

## Essay #2: Evaluating Two Primary Texts

---

### Assignment

For your next essay, you will write an argument in which you use evaluative thinking to persuade your audience to see the value (or lack of value) of a literary text and a nonliterary text. Refer to Chapter 2, Critical Reading and Critique in *A Sequence for Academic Writing*.

### What You Will Learn

Making an evaluation is a common thinking and writing strategy for your personal and professional life. Any time you consider which restaurant to go to, which movie to see, or which car to buy, you are making an evaluation. At the professional level, you may evaluate personnel, decide which individual to hire for a position, or choose a health care plan for your company. All of these decisions involve making an evaluation.

### Basic Features of Evaluation Essays

- A clearly defined subject, often framed as a question in the early stages of writing
- Criteria for evaluating your chosen subject
- A convincing argument that shows how your subject meets or does not meet the criteria
- A conclusion which states your final judgment about the subject and answers the question

### Assigned Topic

Statements of belief can take many forms—religious belief, belief in certain institutions, belief in a certain worldview or perspective, or belief in a philosophical idea or principal (the goodness of human nature, for example).

In this paper you are asked to evaluate (make a judgment about) two statements of belief—one literary and one non-literary. Your essay should argue whether your selected texts are rhetorically effective—using specific criteria that you will define in your essay.

### Requirements

In order to successfully complete the assignment, your paper must:

1. Introduce one literary work from the Unit 2 Course Calendar *and one non-literary work* (photograph, video clip, clip from a film, advertisement, brochure, other visual art, etc.) that have *similar* underlying beliefs or claims.
2. Define specific criteria for an effective statement of belief. Explain which features a statement of belief must have in order to be *rhetorically effective*.
3. Using textual evidence from both primary sources, evaluate whether these texts are successful statements of belief based on the criteria you have selected. Successful papers for this assignment typically argue that one text is more effective than the other. Your evaluation essay should remain focused on exactly *how* these texts successfully meet or fail to meet the criteria you established.
4. Offer significance—answer the *so what?* question.

### Format

- MLA Style for heading, citations, and works cited
- At least 1,250 words for final drafts (at least 4 complete, typed, double-spaced pages)
- Use 1-inch margins on all sides of the paper
- You must have a works cited page at the end of the essay

# *Typical Problems in Evaluation Essays*

## **Subject**

- The subject is too broad (all jazz music instead of a particular jazz recording).
- The subject doesn't lend itself to evaluation (the problems of the homeless).

## **Judgment**

- The essay describes or summarizes the subject, but does not express a judgment based on evidence.
- The essay gives the strong and weak points of the subject, but does not assert a judgment.

## **Criteria**

- Criteria are not appropriate to the subject or to the readers.
- Criteria do not form the basis of the judgment.

## **Argument**

- Too much descriptive, historical, or background information takes away from the judgment
- Argument consists of a string of unsupported value judgments (The acting was good. The directing was excellent.)
- The reasons do not relate to the criteria.
- Essay contains too much summary or description with too little reasons and evidence.
- Essay sounds like an advertisement for the topic.

## **Comparison and Contrast**

- Essay overdoes the comparison and contrast, thus evaluating two subjects instead of one.
- The comparison or contrast is not developed.
- The comparison or contrast does not seem related to the subject.

The instruction below is provided by MyCompLab - Resources/Writing Purposes/Writing to Evaluate

We can evaluate just about anything, from the food we eat, to the classes we take, to the performance of our public representatives. We can evaluate things using many different criteria, such as how excellent they are, how appropriate to particular needs, or how morally good they are.

We do these evaluations to accomplish various purposes. We evaluate to make distinctions (e.g., This sandwich has less fat), to rank things (e.g., This actor's performance was superior to that actor's), or to advocate a course of action (e.g., We should use this manufacturing process because it would create fewer environmental pollutants).

Two people studying a subject may differ wildly in their evaluations. This does not mean that all evaluations are completely subjective. Good evaluations are based on clear criteria. Here are three suggestions for establishing your criteria:

1. **Establish categories of excellence.** You might list the qualities of your subject so you can describe its excellence in greater detail. For example, Academy Awards recognize excellence in sound, editing, acting, directing, and costuming.
2. **Order your categories by importance.** Some qualities are more important than others; discussing them first will emphasize their importance. For example, you should evaluate the acting in a film first if that matters most to you.
3. **Define what excellence means in each category.** Can you describe what excellence means for you in each category? For example, what does good acting mean in an action flick (assuming this is possible)?

We often use other types of writing in order to evaluate. We might compare two or more subjects to evaluate one over the others. We might analyze a subject, studying its features or parts, in order to evaluate those parts. Finally, we might argue a particular viewpoint on an issue in order to evaluate different courses of action; the best course of action would be the one that addresses the issue as you've defined it.

Here are a few additional suggestions to improve your evaluative writing:

- **Limit the scope of your criteria to analyze rigorously.** Many subjects could be divided into dozens of qualities. Selecting a few important criteria will let you discuss them more deeply.
- **Explain why your criteria are appropriate.** To justify your criteria to readers, you should explain that the qualities you have chosen make sense, are generally used by other scholars in this area, or will work very well in teaching us why the subject is excellent.
- **Provide specific examples.** Use specific descriptions or examples from your subject to show that your evaluation is accurate.