

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC ANALYTICAL WRITING CHECKLISTS

HOW TO USE THESE CHECKLISTS

Purpose: Each academic discipline has unique conventions, priorities, and expectations. These checklists show what matters most in your field.

Instructions:

1. Find your subject area
2. Use the checklist BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER writing
3. Check off each item as you complete it
4. Pay special attention to "High Priority" items
5. Review "Common Mistakes" section to avoid pitfalls

Note: These are additions to general analytical writing principles. You still need strong thesis, evidence, and analysis—these checklists show what's SPECIFIC to each field.

1. LITERATURE & ENGLISH

DISCIPLINE PRIORITIES

What Literature Professors Value Most:

- Close reading of specific language
 - Identification of literary devices/techniques
 - Interpretation of meaning beyond plot
 - Engagement with text's complexity and ambiguity
 - Original insights about how text creates meaning
-

THESIS & ARGUMENT CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Thesis makes interpretive claim, not plot summary
- ☐ Thesis identifies specific literary techniques/devices
- ☐ Thesis explains what techniques REVEAL about meaning
- ☐ Argument addresses HOW text creates meaning, not just WHAT it means

- ☐ Thesis is arguable (another reader could disagree)

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Thesis engages with text's complexity/ambiguity
- ☐ Argument acknowledges multiple possible interpretations
- ☐ Thesis connects specific passages to broader themes
- ☐ Claim goes beyond obvious readings

Should Include

- ☐ Reference to specific literary elements (symbolism, irony, structure)
 - ☐ Claim about author's technique or craft choices
 - ☐ Recognition of text's formal features (not just content)
-

EVIDENCE & QUOTATION CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Every claim supported by specific textual evidence
- ☐ Quotes are brief (usually 1-4 lines; block quote only if necessary)
- ☐ Every quote has page number/line citation
- ☐ Quotes integrated grammatically into sentences
- ☐ Context provided before each quote

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Evidence comes from throughout text (not just first chapter)
- ☐ Multiple pieces of evidence per body paragraph (2-3 minimum)
- ☐ Quotes selected for interesting LANGUAGE, not just content
- ☐ Evidence shows patterns across text

Should Include

- ☐ Mix of direct quotation and close paraphrase
 - ☐ Signal phrases introducing all quotes
 - ☐ No "naked quotes" (dropped in without introduction)
-

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Analysis explains HOW language creates meaning
- ☐ Literary devices identified and explained (metaphor, irony, etc.)
- ☐ Close reading of specific word choices
- ☐ Analysis-to-evidence ratio is at least 2:1

- ☐ Interpretation goes beyond plot summary

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Analysis addresses ambiguity or multiple meanings
- ☐ Engagement with connotations, not just denotations
- ☐ Attention to formal features (structure, syntax, sound)
- ☐ Recognition of how parts relate to whole

Should Include

- ☐ Explanation of WHY author made specific choices
- ☐ Discussion of effects created by techniques
- ☐ Connection between form and content

LITERARY TERMINOLOGY CHECKLIST

Must Use Correctly

- ☐ Literary devices properly identified (metaphor vs. simile, etc.)
- ☐ Genre terms accurate (tragedy, satire, bildungsroman)
- ☐ Narrative terms correct (narrator, point of view, voice)
- ☐ Poetic terms accurate if analyzing poetry (meter, rhyme, stanza)

Useful Terms by Category

Figurative Language:

- Metaphor, simile, personification, symbolism, allegory

Narrative Technique:

- First/third person, omniscient/limited, stream of consciousness, unreliable narrator

Poetic Devices:

- Meter, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, enjambment, caesura

Structural:

- Foreshadowing, flashback, frame narrative, parallel structure

Tone & Style:

- Irony (verbal, dramatic, situational), satire, diction, syntax
-

CONVENTIONS & FORMAT CHECKLIST

Required

- ☐ Present tense when discussing literature ("Hamlet decides," not "decided")
- ☐ Author last name after first full reference (Fitzgerald, not F. Scott)
- ☐ Italicize book titles, quotation marks for short stories/poems
- ☐ MLA format (unless specified otherwise)
- ☐ Works Cited page with proper formatting

Common Format Issues

- ☐ No contractions (don't → do not)
 - ☐ No first person unless explicitly allowed
 - ☐ No second person (you)
 - ☐ Formal academic tone maintained
-

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

✗ Plot Summary Instead of Analysis

- Don't just retell what happens
- ✓ Analyze what it MEANS and HOW it works

✗ Ignoring Form/Technique

- Don't discuss only content/themes
- ✓ Explain HOW author creates meaning through technique

✗ Over-Reliance on Biography

- Don't assume author's life explains text
- ✓ Focus on text itself (close reading)

✗ Vague Language

- Don't say "the author uses imagery"
- ✓ Specify: "olfactory imagery of decay"

✗ Treating Characters as Real People

- Don't psychoanalyze characters as if real
 - ✓ Discuss them as authorial constructions serving thematic purposes
-

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before Writing:

- What specific passages best support my claim?
- What literary devices does the author employ?
- How does form relate to content?
- What alternative interpretations exist?

During Writing:

- Am I analyzing LANGUAGE or just summarizing?
- Have I identified specific techniques?
- Am I explaining HOW meaning is created?
- Is my analysis sophisticated enough?

After Writing:

- Does every paragraph include close reading?
 - Have I gone beyond obvious interpretations?
 - Is my evidence the strongest available?
 - Have I maintained present tense throughout?
-

2. HISTORY

DISCIPLINE PRIORITIES

What History Professors Value Most:

- Use of primary sources as evidence
 - Historical context and periodization
 - Causation analysis (not just events, but WHY)
 - Engagement with historiography (what historians argue)
 - Awareness of historical interpretation vs. fact
-

THESIS & ARGUMENT CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Thesis makes historical argument, not just states facts
- ☐ Thesis addresses causation or significance
- ☐ Argument is based on evidence, not assumptions
- ☐ Thesis identifies specific historical factors/forces
- ☐ Periodization or timeframe clearly specified

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Thesis challenges or complicates conventional narratives
- ☐ Argument acknowledges historical complexity
- ☐ Multiple causes/factors identified
- ☐ Thesis engages with "why" and "how," not just "what"

Should Include

- ☐ Specific historical context
 - ☐ Recognition of contingency (could have been different)
 - ☐ Awareness that history involves interpretation
-

EVIDENCE & SOURCES CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Primary sources used as main evidence
- ☐ Every factual claim has source citation
- ☐ Sources are appropriate to time period analyzed
- ☐ Direct engagement with historical documents
- ☐ Sources evaluated for bias and perspective

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Mix of primary and secondary sources
- ☐ Multiple sources support each major claim
- ☐ Sources represent different perspectives where relevant
- ☐ Awareness of source limitations

Primary Source Types

- ☐ Government documents, speeches, laws
- ☐ Letters, diaries, memoirs
- ☐ Newspapers and periodicals from the era
- ☐ Statistical data from the period

- ☐ Artifacts, images, material culture

Secondary Source Types

- ☐ Scholarly books by historians
 - ☐ Peer-reviewed journal articles
 - ☐ Historical analyses by experts
 - ☐ NOT Wikipedia, encyclopedias (use for background only)
-

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Analysis explains historical causation
- ☐ Multiple factors/causes considered
- ☐ Distinction made between correlation and causation
- ☐ Historical change over time explained
- ☐ Analysis avoids presentism (judging past by present values)

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Contextualization (events explained within their time)
- ☐ Recognition of historical actors' perspectives
- ☐ Acknowledgment of what was/wasn't possible historically
- ☐ Engagement with "how do we know?" questions

Should Include

- ☐ Discussion of historical significance
 - ☐ Recognition of unintended consequences
 - ☐ Awareness of multiple causation (rarely single cause)
 - ☐ Distinguishing between short-term and long-term causes
-

HISTORICAL THINKING CHECKLIST

Causation Analysis

- ☐ Identified immediate causes
- ☐ Identified long-term causes
- ☐ Distinguished necessary vs. sufficient causes
- ☐ Considered counterfactuals where appropriate
- ☐ Avoided oversimplification (single-cause explanations)

Contextualization

- ☐ Events explained within historical context

- ☐ Political, social, economic context provided
- ☐ Contemporary beliefs and values considered
- ☐ Avoided anachronism (imposing modern ideas on past)

Continuity & Change

- ☐ What changed identified
 - ☐ What stayed the same recognized
 - ☐ Pace of change addressed
 - ☐ Turning points identified
-

CONVENTIONS & FORMAT CHECKLIST

Required

- ☐ Past tense for historical events
- ☐ Present tense for historiography ("Historian X argues...")
- ☐ Proper historical periodization (not "ancient times" but specific dates)
- ☐ Chicago/Turabian citation format (usually; sometimes MLA)
- ☐ Bibliography with primary and secondary sources separated (if Chicago)

Dates & Terminology

- ☐ Specific dates used (not "long ago")
 - ☐ BCE/CE or BC/AD used consistently
 - ☐ Historical terms used accurately (don't call everything "revolution")
 - ☐ Place names accurate to period (Constantinople, not Istanbul, for Byzantine period)
-

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

✗ Presentism

- Don't judge historical actors by modern standards
- ✓ Explain actions within historical context

✗ Inevitability

- Don't assume outcomes were inevitable
- ✓ Recognize contingency and possibility

✗ Single-Cause Explanations

- Don't reduce complex events to one cause
- ✓ Analyze multiple factors and their interactions

✗ Ignoring Primary Sources

- Don't rely entirely on textbooks/Wikipedia
- ✓ Engage directly with historical documents

✗ Treating All Sources as Equally Reliable

- Don't accept sources uncritically
- ✓ Evaluate sources for bias, perspective, reliability

✗ Narrative Without Analysis

- Don't just tell what happened
- ✓ Explain why it happened and why it matters

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before Writing:

- What primary sources can I use?
- What caused this historical event/change?
- How do historians disagree about this topic?
- What was possible/impossible in this historical moment?

During Writing:

- Am I analyzing causes, not just describing events?
- Have I provided sufficient historical context?
- Am I avoiding presentism?
- Do I have evidence for every factual claim?

After Writing:

- Is every claim supported by cited sources?
 - Have I explained causation thoroughly?
 - Did I engage with primary sources directly?
 - Have I avoided anachronistic judgments?
-

3. NATURAL SCIENCES (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)

DISCIPLINE PRIORITIES

What Science Professors Value Most:

- Evidence-based reasoning from experiments/data
 - Clear methodology description
 - Accurate use of scientific terminology
 - Logical connection between data and conclusions
 - Recognition of limitations and alternative explanations
-

THESIS & HYPOTHESIS CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Hypothesis is testable and falsifiable
- ☐ Thesis makes specific claim about relationships between variables
- ☐ Prediction is clearly stated
- ☐ Claim is based on existing research/theory
- ☐ Scope is appropriate (not too broad)

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Null hypothesis considered
 - ☐ Mechanism or explanation proposed
 - ☐ Variables clearly identified (independent, dependent)
 - ☐ Thesis connects to broader scientific understanding
-

EVIDENCE & DATA CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Data comes from reliable sources (peer-reviewed journals, experiments)
- ☐ Sample sizes reported
- ☐ Methodology clearly described
- ☐ Statistical significance reported where relevant
- ☐ Raw data vs. interpretation distinguished
- ☐ Units of measurement included

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Multiple studies cited for major claims

- ☐ Controls and variables identified
- ☐ Replication noted where relevant
- ☐ Margin of error/confidence intervals reported

Data Presentation

- ☐ Figures and tables properly labeled
 - ☐ Axes labeled with units
 - ☐ Captions explain what's shown
 - ☐ Data visualizations are clear and accurate
 - ☐ Reference made to figures in text
-

ANALYSIS & REASONING CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Clear cause-effect reasoning
- ☐ Alternative explanations considered
- ☐ Confounding variables addressed
- ☐ Limitations acknowledged
- ☐ Correlation vs. causation distinguished
- ☐ Mechanism explained (not just correlation)

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Statistical analysis appropriate to data
- ☐ Uncertainty quantified
- ☐ Results interpreted in context of theory
- ☐ Practical implications discussed

Should Include

- ☐ Discussion of what results mean
 - ☐ Explanation of unexpected findings
 - ☐ Suggestions for future research
 - ☐ Recognition of what remains unknown
-

SCIENTIFIC TERMINOLOGY CHECKLIST

Must Use Correctly

- ☐ Technical terms defined on first use
- ☐ Scientific names correct (italicized for species)
- ☐ Units standard and consistent (SI units preferred)

- ☐ Precision appropriate (significant figures)
- ☐ Abbreviations defined before use

Discipline-Specific Terms

Biology: taxonomy, cellular processes, genetic terminology **Chemistry:** chemical formulas, reactions, bonding
Physics: forces, energy, fundamental constants

CONVENTIONS & FORMAT CHECKLIST

Required Structure (Lab Reports/Research Papers)

- ☐ Abstract (if required) - concise summary of entire paper
- ☐ Introduction - background and hypothesis
- ☐ Methods - reproducible procedure description
- ☐ Results - data presentation without interpretation
- ☐ Discussion - interpretation and analysis
- ☐ Conclusion - summary and implications
- ☐ References - all sources cited

Writing Conventions

- ☐ Past tense for completed experiments ("we measured")
- ☐ Passive voice often acceptable ("the sample was heated")
- ☐ Third person preferred over first in formal papers
- ☐ Objective, neutral tone (no emotional language)

Citation Format

- ☐ Usually APA or CSE format
 - ☐ In-text citations with author-date
 - ☐ References page with full citations
 - ☐ All data sources cited
-

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

✗ Overstating Certainty

- Don't claim absolute proof
- ✓ Use appropriate qualifiers (suggests, indicates, appears to)

✗ Confusing Correlation with Causation

- Don't assume correlation proves causation
- ✓ Identify confounding variables and alternative explanations

✗ Cherry-Picking Data

- Don't ignore contradictory evidence
- ✓ Address anomalies and conflicting results

✗ Insufficient Methodology Detail

- Don't write vague procedures
- ✓ Provide reproducible detail

✗ Interpreting in Results Section

- Don't analyze in Results
- ✓ Keep Results objective (data only), interpret in Discussion

✗ Ignoring Limitations

- Don't present research as flawless
 - ✓ Acknowledge limitations honestly
-

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before Writing:

- What is my testable hypothesis?
- What data supports or refutes this hypothesis?
- What alternative explanations exist?
- What are the limitations of available evidence?

During Writing:

- Am I distinguishing data from interpretation?
- Have I explained mechanisms, not just correlations?
- Is my methodology reproducible?
- Am I using technical terms correctly?

After Writing:

- Is every claim supported by evidence?
- Have I acknowledged limitations?
- Are my conclusions justified by the data?

- Have I cited all sources properly?
-

4. SOCIAL SCIENCES (Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology)

DISCIPLINE PRIORITIES

What Social Science Professors Value Most:

- Empirical evidence from studies/research
 - Theoretical framework application
 - Methodological rigor and awareness
 - Cultural/social context consideration
 - Recognition of complexity and multiple variables
-

THESIS & ARGUMENT CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Thesis makes empirically testable claim
- ☐ Theoretical framework identified
- ☐ Variables clearly specified
- ☐ Population/sample specified
- ☐ Claim is sociologically/psychologically grounded

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Thesis addresses causation or correlation
 - ☐ Multiple factors considered
 - ☐ Scope appropriately limited
 - ☐ Research question clearly stated
-

EVIDENCE & RESEARCH CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Peer-reviewed studies cited
- ☐ Sample sizes and populations reported
- ☐ Research methodology described
- ☐ Statistical significance noted

- ☐ Multiple studies support major claims
- ☐ Primary research data used where possible

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence where appropriate
- ☐ Recent research emphasized (last 5-10 years)
- ☐ Classic foundational studies included
- ☐ Cross-cultural evidence considered where relevant

Evidence Types

- ☐ Experimental studies
 - ☐ Survey data
 - ☐ Observational studies
 - ☐ Case studies
 - ☐ Meta-analyses
 - ☐ Ethnographic research
-

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Theoretical framework applied to evidence
- ☐ Multiple variables considered
- ☐ Alternative explanations addressed
- ☐ Social/cultural context incorporated
- ☐ Generalizability limitations noted
- ☐ Individual vs. group-level analysis distinguished

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Intersectionality considered where relevant (race, class, gender)
- ☐ Historical context provided
- ☐ Power dynamics analyzed
- ☐ Structural vs. individual factors distinguished

Should Include

- ☐ Discussion of practical implications
 - ☐ Ethical considerations where relevant
 - ☐ Recognition of researcher positionality/bias
 - ☐ Suggestions for future research
-

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK CHECKLIST

Major Theories (Know and Apply Appropriately)

Psychology:

- ☐ Cognitive theories
- ☐ Behavioral theories
- ☐ Social learning theory
- ☐ Developmental theories
- ☐ Psychoanalytic approaches

Sociology:

- ☐ Functionalism
- ☐ Conflict theory
- ☐ Symbolic interactionism
- ☐ Social constructionism
- ☐ Critical theories

Anthropology:

- ☐ Cultural relativism
- ☐ Structural functionalism
- ☐ Interpretive approaches
- ☐ Practice theory

Framework Application

- ☐ Theory explicitly named and explained
 - ☐ Theory guides analysis throughout
 - ☐ Evidence interpreted through theoretical lens
 - ☐ Theory's limitations acknowledged
-

CONVENTIONS & FORMAT CHECKLIST

Required

- ☐ APA format (most common in social sciences)
- ☐ Past tense for completed studies ("Smith (2020) found...")
- ☐ Present tense for general theories ("Piaget argues...")
- ☐ Third person preferred (though "we" acceptable in some contexts)
- ☐ Objective, analytical tone

APA Specific

- ☐ In-text citations: (Author, Year)

- ☐ References page (not Bibliography or Works Cited)
 - ☐ Hanging indent for references
 - ☐ DOI included where available
-

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

✗ Ignoring Cultural Context

- Don't assume findings generalize across all cultures
- ✓ Consider cultural specificity and diversity

✗ Oversimplifying Causation

- Don't claim simple cause-effect for complex social phenomena
- ✓ Recognize multiple factors and interactions

✗ Confusing Individual and Structural

- Don't reduce structural issues to individual choices
- ✓ Analyze both individual agency and social structures

✗ Relying on Outdated Research

- Don't cite only old studies
- ✓ Emphasize recent research (last decade)

✗ Ignoring Intersectionality

- Don't analyze race, class, gender in isolation
- ✓ Consider how identities intersect

✗ Treating Correlation as Causation

- Don't assume correlation proves causation
 - ✓ Distinguish and explain carefully
-

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before Writing:

- What theoretical framework guides my analysis?
- What empirical research supports my claim?
- What population does this apply to?

- What contextual factors matter?

During Writing:

- Am I applying theory consistently?
- Have I considered alternative explanations?
- Am I oversimplifying complex phenomena?
- Have I addressed cultural context?

After Writing:

- Is every claim supported by research?
 - Have I acknowledged limitations?
 - Did I use appropriate theoretical framework?
 - Are my generalizations justified?
-

5. PHILOSOPHY

DISCIPLINE PRIORITIES

What Philosophy Professors Value Most:

- Logical argumentation and reasoning
 - Precise definitions and distinctions
 - Engagement with philosophical texts and arguments
 - Consideration of objections and counterarguments
 - Conceptual clarity and rigor
-

THESIS & ARGUMENT CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Thesis makes clear philosophical claim
- ☐ Position is precisely stated (no ambiguity)
- ☐ Key terms defined
- ☐ Argument is logical and valid
- ☐ Thesis is genuinely philosophical (not just opinion)

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Argument structure is explicit (premises → conclusion)
 - ☐ Thesis engages with existing philosophical debate
 - ☐ Position is defensible with reasons
 - ☐ Scope appropriately limited
-

ARGUMENTATION CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Premises clearly stated
- ☐ Logical structure explicit
- ☐ Valid reasoning (conclusion follows from premises)
- ☐ Sound argument (premises are true)
- ☐ Fallacies avoided

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Deductive or inductive structure identified
- ☐ Hidden assumptions made explicit
- ☐ Necessary vs. sufficient conditions distinguished
- ☐ Conceptual distinctions clearly drawn

Argument Structure

- ☐ Premise 1: [stated clearly]
 - ☐ Premise 2: [stated clearly]
 - ☐ Premise 3: [if needed]
 - ☐ Therefore: [conclusion follows logically]
-

EVIDENCE & SOURCES CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Primary philosophical texts cited
- ☐ Accurate representation of philosophers' views
- ☐ Direct engagement with philosophical arguments
- ☐ Quotations used to support interpretations
- ☐ Sources are authoritative (peer-reviewed philosophy)

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Multiple philosophers engaged
- ☐ Historical context provided where relevant

- ☐ Interpretations supported by textual evidence
 - ☐ Original texts, not summaries, consulted
-

ANALYSIS & REASONING CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Objections considered and addressed
- ☐ Counterarguments presented fairly
- ☐ Rebuttals to objections provided
- ☐ Implications explored
- ☐ Assumptions identified and examined
- ☐ Conceptual analysis conducted (what does X mean?)

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Thought experiments used effectively
- ☐ Analogies evaluated for strength
- ☐ Necessary vs. sufficient conditions analyzed
- ☐ Logical consequences traced

Should Include

- ☐ "On the one hand... on the other hand" structure
 - ☐ Objection: "One might argue that..."
 - ☐ Reply: "However, this objection fails because..."
 - ☐ Recognition of argument's limits
-

PHILOSOPHICAL TERMINOLOGY CHECKLIST

Logical Terms (Use Correctly)

- ☐ Valid/sound
- ☐ Necessary/sufficient
- ☐ A priori/a posteriori
- ☐ Deductive/inductive
- ☐ Premise/conclusion
- ☐ Implication/entailment

Argument Types

- ☐ Modus ponens/tollens
- ☐ Reductio ad absurdum
- ☐ Argument by analogy

- ☐ Dilemma
- ☐ Thought experiment

Common Fallacies to Avoid

- ☐ Ad hominem
 - ☐ Straw man
 - ☐ False dichotomy
 - ☐ Begging the question
 - ☐ Appeal to authority
-

CONVENTIONS & FORMAT CHECKLIST

Required

- ☐ Formal academic style
- ☐ Precise language (no vagueness)
- ☐ Clear definitions of key terms
- ☐ Logical paragraph structure
- ☐ Standard citation format (varies: Chicago, MLA, or APA)

Writing Style

- ☐ Active voice preferred
 - ☐ Short, clear sentences better than long complex ones
 - ☐ Technical terms defined
 - ☐ Ambiguity avoided
 - ☐ Each paragraph = one point
-

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

✗ Vague Thesis

- Don't leave position ambiguous
- ✓ State exactly what you're arguing

✗ Straw Man Arguments

- Don't misrepresent opposing views
- ✓ Present objections in strongest form

✗ Invalid Reasoning

- Don't claim conclusion follows when it doesn't

- ✓ Ensure logical validity

✗ **Assuming What Needs Proof**

- Don't beg the question
- ✓ Provide independent reasons for premises

✗ **Ignoring Objections**

- Don't pretend your argument is unassailable
- ✓ Address strongest counterarguments

✗ **Confusing Definition with Argument**

- Don't define your way to conclusion
 - ✓ Argue for substantive claims
-

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before Writing:

- What exactly am I arguing?
- What are my premises?
- Does my conclusion follow logically?
- What objections might someone raise?

During Writing:

- Is each term clearly defined?
- Is my reasoning valid?
- Have I considered counterarguments?
- Are my premises true?

After Writing:

- Does my conclusion follow from premises?
 - Have I addressed the strongest objections?
 - Is my position clearly stated?
 - Have I avoided logical fallacies?
-

6. FILM & MEDIA STUDIES

DISCIPLINE PRIORITIES

What Film/Media Professors Value Most:

- Analysis of visual/audio techniques, not just plot
 - Understanding of medium-specific storytelling
 - Recognition of formal elements (cinematography, editing, sound)
 - Engagement with film theory
 - Cultural and historical context
-

THESIS & ARGUMENT CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Thesis analyzes HOW film creates meaning, not just WHAT
- ☐ Specific cinematic techniques identified
- ☐ Claim about director's/medium's strategies
- ☐ Thesis goes beyond plot summary
- ☐ Focus on visual/formal analysis

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Theoretical framework applied (if appropriate)
 - ☐ Genre conventions addressed
 - ☐ Cultural/historical context incorporated
 - ☐ Comparison drawn (if comparative analysis)
-

VISUAL ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Cinematography analyzed (camera angles, movement, framing)
- ☐ Mise-en-scène described (everything in frame)
- ☐ Editing techniques identified (cuts, transitions, pace)
- ☐ Lighting discussed (high-key, low-key, natural)
- ☐ Color palette and symbolism analyzed
- ☐ Specific scenes described in detail

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Composition analyzed (rule of thirds, symmetry)

- ☐ Shot types identified (close-up, wide, medium)
- ☐ Camera movement noted (pan, tilt, dolly, crane)
- ☐ Depth of field discussed
- ☐ Aspect ratio considered

Cinematic Vocabulary

- ☐ Shot types: ECU, CU, MS, LS, ELS
 - ☐ Angles: high, low, eye-level, Dutch
 - ☐ Movement: tracking, dolly, crane, handheld
 - ☐ Editing: cut, dissolve, fade, match cut, jump cut
 - ☐ Lighting: three-point, chiaroscuro, natural
-

AUDIO ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

Should Include

- ☐ Sound design discussed (diegetic vs. non-diegetic)
 - ☐ Music and score analyzed
 - ☐ Dialogue delivery and importance
 - ☐ Sound effects and their functions
 - ☐ Silence as technique
-

EVIDENCE & DESCRIPTION CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Specific scenes described in detail
- ☐ Timestamps provided for key moments
- ☐ Visual elements described (not assumed reader has seen)
- ☐ Multiple examples throughout film
- ☐ Scene description integrated with analysis

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Frame composition described
 - ☐ Visual motifs tracked
 - ☐ Patterns across film identified
 - ☐ Screenshots referenced (if paper includes images)
-

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Analysis explains what techniques MEAN
- ☐ Connection between form and content
- ☐ Discussion of director's choices
- ☐ Genre conventions analyzed
- ☐ Cultural/social implications explored

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Comparison to other films/directors
 - ☐ Theoretical framework applied
 - ☐ Audience positioning analyzed
 - ☐ Ideological analysis conducted
-

CONVENTIONS & FORMAT CHECKLIST

Required

- ☐ Film title italicized
- ☐ Director name included at first mention
- ☐ Year of release noted
- ☐ Present tense for describing film
- ☐ MLA or Chicago format (check assignment)

Citation Format

- ☐ Film citation includes: Title. Director. Studio, Year.
 - ☐ Timestamps for specific scenes if needed
 - ☐ Edition noted if relevant (director's cut, etc.)
-

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

✗ Plot Summary Instead of Analysis

- Don't just retell story
- ✓ Analyze how story is TOLD visually

✗ Ignoring Form

- Don't focus only on themes/content
- ✓ Analyze cinematography, editing, sound

✗ **Vague Visual Description**

- Don't say "the scene looks dark"
- ✓ Specify: "low-key lighting with hard shadows creates..."

✗ **Treating Film Like Literature**

- Don't analyze only dialogue/plot
- ✓ Focus on visual storytelling

✗ **No Specific Examples**

- Don't make general claims
 - ✓ Describe specific scenes with timestamps
-

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before Writing:

- What specific visual techniques does director use?
- How does cinematography create meaning?
- What patterns exist across the film?
- How does this film work as cinema, not just story?

During Writing:

- Am I analyzing VISUAL storytelling?
- Have I described scenes in enough detail?
- Am I using proper film terminology?
- Have I gone beyond plot?

After Writing:

- Does my analysis focus on HOW film creates meaning?
 - Have I supported claims with specific scenes?
 - Did I use cinematic vocabulary correctly?
 - Have I analyzed form, not just content?
-

7. ART HISTORY

DISCIPLINE PRIORITIES

What Art History Professors Value Most:

- Formal analysis (close looking at visual elements)
 - Historical and cultural context
 - Understanding of artistic techniques and materials
 - Engagement with iconography and symbolism
 - Recognition of artistic movements and influences
-

THESIS & ARGUMENT CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Thesis makes interpretive claim about artwork's meaning
- ☐ Specific visual elements identified
- ☐ Historical context incorporated
- ☐ Artist's techniques/choices analyzed
- ☐ Thesis goes beyond description to interpretation

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Thesis addresses artistic movement or style
 - ☐ Cultural significance discussed
 - ☐ Comparison to other works/artists
 - ☐ Patronage or commission context included
-

FORMAL ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Line analyzed (contour, implied, actual)
- ☐ Color discussed (palette, symbolism, temperature)
- ☐ Composition analyzed (arrangement, balance, focal point)
- ☐ Light and shadow described (chiaroscuro, tenebrism)
- ☐ Space discussed (positive/negative, perspective)
- ☐ Texture noted (actual or implied)

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Proportion and scale analyzed

- ☐ Movement and rhythm identified
- ☐ Unity and variety discussed
- ☐ Emphasis and subordination noted
- ☐ Medium and technique described

Formal Elements Vocabulary

- ☐ Line quality: thick, thin, flowing, angular
 - ☐ Color: hue, saturation, value, temperature
 - ☐ Composition: symmetrical, asymmetrical, hierarchical
 - ☐ Perspective: linear, atmospheric, isometric
 - ☐ Technique: impasto, glazing, sfumato, etc.
-

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Historical period specified and explained
- ☐ Artistic movement identified
- ☐ Patronage/commission context discussed
- ☐ Cultural and religious context provided
- ☐ Social/political context relevant to work

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Artist's biography where relevant
 - ☐ Contemporary reception discussed
 - ☐ Function and original location described
 - ☐ Influences identified
-

ICONOGRAPHY CHECKLIST

Should Include

- ☐ Symbols identified and explained
 - ☐ Religious or mythological references interpreted
 - ☐ Allegorical meanings discussed
 - ☐ Iconographic tradition noted
 - ☐ Cultural codes explained
-

EVIDENCE & DESCRIPTION CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Artwork described in detail
- ☐ Specific visual elements referenced
- ☐ Details analyzed, not just general impression
- ☐ Multiple parts of composition discussed
- ☐ Physical characteristics noted (size, medium, location)

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Comparison to other artworks
- ☐ Primary sources cited (artist's writings, contracts)
- ☐ Scholarly interpretations engaged

CONVENTIONS & FORMAT CHECKLIST

Required

- ☐ Artist name, Title (italicized), Date
- ☐ Medium specified
- ☐ Dimensions noted (height × width)
- ☐ Current location (museum, collection)
- ☐ Present tense for describing artwork
- ☐ Chicago citation format (usually)

Artwork Citation Format

Artist Lastname, Firstname. Title of Work. Date. Medium. Dimensions. Museum/Collection, City.

Image Usage

- ☐ Images included where appropriate
- ☐ Images properly captioned
- ☐ Images referenced in text
- ☐ Permission/credits for images

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

✗ Pure Description Without Analysis

- Don't just describe what you see
- ✓ Interpret what it means

✗ Ignoring Formal Elements

- Don't discuss only subject matter
- ✓ Analyze how visual elements create meaning

✗ Presentism

- Don't judge past art by modern standards
- ✓ Understand within historical context

✗ Biographical Fallacy

- Don't reduce artwork to artist's biography
- ✓ Focus on work itself, use biography sparingly

✗ Vague Language

- Don't say "the painting is beautiful"
 - ✓ Specify what creates aesthetic effect
-

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before Writing:

- What do I see when I look closely?
- What formal elements are most important?
- What is the historical context?
- What does this artwork mean?

During Writing:

- Am I analyzing form as well as content?
- Have I provided enough visual description?
- Have I explained historical context?
- Am I using art historical terminology correctly?

After Writing:

- Would reader understand artwork without seeing it?
- Have I balanced formal and contextual analysis?
- Did I interpret, not just describe?

- Are all artworks properly cited?
-

8. BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

DISCIPLINE PRIORITIES

What Business/Economics Professors Value Most:

- Data-driven analysis and quantification
 - Understanding of economic principles and models
 - Practical application and real-world examples
 - Cost-benefit thinking
 - Recognition of trade-offs and constraints
-

THESIS & ARGUMENT CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Thesis makes specific, measurable claim
- ☐ Economic principles identified
- ☐ Quantifiable predictions or outcomes stated
- ☐ Market forces or incentives analyzed
- ☐ Thesis addresses efficiency, costs, or benefits

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Assumptions explicitly stated
 - ☐ Trade-offs identified
 - ☐ Alternative solutions considered
 - ☐ Risk and uncertainty addressed
-

EVIDENCE & DATA CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Quantitative data provided
- ☐ Sources for statistics cited
- ☐ Relevant economic indicators used
- ☐ Time period specified
- ☐ Sample size and methodology noted
- ☐ Data presented in tables/charts where appropriate

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Multiple data sources compared
- ☐ Trends over time shown
- ☐ International comparisons where relevant
- ☐ Market data included

Common Data Types

- ☐ Financial statements (income, balance sheet, cash flow)
 - ☐ Market data (prices, volumes, trends)
 - ☐ Economic indicators (GDP, inflation, unemployment)
 - ☐ Company performance metrics
 - ☐ Industry statistics
-

ANALYSIS & REASONING CHECKLIST

High Priority ✓✓✓

- ☐ Economic model applied
- ☐ Supply and demand analyzed
- ☐ Costs and benefits quantified
- ☐ Opportunity costs identified
- ☐ Incentive structures analyzed
- ☐ Market efficiency discussed

Medium Priority ✓✓

- ☐ Marginal analysis conducted
- ☐ Externalities identified
- ☐ Market failures recognized
- ☐ Short-run vs. long-run effects distinguished
- ☐ Elasticity considered

Economic Principles to Apply

- ☐ Scarcity and choice
 - ☐ Marginal analysis
 - ☐ Opportunity cost
 - ☐ Incentives matter
 - ☐ Trade creates value
 - ☐ Supply and demand
 - ☐ Market equilibrium
 - ☐ Comparative advantage
-

BUSINESS ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

Should Include

- ☐ SWOT analysis (if relevant)
 - ☐ Financial ratios calculated
 - ☐ Competitive analysis
 - ☐ Strategic implications
 - ☐ Risk assessment
 - ☐ ROI or cost-benefit analysis
-

CONVENTIONS & FORMAT CHECKLIST

Required

- ☐ Professional business writing style
- ☐ Data visualizations (charts, graphs) where appropriate
- ☐ Executive summary (for business reports)
- ☐ Clear section headings
- ☐ APA format typically
- ☐ Appendices for detailed data

Quantification

- ☐ Specific numbers, not "many" or "a lot"
 - ☐ Percentages and ratios calculated
 - ☐ Currency specified (USD, EUR, etc.)
 - ☐ Time periods clear
 - ☐ Units consistent
-

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

✗ Qualitative Claims Without Quantification

- Don't say "sales increased significantly"
- ✓ Specify: "sales increased 23% from Q1 to Q2"

✗ Ignoring Opportunity Costs

- Don't analyze only explicit costs
- ✓ Include what's given up

✗ Confusing Accounting and Economic Profit

- Don't ignore implicit costs
- ✓ Include all opportunity costs

✗ **Static Analysis**

- Don't ignore how things change over time
- ✓ Consider dynamic effects and adjustments

✗ **Ignoring Incentives**

- Don't assume people don't respond to incentives
- ✓ Analyze how people respond to changed incentives

✗ **Normative vs. Positive Confusion**

- Don't confuse "what should be" with "what is"
 - ✓ Distinguish value judgments from factual claims
-

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before Writing:

- What data do I need to support this claim?
- What economic principles apply?
- What are the costs and benefits?
- What incentives are at work?

During Writing:

- Have I quantified claims where possible?
- Have I applied economic reasoning?
- Have I considered trade-offs?
- Am I using data correctly?

After Writing:

- Is every claim backed by data?
 - Have I calculated all relevant ratios/metrics?
 - Did I identify opportunity costs?
 - Are my economic principles correctly applied?
-

QUICK REFERENCE: DISCIPLINE COMPARISON

Evidence Priorities by Field

Discipline	Primary Evidence Type	Secondary Evidence
Literature	Direct textual quotations	Literary criticism, biography
History	Primary sources (documents, archives)	Scholarly historical analyses
Natural Science	Experimental data, measurements	Peer-reviewed studies
Social Science	Research studies, surveys	Theoretical frameworks
Philosophy	Logical arguments, thought experiments	Philosophical texts
Film/Media	Specific scenes, visual techniques	Film theory, criticism
Art History	Artworks themselves, formal analysis	Scholarly interpretation
Business/Economics	Financial data, market statistics	Economic models, case studies

Citation Format by Discipline

Discipline	Typical Format	Key Features
Literature	MLA	Author-page in text; Works Cited
History	Chicago/Turabian	Footnotes or endnotes; Bibliography
Natural Science	CSE or APA	Author-date; numbered references
Social Science	APA	Author-date in text; References
Philosophy	Varies (Chicago/MLA)	Precise citations; primary texts
Film/Media	MLA or Chicago	Film citations with director/year
Art History	Chicago	Footnotes; images properly credited
Business/Economics	APA	Author-date; data sources cited

Verb Tense by Discipline

Discipline	Discussing Subject	Discussing Research
Literature	Present ("Hamlet says")	Present ("Critics argue")
History	Past ("Lincoln delivered")	Present ("Historians argue")
Natural Science	Past for experiments	Present for facts
Social Science	Past ("Study found")	Present for theory
Philosophy	Present ("Kant argues")	Present throughout
Film/Media	Present ("Director uses")	Present ("Critics suggest")

Discipline	Discussing Subject	Discussing Research
Art History	Present ("Artist depicts")	Present ("Scholars interpret")
Business/Economics	Past for data	Present for principles

FINAL TIPS FOR ALL DISCIPLINES

Universal Principles

- ☐ Know your discipline's conventions
- ☐ Use field-appropriate terminology correctly
- ☐ Follow discipline's citation format precisely
- ☐ Understand what counts as evidence in your field
- ☐ Match your analysis to discipline's priorities
- ☐ Write in the style expected by your field

When in Doubt

- ☐ Check assignment requirements
- ☐ Review examples from your discipline
- ☐ Consult style guides specific to your field
- ☐ Ask your professor about conventions
- ☐ Look at journals in your discipline

Remember: Each discipline values different things. Know your field's priorities and conventions, and your writing will be more effective!