The Analytical Essay

An analysis is the systematic study of something, usually by breaking it down into its parts. We may analyze a painting, a poem, or a mathematical problem by examining the components of each. One form of analysis is division, such as separating a shopping list into dairy products, vegetables, meat, and cleaning items. Such division can lead to classification, whereby we place similar products into the categories listed above: milk and eggs (dairy products), carrots and peas (vegetables), chicken and lamb (meats), and detergent and scouring powder (cleaning items). Not many people take the time to classify their shopping lists this way, but think of the time and energy they could save if they did so.

Classification not only groups similar objects, but also separates them from contrasting ones. The categories should not overlap if we are to understand their distinct qualities and to distinguish the items within the categories from one another.

Although dividing and classifying are very good ways to approach all analytical essay, they are not the only ways. The most important thing to remember when writing an analytical essay is to actually analyze the work.

You must analyze everything in the work and ask yourself "WHY" about each thing. For example, ask yourself, "Why did the painter paint this?" "Why did the author comment on this?" "What effect was he/she trying to have on the viewer or reader?" Also, an analysis is your opinion of why the artist or author or poet or mathematician etc., did or said what he/she did. Finally, in showing your opinion, you need evidence from the work to prove or illustrate your point.