

The Analytical Essay

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Today's Agenda

- What is an analytical essay?
- Structure of an analytical essay: Macro and micro
- Higher order concerns
- Rhetorical moves
- Conclusion

What is an Analytical Essay?

- Four components of an analytical essay:
 1. Analysis
 2. Interpretation
 3. Persuasion
 4. Logical argumentation (ties together 1-3)

What is an Analytical Essay?

- Analysis:
 - Breaking object of study down into parts
 - Highlighting connections between parts
 - Drawing inferences/conclusion from the highlighted connections
 - **Example:** Consumer choice model

What is an Analytical Essay?

- Interpretation:
 - Creating meaning
 - Reasoned explanation
 - Premium on clarity:
 - Vague and general (No!)
 - Specific and concrete (Yes!)

What is an Analytical Essay?

- Persuasion:
 - Thesis-centered and argumentative
 - Developing a point of view
 - Getting your audience to *share* that point of view
 - Strategic, selective of evidence

What is an Analytical Essay?

- Logical argumentation:
 - Central claim
 - Clear assumptions
 - Evidence to support central claim
 - Conclusions follow logically from assumptions and reasoning about evidence
 - **Cheating:** Drawing conclusions *without* supporting evidence!

What is an Analytical Essay?

- Objects of analysis/interpretation:
 1. Prior literature/research on a topic
 2. A public policy
 3. Data: Casual empiricism, regression equations
 4. Model: Constellation of assumptions and simplifications, “thinking aid”

The Structure of an Analytical Essay

- An analytical essay is logical and hierarchical
- Your main claim, the thesis, is privileged:
 - Must appear at the outset of the paper
 - Interpretations of “the facts” refer back to the thesis

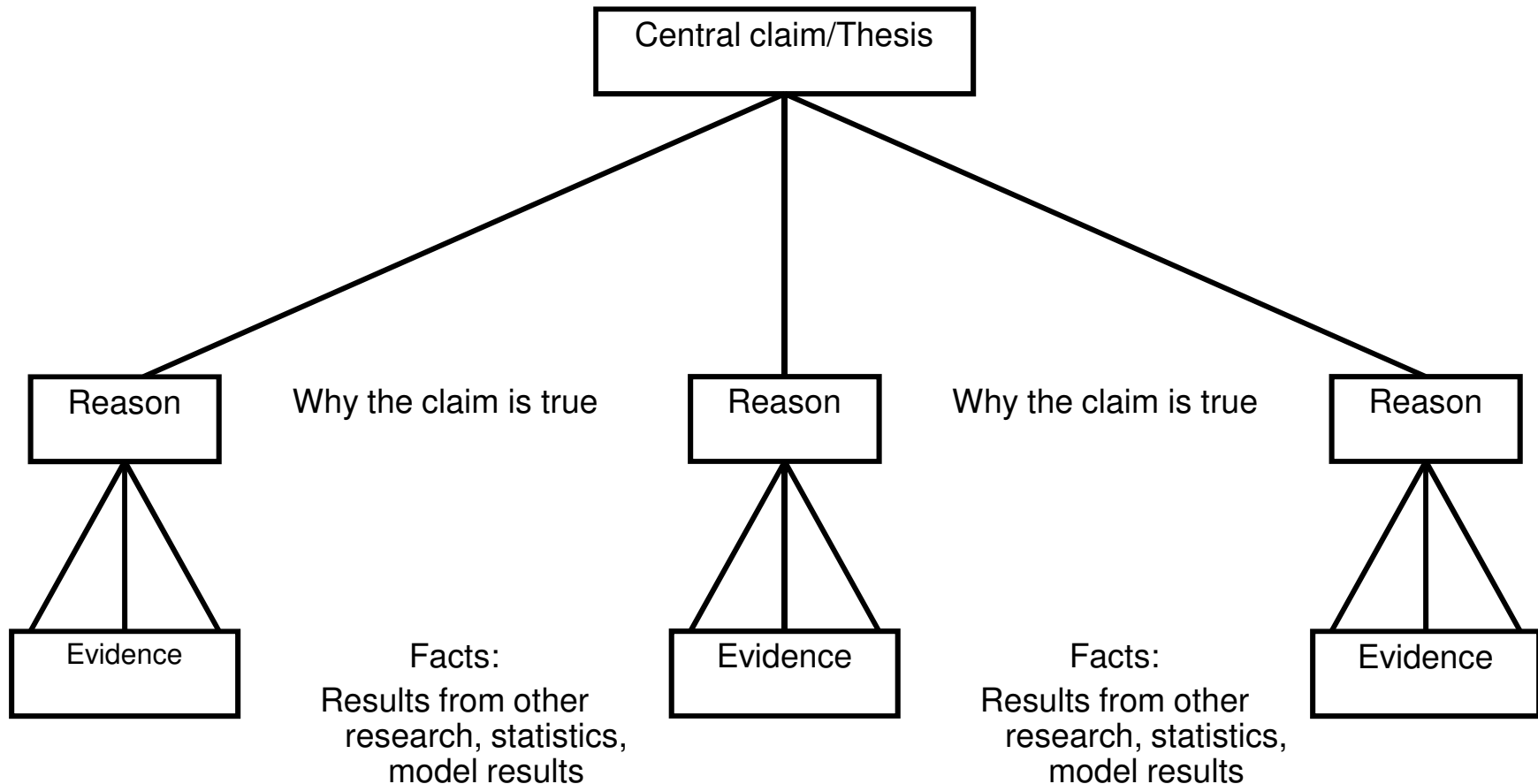
The Structure of an Analytical Essay

- An analytical essay is logical and hierarchical
- Your main claim, the thesis, is privileged:
 - Purposes of information in the paper:
 - Context for the thesis
 - Support for the thesis
 - Challenges to the thesis
 - Reappears in the conclusion

The Structure of an Analytical Essay

- An analytical essay is logical and hierarchical:
 - **Logical:** Conclusions follow naturally from assumptions and reasoning
 - **Hierarchical:** Thesis, major reasons, supporting evidence, conclusion
- Suggestive of a general structure for analytical essays, and one that fits a variety of papers common in economics

Macro Structure of an Analytical Essay



Macro Structure of an Analytical Essay

- **Example:** Illness and the labor market
- Thesis: The impact of chronic illness on workers' wages is indeterminate...
- Reason: ...*because* firms have lower demands for chronically ill workers and chronically ill workers supply less labor
- Evidence: Demand and supply model, data on chronic illness and productivity, labor demand, and labor supply

Macro Structure of an Analytical Essay

- The general structure of an analytical essay applies to the most common economics papers:
 1. Literature reviews
 2. Empirical papers
 3. Theory papers

Macro Structure of an Analytical Essay

- **Literature reviews:**
 1. Introduction
 2. Subsections of topic/area of research
 3. Conclusion
- **Purpose of section:**
 1. Introduce topic, scope and organization of review
 2. Outlining what we know about a topic
 3. Summing up, identifying open questions, areas for future research

Macro Structure of an Analytical Essay

- **Empirical papers:**

1. Introduction
2. Literature review
3. Methodology
4. Data
5. Results
6. Discussion
7. Conclusion

- **Purpose of section:**

1. Introduce topic, motivation, thesis
2. Context for the research
- 3.-4. Model to be estimated, variables in regression, source of information
- 5.-6. Summary statistics, estimated parameters, hypothesis testing, interpretation
7. Return to thesis

Macro Structure of an Analytical Essay

- **Theory papers:**

1. Introduction
2. Literature review
3. Model setup
4. Model results/analysis
5. Extensions of model
6. Conclusion

- **Purpose of section:**

1. Introduce topic, motivation, thesis
2. Context for the research
3. Definitions and assumptions
4. Manipulation of the model and interpretation of its implications
5. Relaxing assumptions and deriving new results
6. Return to thesis

Micro Structure of an Analytical Essay

- Think of a pyramid:
 1. Top: Sharp, focal, catches attention
 2. Middle to bottom: Ever broader, supports everything above it
- Think of an argument:
 1. Top: Central claim, thesis
 2. Middle to bottom: Reasons and supporting evidence

Micro Structure of an Analytical Essay

- The “macro” structure should repeat itself:
 1. In each section of the paper
 2. In each paragraph
- “Pyramid” principles:
 1. Most important information first
 2. Elaborations and supporting information to follow

Higher Order Concerns

- Incorporating counterarguments:
 - Do other studies find different results using different data or different models?
 - What are the alternative explanations?
 - What are the competing models?

Higher Order Concerns

- Refuting counterarguments:
 - Why is your interpretation of “the facts” the most persuasive?
 - What support for your claims do you have that competing explanations do not?
 - Is there something important about the topic that a competing argument ignores and that you do not?

Higher Order Concerns

- Concession:
 - What are the limitations of your argument?
 - Are your empirical results sensitive to specification, data, or measurement issues?
 - Are your theoretical results sensitive to the assumptions you make?
 - Are any of your assumptions particularly unrealistic?

Rhetorical Moves in Analytical Essays

- Priority: More important claims, reasons, and supporting information appears earlier
- Order: Claim up front, supporting information to follow
- Support: Build off of “old” information on the way to drawing conclusions
- Specificity: A well-chosen example can get your point across better than being general and vague

Rhetorical Moves in Analytical Essays

- Words and phrases that signal:
- Motivation: “important,” “worth studying,” “interesting,” “motivated by,” “puzzle”
- Comparison: “agreement,” “disagreement,” “like,” “alike,” “unlike,” “in response to,” “similar to,” “different from”

Rhetorical Moves in Analytical Essays

- Words and phrases that signal:
- Results: “implies that,” “follows from,” “implication of,” “outcome of,” “we find that”
- Limitations: “ignores,” “fails to consider,” “is limited by,” “constrained to,” “is sensitive to,” “is not supported by,” “fails to explain,” “assumes that,” “is not consistent with”

Conclusion

- Analytical essays are a blend of analysis, interpretation, and persuasion
- Organization: Logical and hierarchical
- “Pyramid” structure in the large and in the small
- A form of writing for many of the types of papers common in economics

Resources for Writing in Economics

- Steven A. Greenlaw *Doing Economics: A Guide to Understanding and Carrying Out Economic Research*. Houghton Mifflin Company. New York. 2006.
- <http://college.hmco.com/economics/greenlaw/research/1e/students/index.html>
- Deirdre N. McCloskey *Economical Writing*. Waveland Press, Inc. Prospect Heights. 2000.
- <http://www.waveland.com/Titles/McCloskey.htm>
- Robert H. Neugeboren *The Student's Guide to Writing Economics*. Routledge. New York. 2005.
- http://www.routledge.com/shopping_cart/products/product_detail.asp?sku=&isbn=0415701236&parent_id=&pc

Remaining Talks in the Series

- “Presenting Statistical Evidence and Graphical Information in Written Work”
Wednesday, April 4, 3:00-4:30pm
Monteith 339