

Argument Analysis Essay: “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

- **Weight:** 2
- **Length:** a minimum of 2½ **double-spaced pages**, following the usual FYC essay format guidelines: printed on one side only, 1” margins, 12 point Times New Roman or a comparable font, etc. (Most essays run about 3 full pages.)
- **Due Date:** to be announced
- **Highlighted Criteria:** content (clear, focused claims; use of specific examples to support or demonstrate claims); organization (transitions, paragraph-level, overall-level); stance, style, diction; grammar; punctuation; spelling; and format
- **Focus and Topic(s):** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness, strength, or beauty of King’s arguments using **one** of the “Aspects of Arguments” categories (and/or corresponding subcategories) we have investigated this semester:
 - Goal-Directed
 - Multisided
 - Supported
 - Rule-based

Which **one** of the above areas, for instance, do you think is best exemplified in King’s “Letter”? Or which one area makes King’s letter a “good/great/effective/etc” argument? A focused analysis using one area is far better than a cursory, sketchy analysis. Don’t do too little as a result of trying to do too much.

- No matter what your particular topic or focus is, be sure to define your term(s) early in your essay. If you are analyzing King’s *eunoia*, for instance, define (in your introduction perhaps?) what you mean by *eunoia*.
- **Suggested Structure:** I encourage you to set up this essay similar to how you’ve set up other FYC essays. I also encourage you to consider this as a type of “literary analysis,” which you may be used to from previous English classes: make claims (interpretations) about the text, and provide specific examples from the text to back up or demonstrate those claims.
- **Quoting, Paraphrasing, Summarizing:** I assume you have a working knowledge of informal MLA guidelines as far as quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing are concerned. Here are some important reminders and/or a few guidelines that are unique to this assignment:
 - Do not fill your paper with quotations. Quotations are one of several valid ways to support what you write; they should not constitute the majority of your work, especially in an essay this short.
 - Assume your reader is familiar with King’s argument but still needs ‘reminders’ (evidence from the text) when you assert claims.
 - No “block” quotations—absolutely NO exceptions. A “block quotation” is defined as a quotation that is longer than 4 typed lines (as they appear in your paper), and/or is indented or set off from the rest of the text. I know King’s “Letter” fairly well. I do not need long blocks of text from King in your essay.

- Use present tense verbs in the “writes” clause: King *writes*, not King *wrote*, for example. Remember that King’s argument is written, not spoken, so using “says” (i.e., “King says,”) is inaccurate and weak. Use “King writes,” or use even stronger verbs: **claims, considers, questions, adds, offers, observes**, etc.
- I strongly encourage you, when you refer to points King makes or you quote King, not to use what I call “war metaphors”: King disarms, King screams, King shuts down, King battles, etc. King is all about peace and love, man, not about battling, fighting, war, etc. Your analysis needs to be consistent with his style, tone, and goals.
- When you summarize, paraphrase, or quote King, provide the page number in your end-of-text citation. (Use the version I have provided on our class website.)
- Finally, there is no need for a Works Cited page. (I have “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” myself.)