

Intro to Essays and the AAA

Overview

Two essays: Analyze an Issue (AAI) and Analyze an Argument (AAA)

Each is scored 0 – 6; your reported score is their average.

A score of 3 or below is given to papers that clearly have flaws. ☹

4 means “competent” 😊

5 is “quite good” 😊

6 means “nobody could have done better!”



Each essay is about persuasive communication. It is much more important to be clear than to be scholarly. Don't try to write like a PhD. Use language that is natural to you (as long as it is correct, of course!)

“Analyze an Argument”

A one-paragraph, hypothetical argument is presented to you. It is full of details, flaws, weaknesses, and hidden assumptions. Your job is usually to spot as many flaws, weaknesses, and hidden assumptions as you can, paying careful attention to the given details. A good target length is 500 words for the AAA essay. As a rule of thumb, your score will probably be (Word Count) / 100 ± 1.

This type of essay is an exercise in focusing on the written passage presented to you. It is not necessary to refer to outside knowledge. You will earn your best score by complete analysis (picking up on all the details, flaws, weaknesses, and hidden assumptions) and following the specific instructions. Grading rubric is on p. 39 for reference. See the score of 6 for “what to do” and the score of 3 for “what not to do”.

You are not graded on but you are graded on ...
Any reference to outside knowledge	“Examining aspects of the argument”
Technical or academic language	“Effective vocabulary”
Person, tone, or style	“Conventions of standard written English”
Making any particular number of points	“Identifying aspects of the argument”
Writing any particular number of words or paragraphs	“Developing” ideas

Approach

(See p. 29)

Preparation: Dissect the prompt

Backdrop: The author setting context, including other people's ideas.

Central argument: The reason the author wrote the article. This is where the author is trying to

- Convince everyone that something is true
- Persuade someone to do something

Evidence: Why the author thinks we should believe him.

Introduction

Restate the central argument. Add a sentence to show that you are reading critically and following instructions.

“The author believes that *use of the Mason River for water sports is sure to increase*. Consequently, he attempts to persuade the Mason City government to *devote more money in this year's budget to riverside recreational facilities*. However, the author fails to cite convincing evidence, and he seems to *rely on questionable and unstated assumptions*.”

Body

Dedicate at least one paragraph to each prong of the argument.

When you introduce your ideas, phrase them according to the instructions.

Ex: “The author's certainty that residents will use the river more for water sports rests on the *assumption* that their favorite water sports are river activities.”

Explain why your point is relevant to the argument at hand!

Ex: “If it turns out that Mason City residents had swimming pools in mind when they listed ‘swimming’ as a favorite activity, then they would not be likely to swim in the river regardless of the facilities on its banks.”

Eventually try to refer to all the details in the prompt.

Conclusion

The least important (save for end). Brief summary of what you just decided.

Common Trouble-Spots from the Trenches

My advice in referring to unknown genders:

- Pick a gender and stick to it. “He / she” is unnecessary and unwieldy, and “they” is improper.
- If there are two generic people, make one male and the other female

The instructions never ask us to lay blame or solve a problem.

Avoid “throat clearing language” – unnecessary words and phrases

“I think that the reason the author is trying to argue for an increase in the budget is just because, in his mind, he thinks that the city can afford to spend money for expenses on anything that it wants and has no limit to its budget.”

Get to the point!

“The author thinks that the city has an unlimited budget.”

The word “however” has two meanings with different usages, which students **OFTEN** mix up.

However: 1. But, on the other hand. 2. Whichever way you do it or look at it.

Correct usage of 1: “The author encourages the city to spend more. However, the city does not have an unlimited budget, and there are competing priorities.”

Alternative correct usage of 1: “The author encourages the city to spend more. The city does not have an unlimited budget, however, and there are competing priorities.”

Correct usage of 2: “Most people won’t use a river for water sports, however clean the river may be.”

Incorrect mixed up usage: “The author encourages the city to spend more, however the city does not have an unlimited budget.”

The correct phrase is “based on”, not “based off” or “based off of” !! This phrase seems to be trending. It sounds very uneducated! You would never say, “I chose my phone off the basis of its calling plan.”

What Next?

Read real student responses and their scores: pp. 31 – 36

Watch me write an AAA essay from scratch so you can see the process, not just the finished product. (See your homework)

Write one yourself (see homework). Time yourself but don't stop yourself. If it takes you longer than 30 minutes, then make sure your finished response is no more than about 500 words long.

Continue practicing AAA essays until you can write a response you're happy with in 30 minutes.