

CAC Shared Vocabulary

ARGUMENTATION

Critical Reading: the practice of careful, analytical reading whereby a reader strives to understand what a text means and how it operates. In other words, reading slowly and purposefully, using active reading techniques to understand the meaning of a text.

Annotation: a central part of close reading whereby a reader engages with a text by taking notes in the margins, underlining or highlighting key important words, sentences, or passages, or summarizing sections.

Thesis: an arguable assertion that is the central idea of an essay and which often ends with a because-clause, an assertion which also needs to be supported/demonstrated. In other words, a statement that previews the position of your paper, that others may dispute, and that you will defend with support.

Assertion: a declaration or claim that requires support in order to be convincing.

Evidence: material used to support claims or assertions, often in the form of facts, statistics, examples, testimony/expert opinions, etc.

Support: the combination of evidence and explanation used to strengthen an assertion.

CRITICAL THINKING

Analysis: A form of critical thinking whereby an object (text, problem, or phenomenon, etc.) is broken into its constituent parts and the relationships among the parts are explained.

Synthesis: A form of critical thinking in which parts of an object that may have been analyzed are put back together with other materials to create something new.

Evaluation: A form of critical thinking in which an object (text, problem, phenomenon, etc.) is argued to have merit or not based on a set of reasonable standards, called criteria.

THE WRITING PROCESS

Prewriting: Also known as invention, this preliminary step for writing an essay is comprised of strategies such as brainstorming, mapping, listing, clustering, researching, annotating target texts, free writing, etc. In this step, students generate ideas in free form, learn more about their topics, think about issues in advance of drafting, and generate preliminary theses. Spending time thinking about their topics in advance of writing will often prevent writer's block and lead to well-developed essays. *Brainstorm your paper:* read the prompt; list multiple ideas; collect notes and research; begin thinking about a thesis.

Planning: Also known as organizing, this step includes strategies such as reviewing the assignment, forming a preliminary thesis, sketching a plan, and outlining. In this step, students take the ideas that they have generated and begin to shape them to address the goals of the writing assignment. Forming a tentative thesis is essential to successful planning because the thesis articulates their argument in miniature. *Organize your paper:* review the assignment, narrow your topic, gather evidence or support, clarify your thesis, and outline your paper.

Drafting: For many students, drafting is the one-step process for writing an essay. They think that writing an essay in one sitting will lead to an effective essay. Drafting is essentially translating ideas into written, essay form. Effective drafting usually comes only after students have spent time pre-writing and planning. *Write your paper:* put your outline into sentences and paragraphs, expand your ideas and support, and clarify your thesis and assertions.

Revising: Drafting and revising go hand-in-hand. After students produce a draft for a formal essay, they will need to revise the draft. Revising is re-seeing their work with fresh eyes to understand its strengths and weaknesses. Revision is concerned with substantive issues (thesis, development, organization, etc.) and not sentence-level issues (see editing below). Strategies for effective revision include critical re-reading of the draft and annotating the draft by the writer; peer review by a classmate using a peer response sheet; conferencing on the draft with the professor; and visiting the writing center for feedback. After students receive feedback, they return to the drafting step to produce another version of their draft and should then go through revision again. *Re-read your paper:* look for strengths and weaknesses in the content, get feedback from others, make sure your evidence effectively supports your thesis.

Editing: Sometimes students equate editing with revising; however, revision is concerned with substantive/content/organizational issues while editing relates to sentence-level and formatting issues—mechanics, grammar, spelling, style, documentation, and document design. Proofreading is the primary strategy we teach here. We encourage students to edit near the end of creating their essays because they sometimes obsess over these details at the expense of content. *Polish your paper:* look for errors in grammar, mechanics, syntax, verb tense, spelling, style, formatting, and documentation.

Please note: this process is recursive. For example, students may reach the drafting stage and decide they do not have enough information to develop an argument, so they return to the pre-writing stage to gather more evidence or ideas. Students may also revise a draft and decide they need to re-organize the paper and go back to the planning stage to create a formal outline.