

In-Class Activity: “Rewriting the Essay — From Description to Argument”

Learning Objective

Students will learn how to transform descriptive writing into analytical academic discourse by identifying, revising, and strengthening argumentation.

Step 1: The Sample Essay (Descriptive Version)

The Role of Identity in Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is a famous African novel that talks about precolonial Igbo society and the arrival of Europeans in Nigeria. The novel describes the traditions, culture, and beliefs of the Igbo people. Achebe presents the protagonist, Okonkwo, as a man who wants to be strong and respected in his village. He works hard to be different from his father, who was lazy and poor. The novel also shows how European colonization changed African identity. When the missionaries come, the Igbo people start to lose their traditional customs. Some of them join Christianity, while others try to keep their old ways. Okonkwo cannot accept these changes and finally takes his own life. This shows how the clash between tradition and modernity leads to the fall of the old society. Achebe’s book teaches readers about African culture and the impact of colonization. It helps readers understand how identity can change when people face new ideas. The story of Okonkwo is tragic, but it is also educational because it shows how colonialism can destroy traditional life.

Step 2: Group Task — Deconstruct the Essay

In groups of 3–4, identify the following:

1. Thesis statement: What is the main argument (if any)? How can it be clearer?
2. Descriptive vs. Analytical Sentences: Which sentences merely describe the plot or character? Which ones could be developed into claims or arguments?
3. Evidence and Commentary: Is there any direct evidence (quotes, references)? Where could you add interpretation or critical comment?
4. Transitions: How does the essay move between ideas? Are there logical connectors (however, therefore, by contrast, etc.)?
5. Academic Tone: What expressions sound informal or general? How can they be made more academic?

Step 3: Rewrite (Analytical Version)

Now, rewrite the essay (or one paragraph) to make it argumentative and analytical. Follow these guidelines:

- Begin with a clear thesis that states an argument (not just a topic).
- Support your claim with textual evidence (short quote or paraphrase).
- Include interpretation (what does this evidence show?).
- Use academic connectors and disciplinary verbs (argues, suggests, reveals, interrogates).
- Conclude with a sentence that synthesizes ideas (so what?).

Step 4: Reflection

After rewriting, each student writes a short paragraph (5–7 sentences):
What specific changes made your essay more analytical?
How did you clarify your argument or strengthen your academic tone?

Step 5: Evaluation Checklist

Criteria	Description	✓
1. Thesis	Clearly presents an argument or claim	
2. Evidence	Includes textual or theoretical support	
3. Analysis	Goes beyond description to interpretation	
4. Coherence	Logical flow with effective transitions	
5. Academic Tone	Uses formal, precise, disciplinary language	
6. Conclusion	Synthesizes main idea, not just repeats	

Suggested Readings for Follow-Up

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing.* Norton, 2018.

Swales, John M., and Christine B. Feak. *Academic Writing for Graduate Students.* University of Michigan Press, 2012.

Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* Sage, 1997.