



The Lantern English Co.  
The Advanced Writer

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## **The Advanced Essay II – Syllabus**

**Course Description:** In this continuation of advanced essays, students use critical analysis skills to review rhetorical analysis and then write three new types of essays, all of which will demand strong critical thinking, thorough analysis, and growing writing style. Students in this class write five essays, three of which allow for rough drafts and revisions.

### **Course Outline:**

**Week One:** Reviewing the Rhetorical Analysis

**Week Two:** Critical Evaluation – Submit Rough Draft

**Week Three:** Critical Evaluation – Submit Final Draft

**Week Four:** To Agree or Disagree – Submit Rough Draft

**Week Five:** To Agree or Disagree – Submit Final Draft

**Week Six:** To Agree or Disagree – Practice Essay

**Week Seven:** The Personal Narrative – Submit Rough Draft

**Week Eight:** The Personal Narrative – Submit Final Draft

**Grading Information:** Assignments 1, 3, 5, 6, and 8 will be graded using *The Advanced Writer* Grading Rubric. Assignments 2, 4, and 7 will be graded using our Rough Draft Rubric. All assignments will be averaged to receive a final course grade.



## The Advanced Essay II

### Lesson Two: Critical Evaluation

#### SAMPLE LESSON

In *The Advanced Essay I*, we covered the first few components of advanced writing—paraphrase, summary, critical reading, and rhetorical analysis. Let us review the following information:

In our advanced responses, we consider three key sections, answering some specific questions.

- **General Meaning (This is where paraphrase and/or summary is seen, as covered in *The Advanced Essay I*, Lessons 1-4):** What is happening in this text? What is this text about? And how do I know?
- **Created Meaning (This is where rhetorical analysis is used, as covered in *The Advanced Essay I*, Lessons 5-8):** How does the author make his/her point? What type of language does the author use? What type of development and organization does the author use? How do the author's choices of language, development, and organization help the reader to understand or benefit from the text?
- **Thematic Meaning (This is where critical evaluation is used; we will be focusing on thematic meaning for the entirety of this class):** What questions does this text raise? How is this text connected to personal experience, other texts, or the world? How does this text relate to the human condition? How can these ideas be interpreted? Do I agree or disagree with the ideas in the text? What are my opinions about the ideas in the text?

Once you have understood the general meaning (paraphrase/summary) and created meaning (rhetorical analysis) of a text, it is time to move to the thematic meaning (evaluation). In evaluation essays, you will combine skills in paraphrase and summary writing with rhetorical analysis skills to develop meaningful discussions about texts. The critical evaluation process will continue to employ your reading and thinking skills, furthering you to a place where you can begin to agree or disagree with texts you are reading.

## **THE PURPOSE OF CRITICAL REVIEW –**

The purpose of a critical review is three-fold:

1. Summarize the Text: Think 'surface content.' What is this text about? What are the main ideas? What are the central claims? Who is the intended audience? Etc.
2. Understand the Text's Rhetoric: How has the author organized this text? How does the author make claims? What rhetorical methods does the author employ? Etc.
3. Evaluate the Text: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the source? What is the purpose of the source? Why has the author organized the source in the given way? How does each component of the source connect with another? Etc.

Critical review skills can be employed in response to any media material, including fictional texts, non-fictional texts or articles, essays, poetry, or even films. First, you must close-read the text. Additionally, you may be required to read other related texts to ensure that you can present a fair review of the selected text.

**As with critical reading and thinking skills, giving a critical review of something does not mean to offer negative criticism.** “Rather, it requires you to question the information and opinions in a text and present your evaluation or judgment of the text.” (1) Again, in order to present a fair and worthy evaluation, you should consider the topic from various perspectives by reading related texts, understanding the background of the original text, etc.

## **THE STRUCTURE OF A CRITICAL REVIEW –**

Regardless of the length, be it one page or four pages, critical reviews are typically structured using a particular method.

### **Introduction**

The introduction is commonly one paragraph for a chapter or article review but two or even three paragraphs for a book or film review. In your introduction, ensure that the title of the source and the author(s) are made clear. Briefly explain the topic of the selected source. Finally, the introduction should conclude with a short statement of evaluation, be it positive or negative or even a mixed response (your thesis).

### **Summary**

Next, you should summarize the key points of the selected source along with giving a handful of examples. You can also summarize the author's intentions behind the source, as well as noting the organization of the source. The summary should comprise only about one fourth to one third of the critical review.

### **Critique**

After you have summarized the text, you will now offer your critique. Remember, the critique is not an offering of negative criticism. Instead, it needs to be a balanced discussion and analysis of the text's strengths, weaknesses, and important features. Just as with any successful essay, a good review should also include pieces of reputable evidence to support your evaluation (remember to cite your references).

The critique can be organized in several ways:

- Begin with the most important evaluations and continue through the least important evaluations.
- If your evaluations are more positive than negative, begin with the negative points, followed by the positive.
- If your evaluations are more negative than positive, begin with the positive points, followed by the negative.
- If your evaluations are more mixed, you can balance the discussion of positive points and negative points. For example, you may want to present an idea in the text, beginning by stating the positive about this idea followed by the negative.

- For a short review, it is better to include a single paragraph or two about the positives and a single paragraph or two about the negatives. However, for a long review, you can more easily combine both positives and negatives within paragraphs.
- Throughout or at the end of the review, you can also make suggestions as to how the text can be improved.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion need only be a simple paragraph. Restate your thesis and general opinion of the selected source. As in a book report, you can also offer your recommendations.

## **References**

If you have used any outside sources as evidence in your review, ensure that these sources are properly cited and included as a list of works cited at the end of the review.

## **THE SUMMARY –**

From *The Advanced Essay I*, you have a working knowledge of how to paraphrase and summarize properly. When writing the critical review, remember that your summary should comprise no more than one fourth to one third of the review. Follow these steps to summarize well:

- Briefly review the source. Look for straightforward information in the introduction, conclusion and the title and headings (if applicable). By studying just these sections, can you deduce the main points of the source?
- Reread the text more closely this time; then identify the topic sentences and note main points and important details.

## **FINAL NOTES –**

The ideas presented in this lesson are from the perspective of evaluating a TEXT, but we practiced a lot of text responses in *The Advanced Essay I*, so we want you to move in a different, and perhaps more fun, direction. For your first response essay, you will evaluate a FILM. Therefore, you will not need to *close-read* anything, but you will need to *close-watch*. Apply all of the same concepts for writing a text-based critical review, but instead, review a film.

- Remember that you are writing an evaluation. Therefore, do not merely summarize or discuss what the film is about. You must evaluate the quality of the film. You may discuss and evaluate things such as the plot, the writing, the production, etc.
- Remember that you are writing a critical evaluation. Therefore, your essay should neither be all-positive or all-negative. Evaluate all elements of the film, both the positive and the negative. Be fair and honest.
- You **may** read reviews from other critics, but avoid relying on their reviews as the support for your thesis. Think critically about your *own* evaluation of the film.
- Evaluate the film based on a strong criteria. A film is not “good” simply because it's popular, or vice versa. A film is not bad simply because you yourself did not find the plot interesting. Think deeply about the film. *Why* do you think it is popular, for example? Do these reasons have merit? Why did you *not* find the plot interesting?
- Avoid using the pronoun “you”, directly referencing the reader. While in certain essays, this pronoun can be beneficial, it is not so in the critical evaluation. Here, it can seem heavy-handed and preachy, trying to force the reader aggressively to believe in something rather than allowing the reader to make his or her determination based upon the logic and support you provide. Instead, use terms like “audiences” or “viewers” or “readers,” depending on the subject. This makes the argument seem more objective rather than “telling” the reader to think a certain way. Oftentimes, this “telling” with the word *you* is a mask for a lack of developed reasoning. Make your reasons do the persuasive work.
- Remember to evaluate the essay critically. Do not write from “feeling,” but from solid evidence and reasoning. Do not evaluate on personal taste, but objectively and critically.

**Assignment 2A:** Choose and watch a film of your choice. As you watch, consider the film's rhetoric. How is the film organized? What is the film's main idea? How have the producers gone about conveying the main idea(s) of the film?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the film? What is the purpose of the film? Why have the producers organized the film in the given way? How does each component of the film connect with another? Etc.

**Assignment 2B:** In response to the film, write a rough draft critical evaluation essay. This essay should be 800-1200 words and critically evaluate the quality of the film.

Your evaluation essay should demonstrate critical thought and development of your own opinions about the film, not merely be a conglomeration of other people's opinions/reviews about the film.

Write to a general audience, assuming that your reader has not seen the movie. Provide sound, fair, and thorough evidence to support your claims. Remember to note the title of the film, its production company, and the date of its release.

Use of 6-10 sources (**primary** and/or **secondary** sources ONLY; no tertiary sources permitted) is required, submitted in a proper MLA works cited list and appropriately cited within the text using either in-text citations or parenthetical references.

We have attached an example that you may wish to review.

**Source –**

1. "Writing a Critical Review." *University of Mary Washington*, <https://academics.umw.edu/writing-fredericksburg/files/2011/09/Critical-Review.pdf>.