

The Five Analytical Moves

Move 1: Suspend Judgment (understand before you judge)

Move 2: Define Significant Parts and How They're Related

Move 3: Look for Patterns of Repetition and Contrast and for Anomaly

The Method:

- Step 1: List all details (or words) that repeat exactly and the number of repetitions of each.
- Step 2: List all strands—groupings of the same or similar kinds of words, details.
- Step 3: List organizing contrasts—binary oppositions (e.g., open/closed, round/pointed).
- Step 4: Select and list the two most significant repetitions, the two most significant strands, and the two most significant binaries.
- Step 5: Select and list the one repeated detail, or one strand, or one binary that you take to be the most significant for arriving at ideas. Write one paragraph explaining your choice.

Move 4: Make the Implicit Explicit (convert to direct statement meanings that are suggested indirectly)

Move 5: Keep Reformulating Questions and Explanations

Six Steps for Making a Thesis Evolve:

1. Formulate an idea about your subject—a working thesis.
2. See how far you can make this thesis go in accounting for (confirming) evidence.
3. Locate complicating evidence that is not adequately accounted for by the thesis.
4. Make explicit the apparent mismatch between the thesis and selected evidence, asking and answering So What?
5. Reshape your claim to accommodate the evidence that hasn't fit.
6. Repeat steps 2, 3, 4, and 5 several times.

Five Kinds of Weak Theses and How to Fix Them:

Weak thesis statements:

1. make no claim
The Fix: Raise specific issues for the essay to explore.
2. are obviously true or are a statement of fact
The Fix: Find some avenue of inquiry—a question about the facts or an issue raised by them. Make an assertion with which it would be possible for readers to disagree.
3. restate conventional wisdom
The Fix: Seek to complicate—see more than one point of view on—your subject. Avoid conventional wisdom unless you can qualify it or introduce a fresh perspective on it.
4. offer personal conviction as the basis for the claim
The Fix: Try on other points of view honestly and dispassionately; treat your ideas as hypotheses to be tested rather than obvious truths.
5. make an overly broad claim
The Fix: Convert broad categories and generic (fits anything) claims to more specific, more qualified assertions; find ways to bring out the complexity of your subject.