

Writing on Literature

Discussion

1. How much writing experience you have with English texts?
2. Do you often write in hand?
3. What kind of texts are you required to write for your studies?
4. Have you ever written a poem or a short story?
5. Is there a difference between writing Czech/Slovak and English texts?

Argumentative Text Writing Example

A. Complete the instructions:

Write about the following _____: Is freedom of speech necessary in a free society?

Give _____ for your answer.

Write at _____ 250 words.

B. Decide about ideal structure for the text:

Introduction	Summarize ideas, restate position
Paragraph 2	Main idea, supporting idea, examples
Paragraph 3	Restate the topic, indicate your position
Conclusion	Main idea, supporting idea, examples

C. Write some exam tips:

1. Decide _____ you agree or disagree completely with the statement, partly agree or disagree with it, or have no definite opinion.
2. Choose one of these _____:
3. State your position in the introduction and _____ justify it with agreements. This may be more suitable if you feel strongly about the statement.
4. Present the arguments first and then say what you think in the conclusion. This may be better if you have no _____ opinion but can put forward arguments on both sides.
5. _____

D. Read the model answer:

In the last decade, there has been considerable debate over the role of free speech in a free society. Some object to absolute freedom of speech. Others advocate free speech, arguing that the freedom of speech is the single most important political right of citizens in a civilized society. Whilst I believe that there are strong arguments on both sides, I would suggest that freedom of speech should be protected in all but extreme circumstances.

The freedom of speech is important at all levels in a society. Yet it is most important for the

governments. A government which does not know what the people feel and think is in a dangerous position. This is how the communist regimes of Eastern Europe were toppled in the 1980s. The same is happening again in other regions of the world today. The governments that muzzle free speech run a risk of pushing their people to behave destructively or to rebel.

Furthermore, without free speech no political action is possible and no resistance to injustice and oppression is possible. Without free speech elections would have no meaning at all. Policies of contestants become known to the public and become responsive to public opinion only by virtue of free speech. Between elections the freely expressed opinions of citizens help restrain oppressive rule. Without this freedom it is futile to expect political freedom or consequently economic freedom.

In conclusion, I believe that the importance of free speech as a basic and valuable characteristic of a free society cannot be underestimated. It may be challenging for society to allow differences of opinion out into the open; however, the consequences of restricting free speech are likely to be more damaging in the longer term.

(285 words)

E. Discuss the following comments and explain the highlighted phrases:

The writer of this essay has produced a well balanced and **coherent piece of writing**.

They clearly answer the question. The first body paragraph is dedicated to discussing the merits of freedom of speech, and the second body looks at its political consequences **in more detail**. Finally, the writer provides their **own opinion on the issue**.

Very important for argumentative essays, each paragraph has a **clear central topic** which is expanded upon in the supporting sentences.

Regarding grammar, the writer has successfully demonstrated their ability to use a mix of sentence structures, including a **variety of complex sentences** (_____).

Ideas are coherently presented by **using transition words** (_____).

It is important in argumentative essays to have good **topic related vocabulary**.

Also of importance with regards to vocabulary is to **vary your word choices** and not to repeat the same word.

Adapted from <http://www.ielts-writing.info/index.php/academic/ielts-writing-task-2-18/>

Reading – Review

A. Look at the structure of the text, what sections are there?

B. Discuss the purpose and form of the following text.

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Rough-draft Critical Review

Eng 1114-91, Spring 2006

A Critical Review of *Man's Search for Meaning*

Introduction

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor E. Frankl tells the very personal story of his experience as a prisoner in a concentration camp during the Holocaust. He presents this story in the form of an essay in which he shares his arguments and analysis as a doctor and psychologist as well as a former prisoner. This paper will review Frankl's story as well as his main arguments, and will evaluate the quality of Frankl's writing and focus on any areas of weakness within the story.

Summary

This section contains a summary of *Man's Search*. Frankl begins his book by stating that his purpose in writing the book is not to present facts and details of the Holocaust, but to provide a personal account of the everyday life of a prisoner living in a concentration camp. He states, "This tale is not concerned with the great horrors, which have already been described often enough (though less often believed), but...it will try to answer this question: How was everyday life in a concentration camp reflected in the mind of the average prisoner?" (21). Frankl then goes on to describe the three stages of a prisoner's psychological reactions to being held captive in a concentration camp.

The first phase, which occurs just after the prisoner is admitted to the camp, is shock. The second phase, occurring once the prisoner has fallen into a routine within the camp, is one of apathy, or "the blunting of the emotions and the feeling that one could not anymore" (42). The third phase, which occurs after the prisoner has been liberated from the camp, is a period of "depersonalization", in which "everything appears unreal, unlikely, as in a dream" (110). In this phase, released prisoners also feel a sense of "bitterness and disillusionment" when returning to their former lives (113). Frankl describes each of these phases using psychological theory and provides personal experiences to exemplify each of the stages.

Author's Arguments

As described above, Frankl's main purpose for writing this book is to present and analyze the average prisoner's psychological reactions to the everyday life of a concentration camp. His three main arguments are his presentation and analysis of each of the psychological stages that the average concentration camp prisoner experiences: shock, apathy and depersonalization. He bases his analyses of each of these stages on the actions of the prisoners and his own personal thoughts and reactions as he experienced life in a concentration camp.

For example, Frankl argues that the second phase of apathy forces "the prisoner's life down to a primitive level" (47) in which "all efforts and all emotions were centered on one task: preserving one's own life and that of the other fellow" (47). He bases this theory on events he witnessed while living in the camp himself, and states, "It was natural that the desire for food was the major primitive instinct around which mental life centered. Let us observe the majority of prisoners when they happened to work near each other and were, for once, not closely watched. They would immediately start discussing food" (48). Frankl continuously uses examples from his experiences in the concentration camp to illustrate and strengthen his psychological arguments throughout the text.

Evaluation

This section contains an evaluation of Frankl's book. Firstly, the author is a survivor of the Holocaust and was a prisoner of a concentration camp himself, which gives him the personal insight to be able to comment on the psychological conditions of an average prisoner. However, this also creates a bias and because of his personal experience, he is unable to be entirely objective in writing his analysis. Frankl acknowledges this bias in the beginning of his book, by stating, "Only the man inside knows. His judgments may not be objective, his evaluations may be out of proportion. This is inevitable. An attempt must be made to avoid any personal bias, and that is the real difficulty of a book of this kind" (24-25). Although he is aware of this bias, it creates a partiality that will sway the readers throughout his story and it serves as a minor weakness in his writing style.

A second weakness in Frankl's writing is in the assumptions he sometimes makes to prove his point. He makes overarching generalizations several times in his book, making statements that, although may have been true for himself and those around him, might not have been true for every prisoner in every concentration camp during the Holocaust. For example, in one instance, he says, "The prisoner of Auschwitz, in the first phase of shock, did not fear death" (37). It is very bold to say that no prisoner of Auschwitz, one of the most well-known and deadly concentration camps of the Holocaust, did not fear death, as death was all around them and was a very real threat in their daily lives. Although he might have not feared death during his phase of shock, it is impossible for him to guarantee that no prisoner was at all fearful of death in this first psychological phase, and for him to make overarching assumptions like this is a weakness to the overall quality of his book.

Finally, Frankl sometimes becomes too technical and verbose in his writing style, which makes it very hard for the average reader to understand. One example of this is as follows. Frankl states, "I remember an incident when there was an occasion for psychotherapeutic work on the inmates of a whole hut, due to an intensification of their receptiveness because of a certain external situation" (102). This sentence, which is overly wordy and complicated, makes it difficult for the average reader to understand exactly what he is saying. A reader can easily get frustrated when trying to decipher the author's meaning due to overly complicated language, and this is a third weakness of Frankl's writing.

Conclusion

This critical review has evaluated the book *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor E. Frankl. The psychological theories that Frankl presents are very interesting and he does a good job of illustrating these theories with his own personal experiences. **However**, his writing is weakened by the presence of bias, the overarching assumptions he occasionally makes, and his sometimes overly technical and verbose language.

C. Make a list of cohesive tools used in the text:

This section contains, however

Adapted from:

<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/CollegeWriting/WRITEREAD/CritReview/samples.htm>

Summary Writing:

A. Match the books with their summaries.

Chasing Superwoman by Susan DiMichele

Great Gatsby by F. S. Fitzgerald

Harry Potter And The Sorcerer's Stone by J.K. Rowling

1. Poor man falls in love with rich girl and spends the rest of his life getting rich to impress her, but no matter how rich he is and how many lavish parties he throws, he's never, ever good enough and dies utterly alone.
2. A boy wizard begins training and must battle for his life with the Dark Lord who murdered his parents.
3. A successful attorney and mother of three battles discrimination, exhaustion, and a clueless boss while balancing a career, a family, and a life of faith.

B. Read the following characteristics and decide which relate to a good summary.

- a) The same order of facts and ideas as the original.
- b) Similar wording to the original as well as occasional phrases taken directly from the original.
- c) Different sentence patterns* from the original.
- d) Additional information which the original writer omitted*, but which helps to understand the subject.
- e) A personal comment on the subject.
- f) Simpler vocabulary than the original.
- g) Key points of the original.
- h) References to figures, tables, or sources.
- j) Use of the first person singular.
- k) Written in point form.
- l) The title should be included in the text.
- m) The opening sentence should state the main idea.

C. Read the following pairs of summaries and decide which one is more appropriate and WHY, given the above guidelines and that the limit is 50-70 words (the word count is at the end):

Czech cinema has gone through great changes since 1989. Some have considered the state of the financial and artistic conditions for filmmakers to be disadvantageous because there was no more guaranteed financial support and only market forces could be relied on. This meant that artistic aims in some cases have had to be sacrificed for commercial reasons. (57 words)

My topic was "Czech Cinema Since 1989: Crisis or Not". I focused on the financial crisis first, on art crisis then. It's connected. I showed it in some examples. My result was that Czech cinema isn't in crisis, but it's necessary to be careful about it. (46 words)