

### Assignment 3: Analysis using four articles

Note: Details about this assignment are in your handout packet and are also posted at this website. As this is a writing approach quite different from anything you've likely written before, I strongly urge you to look these papers over carefully before beginning to write your own essay.

**Essay 1.** In this paper, see how this student integrated his analytical points into his first summary as he went along. So the reader understands what points he is making as we're being told what his editorial had to say. Compare with his second analysis where he doesn't do such a good job at explaining what the editorial contained. Another area this student could have improved is including more examples. For example, he praised one writer for his use of "primary sources." But we don't know what these are. In the second analysis, he discusses emotional appeals and strong words. But he doesn't quote any so we don't understand the student writer's points. So as you read this paper, think about what questions come to your mind. In your paper, answer such questions for your readers.

### Zimbabwe Editorials

In the four editorials about the upcoming election in Zimbabwe, the authors all held a similar position. Each deal with Robert Mugabe, the current president of Zimbabwe, who has fixed Zimbabwe's "democratic" elections in the past and is now resorting to the same practices of intimidation and oppression to keep his ZANU- PF party as the controlling power in the country. The authors attempt to persuade the reader that the outside pressure placed on Mugabe to allow a free election has not been sufficient and more intervention is needed to alleviate the misery Mugabe has inflicted on his people. All four writers use a variety of techniques to convey their ideas to the reader. These techniques vary widely based on the different styles and formats of the authors, but throughout all four columns, there are methods that are compelling as well as those less effective.

Michael Booth of the New York Times starts out his editorial by setting a scene in which two political parties are battling for the presidency of their country as the election comes down to the wire. He then interviews a member of Parliament who complains about unethical Practices Mugabe has committed against his party. The statesman claims that his election officers are being barred from polling places. This brings Booth to his thesis which states that the election in Zimbabwe is rigged to favor those in power. He goes on to support his thesis with statistics and claims from eyewitness accounts and primary sources. Another technique Booth uses throughout his editorial is to present Mugabe's public relation attempts and then demonstrate Mugabe's insincerity. He mentions that Mugabe agreed to follow fair election guidelines and also invited hundreds of foreign officials to observe the election. The writer immediately follows this mention with facts that demonstrate that Mugabe is not following the guidelines and says the election monitors were let into Zimbabwe only belatedly. This technique pops up again in the very next paragraph when Booth says, "Independent election monitors and

international agencies contend - and the government denies - that food has been widely used as a political weapon."(Booth) He goes on to explain that it has been discovered residents cannot buy corn unless they have a ZANU-PF party card. Booth's column is in the classic format of an introduction that grabs the reader, a thesis statement, and support for the thesis with logic and facts from reputable sources.

The second editorial is from the Washington Post, and the author uses a very different format from the first. He begins with a strongly worded thesis as the opening sentence in the editorial but then does nothing but hammer the reader with emotional appeals and a few unsupported facts that the reader may accept because of the force with which they are presented. The author uses a strong technique of presenting arguments from the opposing viewpoint and then smashing them to pieces. He does this when he says, "Mugabe apologists cloak their support of him in terms like liberator during Zimbabwe's apartheid era. That support, however, is unjustified given Mr. Mugabe's moves to oppress the very people he purports to have liberated." (Schell)

This column is short but powerfully worded and leaves a lasting impression in the reader's mind. However, the author could have done a better job by supporting his claims with stronger backing.

The third editorial in the Chicago Tribune by Robert Buchan grabs the reader's attention with a strong title: "Starving the voters is how Mugabe has rigged the election." Buchan starts his editorial with the strongest thesis of all four columns. "With a parliamentary election set for Thursday, Zimbabwe President, Robert Mugabe, has found a way to reach the voters: starve them to death."(Buchan) This thesis is strong because it starts out slow, makes the reader ask himself a question, and then nails him with a blunt and horrific claim. The reader asks himself how does Mugabe reach the voters? Then Buchan hits the reader with the horrific statement "starve them to death." Did he just say STARVE them? The author has captured the reader's attention.

Buchan supports his claims not with statistical facts, but by using different quotes from officials in the region. When drawn together, these quotes form a very unfavorable impression of Mugabe and his "regime." Buchan's main tactic is description. He describes a nation in turmoil where nearly 3 million people may starve to death. He also describes a people calling out desperately for help. He describes their calls and how they are either falling on deaf ears or being silenced by Mugabe and his thugs.

The fourth editorial by Joe Ambler of the Boston Globe takes a completely different approach from any of the previous articles. He interviewed an official who held a very high position, propaganda chief, in Mugabe's party just a month ago in which Moyo denounced the ZANU-PF party. Ambler used multiple quotes that depict Mugabe as a paranoid madman and charges his party with being a "tribal clique with no respect for democracy."(Ambler) Since he relies heavily on Moyo's quotes, one would expect Ambler to give some background on him showing that he is a reputable source, but Ambler does not. This is his main weakness. Moyo lied for Mugabe as his propaganda chief for years. Why wouldn't he lie in the same manner to attack the party from which he

was just expelled? Even so, Ambler organized Moyo's quotes into a very scathing attack against Mugabe and his party.

When all four editorials were compared, the most effective methods seem to be a good introduction that grabs the reader's attention, a strongly worded thesis, and strong support that constantly refers back to the thesis. The most common mistakes the authors made were not showing the validity of their support. All four authors conclude with a vague statement or quote. These "one-liner" conclusions are well crafted and sum up the main point of the editorial for the reader to digest one more time. The authors' messages are fairly short, use simple wording, and hit you with point after point about how horrible Mugabe's regime is and how nothing has been done. With the exception of the interview editorial, the authors bring the message to the reader like a tornado. They tell the reader what they are about to tell him in their thesis. Then they slam the message into our heads with point after point. Then as quickly as the storm came, it leaves with a short statement such as, "If Mugabe is left unchecked, there is no telling how far he will go." (Buchan) It only takes about two to three minutes to read the editorials but they leave lasting impressions.

("Works Cited" deleted here. All author names have been changed.)

**Essay 2:** I admit, the next essay needs a better introduction and transitions. Still, much of the content can help guide you on what's needed in your papers.

### **The Legal Drinking Age**

The following is an analysis of four articles on the legal drinking age. These articles debate whether or not the legal drinking age in the United States of 21 years old should be lowered or maintained. Out of the four, Ruth C. Eng and Gene Ford's articles support lowering the legal drinking age while Susan Powell and Isaac Monson's articles support lowering it. Although they have different opinions, all four of these articles are effective.

Ruth C. Eng is an Applied Health Sciences professor at Indiana University. For over twenty years she has been researching and writing about the legal drinking age. She is internationally recognized for her authority on the drinking patterns and problems of college students (Engs). For these reasons, she is highly credible in her writing.

Engs' article entitled, "Why the Drinking Age Should Be Lowered: An Opinion Based on Research," is in favor of lowering the drinking age. She believes that the legal drinking age should be lowered to 18 or 19 and young adults be allowed to drink in social situations. She believes that this will teach them to become responsible drinkers. She backs up her argument by discussing percentages that support a lower drinking age, other countries' success with a lower drinking age, and the fact that previous prohibition laws were not successful (Engs). There are few downfalls in her article and overall, it is very effective.

Engs' opening paragraph is effective because she establishes her credibility right away by saying, "This opinion is based upon research that I have been involved in for over twenty years. (Engs)." She also sums up what she will be discussing in her article.

Engs' second paragraph says that if the drinking age were lowered, less people under the age of 21 would be tempted to drink. She feels that youth look at alcohol as the "forbidden fruit" and if they were legally allowed to consume it, their desire to do so would be lessened (Engs). She uses evidence such as how prohibition failed to work in previous years to back up this opinion. She also backs this up later in her article by discussing the significant increase in percentages of the negative effects that alcohol has on college students when the drinking age is 21(Engs). This evidence makes her article very effective.

Another effective means that Engs uses is that she carefully defines terms that she feels the reader might not understand. For example, when discussing "binge" drinkers, she takes the time to define this word as, "consuming over 5 drinks at least once a week (Engs)." Because of this, the reader has a better understanding of what she is talking about.

It is obvious from the percentages and statistics that Engs uses throughout her entire article that she has thoroughly researched this topic and that she feels strongly about it. The passion that she shows for this topic and the research that she put into it makes her article exceptionally effective.

Like Professor Ruth Engs' article, Gene Ford's article, "Why We Should Lower the Drinking Age to 19," also supports lowering the legal drinking age and is effective. In her article, she discusses the strict drinking laws that the U.S. has and why these laws are related to the drinking problems among its young adults.

Right from the title, Gene Ford's article is effective because she has a set plan that she wishes would be accomplished. She says, "The U.S. has the strictest youth drinking laws in western civilization and yet the most drinking-related problems among its young. And there seems to be a connection between these two facts (Ford)." This is effective because she states her thesis and uses the rest of her article to back it up. It is also effective because it prepares the reader for what they are about to encounter.

Ford's second paragraph is also effective. She uses a personal example to back up her argument. This personal experience with youth and drinking also help to establish her credibility. Like Engs' article, Ford also discusses how other parts of the world allow their youth to drink and have fewer problems because of it. She feels that if the U.S. lowered its drinking age to 19, it would be successful in lowering alcohol related problems (Ford). She uses these countries to back that opinion up. Unlike Engs' article, Ford carefully explains what the drinking age of the countries that she mentions are, which also helps to make her article effective.

Ford continues her article by discussing how prohibition laws failed to previously work. She believes that when given the chance, young people truly can learn ways to handle responsibly alcohol consumption at a lower age. The last sentence of her article is very effective. She says, "Lowering the drinking age to 19 would do much to reduce the youthful abuse of alcohol (Ford)." This sentence ties up her whole article and relates back to her opening.

Isaac Monson, a columnist, takes a different approach to the legal drinking age issue. His article, "Lowering the Drinking Age, Lower Our Quality of Life," is against lowering the legal drinking age. His article discusses why the lowering of the legal drinking age is more harmful than good. While there are some ineffective parts of his writing, overall, his article is effective.

His opening sentence is effective because he uses his position as an 18-year-old college freshman to state his opinion on the issue. This sentence also helps him to gain credibility on the issue right away.

His second paragraph is effective because he uses facts and statistics to support his viewpoint. He says, "When the LDA was nationally raised back to 21, those rates decline. Over 1,000 youths' lives are saved every year with the LDA at 21 (Monson)." This sentence and the others in this paragraph strongly back up his opinion and make that part of his article effective. He is also effective in his fourth paragraph by stating that, "...an alcoholic affects everyone (Monson)." This sentence brings the reader into the situation, which is effective.

Monson makes a very good point later in his article. He says, "...some people say, 'Minors drink anyway, it may as well be legal.' Yeah. Good point. Guys hit their wives too, should we legalize that?" (Monson) This sentence is very effective in getting his point across.

In his closing paragraph, the fact that Europe has a lower drinking age and fewer problems due to alcohol and drunk driving is mentioned. Monson counters this successfully by saying, "In most European countries youth must be 18-21 years of age to obtain their drivers license, That, alone with much stiffer penalties for public intoxication account for the low drunk driving rates in Europe." (Monson) The way that Monson brings up opposing viewpoints like this one, and counters them with his own viewpoint help to make his article effective. However, his article has no concluding paragraph. If he were to sum up his article and use his conclusion to close with impact, it would be more effective. However, overall his article was effective.

The last article being reviewed is also opposed to lowering the legal drinking age and, like the other three, is effective. Susan Powell, Kansas State Collegian, entitles her article, "Lowering Drinking Age Dangerous For All Citizens, Not Just Those of Age."

Her article opens by her stating that there are a number of reasons why lowering the drinking age is a bad idea. She uses the statistic that, "...youth who begin to drink

before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who start at age 21 (Powell)." Here, she makes an effective point. She does the same when she brings up the fact that many teens have a misconception about how much alcohol there really is in certain drinks (Powell).

She is very effective in her last few paragraphs by bringing up driving and highway fatality statistics that back up her opinion that the legal drinking age should be maintained. She also touches a very effective point that none of the other three articles do. She says, "The human brain does not finish developing until about the age of 20 (Powell)." Like Monson, her conclusion does not sum up her article or relate back to her opening. Her article would be more effective if she had done so. However, overall her article is effective.

Although all four of these writers have their own personal opinion on this issue, in general they are all effective. They get their points across by using facts and expressing the research that they have done, and they do so very successfully. Still, in the end, logic would suggest lowering the drinking age is not a wise idea, despite the claims of advocates for this change. While rhetoric and the wish for expanded rights can be well-stated, there is no benefit to society to allow more legal intoxication on our roads and highways. Perhaps other countries have different standards--but other cultures differ in many other ways that do not reflect the lives of America's youth. False analogies do not make for a fully convincing case for importing European laws into the United States.

**Essay 3:** The following paper earned a passing grade, but a word of caution--it can be better developed. Consider it a model for a good first draft before expanding critical thought and conclusions drawn from the analysis.

### **Mental Retardation and Capital Punishment**

Should people living with mental retardation be subject to the death penalty? The discussion over this issue often comes down to whether one places more emphasis on compassion or the rule of law. Most people in the United States would probably say that someone who is truly mentally retarded should not be executed. However, the debate gets more intense when one attempts to determine where to draw the line when deciding who is mentally retarded. Often people on both sides of the issue misuse the numbers for their own benefit. The articles, "The Death Penalty", "Lose Brain, Save Life", "Only U.S. Executes Mentally Retarded", and "Mental Retardation And The Death Penalty", attempt to persuade people to their various sides of the argument. The following will be a discussion of the logic of these arguments.

In the article, "The Death Penalty" posted by the Human Rights Watch, the author makes the claim that people with mental retardation should be spared from execution because of their inability to comprehend the crime of which they are accused, and the punishment which they face. While few would argue with this, the only support given for this argument is that the author believes there to be a surge of opposition to the execution of people with mental retardation. The author never breaches the subject of where the line

lies that distinguishes those who qualify as mentally retarded from the rest of society. The basis for this article's claim seems to be that if an opinion is popular, then it is valid. While this is basically how laws are made in a democratic republic, the majority does not necessarily hold the high moral ground. It does, however, seem convincing in this case. The author offers no rebuttals and comes across as if the article's claim is necessarily true. While this article is flawed, it should be kept in mind that it is only several paragraphs long and probably not meant to cover every aspect of the argument.

In the article, "Lose Brain, Save Life", by Michael Welner, M.D., the thesis is that all one has to do to escape the death penalty is to act mentally retarded. Dr. Welner offers some evidence to show that I.Q. tests are not always accurate but never volunteers an alternate way of determining whether someone should be considered mentally retarded. Dr. Welner cites an example of a man, John Paul Perry, whose I.Q. scores dropped after being arrested. This does seem suspicious; however, it is not likely to convince many people that it is worth the risk of executing someone who is genuinely mentally retarded, just to ensure that no one ever fools the authorities. Thus, the backing for his argument, that people are cheating the system, while potentially valid, is not necessarily an effective one for attempting to persuade the opposition. Once again, no rebuttals are provided and the tone of this article is such that there is little doubt that the author views his conclusion as a necessity. In defense of this article, while the argument might not be the most effective, at least it is based on more thorough logic than the previous one, as well as actually discussing where the line should be drawn for mental retardation.

The main claim of the article, "Only U.S. Executes Mentally Retarded", posted by the Peace and Justice Network of San Joaquin County, is that the United States is the only democracy that expressly allows the execution of people with mental retardation. This article rests its case mainly on a list of mentally retarded people who are sentenced to death, and examples of why they are not mentally competent enough to understand the crime that they have committed. For example, one man asked the judge for crayons to draw with while on trial. These examples are extremely heart breaking and on an emotional level very effective; however, no space is given to the possibility that some of these people might be acting. It is interesting that John Paul Perry, the same man as cited in the article "Lose Brain, Save Life", is used as an example and his test scores are listed differently than in the preceding article. This raises the question as to whether either is citing the correct numbers. While the examples in this article are compelling, little attention is paid to refuting the opposition, and giving solid evidence that these examples are being presented objectively.

The article, "Mental Retardation And The Death Penalty" by Dudley Sharp, seeks to convince the reader that it is already illegal to execute mentally retarded people, and that we do not need any more legislation in that area. While one might agree or disagree with this premise, this is the only one of the articles that goes into great detail as to how the law is currently defined. Sharp states that I.Q. is just one of many considerations when determining if someone is legally mentally retarded. He goes on to say that the opposition often fails to note that there is a margin of error of ten points in I.Q. tests. This then lowers the bar from seventy to sixty points, if one wants to be absolutely sure of the

defendant's mental status. While this may be true, Sharp does not follow through with the obvious conclusion that the line is then raised to eighty points, if one is attempting to make sure that nobody who is mentally retarded is executed. Sharp provides many examples of how there are checks in the legal system to keep mentally retarded people from being executed. On the other hand, no laws are ever cited to show that it is actually illegal to execute these people. While Sharp should be given credit for actually discussing the real legal situation in this country, the article falls short of proving its thesis.

In the heated debate over capital punishment for people with mental retardation, few seem willing to say that they want individuals who cannot understand the crimes they have committed to be executed. On the other hand, there is a major debate going on in this country as to where to draw the line. It seems likely from viewing these four articles that neither side is providing objective information to the curious public. In a democratic republic such as the United States, it is important that voters be well informed. Hopefully the American public will see through the spin on both sides and come to a compassionate and precise decision next election.

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