

Critical Thinking & Writing: Developing an Idea

Dr. Karen Lee, M.F.A., Ph.D. // Writing Center

“Faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life”
(Titus 1.2).




Acknowledgments

- Thanks to Dr. Daniel de Roulet's May 1, 2006 report assessing ENGL 120C: Persuasive Writing, a component of the core curriculum.
- Thanks to the ethnography assignment on Chinatown taught by anthropologists Dr. Vince Gil, Dr. Craig Rusch, and Dr. Jamie Huff.
- Please note that “gut reaction” samples and their revisions are created by me, not our students. 😊



Critical Thinking & Writing

- What constitutes a strong written analysis?
- It goes beyond “gut” or emotional reactions.
- Sentence-level construction is complex & varied in diction & structure.
- Conveys an academic tone appropriate for a college-level audience.
- Organization supports logical flow, coherence, and direction of analysis.



Small Beginnings: Initial or “Gut” Reactions

- It's okay to start with an emotional or “gut” reaction. A personal connection is a great entry point for your thoughtful analysis.
- However, it's not so great to stick to “guts only” without thoughtful development. Relying on “guts” can lead to repetition or unnecessary “beating around the bush.”



Initial “Gut” Reactions: Chinatown Ethnography

- Sample “gut” reaction: This was my first visit to Chinatown! I had a great time.
- I saw Asian Americans work in shops and restaurants underneath the actual places where they lived.
- This was cool because this wasn’t how I grew up in the suburbs.
- My friend and I ate some good Vietnamese food in a restaurant: Yummy pad thai.




Developing an Analysis of “Guts”

- First impressions or “guts” should lead to more analytical questions :
- **Why** do you suppose the commercial and residential spheres are so close together?
- **What** are the social & economic effects of such proximity? What are the pros and cons of this setting in an ethnic enclave?
- **How** is an ethnic enclave such as Chinatown different from a suburb?




Complexity of Thoughts

- Once you have “gut” reaction to an idea, the questioning or “interviewing” method of brainstorming can help you develop the analysis: Interview your idea. Question!
- After brainstorming, you’ll need to create an outline, cluster, or flowchart to organize your ideas. Visual designs also illuminate the complexity of a discussion at a glance.




Questioning or “Interviewing:” Brainstorming to Develop an Idea

- Why is this topic significant, or why should your audience care?
- What sub-topics are related to this idea if you could break it up into categories?
- What might surprise your audience about your topic?
- If common misconceptions exist about this topic, how would you offer a corrective?
How are cause-effect, if-then, or past-future statements related to your topic?




Questioning or “Interviewing:” Brainstorming to Develop an Idea

- Are there similar examples in history? What we can learn from similar events (analogy)? How are other events similar or different (comparison/contrast)?
- If there is a problem involved, what are possible solutions to recommend?
- What evidence exists to support your points? Are there exceptions?



Questioning or “Interviewing:” Brainstorming to Develop an Idea

- Is this idea or situation true for everyone? Are there qualifications or exceptions?
- How would you apply this idea to another situation?
- What are the pros & cons of this idea?
- How would you refute an opponent’s argument to your points? Are there any logical fallacies in your argument?



Questioning or “Interviewing:” Brainstorming to Develop an Idea

- Last but not least, be sure you answer the “so what” question: We’ve said all this to say what? So what?
- What are your final thoughts about the significance or relevance of this topic in relation to society, to posterity, and our Christian faith?



Structuring Your Notes

- Once you're satisfied with the generous amount of material produced by "interviewing" the topic (brainstorming), you need to structure your notes to prepare for writing your analysis.



Organization: Visualizing Complexity

- Use one of the following three methods to guide & structure your analysis.
- You may choose to use an **outline** to structure your brainstorming.
- **Clusters** or “webs” are also useful.
- **Flowcharts** can further help you perceive complexity and connectivity.

Visual Organization: Sample Outline

I. Introduction

II. Commercial Sphere

A. Cultural Tourism

B. Franchise vs. Private Ownership

III. Residential Sphere

IV. Generational Differences

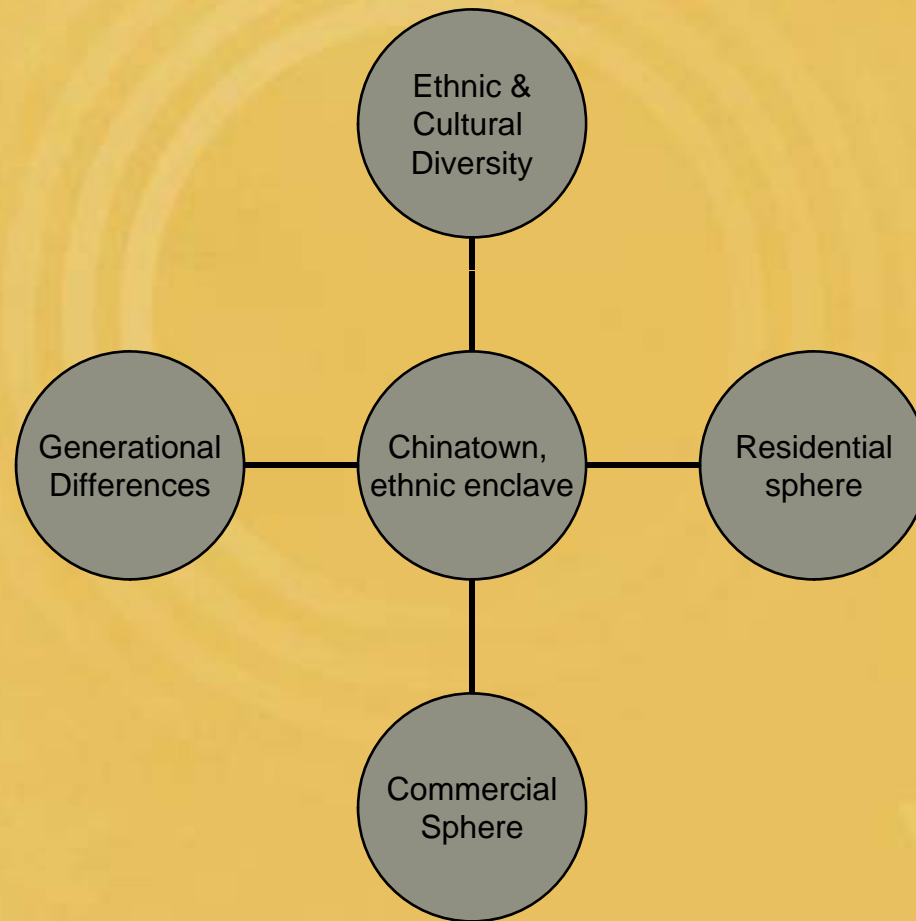
A. English-speaking (second+ generation)

B. Diversity of mother tongues (all)

V. Ethnic & Cultural Diversity

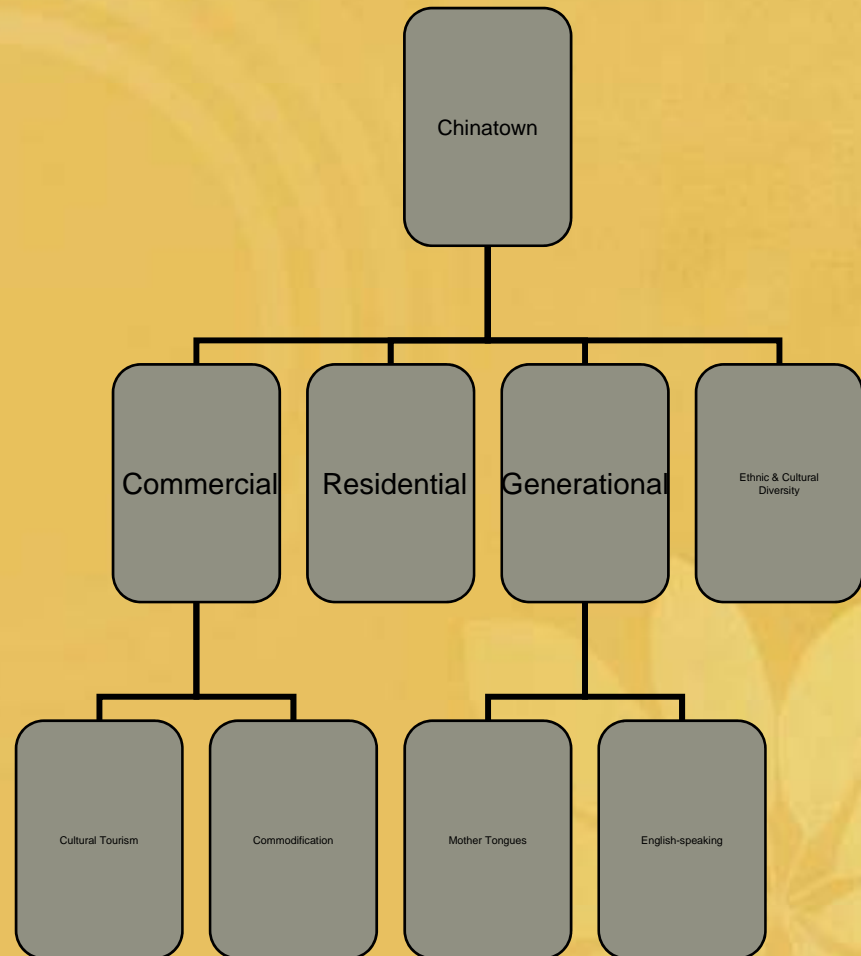
VI. Conclusion

Visual Organization: Sample Cluster



Visual Organization: Sample Flowchart

A flowchart is a useful way to see how your idea is developing in terms of complexity, connectivity, and overall organization.





Proper Diction & Academic Tone

- Writing for a college audience means using complex & varied sentence structures with proper pitch & formality (tone), proper word choice & placement (diction), and vocabulary.
- It doesn't mean you need to write long, long, long, convoluted sentences with archaic or arcane words.
- Eschew obfuscation.




Proper Diction & Academic Tone

- Use vocabulary relevant to the field of analysis. Textbook glossaries and lists of key terms are helpful.
- No slang, no first-person “I,” no second-person “you,” and no contractions (don’t, won’t, shouldn’t). Use gender-inclusive language (oneself, she or he, humanity).



Revising for Tone & Diction

- This was my first visit to Chinatown, a cool place where I saw Asian Americans work in shops and restaurants underneath the actual places where they lived. This was cool because this wasn't how I grew up in the suburbs.
- **Sample Revision:** Ethnographic observations of Chinatown included the proximity of residential and commercial spheres, which were not segregated.



Now You Try It!

- Revise the following example for complexity of thought, tone, and diction.



Example “Guts” for Revision

My friend and I ate some Vietnamese food in a restaurant. The food was good, and we could afford it. I saw that both Chinese Americans and Vietnamese Americans live in Chinatown. Thai, Laotian, and Hmong also live there. There were lots of souvenir shops selling the same sorts of things like paper flowers and silk purses at affordable prices. I'd like to return to learn more.



A Possible Revision

Not only Chinese Americans but also Asian ethnicities such as Vietnamese, Thai, Laotian, and Hmong are part of Chinatown's diverse residential commerce. The proximity of competitors results in low prices on menu items, souvenirs, and other tourist commodities. Low pricing of commodified exotica attracts cultural tourists, although it ultimately produces an economic ceiling in an ethnic enclave.



Summary:

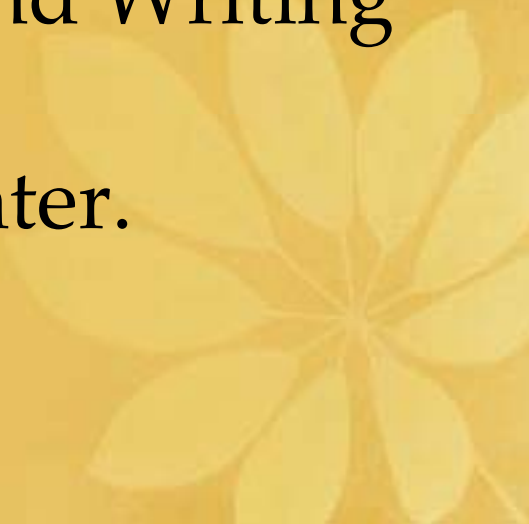
Critical Thinking & Writing


- To develop your critical written analysis, remember the following strategies:
- Question or “interview” the idea or topic.
- Use an outline, a cluster, or flowchart to organize your analysis.
- Use appropriate diction & academic tone.
- Always go beyond GUTS! Analyze!



Related Writing Presentations for Further Study

For our additional practice based on Critical Thinking & Writing Unit, refer to the Writing Center's presentations for Writing a Research Paper, Thesis Statements, Logical Fallacies, Introductions & Conclusions, and Writing a Smooth Paper at www.vanguard.edu/writingcenter.





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