provide **evidence** that supports your **thesis**. “Okay,” your reader concedes, “But why does your **evidence** support your **thesis**? What is the connection?” As you introduce your **evidence**, you **reason** *how* and *why* it supports your **thesis**—and thus why your reader should believe it!

(1) Formulating a **thesis** is an art and a science! It requires practice and patience. “Within the guidelines of your assignment, begin by asking questions that you are interested in exploring, that you believe will interest your audience, and that will contribute to an ongoing debate or to existing knowledge in the field. For any type of assignment, you should make sure that your questions are *narrow* (not too broad), *challenging* (not too bland), and *grounded* (not too speculative).”

Too broad: “What is horror?”

More narrow: “How does *Dracula* adhere to or deviate from the conventions of horror literature?”

Too bland: “Which actresses feature in horror films?”

Challenging: “How does a figure’s gender inform their characterization?”

Too speculative: “Is the supernatural real?”

Grounded: “How do horror authors use the supernatural to elicit fear or quell it?”

You might have several questions you are considering! Your **thesis** answers your central question: “The **thesis** expresses your informed, reasoned judgment, not your opinion. Usually your **thesis** will appear at the end of the first paragraph.”

(2) **Evidence & reasoning** persuades your reader of the claim your thesis has made. After your introductory paragraph/s, your essay “will draw on the sources you use to support your thesis.” For the purposes of this course, our class readings constitute your body of “source material” from which you will draw evidence that demonstrates why your (necessarily) debate-able **thesis** is true.

Essay #0 | What is a myth?

Let us assume, for the purpose of this assignment, that the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* contains (or is!) a myth. Reflect on the content of the *Hymn*, and on our discussion as a class during Week 1. Then, compose what could be the thesis for a longer essay that addresses one or some combination of the following questions:

1. If the *Hymn* counts, then what is a myth?
2. What are some of this genre's defining features?
3. How are myths different from other kinds of stories?
4. Is a myth always a story? Is it always literary?

A thesis is a non-obvious claim abstracted from concrete details about some feature of the text on which you are working. List out 3-5 pieces of evidence in support this thesis, and explain briefly how this evidence supports your claim. Remember: do *not* generalize! Use specific examples from the *Hymn* to back up your claims about the nature of myth. Please do not bring in material beyond our readings!

Print out and bring with you to class on Thursday *two* copies of your exercise to exchange with (a) peer(s). By commenting upon each other's work, you will analyze a claim to see how debate-able and supportable it is. I will meet with each of you individually to discuss my comments, just as we will meet to discuss your first draft of at least the first three (of a total of four) full-length essays due over the course of this semester.

Writing activity A | Review of Essay #o

Answer the following questions about your peer's thesis and their reasoning.

1. What's the "so what?" or "and this matters because" of the **thesis** statement?
2. For each piece of evidence, consider the following:
 - How does the **evidence** relate back to the "so what?" of the **thesis**?
 - How does the author's **reasoning** show that this **evidence** supports their **thesis**?

Essay #1 | On the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*

Compose a short (4-5 double-spaced pages with reasonable margins and 12 point font) essay that addresses some key issue in the text of the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. Remember: you must articulate a debate-able claim in your thesis statement and then support it with evidence and reasoning drawn from the text. You may develop your argument from Essay #0 or consider a new thesis entirely.

I provide some suggested questions (*not* theses!) you might consider below, but pursue your own interests. If you plan to pursue a new thesis and deviate significantly from the questions posed below, I encourage you to consult with me. Ensure your work is free from errors in grammar and spelling!

1. (from Essay #0) If the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* is a myth, then what are some defining features of this genre for the ancient Greeks?
2. How does the poet of the *Hymn* characterize Aphrodite?
3. How does the poet characterize the nature of desire?
4. How does the poet characterize the relationship between gods and mortals?
5. How does the poet characterize the relationship between men and women?

Writing activity B | On writing

Reflect in in some form—with a list, mind-map, Venn diagram, dialogue, or just with a paragraph or two—on your relationship with writing. Perhaps consider one or more of the following questions:

- Do you enjoy writing? If so, what kind? Short fiction, poetry, analytical, or something else
 - If so, why? If not, why?
- What kinds of courses have you taken that have involved writing?
 - What did you learn about writing in these courses?
- What do you find difficult about writing?
- What comes easily to you?
- What is the relationship between writing and reading?
- Why did you choose this ESEM in particular?

Writing activity C | Close reading

Consider the lines of the *Hymn to Aphrodite* you chose to read closely. Write them out in your own hand in the space below:

Take your time with these lines, and reflect on why you chose them by answering the following questions, and maybe answering some of your own:

- What seemed significant about these lines at the time you selected them?
- What adjectives or adverbs does the poet use?
- What is their relationship to the rest of the poem?
- Is there any interesting wordplay in them?
- What kind of tone do they convey?
- Do they hint toward a particular theme immanent in the poem?
- Are there any other lines in the poem that convey similar meaning or use similar language? Are there any that convey the opposite? Jot them down below and, perhaps on your own time, as you consider Essay #1, you might repeat this exercise with those lines!

Writing activity D | Citation exercise

Here is an essay context in which **two** elements from the *Hymn* appear.

- First, **correct** the style of the passage, adjusting capitalization and punctuation as needed. Then, **cite each element**, all in Chicago notes/bibliography style. Include: one footnote for the first element; one footnote for the second element; and one bibliographical entry for the whole thing. Do not use a citation generator! Use only the linked guide.

In the homeric hymn to Aphrodite, the poet says that Zeus accordingly implanted sweet desire in her heart for Anchises. At the end of the poem Aphrodite says Think the matter over and restrain yourself rather than mentioning my name; beware the gods' wrath!

- Now, convert those citations to MLA format.
- Finally, create a citation in either style for the lines you chose to close read.

Writing activity E | Peer review of Essay #1

Answer the following questions about your peer's draft.

1. What's the "so what?" or "and this matters because" of the **thesis** statement?
2. For each body paragraph, consider the following:
 - How does the paragraph relate back to the "so what?" of the **thesis**?
 - What **evidence** does the author bring out in this paragraph?
 - How does the author's **reasoning** show that this **evidence** supports her **thesis**?
3. Having considered each body paragraph, what do *you*, as a reader, consider to be your peer's central claim? Does it hold up to the **thesis**?
4. A **thesis** must be debatable, and so there are always counter arguments to consider.
 - What is a counter argument that your peer does not address?
 - What evidence can you bring out from the text to support this counter argument?
5. How does your peer conclude? What work does the conclusion do?
6. Finally, what did the author do well? Where could they improve?

Essay #2 | On myths of cosmic Eros

Compose a short (4-5 double-spaced pages with reasonable margins and 12 point font) essay that addresses some key issue in the text of Hesiod's *Theogony* **or** Plato's *Symposium*, **perhaps** using the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* as a point of comparison. Remember: you must articulate a debate-able claim in your thesis statement and then support it with evidence and reasoning drawn from the text.

I provide some suggested questions (*not* theses!) you might consider below, but pursue your own interests. If you plan to pursue a new thesis and deviate significantly from the questions posed below, I encourage you to consult with me. Ensure your work is free from errors in grammar and spelling!

1. How does Hesiod represent the relationship between men and women, or between gods and mortals?
2. What is the nature of Eros for Socrates or Aristophanes, and are they being serious?!
3. How do Socrates or Aristophanes characterize the divine? How do mortals show up in the *Symposium*?
4. Are the speeches of Socrates and/or Aristophanes myths?
5. How does Apuleius represent desire?
6. What are the gods like in the story of Cupid and Psyche?
7. Is the nature of Eros to be creative or destructive?

Writing Activity F | Compare, contrast, abstract

With this exercise, you'll practice an important skill for developing theses: abstracting from concrete observations.

Take a few moments to consider our first two readings: the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and Hesiod's *Theogony*. These poems both arose from the same *milieu*—that is, they both reach out to us from the archaic Greek world—and so are ripe for juxtaposition. Write freely about them, or consider some of the following questions:

- How is Zeus represented across these texts?
- How is Aphrodite depicted?
- What is the cosmos like and who is in charge?
- How do human beings show up in either text?
- What is the role of sex and/or desire in either text?
- How does violence appear in each?
- How about power?
- How do the sexes interact with each other?

Now, from your observations about concrete moments in the text, **abstract** a claim. The claim can be about anything, so long as it's grounded in observations about one or both texts. Record your claim below.

Writing activity G | Rhetorical analysis

Both Socrates' and Aristophanes' *encomia*, or "praise speeches," are highly conceptual, but they're both argumentative. Yesterday, through our discussion in class, we pulled apart the rhetoric of each speech and we determined what each speech asserted that desire is, and what its function/s is/are.

Unlike in an *encomium* (praise speech), an academic essay uses different support to prove its **thesis**, namely, the citation of specific examples as evidence and an argument that weaves the examples together by way of reasoning. With a partner, imagine that Socrates/Aristophanes needs to transform their *encomium* into an academic essay. First, fill in the blanks in this **thesis** from your chosen speaker's perspective:

"Desire is _____, and so its function/s is/are _____."

Next, outline an essay in support of this thesis by using as evidence the material we have encountered in class so far. You may use any source as evidence for your claims, but the evidence must be specific, as it always should be in academic writing. List out your evidence, and then demonstrate your reasoning: why and how are your pieces of evidence related, and why do they support Socrates'/Aristophanes' claim?

Essay #3 | On erotic relationships between gods and mortals

Compose a moderate-length (5-6 double-spaced pages with reasonable margins and 12 point font) essay that addresses some key issue in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, Homer's *Odyssey*, **and/or** Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, **perhaps** using Zeitlin's theoretical apparatus as a heuristic tool. Your paper must engage with **at least** 2 of these sources (NB: two discrete stories from Ovid count as two sources). Remember: you must articulate a debate-able claim in your thesis statement and then support it with evidence and reasoning drawn from the text.

I provide some suggested questions (*not* theses!) you might consider below, but pursue your own interests. If you plan to pursue a new thesis and deviate significantly from the questions posed below, I encourage you to consult with me. Ensure your work is free from errors in grammar and spelling!

1. How do gender dynamics effect relationships between mortals and gods, if at all?
2. How do “negative” emotions—fear, hatred, etc.—show up in these erotic stories?
3. Does the perspective of a story's narrator effect how that tale is told?
4. How and where does lack of consent appear in these myths?
5. Are there differences between the way in which male and female perpetrators behave? Between male and female victims?
6. In what stories is Eros a “Tyrannos,” as Zeitlin claims?

Writing activity H | Peer review of Essay #2

Answer the following questions about your peer's draft.

1. What's the "so what?" or "and this matters because" of the **thesis** statement?
2. For each body paragraph, consider the following:
 - How does the paragraph relate back to the "so what?" of the **thesis**?
 - What **evidence** does the author bring out in this paragraph?
 - How does the author's **reasoning** show that this **evidence** supports her **thesis**?
3. Having considered each body paragraph, what do *you*, as a reader, consider to be your peer's central claim? Does it hold up to the **thesis**?
4. A **thesis** must be debatable, and so there are always counter arguments to consider.
 - What is a counter argument that your peer does not address?
 - What evidence can you bring out from the text to support this counter argument?
5. How does your peer conclude? What work does the conclusion do?
6. Finally, what did the author do well? Where could they improve?

Writing activity I | Extrapolation into the abstract

Refer to your chosen moment—a short passage or even just a sentence—from the *Odyssey* and from the tale of Cupid & Psyche that you felt encapsulates a point of comparison or contrast between the two texts. These are your pieces of evidence.

First, answer these questions with reference to specific words or moments in **each** of your pieces:

- Which words leap out at you as particularly indicative of the nature of desire?
- Do words like these crop up elsewhere in the text?
- Whose perspective does the moment convey?

Next, use your answers about each individual text to articulate precisely a point of comparison or contrast between desire across these texts:

This is an abstract claim, extrapolated from specific evidence. Now, return to the texts: are there other moments that feel particularly poignant?

Writing activity J | Generous reading

Criticism is an important tool, but it is far more difficult—and much, *much* more useful—to engage empathetically with scholarly work. Hence, “generous reading,” the practice of reading scholarship with an eye toward what you can take away from it and apply to your own work on a text.

Start by thinking about Zeitlin’s “Eros Tyrannos.” Were there particular moments in her analysis of either the *Symposium* or the *Hymn to Aphrodite* that jumped out at you? What were they, and, on second reading, *why* did they? Be very specific.

Next, abstract from these concrete moments: what do they convey more generally about Zeitlin’s view on the nature of desire and/or of myth for ancient Greeks?

Finally, consider texts besides the *Hymn* or the *Symposium* that we have read so far. Could you apply the idea you’ve abstracted from Zeitlin’s observations to this text? Choose a moment from it, and try it out!

Writing activity K | Lens practice

Choose one of the pairings below from Books 1-3 of the *Metamorphoses* (or mix and match!). Situate them in dialogue with each other. How might your reading of (A)/(B) illuminate something about (B)/(A)?

Example: If text (A) is the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and (B) is Aristophanes' speech from Plato's *Symposium*, then (A)'s insistence that desire is violent might make me reconsider (B)'s comic overtones. Is there not something violent about Zeus' separation of all lovers? Is there something horrific in Hephæstos' offer to melt human beings together?

(A) Daphne and (B) Io

(A) Syrinx and (B) Callisto

(A) Actæon and (B) Semele

(A) Tiresias and (B) Narcissus & Echo

Essay #4 | On erotic relationships between human beings

Compose an (6-8 double-spaced pages with reasonable margins and 12 point font) essay that addresses some key issue in Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Seneca's *Phaedra*, Propertius, or Sappho, **perhaps** using Carson's theory as scaffolding for your ideas. Your paper must engage with **at least** 3 sources (NB: two discrete stories from Ovid count as two sources). Remember: you must articulate a debate-able claim in your thesis statement and then support it with evidence and reasoning drawn from the text.

I provide some suggested questions (*not* theses!) you might consider below, but pursue your own interests. If you plan to pursue a new thesis and deviate significantly from the questions posed below, I encourage you to consult with me. Ensure your work is free from errors in grammar and spelling!

1. Do any of these stories depict Eros as anything other than "Bittersweet," as Carson claims?
2. Are there differences between Ovid's representation of god/mortal, god/god, and mortal/mortal relationships?
3. Again, what *is* a myth? Do Sappho's and/or Propertius' poems count?
4. In these sources, is heterosexual attraction represented differently from its homosexual counterpart?
5. When the narrator of a story is in the first-person ("I"), does this speaker depict desire differently than a third-person narrator does?

Writing activity L | Peer review of Essay #3

Answer the following questions about your peer's draft.

1. What's the "so what?" or "and this matters because" of the **thesis** statement?
2. For each body paragraph, consider the following:
 - How does the paragraph relate back to the "so what?" of the **thesis**?
 - What **evidence** does the author bring out in this paragraph?
 - How does the author's **reasoning** show that this **evidence** supports her **thesis**?
3. Having considered each body paragraph, what do *you*, as a reader, consider to be your peer's central claim? Does it hold up to the **thesis**?
4. A **thesis** must be debatable, and so there are always counter arguments to consider.
 - What is a counter argument that your peer does not address?
 - What evidence can you bring out from the text to support this counter argument?
5. How does your peer conclude? What work does the conclusion do?
6. Finally, what did the author do well? Where could they improve?

Writing activity M | Lens practice

Choose one of the pairings below, each of which includes a tale from Book 10 of the *Metamorphoses*. Situate them in dialogue with each other. How might your reading of (A)/(B) illuminate something about (B)/(A)?

Example: If text (A) is the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and (B) is Aristophanes' speech from Plato's *Symposium*, then (A)'s insistence that desire is violent might make me reconsider (B)'s comic overtones. Is there not something violent about Zeus' separation of all lovers? Is there something horrific in Hephæstos' offer to melt human beings together?

(A) Eurydice and (B) Diotima's speech

(A) Pygmalion and (B) Hesiod's Pandora

(A) Ovid's Ganymede and (B) the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite's* Ganymede

(A) Myrrha and (B) Seneca's *Phædra*

(A) Atalanta and (B) Cupid & Psyche

Writing activity N | Generous reading

Criticism is an important tool, but it is far more difficult—and much, *much* more useful—to engage empathetically with scholarly work. Hence, “generous reading,” the practice of reading scholarship with an eye toward what you can take away from it and apply to your own work on a text.

Start by thinking about Carson’s *Eros the Bittersweet*. Were there particular moments in her analysis, particularly of Sappho, that jumped out at you? What were they, and, on second reading, *why* did they? Be very specific.

Next, abstract from these concrete moments: what do they convey more generally about Carson’s view on the nature of desire and/or of gender for ancient Greeks?

Finally, consider texts besides Sappho’s poems that we have read so far. Could you apply the idea you’ve abstracted from Carson’s observations to this text? Choose a moment from it, and try it out!

Writing activity O | Completing the fragment

Choose your favorite fragment of Archilochus or Anacreon. Especially if your fragment is just a line or two, imagine a context for them: what could come before and after? Write some possible lines! There are limitless possibilities, so feel free to come up with several iterations. If there are *lacunae* (gaps, represented by ellipses in our translations), fill them in with a word or two.

NB: These do not have to be “good poetry” (and what even is that?!). This exercise is to generate your thinking about fragmentation.

Writing activity P | Peer review of Essay #4

Answer the following questions about your peer's draft.

1. What's the "so what?" or "and this matters because" of the **thesis** statement?
2. For each body paragraph, consider the following:
 - How does the paragraph relate back to the "so what?" of the **thesis**?
 - What **evidence** does the author bring out in this paragraph?
 - How does the author's **reasoning** show that this **evidence** supports her **thesis**?
3. Having considered each body paragraph, what do *you*, as a reader, consider to be your peer's central claim? Does it hold up to the **thesis**?
4. A **thesis** must be debatable, and so there are always counter arguments to consider.
 - What is a counter argument that your peer does not address?
 - What evidence can you bring out from the text to support this counter argument?
5. How does your peer conclude? What work does the conclusion do?
6. Finally, what did the author do well? Where could they improve?