

write to analyse, review, explain or comment

ANALYSING, REVIEWING, COMMENTING and EXPLAINING

These types of writing are very similar. They are all based upon:

- a **thoughtful and well-considered analysis** of the topic in question (given for coursework or exam)
- a **careful selection** of the information revealed by the analysis
- a piece of **well-structured, lively and personal writing based upon the analysis**.

What varies between them is, largely, **the blend between fact and opinion** – that is, how **subjective** or **objective** your writing needs to be.

NOTE: If you are writing for the AQA exam board (syllabus "A") your coursework will be based upon an analysis of a media text such as an advertisement or film extract. You are required, as a part of this syllabus, to include in your writing a technical vocabulary suited to your audience and purpose.

➤ Writing to Analyse

- **Analysing** means breaking your topic down into its key parts to learn about their individual meaning or qualities in order to be able to write a discussion of these that shows how they contribute to the whole. An analysis is usually written in the form of an essay.

➤ Writing to Review

- **Reviewing** requires you to break a topic down then to write a lively and authoritative account that is well-judged, carefully considered and entertaining for its audience.
- A review is usually written with a media audience in mind, such as a magazine article.

➤ Writing to Comment

- **Commenting** is a more personal and opinionated style and needs to be more subjective. You might be asked to write a comment for a magazine or newspaper article or as a speech.
 - A commentary needs to be a **well-considered personal assessment**, one that remains focused tightly throughout on its topic, sticking with just this: it is your individual view of what you consider important about the topic.
 - Commentaries must never be a mere summary or précis of their topic

➤ Writing to Explain

- **Explaining** is about **selecting objective or factual information** rather than *opinion*. The content of your writing needs to be **useful to your audience** and be **lively, objective, balanced, truthful** and **trustworthy**.

OBJECTIVITY?

It's worth remembering that all writing must reflect, to some degree, its writer's attitude towards the topic – that is, be subjective. When it's important to reduce the subjectivity of a piece of writing, such as in an explanation, this natural personal bias can be reduced by providing a variety of different points of view

- *For example, if your topic is smoking, you should think about its 'pros and cons'; even with such a contentious topic, there are always two or more sides).*

A CAREFUL ANALYSIS IS VITAL...

As you saw above, a key aspect of this kind of writing is the need to **break down** – that is, **analyse** – your topic so you can identify **which key individual aspects** are **important, relevant** or **interesting** for your audience's needs.

- *It will be your ability to be able to sort out what is from what is not important that will determine, in part, the marks you are awarded.*

Having sorted out what you believe is important, you then need to **discuss** and **evaluate** your topic at several levels:

- *As an introduction, you'll need to cover the topic as a whole, concisely and with a 'broad brush', e.g. in a film review, mention its genre, its storyline, its director and its main stars.*
- *You'll need to discuss its key individual parts and comment on how these contribute to the effect of the whole.*
- *You'll need to discuss how the parts have been combined to create an effective overall structure.*
- *In a review, you'll need to be careful not to create a 'spoiler' by giving away too much of the plot and risk ruining the audience's enjoyment.*

...AND DON'T FORGET A CLOSE AWARENESS OF AUDIENCE

Clearly, if your potential future readers were able to carry out this analysis and evaluation for themselves, there would be no need for you to do the job for them. This points to another key aspect of this writing: you need to show in the writing a close consideration of **the needs of your audience**. This means that what you write must be **useful, interesting** and **clear**.

- *Because your readers will be **relying on what you say** another key quality of this writing is its **authoritative tone**. You will need to **sound convincing, knowledgeable and certain**.*

...AND PLANNING!

A further important aspect of mark schemes is to award marks for the quality of **the organisation of your writing**. The examiner is looking for evidence that you have **consciously shaped your writing** to allow its meaning to unfold **clearly, usefully** and in **an interesting way** for your audience.

- *In explanations especially, releasing the details you give in a controlled way, in **'bite size chunks'**, will help your reader understand and enjoy reading about your topic.*

➤ **One way to recognise the care and risks of these kinds of writing is to reflect on your own past experiences of reading reviews, explanations and comments:**

- *Have you ever felt patronised by a teacher's explanation that seemed to you to have a condescending tone?*
- *Have you ever felt more confused after an explanation than before - almost made to feel a fool?*
- *Have you ever thought that more or less details were needed in a film review or in an explanation of a topic?*
- *Have you ever felt that you couldn't trust the reviewer or the person who is offering an explanation?*
- *Have you ever felt bored by the (yawn!) l-e-n-g-t-h and d-e-t-a-i-l (yawn!) of a review or explanation?*

If the answer is “yes” to any of the above, you’ll begin to recognise the care needed with these kinds of writing. Of course, whoever made you feel this way probably didn’t aim set out to patronise, confuse, lose or bore you. They simply made poor judgments about their audience - that is, you, their reader or listener - and their **style**. Either that or they lacked the knowledge of how to explain, review or analyse their topic. Their writing was unsuccessful and would achieve a low grade.

When **you** write to explain, review or analyse, you should aim to avoid such common pitfalls. How clear your explanation or review needs to be for its audience, how detailed, how deep, in what **tone** and **register** - these are important aspects to consider.

TIPS TO BOOST YOUR GRADE

Want higher marks? Think about the following...

- **Work out what and how much your reader already knows**
 - *No one likes to read what they already know... it’s boring!*
 - *... and if you do tell what they already know, you risk making readers feel patronised.*
- **Work out what and how much your reader needs to know**
 - *too much and, again, they’re bored or their enjoyment of the topic is ruined...*
 - *... too little and they’re unsatisfied or still confused!*
- **Work out what and how much your reader ought to know**
 - *in a review, for example, the plot needs to be revealed but only in part...*
 - *... and details of the ending? Never!*
- **Work out what and how much your reader would be interested in knowing**
 - *thinking closely about your reader is the key to a good review or explanation!*

➤ MAKE SURE YOUR ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION IS CLEAR

- *Have you broken your topic down into its key segments and written about only these?*
- *Is your writing lively as well as easy to understand and follow?*
- *Have you shown from this analysis how the individual parts work together as a structure?*

➤ MAKE SURE YOU HAVE CONSIDERED THE NEEDS OF YOUR AUDIENCE

- *Have you taken account of what or how much your reader already knows?*
- *Have you given your readers what they need to know in a way that can be easily digested?*
- *Have you tried to **interest** and **involve your reader** by writing in a **lively style**?*
- *Have you organised your writing so its **structure is effective, logical and clear**?*
- *Have you used, if appropriate, **tables** or and **bullet points** if these would help clarify a point?*
- *If needed, have you used a **technical vocabulary**?*

➤ MAKE SURE YOU HAVE SUPPORTED YOUR POINTS

- *Have you used **examples** and explained these and their effect and purpose in sufficient detail?*
- *Have you drawn **comparisons** with other similar things to clarify points?*
- *Have you drawn on **similar events** or **used an anecdote** to create a clear and lively piece of writing?*
- *Have you given relevant **facts, descriptions, examples** or, if relevant, **statistics**?*