

English 101

Writing about Television

For this essay, you will be writing on a television show of your choosing. It can be a comedy or drama but no reality shows...pick something you are interested in and that you think will provide enough material to write about. Identify a subject in which you already have some interest and expertise. Keep in mind that you won't merely be summarizing what the show is about; your goal is to analyze, which means you will be looking at visual images of different scenes --and you will be determining what message is being sent and what underlying cultural implications the show presents. You will make a claim, support it with evidence and ultimately explain its significance to your audience.

Some tips:

The interpretation of a television episode is much like interpreting a short story. You should consider every potentially significant detail in the episode and subject it to a close reading. Your first step when preparing to analyze a show of your choice is to suspend your aesthetic opinion--*that is whether you like a show or not*. What you are working toward is a critical analysis, what you think a program's underlying cultural significance may be. Also consider, what could the popularity of such a show signify?

Options:

- 1) **One Episode:** Pick one episode (For example, *Madmen*: Season1, Episode 1) and focus your analysis on this episode alone. Pull out a significant issue you see being represented and focus your analysis around this episode only. Exemplification will include a discussion of different scenes, characters, dialogue etc., and show how they all work together to highlight your chosen issue. This essay will be extremely focused since you will be working with one episode only, but will allow you to go into great depth.
- 2) **Character Analysis:** You may pick one specific character from a television show and focus your analysis on what you think this character represents. For example, Rachel in *Madmen* is a business woman who is unmarried. She is the only character in the pilot episode who challenges the male characters. Exemplification in this essay can highlight particular scenes and dialogue to prove this point.
 - 2a. **Character Compare/Contrast:** You may compare/contrast two characters. For example, in *30 Rock*, Liz Lemon isn't a character who would be termed classically beautiful, and a lot of the episodes make fun of that idea. However, her best friend Jenna Moroney does any and everything to fit into society's idea of beauty in order to advance her career as an actress. An essay of this sort might compare/contrast the two characters and analyze how the show uses these characters to defy or make fun of stereotypes placed upon women.

- 3) **The Whole Series:** For this option, you can track a character's progression through an entire series to analyze the transformation of a character and analyze why that is significant. For example, in *Breaking Bad*, the Walter White in Season 1 is much different from the Walter White in the final season. Your exemplification will need to pull from multiple episodes to prove your point.
- 4) **Compare/Contrast Two Different Time Periods:** For this option, you may compare/contrast a contemporary television show to that of one from a previous era. For example, you might compare/contrast *I Love Lucy* with *Will and Grace* and analyze how the dynamics of friendships or social interactions have changed or stayed the same. Or you might compare/contrast *Leave it to Beaver* with *Modern Family* to show how the idea of family has changed over time. Whatever you choose, there must be a unifying theme between the two shows, otherwise your analysis will be unfocused. If you choose this option, make sure that your two shows are from different time periods. Do not compare/contrast two contemporary shows.

Citing Sources

For this essay, we will continue to work on developing our analytical skills, but we will also begin to incorporate others' opinions and perspectives to support our own. You must cite at least two sources for this essay, and they must be relevant quotes.

Requirements:

- 4 Pages
- Strong thesis statement
- Solid introduction, powerful paragraphs
- Mechanical Excellence
- Reference Page in flawless MLA format. Improper citations will be docked significantly.
- 2 In-text quotations with proper citations in MLA format
- Minimum one citation: Must be a reputable source; no unknown authors and no Wikipedia.

Review course outline for due dates.

HW: Watch television; pick a show. Analyze a Wikipedia entry about your show to see how focused the information is, how key terms are defined, and how the entry is organized. How trustworthy do you find the information-and what makes you trust it or not? How would you characterize the tone-informative? Argumentative? Point to words that convey tone. Though online encyclopedias may not be considered appropriate to cite as authoritative sources, Wikipedia can be a helpful resource in the early stages of research because it links to additional resources and to information about the discussions that have taken place among those who've contributed to each article, alerting you to controversies about the topic. Take a look at the work cited information at the end of your Wikipedia entry. Browse some of the articles and include at least one in your journal that you think might be helpful to you as you begin to research this show.