*Note:*

*The following is an abridged transcript of Video 3 for the Analytical Writing portion of our course. Just like last time, this is not an exact transcript because I thought it would be best to spare you from having to read all of my “ums,” “likes,” and stutters, and because I wanted to make some things a little clearer here than they were the first time around. Still, the editing is pretty minimal here, with no accounting for grammar or structure, so it is conversational English and NOT representative of how you should be writing your exam responses (*do as I say, not as I do *in this case).*

*Best of luck,*

*Carlos Caetano Leão*

**Introduction**

Alright, welcome everybody to the third and final video of the analytical writing portion of your GRE prep. Today we will be going over the Analyze an Issue task. This one is starkly different from the Analyze an Argument task that we covered before. We talked about the basics in that first Overview video but we’ll do a little review. The Analyze an Issue task assesses your ability to think critically on a topic of general interest and instructions on how to respond to an issue. You can discuss the issue from any perspective, making use of your own educational or personal background, examples from current or historical events, material that you’ve read, or even hypothetical situations. For this you are going to develop your own argument, which to me is harder than the Argument task. For the Argument task, you just take an existing thing and pick it apart. For the Issue task, you need to stand up for yourself. You need to come up with your own opinion and defend it effectively. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers, they’re really just looking for you to defend your opinion. It’s about thinking critically and writing persuasively in a manner that is interesting and convinces people that you are right. There are six possible sets of instructions for this task, they’re all pretty similar but you should pay attention to the one that you have. I uploaded all six on the communities page in a Google Doc.

Today we’re going to be talking about a lot of things that are specific to the Issue task, but bear in mind that all the rules for good writing – varied sentence structure, balanced paragraph structure, vocabulary, specificity – all of these things apply to both this task and the Argument task. Good writing rules still apply.

We’re going to look at one sample prompt and two sample responses, as well as a third very briefly. I should clarify that I do not write these prompts or responses, they are from the GRE site. None of this is my original writing, these are real responses that have been graded.

**Sample Prompt**

Prompt:

*“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*.”

Unlike the argument task where you get a big stretch of writing, this one is usually just one sentence of a concept and some instructions asking you to say if you agree or disagree.

**Essay Response A**

“*Surely many of us have expressed the following sentiment, or some variation on it, during our daily commutes to work: “People are getting so stupid these days!” Surrounded as we are by striding and strident automatons with cell phones glued to their ears, PDA’s gripped in their palms, and omniscient, omnipresent CNN gleaming in their eyeballs, it’s tempting to believe that technology has isolated and infantilized us, essentally transforming us into dependent, conformist morons best equipped to sideswip one another in our SUV’s.*

*Furthermore, hanging around with the younger, pre-commute generation, whom tech-savviness seems to have rendered lethal, is even less reassuring. With “Teen People” style trends shooting through the air from tiger-striped PDA to zebra-striped PDA, and with the latest starlet gossip zipping from juicy Blackberry to teeny, turbo-charged cell phone, technology seems to support young people’s worst tendencies to follow the crowd. Indeed, they have seemingly evolved into intergalactic conformity police. After all, today’s tech-aided teens are, courtesy of authentic, hands-on video games, literally trained to kill; courtesy of chat and instant text messaging, they have their own language; they even have tiny cameras to effectively photodocument your fashion blunders! Is this adolescence, or paparazzi terrorist training camp?*

*With all this evidence, it’s easy to believe that tech trends and the incorporation of technological wizardry into our everyday lives have served mostly to enforce conformity, promote dependence, heighten comsumerism, and materialism, and generally create a culture that values self-absorption and personal entitlement over cooperation and collaboration. However, I argue that we are merely in the inchoate stages of learning to live with technology while still loving one another. After all, even given the examples provided earlier in this essay, it seems clear that technology hasn’t impaired our thinking and problem-solving capacities. Certainly, it has incapacitated our behavior and manners; certainly our values have taken a severe blow. However, we are inarguably more efficient in our badness these days. We’re effective worker bees of ineffectiveness!*

*If T/technology has increased our senses of self-efficacy that we can become veritable agents of the awful, virtual CEO’s of selfishness, certainly it can be beneficial. Harnessed correctly, technology can improve our ability to think and act for ourselves. The first challenge is to figure out how to provide technology users with some direly-needed direction.”*

Ok, first impressions. Obviously, this is a vintage response because they’re talking about Teen People, PDAs, tiny cell phones, etc. Not super recent but still applicable. This person obviously has some very aggressive opinions on the topic; they really make it clear how they feel and there is not a lot of subtext. There’s a sort of redemption at the end where they say maybe there’s a kernel of goodness to technology and give ways in how we can improve with it. Other impressions are that there are a couple of non-sequiturs, some typos, some weird grammar issues, etc. PSA: don’t put an apostrophe after an acronym unless you’re trying to denote ownership or it ends with an S and you feel that you absolutely have to put the apostrophe there (i.e., the plural of “PDA” is “PDAs,” not “PDA’s”). Beside that, the vocabulary and sentence structure is excellent. It’s very varied and very vivid.

I wish I could ask you guys what you think of this argument and whether you believe them! When a grader reads your writing, their answer to “Do I believe this? Do I trust this person?” should be “YES.” Here we can see there are some reasonably well-supported claims, but is there enough evidence? There is some evidence but there could be more. Finally, do you like this person? If you were sitting at a coffee shop and this person started barraging you with this opinion, would you maybe want to walk away? We’ll find out if likeability is actually important for this task in a little bit. We’ll break this down a little more intimately in a bit but first I want to read the next one so we have something to compare it to. For now I want you guys to think about what you think the grade could be for this response.

**Essay Response B**

*“There is no current proof that advancing technology will deteriorate the ability of humans to think. On the contrary, advancements in technology had advanced our vast knowledge in many fields, opening opportunities for further understanding and achievement. For example, the problem of dibilitating illnesses and diseases such as alzheimer’s disease is slowing being solved by the technological advancements in stem cell research. The future ability of growing new brain cells and the possibility to reverse the onset of alzheimer’s is now becoming a reality. This shows our initiative as humans to better our health demonstrates greater ability of humans to think.*

*One aspect where the ability of humans may initially be seen as an example of deteriorating minds is the use of internet and cell phones. In the past humans had to seek out information in many different enviroments and aspects of life. Now humans can sit in a chair and type anything into a computer and get an answer. Our reliance on this type of technology can be detrimental if not regulated and regularily substituted for other information sources such as human interactions and hands on hearing. I think if humans understand that we should not have such a reliance on computer technology, that we as a species will advance further by utilizing the opportunity of computer technology as well as the other sources of information outside of a computer. Supplementing our knowledge with internet access is surely a way for technology to solve problems while continually advancing the human race.”*

So, this person disagreed with the prompt. They actually did the opposite move of the person from Response A, not only in disagreeing but also because Response A was structured as “Tech bad, but here’s a little silver lining” while Response B was structured as “Tech good, but here is a potential issue.” That’s interesting. Initial thoughts on this. Right off the bat, it’s less nasty. There was no super judgemental tone like the last one. The last one was aggro to the point of being extreme – they said things like “paparazzi terrorist training camps”, which is a seriously strong moral-type judgement. This one is much more detached and polite. It is also a lot shorter. It really needs more paragraphs and more accompanying points. They only really had one example – Alzheimer’s research – and one example is just not enough. You need more. They did good legwork on the Alzheimer’s research thing in terms of expanding on the point with some specifics (“growing new brain cells”, “reverse the onset”, etc.). But it was just one thing, we need more. Also, other than a little bit in the first paragraph, there wasn’t really any imagery used. When you read a really vivid, well-written piece of writing, your brain should absolutely light up with images. You should be constantly creating mental images of what you’re reading – really the reading should do that for you. Here, it’s pretty flat. You understand what they’re saying but it’s not inducing any sort of imagery in your brain.

So, think about what you think the score was for this one. Thought about it? Ok. Response A was a 5 and Response B was a 3. It’s easy to think that the first one was so obnoxious that they should have been docked points for it, but that’s actually something that they’re looking for. Not that you’re obnoxious, but that you have flair in this kind of writing. For the last task, Analyze an Argument, they want an objective, detached, academic tone. They want you to just logic and reason an argument apart and say why it’s good or why it’s bad completely objectively, without putting yourself in the mix at all. Here, they want a little slice of you. They want to know how you really feel (or at least how you pretend you really feel while you’re writing). That means flair and style – interesting writing that goes beyond cold, hard, polite facts. They’re still looking for critical thinking but they’re looking for your command over the language. They want to see your ability to convince them of an argument.

If you compare Responses A and B, even though Response A is charged and mean, it’s also filled with personality and specificity. There is a ton of imagery in pretty much every sentence and it shows really strong mastery of the English language. It’s dynamic, there are even exclamation marks in some places, which are almost scary to use in academic writing, but it works! They pulled it off. The readers probably had fun with this one because the writer was playing with language and the readers probably thought “wow, this is different from every other response I’ve read.” Behind that flair, there is a strong, well-formed and well-informed opinion, and you don’t need to dig to find it. That opinion is very obvious because they transmit it to you with such colorful language.

Let’s look at the first paragraph in Response A: “*Surrounded as we are by striding and strident automatons* [here I’m imagining big robots marching around] *with cell phones glued to their ears, PDA’s gripped in their palms* [specific!]*, and omniscient, omnipresent CNN gleaming in their eyeballs. . .*” What a cool image to evoke! And they do this with a ton of heavy vocab use. They’re using words that they know and they’re showing you that they know how to use them. You can show off a little here in terms of vocab as long as it makes sense to use it. If it feels organic, go nuts on the vocab. In Response B, there’s again just no real visualization.

When we talk about all this flair and personality you can put into your writing, I understand that many of you (especially non-English majors) are not used to doing anything other than academic (non-creative) writing. With this background, it can be almost uncomfortable to write with so much emotion. You only have to do it to the point that you are comfortable. You only have 30 minutes to pull this off so don’t bite off more than you can chew stylistically. It still has to be cohesive and have all the aspects of good writing that we talked about in the last video. Put flair in it but don’t sacrifice cohesion for flashiness, just do as much as you feel like you can pull off. Don’t write in a way that makes you feel awkward. You can still get a good grade with a reasonably boring essay that has tons of imagery and specificity. Response B could have maintained its tone and gotten a better grade if it had done a few of the things that we’re about to do.

**Spice Exercise**

We’re going to try to spice up Response B. Step 1 to getting a better grade with this response would be to add more paragraphs with points and supporting evidence, but we’re just going to work with what’s already there. Let’s try to spice it up and make it more interesting writing. Look at this sentence: “*Now humans can sit in a chair and type anything into a computer and get an answer.*” Arguably true, incredibly boring. “Human person sitting at computer typing” is not particularly evocative writing, you’re not really getting much of an image from that. I want you to pause here and think about how you could rewrite this sentence to make it flashier, more dynamic, and more interesting for the reader. Pause now.

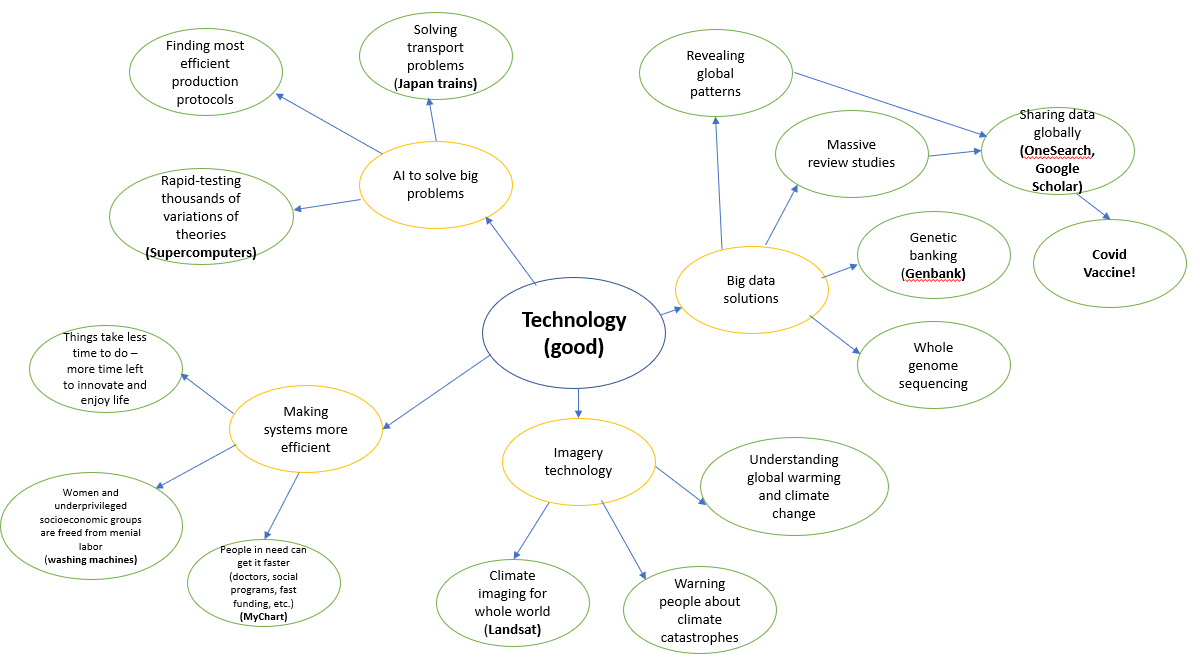
Ok. The main thing you want to do here is infuse specifics and imagery. What comes to mind when you think of someone searching something on the internet? Why say just “computer” when we have laptops, iPhones, Androids, Google, Alexa, etc.? Don’t just say “type” either, get something more visual like “tapping with thumbs” or similar. If you read “with just a few flicks of his thumb,” you for a split second visualize thumbs flicking across a screen. Also, you don’t type something into a computer, you type it into a search bar. Just using the term “search bar” takes the reader’s brain to the search bar at the top of their phone. So, we could change *“Now humans can sit in a chair and type anything into a computer and get an answer.”* to something like “Now anyone can *slide* their *iPhone* out of their *front pocket* and get *Google* to solve their problem *in seconds*.” We got an image of someone sliding a phone out of their pocket, specifically their front pocket. It’s not just any phone, it’s specifically an iPhone. They’re using Google, specifically, to solve their problems. Another alternative might be “Now the answer to any question is just a few *thumb taps* away. You don’t even need to *get out of bed* to *pop open* the *Google search bar* on your *iPhone*, or *casually mumble* a *voice search* to *Alexa*.” You’re picturing someone on their bed – we’ve all been there, it’s a Sunday and you should probably do that homework – and you just lazily tap things into your phone or holler at Alexa real quick… Images! I wish I could hear the ones you came up with for this. If you didn’t understand my instructions earlier, maybe pause now and see if you can come up with more alternatives for this sentence.

Let’s look at another one from B:  *“I think if humans understand that we should not have such a reliance on computer technology, that we as a species will advance further by utilizing the opportunity of computer technology as well as the other sources of information outside of a computer.*” Again, probably a reasonable point but mega boring. They’re just saying very vague, categorical terms like “computer technology”. They say “other sources of information outside of a computer” but they don’t say what – books? Stories that your grandparents tell you while you’re sitting on the porch drinking tea? We could change “by utilizing the opportunity of computer technology” to something more specific like “by improving processing power,” “by finding big data solutions to data-hungry problems,” “by utilizing AI to solve previously unsolvable problems like efficient transportation,” etc. Add examples like “efficient transportation” – that’s one that just slots right into the sentence and gives the reader flavor. Examples show that you’ve actually thought about this and that you have reasons to have your opinion. *You* know that AI has made trains faster in Japan or something (not sure if this is true but let’s roll with it) but the reader doesn’t know that you know that if you just say “using computer technology.” If you tell them by way of a quick example like that that you have something to base your opinion on, your argument just got a lot stronger. Start thinking of specific things that can stand in the place of vague categorical concepts and make the substitutions where you can – that is a very big deal for this task.

**Word Mapping**

Something that can help with this is word mapping. We’ve all done them before – it’s where you have one concept in the center and words branching off of it. This isn’t a necessary thing to do but it’s something that you should maybe consider if you have a really hard time coming up with specifics as you’re writing. If, as you’re writing, you want to just write in the big vague categorical concepts and then later substitute in more specific ones, this might help. It can also help if you want to just brainstorm really quick before you start writing. You have scratch paper so you don’t need to be typing these maps out. I don’t want you to think you have to do this, and if you do end up doing it I don’t want you to spend much time on it. This can be done in like two minutes – it’s one of those things just like practicing outlining (that we talked about last time) where if you do a bunch of quick maps for a bunch of prompts you’ll figure out how to do them efficiently. Time yourself and practice if you really feel like it would help you.

Here’s an example of one that I made for this prompt:



Yours do not need to be this in-depth. I made this after I had read a bunch of responses so I was NOT fresh to the prompt – I’d had the subject on my mind for a while before I wrote this. But still, this only took like 3 minutes. In the middle we have Technology (good) and branching off are general concepts that get progressively more specific. When I thought of specific examples I wrote them in bold (e.g., GenBank, OneSearch, Covid vaccine, etc.) so I could find them easily and include them in my writing. Each yellow bubble could be a paragraph and each of the greens could be supporting evidence and imagery.

The only way to know if this’ll work for you will be to give it a shot when you’re practicing. Maybe you’ll love it or maybe you won’t. Practice is key to getting a good grade on this thing. You don’t need to practice writing the whole response every time. You should definitely do that sometimes, but sometimes you can just practice writing an outline or a brainstorm for a prompt and go from there.

**Essay Response C**

I want to look at just one more essay response. We’re not going to dive too deep into this one. It’s a bad one, I’ll tell you right off the bat that the score is 2. I included it just to look at some things that didn’t really come up in the other ones but that you should definitely avoid.

“*In recent centuries, humans have developed the technology very rapidly, and you may accept some merit of it, and you may see a distortion in society ocured by it. To be lazy for human in some meaning is one of the fashion issues in thesedays. There are many symptoms and resons of it. However, I can not agree with the statement that the technology make humans to be reluctant to thinking thoroughly.*

*Of course, you can see the phenomena of human laziness along with developed technology in some place. However, they would happen in specific condition, not general. What makes human to be laze of thinking is not merely technology, but the the tendency of human that they treat them as a magic stick and a black box. Not understanding the aims and theory of them couses the disapproval problems.*

*The most important thing to use the thechnology, regardless the new or old, is to comprehend the fundamental idea of them, and to adapt suit tech to tasks in need. Even if you recognize a method as a all-mighty and it is extremely over-spec to your needs, you can not see the result you want. In this procedure, humans have to consider as long as possible to acquire adequate functions. Therefore, humans can not escape from using their brain.*

*In addition, the technology as it is do not vain automatically, the is created by humans. Thus, the more developed tech and the more you want a convenient life, the more you think and emmit your creativity to breakthrough some banal method sarcastically.*

*Consequently, if you are not passive to the new tech, but offensive to it, you would not lose your ability to think deeply. Furthermore, you may improve the ability by adopting it.*”

We won’t even get into content here because it’s kind of hard to sift through. We’re not worried about that right now, I just want to show you some examples of things that you should avoid (other than the obvious ones). Try not to use forms of the verb “to be” in every single sentence. Don’t use “you” if you can. We casually speak this way a lot of the time, with a hypothetical “you” that’s not actually referring to anyone, but don’t write this way. When you use “you,” you’re implicating the reader – you’re saying that *you know* that the reader thinks something but they might not and that might be distracting or irritating to the reader. The subjects in most of these sentences are not specific at all – a lot of “they,” “it” and “humans”. Don’t do that – be specific to the subject you are referring to. Just like in the Analyze an Argument video where we learned to not just refer to “sentence one” but to actually say what the author said in sentence one, here you want to be specific about the subject of the sentence. Don’t make the reader have to think back to what they read before – you want to let the reader be lazy, not you. Avoid single sentence or very short paragraphs. Use as much good vocab as you can. Certainly none of this vocab was in the verbal reasoning part of the test!

**Conclusion**

That’s it pretty much guys! I just wanted to let you know about a resource if you are at Cal State: the CSUSM writing center. You can bring any piece of writing and they’ll help you analyze and improve it. You can also go there and just ask questions about writing but the most efficient use of your time is to come with things already written. You can write responses to sample prompts, bring them in and tell the people there that you’re studying for the GRE. They will help you do the things that I can’t help you do asynchronously – actually look at your writing and go from there. There are in-person walk-ins and online tutoring, here’s the link: <https://www.csusm.edu/writingcenter/index.html>. This is a really good resource, if you want to improve your writing, go check them out. Also, I’m here! If you can’t or don’t want to go into the writing center, email me.

I think that’s it for this part of the course. If you email me burning questions that I think I should address for everybody, I will make another video. See you guys and remember that you can take this test more than once. Also remember that it’s nice to have a good GRE score but at this point in the world in 2022, it’s not the end of the world if the test doesn’t work for you because a lot of places aren’t taking it or are at least trying to do a more holistic approach to their admissions.

Good luck out there guys, see ya!