

August 23, 2017 Class Notes:

What is an Argument? An argument is usually a main idea, often called a “claim” or “thesis statement” backed up with evidence that supports the idea.

Claims - can also be complex, using reasoning and evidence

Why are Arguments Important? You will need to select a point of view and provide evidence to shape the material and offer your interpretation of the material. Engage in critical thinking and debate in your writing.

Critical Writing - develops an idea in the form of an argument and uses a text or other cultural artifact as a medium for developing that idea. Critical papers require:

- complex, argumentative theses
- specific and thorough introductions
- strong topic sentences
- solid transitions between ideas and between paragraphs
- convincing evidence
- careful interpretation of evidence
- clear warrants and close readings
- effective word choice
- thought-provoking counterarguments

Critical Reading - is important to understanding an argument; put the author’s ideas in your own words. Stop thinking of these ideas as facts and start thinking of them as arguments. When you read ask the following questions:

- What is the author trying to prove?
- What is the author assuming I will agree with?
- Do I agree with the author?
- Does the author adequately defend her argument? What kind of proof does she use. Is there something she leaves out that I would put in? Does putting it in hurt her argument?

Books - are marketed in ways that emphasize how they make us feel, not make us think.

Regarding the characters, you must ask yourself the following questions:

- Why did the author create this unsavory character?
- What’s the author trying to show here?
- What’s the larger dynamic or problem into which this character and his / her / its behaviors fit?

Characters - all characters, at one level or another, are works of the imagination. They are messengers or vehicles for narrative content.

Rhetoric - is the art of using language. Rhetoric includes the arts of exposition, argumentation, and all other “work” through language. Useful questions to ask of every text you read:

- Who is the text’s author, and what is important to know about him or her?
- For whom is the author writing, and why? How would you describe the text’s audience?

- How does the genre of your text (poetry novel, play, etc.) actually work? What assumptions do readers have to bring to various genres in order for them to make sense? What conventions (traditional and widely accepted ways of conveying information) does the particular genre you're interested in use to communicate with its readers?
- What ideological assumptions (that is, unspoken and / or unexamined beliefs) hold your text together? What ways of thinking are in place that make your text intelligible to its readers?
- How does this text challenge or agree with other texts? What, in other words, are its intertextual characteristics?
- Does the author refer to other texts within this text? What kinds of texts are they? Do they help establish or challenge the current text's credibility?
- What is the historical context in which your text was written? How does this text engage the intellectual, social and political climate of its time?
- How would you describe the aesthetics of your text? How are those aesthetics related to genre, ideology, other art forms, history, etc.?
- What key terms, images and concepts has the author chosen to highlight in this text? Where in the piece do you encounter these terms, and are their patterns to their use?
- Are there any terms or phrases that seem historically specific?
- How does the author formulate relationships among key terms, images, and concepts?
- What claims (about people, the world, history, science, life, death, etc.) are made in this text? Which claims are the most important? Are they supported?