

Exercises 15-16: Analysis of King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

Your task is straight-forward: Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness, strength, or brilliance of King's arguments using **a subset of one** of the "Aspects of Arguments" categories we have investigated this semester:

- Goal-Directed: implicit, explicit, discrete, and ultimate goals
- Multisided: weakness to own position, strength to other side
- Supported: ethos (phronesis, arête, eunoia), pathos, logos
- Rule-based: induction, STAR, deduction, syllogisms, and enthymemes

Which subset of one of the above areas, for instance, do you think is best exemplified in King's "Letter"? Even better: Which one specific aspect of one of the above areas makes King's letter a "great/effective/etc" argument?

For instance, don't write about Supported (too general) or even ethos (again, too general); instead, write about phronesis, which is part of ethos, which is part of Supported. A focused analysis using one particular 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 exercise. If you are analyzing King's eunoia, for instance, define (in your first or second sentence, perhaps) what you mean by eunoia. I need to see how you understand the term before I see how you use it as the focus of your critical analysis.

Length and Suggested Structure: Your analysis needs to be a minimum of **one full page, single-spaced**. It may help you to consider this exercise 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. Also, explain why the examples you've chosen matter and/or why the issue under examination matters.

Quoting, Paraphrasing, Summarizing: You should have a working knowledge of informal MLA guidelines as far as quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing are concerned. Here are some reminders and/or a few guidelines that are unique to this assignment:

- Assume your reader is familiar with King's argument but still needs very short, quick 'reminders' (evidence from the text: quotes, paraphrases, summaries) 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 analysis. (Really, in a piece this short, avoid quoting more than one line at a time.)
- 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.
- When you refer to points King makes or when you quote King, don't use what I call "war metaphors":
- ~~King disarms, King screams, King shuts down, King battles, etc.~~ Your analysis needs to be consistent with King's style, tone, and goals.
- When you summarize, paraphrase, or quote King, you don't need to provide an end-of-text citation (no need for a page number, etc.).
- There is no need for a Works Cited page. (I have "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" myself.)