Critical Analysis by Tonja Nelson

> *To think incisively and to think for one's self is very difficult... to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from false, the real from unreal, and the facts from the fiction, Dr. Martin Luther King.*

A critical analysis paper requires the writer to construct an argument based on any given topic. It could be a movie, book, art, literature or point of view. In political terms, developing a critical analysis also involves analyzing a particular conflict or social issue and establishing a claim (thesis).

However, analyzing can be a complicated process, and one might ask, **"How and what should I analyze?"** Through a series of asking questions based on a certain topic's status, one can build a critical analysis paper. This process is called stasis theory. According to Purdue OWL, "stasis theory helps writers conduct critical analyses of the issues they are investigating." This theory, developed by Aristotle in early Greece, consists of four basic stases: **facts, definition, quality, and policy/implications:**

FACTS: First ask, "*What are the facts?*" (who, what, when, where, how, and why). Here are some examples:

> ➢ Who is involved?
> ➢ What happened?
> ➢ What is the problem or situation?
> ➢ When and where did this "something" take place?
> ➢ What were its causes?
> ➢ Can the problem be resolved?

Example: If one is examining how effectively the Communications lab helps students, this may be a scenario:

> The Communications Lab provides a tutoring service to help students at Oklahoma City Community College with their writing assignments. The lab also offers free printing with a ten page limit per student. Sometimes, however, this limit is abused by students who do not care about lab policy. I have been in the lab and heard the printer going to about fifty pages. This poses a problem when toner runs out from over printing and students are forced to go to another lab.

The first two sentences are facts derived from the questions asked previously. Notice how the next two sentences have truth mixed with opinion. Even though personal experience is expressed, the writer cannot be certain students do not care about policy, or whether or not the printer was printing more than one job. The last sentence is truth and answers the question "What is the problem?"

Finding argument: If, through the process of examining the facts, discrepancy is found, a claim or argument can be made. For instance, I could challenge the fact of free printing by presenting evidence that money for printing is actually paid through school fees, thus making the Communications Lab's fact invalid. ***Evidence of such claims must be given to avoid speculation.***

Achieving stasis: If, through the course of analyzing a stasis, agreement is acquired. Then, no argument is made. Reaching agreement, however, is a good opportunity to elaborate further as to **why** it is fact. **Note:** finding argument and achieving stasis are natural products of any critical analysis and central for thesis statements such as this: "By analyzing the effectiveness of the Communications Lab's ability to help students, one finds free printing to be most beneficial; however, they should consider offering a front and back option to save paper."

DEFINITION: When examining the defining components of any issue, one first defines the topic. Then a person looks at the concepts involved and how they are related such as the concept of free printing when debating Communications Lab's effectiveness to help students. Inquire the following:

- ➢ How is the topic defined?
- ➢ Is this definition the same for everyone?
- ➢ What concept/concepts are featured?
- ➢ What kind or nature are the concepts?
- ➢ Are the ideas clear?
- ➢ What is their purpose?

Example: Pulling from the initial example, the Communications Lab defines free printing as giving ten pages per day to students without asking for payment. They also define free printing as a benefit to students that other labs do not offer. On the other hand, how do students define free printing? Their definition may be construed as printing free of charge without a limit. Another thing to ask, "Does the Communications lab's policy of printing align with their definition?" If not, an argument can be made from this aspect.

QUALITY: Qualitative analysis asks the writer to evaluate the seriousness of the issue by asking these types of questions:

- ➢ How serious is this issue?
- ➢ Who does the topic affect?
- ➢ What is at stake?
- ➢ How relevant is this topic?
- ➢ Is it beneficial or not?

Arguments of quality could be represented as a topic being taken too lightly, over exaggerated, or even off topic. For example, in the Communications Lab's case, one might come to this conclusion:

> The students of OCCC are provided a service where free printing is allowed with a reasonable limit. Therefore, this benefit is far

greater than the quarrel being made over printing extra pages in the Communications lab. However, the value of extended printing is far less relevant than that of saving paper. (Support for claim must be given, or it is considered opinion)

This example begins with a topic sentence, followed by a statement of value, and ends with an argument being made and later supported. **Note:** The ideas of free printing being "most beneficial and "saving paper" also appear in the example thesis previously given.

POLICY/IMPLICATIONS:
Analyzing policy is a two way street. The first one poses the question: "What should be changed and why?" The other focuses on the implications derived from topic. Here are some example questions:

➤ Should any action be taken to solve conflict and why?
➤ Who does this action involve?
➤ When and where should this action take place?
➤ Should any procedures be changed or stay the same and why?
➤ What should be implemented?
➤ What are the implications in this argument, negative and positive?

These two elements are very related. For example, if through the process of analyzing the topic of printing in the lab, the writer discovers that the Communications Lab's policy of ten pages has many implications. One proceeds with the following:

> The Communications lab's policy on free printing has many negative effects. First of all, because of current printing policy, students will print over the maximum limit. Second, students will print at home and not come to lab any more. Lastly, as a result of restriction on printing, students will visit other labs instead. (After each claim of implication, one must always add reasoning and/or evidence to support claim.

Individually, an analysis of policy is the basic break down of rules and why these procedures are in place while implications are basically the results of the policy in place (sometimes seen as the effects of policy). **Note:** the above example is from a student's viewpoint; therefore, implications from the other perspective might be that the Communications Lab incurs toner cost and depreciation of printer. Remember to always analyze both sides of the spectrum.

Implementing change: Then, from these implications, the question arises: "Is the loss greater than the benefit? One weighs the two and decides whether or not something should be changed or stays the same. A critical analysis paper shows this type of relationship. From there, the writer then decides whether or not they want to delve deeper into the issue and present a solution.

Resolving argument: If one is looking at the current Communications Lab policy on printing, a person could say "yes" something should be changed and why. As a resolution to the printing problem, the writer could assert that Communications Lab offers front and back printing to students. Notice that this solution is announced in the thesis statement example given earlier in the Achieving stasis segment.

NOTE: Subject to Prof. Markus Smith's student, his syllabus shows an action or solution being given to the critical analysis. According to Prof. Smith, "it depends on the paper and the student whether or not a solution is provided." Also, "You can say that abortion is wrong, [which is opinion], as long as you provide evidence and reasoning to support your argument."

- ➢ Claim – Support = Opinion
- ➢ Claim + Support = Happy Professor