Analyzing an Issue

You will be given one prompt along with one set of instructions for writing about it. There are several dozen possible prompts and six possible sets of instructions, all available online:

http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/analytical_writing/issue/pool

Examples

1. As people rely more and more on technology to solve problems, the ability of humans to think for themselves will surely deteriorate.

   Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true and explain how these considerations shape your position.

2. Claim: We can usually learn much more from people whose views we share than from those whose views contradict our own.

   Reason: Disagreement can cause stress and inhibit learning.

   Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim and the reason on which that claim is based.

3. Some people believe that competition for high grades motivates students to excel in the classroom. Others believe that such competition seriously limits the quality of real learning.

   Write a response in which you discuss which view more closely aligns with your own position and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should address both of the views presented.

4. Scandals are useful because they focus our attention on problems in ways that no speaker or reformer ever could.

   Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim. In developing and supporting your position, be sure to address the most compelling reasons and/or examples that could be used to challenge your position.
Analyzing an Issue, cont.

Before You Write

- Read the prompt and the instructions: What **keywords** might you need to define, and how?
- Weigh each side: Consider the major **arguments for and against** the claim.
- Find some examples: list a few **examples** (the more specific, the better!)
  - **for and against** the claim.
- Reread the instructions: Look for the specific parts of the question that you need to address. List out those parts and consider making a very rough outline or diagram of the essay you plan to write.
- Decide on your **thesis**.

Partway Through

- Double check your notes on the instructions. Did you address each part?

At the End

- Reread the first line or two of what you’ve written and make any small changes.

Your Paper...

- Must address each element of the specific question you are asked.
- Can take any position on the issue you are asked about.
- Should be clearly organized in support of a specific point, although there is no one specific way it needs to be organized.
- Should be at least 4 paragraphs long; **the longer the better**, as long as you have something specific to say.
- Does **not** need to be a formal “five-paragraph essay”
- Should be packed with lots of specific, concrete detail.
- Can include “I” and “me”
- Will almost certainly include a few mechanical errors, although serious and persistent errors will harm your grade.
Analyzing an Argument

You will be given one 1-paragraph argument along with one set of instructions. Several dozen possible arguments and nine possible sets of instructions are available online at

www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/analytical_writing/argument/pool

Your Paper

- Should assume that the “argument” is flawed and your job is to find the flaws.
- Must address each element of the specific question you are asked.
- Must focus on the particular argument you are given, not the issue itself.

Examples

1. The vice president of human resources at Climpson Industries sent the following recommendation to the company's president.

"In an effort to improve our employees' productivity, we should implement electronic monitoring of employees' Internet use from their workstations. Employees who use the Internet from their workstations need to be identified and punished if we are to reduce the number of work hours spent on personal or recreational activities, such as shopping or playing games. By installing software to detect employees' Internet use on company computers, we can prevent employees from wasting time, foster a better work ethic at Climpson, and improve our overall profits."

   Write a response in which you examine the stated and/or unstated assumptions of the argument. Be sure to explain how the argument depends on these assumptions and what the implications are for the argument if the assumptions prove unwarranted.

2. The following appeared in a recommendation from the planning department of the city of Transopolis.

"Ten years ago, as part of a comprehensive urban renewal program, the city of Transopolis adapted for industrial use a large area of severely substandard housing near the freeway. Subsequently, several factories were constructed there, crime rates in the area declined, and property tax revenues for the entire city increased. To further revitalize the city, we should now take similar action in a declining residential area on the opposite side of the city. Since some houses and apartments in existing nearby neighborhoods are currently unoccupied, alternate housing for those displaced by this action will be readily available."

   Write a response in which you discuss what specific evidence is needed to evaluate the argument and explain how the evidence would weaken or strengthen the argument.
Analyzing an Argument, cont.

3. A recent sales study indicates that consumption of seafood dishes in Bay City restaurants has increased by 30 percent during the past five years. Yet there are no currently operating city restaurants whose specialty is seafood. Moreover, the majority of families in Bay City are two-income families, and a nationwide study has shown that such families eat significantly fewer home-cooked meals than they did a decade ago but at the same time express more concern about healthful eating. Therefore, the new Captain Seafood restaurant that specializes in seafood should be quite popular and profitable.

Write a response in which you discuss what questions would need to be addressed in order to decide whether the conclusion and the argument on which it is based are reasonable. Be sure to explain how the answers to the questions would help to evaluate the conclusion.

4. There is now evidence that the relaxed pace of life in small towns promotes better health and greater longevity than does the hectic pace of life in big cities. Businesses in the small town of Leeville report fewer days of sick leave taken by individual workers than do businesses in the nearby large city of Masonton. Furthermore, Leeville has only one physician for its one thousand residents, but in Masonton the proportion of physicians to residents is five times as high. Finally, the average age of Leeville residents is significantly higher than that of Masonton residents. These findings suggest that the relaxed pace of life in Leeville allows residents to live longer, healthier lives.

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

Before You Write

- Read the “argument.” Take notes! What might be wrong with its
  - numbers (especially percentages) or unspecified quantities (“some,” “many,” or missing information)?
  - comparisons between one group or between a population and a sample?
  - assumptions about what is or isn’t true of the situation?
  - possible consequences if were accepted?
- Read the instructions. How will you need to present these problems: as unanswered questions? Missing evidence? Unwarranted assumptions? Alternative explanations?
- Consider making a diagram and/or a very rough outline.
Analyzing an Argument

Things to look for:

a. Numbers.
   i. What numbers can you find? Percentages?
   ii. What words about quantity (“some,” “many”) can you find?
   iii. Where COULD there be numbers that are missing?
   iv. What would change if these amounts were very big or very small?

b. Comparisons
   i. Are two things being compared? What?
   ii. How many differences can you find between them?
   iii. What other differences could possibly exist between them?
   iv. How could those differences affect the argument?

c. Assumptions
   i. What assumptions does the argument make?
   ii. What would the opposite of those assumptions be?
   iii. What would change if those opposites were true?

d. Consequences
   i. Are any costs or risks (financial or otherwise) required to implement/accept the argument? What?
   ii. Could any costs or risks (financial or otherwise) come as a result of implementing/accepting the argument?
   iii. How do these costs relate to any possible benefit?

Possible Outline

1. Thesis
2. First flaw: problem and explanation
3. Second flaw: problem and explanation
4. Third flaw: problem and explanation
5. Because of these problems, the argument is unconvincing.

Possible Theses

- This argument isn’t convincing.
- This argument makes too many unwarranted assumptions (lacks too much evidence, leaves too many questions unanswered, etc.) to be convincing.
- Although the proposed idea might be OK, this argument makes too many unwarranted assumptions (lacks too much evidence, leaves too many questions unanswered, etc.) to be convincing.