

WRITING ABOUT THE THEME

USING LANGUAGE

1. Deborah Tannen (p. 120), William Lutz (p. 121), and Perri Klass (p. 139) discuss the power of language with a good deal of respect. Tannen refers to its social uses, Lutz to its effectiveness "in explaining . . . accidents," and Klass to its support as she became a doctor. Think of a time when you were in some way profoundly affected by language, and write an essay about this experience. Provide as many examples as necessary to illustrate both the language that affected you and how it made you feel.
2. Kim Kessler (p. 126), David Sedaris (p. 131), and Perri Klass all write about forms of language that do not obey traditional rules and are considered incorrect by some people. As you see it, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using nonstandard language when speaking and writing? How effective are these forms of language as ways to communicate? Write an essay that answers these questions, using examples from the selections and your own experience.
3. Perri Klass writes that medical jargon "contribut[es] to a sense of closeness and professional spirit among people who are under a great deal of stress" (paragraph 8) and that it helps doctors "maintain some distance from their patients" (17). Write an essay in which you analyze the function of "double-speak," as presented by William Lutz. Who, if anyone, is such language designed to help: accident victims? their families? someone else? Can a positive case be made for this language?

8

DIVISION OR ANALYSIS

LOOKING AT POPULAR CULTURE

Division and **analysis** are interchangeable terms for the same method. *Division* comes from a Latin word meaning "to force asunder or separate." *Analysis* comes from a Greek word meaning "to undo." Using this method, we separate a whole into its elements, examine the relations of the elements to one another and to the whole, and reassemble the elements into a new whole informed by the examination.

At its simplest, analysis (as we will call it) looks closely at a subject for the knowledge to be gained and perhaps put to use. A more complex kind of analysis builds on this basic operation to become the foundation of **critical thinking**—the ability to see beneath the surface of things, images, events, and ideas; to uncover and test assumptions; to see the importance of context; and to draw and support independent conclusions.

The method, then, is essential to college learning, whether in discussing literature, reviewing a psychology experiment, or interpreting a business case. It is also fundamental in the workplace, from choosing a career to making sense of market research. Analysis even informs and enriches life outside of school or work, whether we ponder our relationships with others, decide whether a movie was worthwhile, evaluate a politician's campaign promises, or determine whether a new gaming system is worth buying.

We use analysis throughout this book when looking at paragraphs and essays. And it is the underlying task of at least four other methods discussed in other chapters: classification (Chapter 9), process analysis (Chapter 10), comparison and contrast (Chapter 11), and cause-and-effect analysis (Chapter 13).

Reading Division or Analysis

At its most helpful, division or analysis peers inside an object, institution, work of art, policy, or any other whole. It identifies the parts, examines how the parts relate, and leads to a conclusion about the meaning, significance, or value of the whole. The subject of any analysis is usually singular—a freestanding, coherent unit, such as a bicycle or a poem, with its own unique constitution of elements. (In contrast, classification, the subject of the next chapter, usually starts with a plural subject, such as bicycles or the poems of the Civil War, and groups them according to their shared features.) A writer chooses the subject and with it a principle of analysis, a framework that determines how the subject will be divided and thus what elements are relevant to the discussion.

Sometimes the principle of analysis is self-evident, especially when the subject is an object, such as a bicycle or a camera, that can be “undone” in only a limited number of ways. Most of the time, however, the principle depends on the writer’s view of the whole. In academic disciplines, distinctive principles are part of what each field is about and are often the subject of debate within the field. In art, for instance, some critics see a painting primarily as a visual object and concentrate on its composition, color, line, and other formal qualities; other critics see a painting primarily as a social object and concentrate on its content and context (cultural, economic, political, and so on). Both groups use a principle of analysis that is a well-established way of looking at a painting, yet each group finds different elements and thus meaning in a work.

Writers have a great deal of flexibility in choosing a principle of analysis, but the principle also must meet certain requirements: it should be appropriate for the subject and the field or discipline, it should be significant, and it should be applied thoroughly and consistently. Analysis is done not for its own sake but for a larger goal of illuminating the subject, perhaps concluding something about it, perhaps evaluating it. But even when the method leads to evaluation—the writer’s judgment of the subject’s value—the analysis should represent the subject as it actually is, in all its fullness and complexity. In analyzing a movie, for instance, a writer may emphasize one element, such as setting, and even omit some elements, such as costumes; but the characterization of the whole must still apply to *all* the elements. If it does not, readers can be counted on to notice; so the writer must acknowledge any wayward elements and explain why their omission does not undermine the validity of the analysis and thus weaken the conclusion.

Analyzing Division or Analysis in Paragraphs

Jon Pareles (born 1953) is the chief critic of popular music for the *New York Times*. The following paragraph comes from “Gather No Moss, Take No Prisoners, but Be Cool,” a review of a concert by the rock guitarist Keith Richards.

Mr. Richards shows off by not showing off. He uses rhythm chords as a goad, not a metronome, slipping them in just ahead of a beat or skipping them entirely. The distilled twang of his tone has been imitated all over rock, but far fewer guitarists have learned his guerrilla timing, his coiled silences. When he switches to lead guitar, Mr. Richards goes not for long lines, but for serrated riffing, zinging out three or four notes again and again in various permutations, wringing from them the essence of the blues. The phrasing is poised and suspenseful, but it also carries a salutary rock attitude: that less is more, especially when delivered with utter confidence.

Principle of analysis (topic sentence undefined): elements of “not showing off”

1. Chords as goad (or prod)
2. Timing
3. Silences
4. Riffing (or repeating variations of rhythms)
5. Confident, less-is-more attitude

Luci Tapahonso (born 1953) is a poet and teacher. This paragraph is from her essay “The Way It Is,” which appears in *Sign Language*, a book of photographs (by Skeet McAuley) of life on the reservation for some Navajo and Apache Indians.

It is rare and, indeed, very exciting to see an Indian person in a commercial advertisement. Word travels fast when that happens. Nunzio’s Pizza in Albuquerque, New Mexico, ran commercials featuring Jose Rey Toledo of Jemez Pueblo talking about his “native land—Italy” while wearing typical Pueblo attire—jewelry, moccasins, and hair tied in a chongo. Because of the ironic humor, because Indian grandfathers specialize in playing tricks and jokes on their grandchildren, and because Jose Rey Toledo is a respected and well-known elder in the Indian communities, word of this commercial spread fast among Indians in New Mexico. It was the cause of recognition and celebration of sorts on the reservations

Principle of analysis: elements of the commercial that appealed to Indians

1. Rarity of an Indian in a commercial
2. Indian dress
3. Indian humor
4. Indian tradition
5. Respected Indian spokesperson

and in the pueblos. His portrayal was not in the categories which the media usually associate with Indians but as a typical sight in the Southwest. It showed Indians as we live today—enjoying pizza as one of our favorite foods, including humor and fun as part of our daily lives, and recognizing the importance of preserving traditional knowledge.

6. Realism

Topic sentence
(underlined)
summarizes
elements

Developing an Essay by Division or Analysis

▶ Getting Started

Analysis is one of the readiest methods of development: almost anything whole can be separated into its elements, from a lemon to a play by Shakespeare to an economic theory. In college and at work, many writing assignments will demand analysis with a verb such as *analyze*, *criticize*, *discuss*, *evaluate*, *interpret*, or *review*. If you need to develop your own subject for analysis, think of something whose meaning or significance puzzles or intrigues you and whose parts you can distinguish and relate to the whole—for instance, an object such as a machine, an artwork such as a poem, a media product such as a news broadcast, an institution such as a hospital, a relationship such as stepparenting, or a social issue such as homelessness.

Dissect your subject, looking at the actual physical thing if possible, imagining it in your mind if necessary. Make detailed notes of all the elements you see, their distinguishing features, and how those features work together. In analyzing someone's creation, tease out the creator's influences, assumptions, intentions, conclusions, and evidence. You may have to go outside the work for some of this information—researching an author's background, for instance, to uncover the biases that may underlie his or her opinions. Even if you do not use all this information in your final draft, it will help you see the elements and help keep your analysis true to the subject.

If you begin by seeking meaning or significance in a subject, you will be more likely to find a workable principle of analysis and less likely to waste time on a hollow exercise. Each question below suggests a distinct approach to the subject's elements—a distinct principle of analysis—that makes it easier to isolate the elements and see their connections:

To what extent is an enormously complex hospital a community in itself? What is the function of the front-page headlines in the local tabloid newspaper?

Why did a certain movie have such a powerful effect on you and your friends?

▶ Forming a Thesis

A clear, informative thesis sentence (or sentences) is crucial in division or analysis because readers need to know the purpose and structure of your analysis in order to follow your points. If your exploratory question proves helpful as you gather ideas, you can also use it to draft a thesis sentence: answer it in such a way that you state your opinion about your subject and reveal your principle of analysis.

QUESTION To what extent is an enormously complex hospital a community in itself?

THESIS SENTENCE The hospital encompasses such a wide range of personnel and services that it resembles a good-sized town.

QUESTION What is the function of the front-page headlines in the local tabloid newspaper?

THESIS SENTENCE The newspaper's front page routinely appeals to readers' fear of crime, anger at criminals, and sympathy for victims.

QUESTION Why did a certain movie have such a powerful effect on you and your friends?

THESIS SENTENCE The film is a unique and important statement of the private terrors of adolescence.

Note that all three thesis statements imply an explanatory purpose—an effort to understand something and share that understanding with the reader. The third thesis sentence, however, suggests a persuasive purpose as well: the writer hopes that readers will accept her evaluation of the film.

A well-focused thesis sentence benefits not only your readers but also you as a writer, because it gives you a yardstick to judge the completeness, consistency, and supportiveness of your analysis. Don't be discouraged, though, if your thesis sentence doesn't come to you until *after* you've written a first draft and had a chance to focus your ideas. Writing about your subject may be the best way to find its meaning and significance.

► Organizing

In the introduction to your essay, let readers know why you are bothering to analyze your subject: Why is the subject significant? How might the essay relate to the experiences of readers or be useful to them? A subject unfamiliar to readers might be summarized or described, or some part of it (an anecdote or a quotation, say) might be used to grab readers' interest. A familiar subject might be introduced with a surprising fact or an unusual perspective. An evaluative analysis might open with reference to an opposing viewpoint.

In the body of the essay, you'll need to explain your principle of analysis according to the guidelines on page 148. The arrangement of elements and analysis should suit your subject and purpose: you can describe the elements and then offer your analysis, or you can introduce and analyze elements one by one. You can arrange the elements themselves from most to least important, least to most complex, most to least familiar, spatially, or chronologically. Devote as much space to each element as it demands: there is no requirement that all elements be given equal space and emphasis if their complexity or your framework dictates otherwise.

Most analysis essays need a conclusion that reassembles the elements, returning readers to a sense of the whole subject. The conclusion can restate the thesis, summarize what the essay has contributed, consider the influence of the subject or its place in a larger picture, or (especially in an evaluation) assess the effectiveness or worth of the subject.

► Drafting

If the subject or your view of it is complex, you may need at least two rough drafts of an analysis essay—one to work out what you think and one to clarify your principle, cover each element, and support your points with concrete details and vivid examples (including quotations if the subject is a written work). Plan on two drafts if you're uncertain of your thesis when you begin; you'll save time in the long run by attending to one goal at a time. Especially because an analysis essay says something about a subject by explaining its structure, you need to have a clear picture of the whole and how each part relates to it.

As you draft, be sure to consider your readers' needs as well as the needs of your subject and your own framework:

- *If the subject is unfamiliar to your readers*, you'll need to carefully explain your principle of analysis, define all specialized terms, distinguish the parts from one another, and provide ample illustrations.
- *If the subject is familiar to readers*, your principle of analysis may not require much justification (as long as it's clear), but your details and examples must be vivid and convincing.
- *If readers may dispute your way of looking at your subject*, be careful to justify as well as explain your principle of analysis.

Whether readers are familiar with your subject or not, always account for any evidence that may seem not to support your opinion—either by showing why, in fact, the evidence is supportive or by explaining why it is unimportant. (If contrary evidence refuses to be dispensed with, you may have to rethink your approach.)

► Revising and Editing

When you revise and edit your essay, use the following questions and the Focus box on the next page to uncover any remaining weaknesses.

- *Is your principle of analysis clear?* The significance of your analysis and your view of the subject should be apparent throughout your essay.
- *Is your analysis complete?* Have you identified all elements according to your principle of analysis and determined their relations to one another and to the whole? If you have omitted some elements from your discussion, will the reason for their omission be clear to readers?
- *Is your analysis consistent?* Have you applied your principle of analysis to the entire subject (including any elements you have omitted)? Do all elements reflect the same principle, and are they clearly separate rather than overlapping? You may find it helpful to check your draft against your list of elements or to outline the draft itself.
- *Is your analysis well supported?* Is the thesis supported by clear assertions about parts of the subject, and are the assertions supported by concrete, specific evidence (sensory details, facts, quotations, and so on)? Do not rely on your readers to prove your thesis.
- *Is your analysis true to the subject?* Is your thesis unforced, your analysis fair? Is your new whole (your reassembly of the elements) faithful to the original?

A Note on Thematic Connections

Because popular culture is everywhere, and everywhere taken for granted, it is a tempting and challenging target for writers. Having chosen to write critically about a cheering, disturbing, or intriguing aspect of popular culture, all the authors represented in this chapter naturally pursued the method of division or analysis. The paragraph by Jon Pareles dissects the unique playing style of rock guitarist Keith Richards (p. 149). The other paragraph, by Luci Tapahonso, analyzes a pizza commercial that especially appealed to American Indians (p. 149). In an essay, *Dilbert* cartoonist Scott Adams considers what makes newspaper readers laugh (next page). Pat Mora then asks how advertising messages shape Latinas' self-perception and future potential (p. 162). And student writer Andrew Warren III ponders the enduring value of *The Simpsons* (p. 171).

FOCUS ON COHERENCE

With several elements that contribute to the whole of a subject, an analysis will be easy for your readers to follow only if you frequently clarify what element you are discussing and how it fits with your principle of analysis. To help readers keep your analysis straight, rely on transitions and repetition to achieve coherence.

■ **Transitions** such as those listed in the Glossary act as signposts to tell readers where you, and they, are headed. Some transitions indicate that you are shifting between subjects, either finding resemblances between them (*also, like, likewise, similarly*) or finding differences (*but, however, in contrast, instead, unlike, whereas, yet*). Other transitions indicate that you are moving on to a new point (*in addition, also, furthermore, moreover*). Consider, for example, how transitions keep readers focused in the following paragraph from “The Distorting Mirror of Reality TV,” an essay by Sarah Coléman:

Let’s start with the contestants. Most producers of reality TV shows would like you to believe they’ve picked a group of people who span a broad spectrum of human diversity. But if you took the demographics of an average reality show and applied them to the population at large, you’d end up with a society that was 90% white, young, and beautiful. In fact, though reality TV pretends to hold up a mirror to society, its producers screen contestants in much the same way as producers of television commercials and Hollywood movies screen their actors. For ethnic minorities, old people, the un-beautiful, and the disabled, the message is harsh: even in “reality” you don’t exist.

■ **Repetition and restatement** of labels for your principle of analysis or for individual elements makes clear the topic of each sentence. In the preceding passage, the repetition of *contestants* and *producers* and the substitution of *people* and *they* for each emphasize the elements under discussion. The restatement of *reality, TV/television*, and *diversity/demographics/population* clarifies the principle of analysis (the unreality of reality show contestants).

See pages 35–36 for additional discussion of these two techniques.

ON HUMOR

The most wasted of all days is one without laughter.

There is a thin line that separates laughter and pain, comedy and tragedy, humor and hurt.

Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it.

—e. e. cummings

—Erma Bombeck

—E. B. White

JOURNAL RESPONSE Reflect for a moment on your favorite source of humor: a particular comedian, perhaps, or a television show, a Web site, a comic strip. Write a journal entry explaining what you like about this source of comedy, trying to pin down as many details as you can.

Scott Adams

Scott Adams (born 1957) is best known for his cubicle-bound comic strip, *Dilbert*, which dissects the painfully hilarious minutiae of office culture. Raised in upstate New York, Adams earned a BA in economics from Hartwick College and an MBA from the University of California at Berkeley. He started his career as a programmer for a bank and then a telephone company in the San Francisco area; the day jobs served as early inspirations for *Dilbert*, which Adams began publishing while still employed full time. He made the innovative decision in 1994 to provide his e-mail address in the panels, and the feedback from readers helped him to refine the strip into the acclaimed office staple it is today. Adams is the author of nearly four dozen books of comics, self-help, and business advice, most recently *How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big: Kind of the Story of My Life* (2013) and *Go Add Value Somewhere Else* (2014). He is also the co-owner of a small restaurant in California and a certified hypnotist.

Funny Business

What makes a piece of writing funny? In this 2010 essay for the esteemed business newspaper the *Wall Street Journal*, Adams sets out to explain while he demonstrates.

Last weekend a French fry got lodged in my sinus cavity.

I suppose it all started when I was eleven years old. Two of my school buddies and I were huddled on the schoolyard, whisper-sharing everything we knew about the mysteries of the human reproductive process. We patched together bits and pieces of what we had heard from our older

brothers. This was problematic, because two of our brothers were unreliable, and one was a practical joker. And to be fair, my friends and I were poor listeners.

As I later learned, we got a fairly important part of the reproductive puzzle wrong. I can't be more specific about our faulty information, at least not in the *Wall Street Journal*, so instead I will tell you a story about golf. If you choose to draw any parallels, that's your own fault.

Okay, so this golfer hits a majestic drive, and follows it up with an awesome chip and an improbable putt. The golfer pumps his fist and dances a little jig. He turns to his caddy for a high-five and gets no response. "Wasn't that some great golfing?" the golfer asks. The caddy says, "Yes . . . but it was the wrong hole."

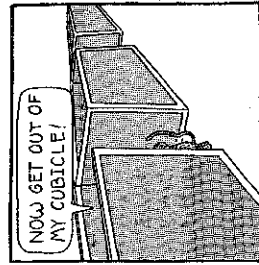
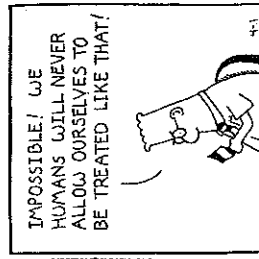
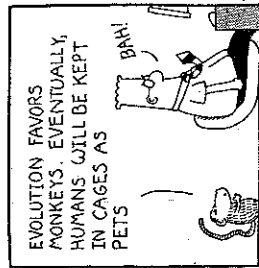
Last weekend, I was visiting my tiny hometown of Windham, New York, enjoying dinner out with my parents, my sister, and two eighty-ish widows who are longtime family friends. One of the ladies mentioned running into an old schoolmate of mine who was part of the misinformed schoolyard trioka of way-back-then. When I heard my schoolmate's name, I flashed back to that day, vividly recalling the key bit of information we got wrong, and I wondered how long it took my buddies to correct their mistaken understandings. I took a bite of my French fry and listened to the rest of the story about how this fellow hadn't changed much since he was a kid. And then one of the widows added, sort of as an afterthought, "He never had any children."

Let me tell you that this was a bad time for me to have food in my mouth. The situation demanded a spit-take, but this was a nice restaurant, and I was sitting directly across from the two innocent widows. I clamped my lips shut and hoped for the best. Something sneeze-like exploded inside me. It was an unholy combination of saliva, potato, laughter and compressed air. I squeezed my sphincter shut, closed my eyes, and well, I don't remember much after that. I think the French fry hit the top of my sinus cavity and caused some sort of concussion.

Anyway, the reason we're here today is so I can give you valuable writing tips. My specialty is humor, so let's stick with that slice of the assignment.

The topic is the thing. Eighty percent of successful humor writing is picking a topic that is funny by its very nature. My story above is true, up until the exaggeration about the French fry in the sinus cavity. You probably assumed it was true, and that knowledge made it funnier.

Humor likes danger. If you are cautious by nature, writing humor probably isn't for you. Humor works best when you sense that the writer is putting himself in jeopardy. I picked the French-fry story specifically



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because it is too risqué for the *Wall Street Journal*. You can't read it without wondering if I had an awkward conversation with my editor. You might wonder if the people in my story will appreciate seeing my version of events in the *Wall Street Journal*. I wonder that too.

In the early days of my cartooning career, as the creator of *Dilbert*, part of the strip's appeal was that I was holding a day job while mocking the very sort of company I worked for. If you knew my backstory, and many people did, you could sense my personal danger in every strip. (My manager eventually asked me to leave. He said it was a budget thing.)

Humor is about people. It's impossible to write humor about a concept or an object. All humor involves how people think and act. Sometimes you can finesse that limitation by having your characters think and act in selfish, stupid or potentially harmful ways around the concept or object that you want your reader to focus on.

Exaggerate wisely. If you anchor your story in the familiar, your readers will follow you on a humorous exaggeration, especially if you build up to it. My story was true and relatable until the French-fry exaggeration.

Let the reader do some work. Humor works best when the reader has to connect some dots. Early in my story I made you connect the golf story to the playground story. The smarter your audience, the wider you can spread the dots. I used this method again when I said of my aborted spit-take, "I don't remember much after that." Your mind might have filled in a little scene in which, perhaps, my eyes bugged out, my cheeks went all chipmunk-like, and I fell out of my chair.

Animals are funny. It's a cheap trick, but animal analogies are generally funny. It was funnier that I said, "my cheeks went all chipmunk-like" than if I had said my cheeks puffed out.

Use funny words. I referred to my two schoolmates and myself as a troika because the word itself is funny. With humor, you never say "pull" when you can say "yank." Some words are simply funnier than others,

and you know the funny ones when you see them. (Pop Quiz: Which word is funnier, observe or stalk?)

Curiosity. Good writing makes you curious without being too heavy-handed about it. My first sentence in this piece, about the French fry lodged in my sinus cavity, is designed to make you curious. It also sets the tone right away.

Endings. A simple and classic way to end humorous writing is with a call-back. That means making a clever association to something especially humorous and notable from the body of your work. I would give you an example of that now, but I'm still having concentration issues from the French fry.

Meaning

1. What is the thesis of "Funny Business"? Does Adams state it explicitly? Try to summarize the central meaning of his analysis in a sentence or two of your own.
2. How does the *Dilbert* cartoon on the opposite page illustrate Adams's ideas about humor?

3. Why is the essay's last sentence particularly effective as a conclusion? Point to evidence from the text to support your answer.

4. If any of the following words are new to you, try to guess their meanings from the context of the essay. Test your guesses in a dictionary, and then use each new word in a sentence or two of your own.

parallels (3)	putt (4)	risqué (9)
majestic (4)	troika (5, 15)	finesse (11)
chip (4)	jeopardy (9)	analogies (14)

Purpose and Audience

1. What is Adams's purpose in writing this essay? How do you know?
2. What assumptions does Adams make about his audience? Where are those assumptions most clearly expressed?

Method and Structure

1. How does Adams use the method of analysis for comic effect? In what ways does analysis lend itself particularly well to a humorous subject such as this one?

2. What is Adams's principle of analysis, and into what elements does he divide his subject? Be specific, supporting your answer with examples from the text.
3. What do the first sentences of paragraphs 8, 9, and 11–17 have in common?
4. How does Adams organize his ideas?
5. **OTHER METHODS** The first six paragraphs of the essay use narration (Chapter 5) to tell a joke. How is this example (Chapter 7) essential to Adams's analysis?

Language

1. Answer the "Pop Quiz" Adams poses in paragraph 15: "Which word is funnier, observe or stalk?" What other words in the essay strike you as inherently funny? Why does Adams repeat several of them?
2. What is Adams's tone? How seriously does he take his subject?

Writing Topics

1. **JOURNAL TO ESSAY** In your journal entry (p. 156), you reflected on your favorite source of comedy. Now write a more formal essay in which you describe that source of comedy and explain what makes it so funny to you. You might cite Adams's elements of humor to explain your enjoyment, if you find them useful, or develop your own principle of analysis to assess just what it is that makes people laugh.
2. Adams claims that it is "impossible to write humor about a concept or an object" (paragraph 11). Is that true, in your experience? Drawing on the principles of humor that Adams outlines in his essay, try your hand at writing something funny. You might write about people or animals if you like, but feel free to choose as your topic a concept or an object that you find amusing on its own.
3. **CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS** Based on the examples Adams uses in this essay, what can you infer about his age, background, and economic status? Does Adams seem to assume his audience is similar to him? (Remember, this essay first appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*.) Are readers who don't match his assumptions (perhaps you yourself) likely to enjoy the essay as much as those who do match? Write an essay in which you analyze the writer's apparent assumptions, explaining how they strengthen the essay, weaken it, or don't affect it at all.

4. **CONNECTIONS** Apply Adams's analysis to one or more of the other humorous essays in this book: David Sedart's "Me Talk Pretty One Day" (p. 131), Brandon Griggs's "The Most Annoying Facebookers" (p. 186), and Jonathan R. Gould's "The People Next Door" (p. 191). Then write an essay that examines how these writers develop humor. Address as many of Adams's elements of humor as seem fitting, but consider especially what is gained from exaggeration and what qualities exaggeration often has. How does each writer make his readers laugh? Use quotations and phrases from "Funny Business" and the other essays as your support.

ON ADVERTISING

You can tell the ideals of a nation by its advertisements.

—Norman Douglas

The art of publicity is a black art.

—Learned Hand

Advertising may be described as the science of arresting the human

intelligence long enough to get money from it.

—Stephen Leacock

JOURNAL RESPONSE Think of a commercial or advertisement that you object to because it is offensive or annoying in some way. Write about why it bothers you so much.

Pat Mora

A poet, speaker, and literacy advocate, Pat Mora was born in 1942 in El Paso, Texas, and grew up in a bilingual family of Mexican heritage. She received a bachelor's degree from Texas Western College and a master's degree from the University of Texas, El Paso. Mora taught high school and college English for several years and worked as a college administrator and museum director at the University of New Mexico for nearly a decade before turning her focus to writing. "Like many Chicana writers," she says, she "was motivated to write because . . . our voices were absent from what is labeled American literature." In addition to voicing herself in two dozen books of poetry, Mora has written several illustrated books for children, the memoir *House of Houses* (1997), and a volume of literary and cultural criticism, *Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle* (1993). She is also the founder of *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* (Children's Day/Book Day), a nationwide family literacy project. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Cincinnati, Ohio.

Great Expectations

In this extract from *Nepantla* (the book's title is a Nahuatl, or Mexican Indian, word meaning "place in the middle"), Mora analyzes the overarching message sent to young Latinas by advertisers. When girls take such messages at face value, Mora worries, they help the advertisers but hurt themselves.

Latinas are labeled a *double minority*. The words are depressing. They don't quite sound like "twice-blessed." Little wonder that most Latinas, whether in the Southwest or elsewhere in this country, don't dwell on this uncomfortable term. Anyway, who has time? We often are too busy playing the game of Great Expectations.

Most humans play some form of this game; most of us strive to fulfill the dreams that our society, our family, and our self have for us. Latinas, though, confront some unique challenges, and we often receive little support in fulfilling our potential.

In the eighties this country began to hear a Latin beat. Generations of determined women and men had questioned discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, immigration laws, inadequate health-care systems, biased arts council panels, and had endured meeting after meeting requesting and ultimately demanding equal opportunities for our people. Singers, writers, and artists had worked to capture the vigor of *lo mejicano*.¹ Their works are more and more visible. And demographics conspire with us. These population shifts, combined with historic equity struggles, mean we live in a society that finds it grudgingly necessary to notice our community. We can't ignore even this lukewarm willingness to respond to the needs of Latinos, whether by politicians, corporations, or federal or state agencies, because we know the grim statistics on wages and education for US Latinos.

Ah, but our millions have billions to spend. Hundreds of millions are targeted by advertisers, who now like us and suddenly care deeply about our needs. Unlike those enmeshed in the political machinations of English Only,² advertisers are happy to be bilingual. Well, their messages are. They speak to us *en español*.³ "Ven es la hora de Miller."⁴ Coors tells us, "Celebre! Cinco de mayo."⁵ Canadian Club says, "¡Qué pareja! Canadian Club y tú!"⁶ Xerox tells us that its Hispana employees are "especial."⁷

Advertisers track our values and thus our buying habits. Their analyses confirm the conclusions of psychologists and sociologists: we are loyal: to our families, the Spanish language, this country. Advertisers like loyalty, which they hope translates to brand-name loyalty. For those to

¹ Spanish: *Mexicaness*. [Editors' note.]

² A movement to make English the official language of the United States, proposing that all official government documents and business be written and conducted solely in English. [Editors' note.]

³ Spanish: *in Spanish*. [Editors' note.]

⁴ Spanish: "It's Miller time." [Editors' note.]

⁵ Spanish: "Celebrate! The fifth of May." Cinco de Mayo, a commemoration of the Mexican army's 1862 victory over the French in the Battle of Puebla during the Franco-Mexican war (1862–67), is a minor holiday in Mexico. [Editors' note.]

⁶ Spanish: "What a pair! Canadian Club and you." Canadian Club is a brand of whiskey. [Editors' note.]

⁷ Spanish: "special." [Editors' note.]

whom English is a new language, brand names probably do bring a sense of security and predictability in the cacophony of strange noises. I remember that when my grandmother, who never spoke or wanted to speak English though all three of her children were born here, had a headache, only Bayer would do. She trusted the symbol on that small, pain-easing white circle.

Politicians, of course, are busy courting our loyalty too, because we are a young segment of an aging population. No more will candidates bite into a *tamales*⁸ with corn husk in place. Media visibility, the occasional Latina actor, the occasional Latino family in a commercial, can in an odd way foster a sense of group identity, even though cultural symbols are usually being appropriated, used. Our growing population makes it less threatening to delve into our cultural past, for what we discover suddenly interests people—perhaps because it is trendy, but the information nourishes us.

Such targeted marketing doesn't change the reality that this country often views us as either fiery, and thus less rational, less than intellectual; or as docile, and thus less than effective, less than assertive. A woman named Maria might be considered as a candidate for a position as a domestic worker or secretary, but it is unlikely that she will seriously be considered as a candidate for senator. Yet. How easy is it, then, for a Latina to deal with a society that finds her dark eyes and hair attractive, but that is a bit surprised to see her aggressively pursuing a goal, striving to become an architect or veterinarian or literary critic? I ain't easy.

And then there are our families. Intense emotional ties. Our parents, siblings, and relatives are a source of indescribable strength. Perhaps because marriage traditionally has been so important in our culture, men and our families often equate an attractive physical appearance with true womanhood. Many a *tía* or *abuelita*⁹ at home wants her niece to pursue a career, preferably in teaching or nursing, but *Tía* is secretly hoping—and probably praying—that we'll receive both a degree and a marriage proposal. She loves us and longs for some fine, respectful, hard-working man who will protect this vulnerable single woman from financial worries and the world's indifference.

Our parents also may do some frowning. How happy will they be at the news that we're considering joining the space program or applying for graduate school in another state? Frowns may really multiply once we're

⁸ Cornmeal dough stuffed with ground meat or sweet filling and steamed in a corn husk. [Editors' note.]

⁹ *Tía* is Spanish for *aunt*. *Abuelita* means *grandmother*. [Editors' note.]

married with a family and announce that we need to begin traveling. Their frowns will say, "Neglect your children and husband? What kind of a woman are you?" Often their concern is genuine, and it is not easy to help them see that their desire to protect can be an unacknowledged desire to control.

Hard choices. We know women are socialized to please. How does a bright, talented Latina weather her family's displeasure when she works long hours rather than visiting regularly with sisters and cousins? *Tía's* frowns have a way of giving us tired blood.

And what about the woman who gazes back in the mirror? What Great Expectations does she have for us? Chances are she wants us to look energetic, to excel in our chosen work, to struggle against injustice, to be a loving and respectful daughter, niece. Chances are she will never be quite satisfied with our efforts. She will be pressuring us, often relentlessly, to try harder, to produce better work. She can be our harshest critic. Convincing her to wink back at us occasionally may be a lifelong challenge.

The Latina who completes her college education—a small percentage of us—may indeed now have more opportunities, whether for employment or for service on panels, committees, and boards, which is appropriate. As double minorities committed to societal change, though, we find ourselves working doubly hard, struggling to prove to others that women like us are not a risk. We often feel tired, alone.

Alone, yet enmeshed in family responsibilities, concerned about our parents and siblings, about our children. And we worry about our national family or community as we hear the statistics about our growing Latina population. If Latinas have families—and fewer of us are marrying—they tend to be larger than the average, and more and more we head these families alone, often in poverty. Although we have high participation in the work force, we tend to be clerical or service workers. Our median income remains below that of Anglos. How well prepared are we for these challenges? How are we assisting other women to plan for the future, to have realistic expectations? Too many of us don't finish high school, too many of us who complete community college programs don't transfer to four-year institutions, too many of us are denied the opportunity to attend colleges away from home, too many of us are not encouraged fully to develop our talents.

As we mother, teach, write, mentor the next generation of women, we need to examine the lives of women in this country, our lives, not as we might want them to be, but as they are. It's difficult to change what we don't understand. What do we know about ourselves and about the

women who will appear in our offices and classrooms? What do we know about our inside lives, the inside lives of the female middle class? Most women in the United States are not reading professional journals in their apartments or houses today. We ingest pollutants—toxic ideas and attitudes—while we watch movies and television or read steamy novels or relax with women's magazines. Women in this country continue to devour novels about women who find comfort in the image of being swept off tiny feet by determined, hard-muscled men.

We turn slick, musk-scented magazine pages that promise *The Secrets of Skin*, Polish, 9 Ways to Prevent Wrinkles, Beauty from Head to Toe. For the price of the magazine, we are lured to believe that we can transform our flabby egos and disappointing bodies into the confident creatures who gaze boldly, sirens who beckon us to become perfect, smiling decorations. Listen to the bait. We are promised that we can be glamorous, attractive, radiant, exhilarating, classic, breathtaking, dazzling, legendary, mysterious. Similar magazines from Mexico promise that we can be *sensual, incredible, sexy, elegante, bella, enigmática*.¹⁰ We're taught the world over that it's our job to be pretty. Too often do we brood when we're five or eighty-five about our exteriors, peer in annoyance at our hips (too wide), noses (too long), lips (too thin). Some of us stop eating or eat until we're sick. We bare our unsatisfactory bodies so they can be reshaped, be made more loveable by surgeons who can mold us into beauty and happiness. How much time we spend looking the part, a part we didn't write.

In her documentary *A Famine Within*, Katherine Gilday skillfully reveals our obsession with The Body, the difficulty we have accepting and loving ourselves, our imperfect selves. She shows how we are bombarded with images of women who seldom look like the women in our lives or in our mirror. Our shapes and the shapes of our mothers are steadily described as inferior, proof of our lack of self-control. We define others by their contours, equate thinness with morality. The young women Gilday interviews visibly struggle for words ugly enough to describe their reaction to being overweight. To be fat is to be "grotesque." Fashion models are often role models, says Gilday. Decorative, silent women.

Driving down the freeway, we see, "You've Come a Long Way, Baby."¹¹ Baby? The woman smiling at us casually holding a cigarette is young, sleek, glamorous. Success is being defined for us as eternal youth, a care-free life, trendy clothes, and getting to do what men do—in this case,

¹⁰ Spanish: *sensual, incredible, sexy, elegante, beautiful, mysterious*. [Editors' note.]

¹¹ An advertising slogan for Virginia Slims, a brand of cigarettes targeted at women. [Editors' note.]

savor a health hazard. We want to define ourselves in broader and richer terms than that, but how do we help young women, all young women, to perceive such manipulation and to wrench their lives free from images that bind?

Meaning

1. Why are Latinas "labeled a *double minority*" (paragraph 1)? What makes the label significant to Mora?
2. "We often are too busy playing the game of Great Expectations," Mora writes in her first paragraph. What does she mean? What does the "game" consist of, and what is its goal? Why "is winning more difficult for Latinas?"
3. What is wrong, in Mora's opinion, with media portrayals that depict Latinas as either "fiery" or "docile" (paragraph 7)?
4. Mora's essay does not contain a direct thesis statement, but her main idea is clear. Express the point of her analysis in your own words.
5. Try to guess the meanings of any of the following words that you are unsure of, based on their context in Mora's essay. Test your guesses in a dictionary, and then use each word in a sentence of your own.

vigor (3)	enmeshed (4)	delve (6)
demographics (3)	machinations (4)	docile (7)
conspire (3)	cacophony (5)	median (13)
equity (3)	appropriated (6)	sirens (15)

Purpose and Audience

1. For whom is Mora writing? How can you tell?
2. What kind of future does Mora envision for young Latinas? How does she propose they achieve such goals?
3. Mora concludes her essay with an unanswered question. Why does she ask it? What is the effect of ending this way?

Method and Structure

1. According to Mora, what have advertisers learned about Latino values? How does she use those values to organize her essay?
2. What elements of popular culture does Mora examine in her analysis? What principle of analysis does she use to reassemble those elements into a new whole?

- In paragraph 16, Mora summarizes the content of a documentary film. What is the subject of the film? How does citing it contribute to or support Mora's analysis?
- OTHER METHODS** Mora's essay relies on **cause-and-effect analysis** (Chapter 13) to examine the impact of popular culture on Latina women. If media messages promoting loyalty and beauty are the cause, what does Mora believe are the effects?

Language

- A poet, Mora enlivens her prose with **metaphor and personification**. Find some examples and comment on their effectiveness.
- Mora uses several Spanish words and phrases in this essay. Why doesn't she translate them for readers?
- How would you characterize the **tone** of Mora's essay? Support your answer with examples from the essay.

Writing Topics

- JOURNAL TO ESSAY** Expand your journal entry about a commercial or advertisement (p. 162) into a full essay analyzing its message. Describe the ad, and pinpoint why you find it offensive or annoying. Make sure your essay has a controlling thesis that draws together all the points of your analysis and asserts why the advertisement has the effect it does. Alternatively, you could choose a commercial you think is unusually entertaining, amusing, or moving, and explain why it works. Be sure to document your sources (see the Appendix).
- Toward the end of her essay, Mora suggests that the images in fashion magazines make Latinas feel inadequate—a response that some say is the direct result of advertising practices that create insecurities for all types of people in order to exploit them. (Consider, for instance, automotive commercials suggesting that parents of adult children have boring lives or ads that push tooth-whitening products.) Choose an example of advertising that you think appeals to a real or invented insecurity to sell a product, and analyze its message in a brief essay or presentation. Are the advertiser's techniques effective? ethical? entertaining? Be sure to identify a principle of analysis for your response and to support your argument with details from the advertisement.
- CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS** This essay was written two decades ago. To what extent do Mora's concerns and criticisms still hold true? Select two or three of her statements, and think of some contemporary examples that

either support or undermine her claims. For instance, how visible are the works of Latino “[s]ingers, writers, and artists” (paragraph 3) today? Do you know of any Latina politicians or professionals (7)? Have fashion magazines changed in any way from what Mora describes (15)? Write an essay of your own responding to Mora's essay. Be sure to include examples to support your view.

- RESEARCH** Mora mentions demographics and the “grim statistics on wages and education for US Latinos” in paragraphs 3 and 13, but she doesn't specify the numbers. Go to the Web site of the Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project (pewhispanic.org), and search the data sets and statistical portraits for recent information on these subjects. For instance, what percentage of the US population identifies as Latino? How many Latino men and women finish high school? How many finish college? How do their earnings compare with the national average? How many Latino families are headed by married couples? How many of them live in poverty? Report your findings.
- CONNECTIONS** Mora writes of familial disapproval of married Latina women who pursue educations and careers. How does this pressure relate to the marital roles that Judy Brady focuses on in her essay “I Want a Wife” (p. 277)? Write an essay analyzing these writers' attitudes toward tradition and feminism. How much do Mora and Brady seem to have in common? Use evidence from both essays to support your response.

ON MERCHANDISING

Junk is the ideal product . . . the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary. The client will crawl through a sewer and beg to buy.

—William S. Burroughs

Your responsibility as a parent is not as great as you might imagine. . . . If your child simply grows up to be someone who does not use the word *collectible* as a noun, you can consider yourself an unqualified success.

—Fran Lebowitz

Toys were lots of fun before they became capitalist tools. —Beth Copeland Vargo

JOURNAL RESPONSE Do you own, or did you ever own, merchandise tied to a movie or TV show, such as *Star Wars* drink glasses, a *Family Guy* T-shirt, or *Smurfs* bedding? Write about why you wanted a particular item or set of items and what, if anything, they still mean to you.

Andrew Warren III

Andrew Warren III was born in 1981 and grew up in Boston. He graduated from the Boston Latin School and worked as a computer technician for several years before completing a BA in English, with a minor in computer science, from the University of Massachusetts, Boston, in 2009. Now a quality-assurance engineer specializing in file transfer systems, Warren reports that his interests include “eating, cooking, watching movies, playing video games, and generally just being a nerd.” He lives in Quincy, Massachusetts.

Throwing Darts at *The Simpsons* (Student Essay)

In this entertaining analysis of the most enduring scripted prime-time show in the history of television (twenty-five years and counting), Warren offers detailed examples and information from a source to support a fresh take on *The Simpsons*. He wrote this essay for a composition class, and then at his instructor’s suggestion submitted it to *Lux*, the literary magazine of the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Warren reports that he revised the finished essay twice before it was published, tightening the focus, dropping some of the deeper analysis, improving the style, and in the process trimming it to half its original length.

“C’mon dude . . . let’s open it,” my friend Sean begged. We were hanging out in our apartment and, yet again, he wanted to play darts with my *Simpsons* dartboard—a repeated episode throughout 2001. It was resting on an end table in its unopened box, cellophane wrapper still intact. I had purchased it earlier that year for \$30 from a collectibles dealer on *eBay*, so I had to protect it every few weeks from Sean or others who wanted to actually play a game of darts. The board was, and still is, a snazzy decoration—a large, colorful square adorned with the images of Homer and Bart Simpson, Moe the Bartender, Barney, and Krusty the Clown. I too have occasionally thought about ripping open the plastic and chucking darts at the board (“playing darts” gives me too much credit), badly scarring the cork and surrounding walls. But I haven’t had the heart.

I began watching *The Simpsons*, a satirical cartoon sitcom about a nuclear small-town American family, every day starting in 1992 or 1993—whenever the first episodes began running in syndication. Before then I didn’t really understand the show. I don’t think I was old enough. But starting in junior high school, the rest of my friends and I, including Sean, used the show as a milestone for good taste. Those first years—up to 1998—are simply brilliant. (That is a fact, and I’ll argue with anyone who disagrees with me to the death.) Those who understood the show received instant respect and inclusion (unless you were a jerk). Many conversations evolved out of strings of quotes from the show’s characters, and obscure references to various scenes became daily jokes. We developed a sentimental attachment to *The Simpsons* that extended far beyond the daily twenty-five-minute television commitment into the cores of our lives, not only due to the resonant pleasure of the viewing experience, but also due to the reinforced social connections my peers and I had crafted among ourselves.

Amazingly, before I even started watching *The Simpsons*, it had already reached its zenith in the public sphere. The show was the biggest pop culture event of 1990 (Turner 25). Bart, the spiky-haired scion of the Simpson clan, led the charge, as images of him and other members of the family graced the covers of some of the most prominent media rags: “*Time* and *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone*, *TV Guide*, and *Mad Magazine*, even *Mother Jones*” (Turner 25). In the wake of the advertising juggernaut came the merchandise. This feverish love affair was dubbed “Bart-mania” by the media, and most mainstream retailers had racks of clothing and shelves of merchandise dedicated to *The Simpsons*—especially Bart. But unlike most other pop culture phenomena, which tend to implode immediately like an explosion starved for oxygen, *The Simpsons* did not die off; and

although the ratings slightly declined after the initial buzz dissipated, the show improved (this is a completely objective fact, I swear), revealing an ever deeper well of ironic and analytical satire of society and the media through carefully, hilariously employed humor.

One of the show's favorite, and funniest, satirical vehicles is Krusty the Clown, Bart Simpson's childhood hero and a symbol of everything that is wrong with the entertainment industry. He is a morally destitute, corrupt, addicted, all-purpose wretch; he is also the most prominent icon in the lives of the Simpson family. The children watch his television show daily. Many episodes begin with the familiar scene of the children sitting in front of the tube after school, faces illuminated by the glow, watching the mindless string of gags that compose the Krusty the Clown Show. Sometimes Krusty is included in the absurd adventures in which the Simpsons are involved each week. Yet the most present he is to them is through the omnipresent, narcissistically personified branding in his merchandise, which constitutes the primary source of his fortunes. Bart's room is a virtual shrine to the entertainer, with many of his material goods bearing the visage and logo of Krusty and his media enterprise. Other examples of Krusty's products, sporting the Krusty Brand Seal of Approval (practically a guarantee that you *will* be injured; see the "Kamp Krusty" episode for explicit examples), are not even connected to toys and playthings. Some of the more blatant, hyperbolic examples are Krusty's Non-Narkotik Kough Syrup for Kids, Krusty's Sulfuric Acid, and the terrifying Krusty's Home Pregnancy Test (Warning: May Cause Birth Defects). So, although the TV experience ends at the same time every day, the relation to Krusty picks up again via his ever-present merchandise.

The writers of *The Simpsons* were well aware of a similar situation developing between the show, its fans, and the Fox Broadcasting Company. Krusty was first introduced to lampoon the uncannily predictable seedy side behind most childhood icons, but later his omnipresence shifted into a satire of the entire enterprise of television and fandom. Like Bart and the rest of the citizens of Springfield, my sentiments have been reinforced through repeated viewing of syndicated broadcasts. Years ago, watching *The Simpsons* was a required activity—I needed my fix—and the Fox Broadcasting Company, well aware of this need since the initial Nielsen-reinforced popularity boom of 1990, produced tons of real-world merchandise spaces in order to occupy the space in between viewings of the show, expanding the potential to make more money. Several years later, I purchased my dartboard, a product with a vague association with the show at best (there has only been one scene, in Moe's Tavern, in which characters playing darts have been featured on *The Simpsons*), just

as Bart's allegiance to Krusty is exemplified in an all-consuming collection of non-clown or even comedy-related merchandise from the show: dolls, bedding and bedroom furniture, decorative posters, and various other artifacts which round out and define his daily existence. They declare his love for his hero. Fans of *The Simpsons* do the same. I've seen countless posters, bottle openers, and other stuff like my dartboard present in my peers' living quarters since the madness began.

So, I recently rediscovered my once-treasured *Simpsons* dartboard in my bedroom. It was up on top of a bookshelf, mostly hidden from view by a movie poster I stuck in front of it. I pulled it down, brushed off the dust, and examined its packaging—still mint. Its value on *eBay* has declined to around \$8 (plus shipping), most likely due to a drop in interest in the show and the merchandising blitz following the less than mediocre movie release. I'm not surprised, as I rarely watch the reruns anymore (and never the Sunday episode premieres). My relationship with my dartboard is now relatively empty. I see it as nothing more than a toy, certainly not the symbol of something else I once loved. The show's creators have been reminding us all along that something like the dartboard is only worth as much as the public's interest in it. In the first episode in which we meet Krusty's character, his merchandise is burned by the citizens of Springfield when the public is tricked into believing that he robbed a convenience store at gunpoint. Our connections to merchandise are only as strong as the quality of the strongest memories of the events which give the products their value. I guess that leaves only one thing: does anyone want to play a game of darts?

Works Cited

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Meaning

1. In your own words, explain Warren's thesis. Where does he state it explicitly?
2. Why, according to Warren, has he been reluctant to take his *Simpsons* dartboard out of its original packaging? What finally makes him decide to open it?
3. What does Warren mean in paragraph 6 when he refers to "the less than mediocre movie release"? What movie is he talking about? Did he like it or not?

4. If you are unfamiliar with any of the following words, try to guess their meanings from the context in which Warren uses them. Look up the words in a dictionary to check your guesses, and then use each one in a sentence of your own.

adorned (1)	phenomena (3)	narcissistically (4)
satire/satirical (2, 3, 4)	implode (3)	visage (4)
syndication/ syndicated (2, 5)	dissipated (3)	hyperbolic (4)
resonant (2)	destitute (4)	lampoon (5)
zenith (3)	icon (4)	uncannily (5)
juggernaut (3)	omnipresent/ omnipresence (4, 5)	

Purpose and Audience

1. What do you think Warren's purpose was in writing this essay: to get more people to watch *The Simpsons*? to explain why his dashboard has lost its value? to convince merchandisers to change their ways? to do something else?
2. What assumptions does Warren seem to make about his readers—their gender or age, their attitudes toward *The Simpsons*, their attitudes toward advertising and merchandising, and so on?
3. In paragraph 3, Warren cites two pieces of information from a source. What does this information add to his analysis?

Method and Structure

1. Why do you think Warren chose the method of analysis to talk about the role of merchandising in the long-term success of *The Simpsons*? How does the method help Warren achieve his purpose?
2. What principle of analysis does Warren apply to his examination of *The Simpsons*? Why is that principle particularly well suited to his subject?
3. What does Warren accomplish in his first and last paragraphs?
4. **OTHER METHODS** Warren's analysis essay is also a model of **comparison and contrast** (Chapter 11) because he examines the similarities between Krusty the Clown fans and *Simpsons* fans. Why do you think Warren devotes so much attention to Krusty? What makes the comparison significant?

Language

1. How would you describe Warren's **tone**? How seriously does he take his subject? Is the tone appropriate, given his purpose?

2. Notice the many sentences and phrases Warren encloses in parentheses, such as "That is a fact, and I'll argue with anyone who disagrees with me to the death" (paragraph 2). What is the function of these parenthetical remarks? What do they contribute to the writer's purpose?

Writing Topics

1. **JOURNAL TO ESSAY** Expand your journal entry about pop culture merchandise (p. 170) into a full essay analyzing a single item. Describe the item and why you wanted it, considering your feelings about the characters it represents. Include a discussion of what the merchandise means to you now, explaining why it is or is not still part of your life. Make sure your essay has a controlling thesis that draws together all the points of your analysis. Document any sources you consult, as Warren does (see pp. 394–405).
2. How did you react to Warren's essay? Do you agree with his assessment of *The Simpsons* and his suggestion that merchandising both helped the show succeed and contributed to its decline? Or do you find his evaluation of the show's worth one-sided, his examples and opinions too personal to form the basis of an analysis? Write an essay that responds to Warren's conclusions. Be sure to include examples to support your view.
3. **CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS** In the Western world, we watch a lot of television: most of us watch it every day. Some people feel that TV can expand our vision of the world by showing us different people and places and exposing us to new ideas and issues. Others argue that TV narrows our views, inundating us with shallow content designed to please the crowd. What is your opinion about the effects of TV? Do you think that your viewing habits have an essentially positive or negative effect on you? Write an essay in which you explain how you think TV affects you.
4. **CONNECTIONS** Like Warren, Antonio Ruiz-Camacho, in "Souvenirs" (p. 252), writes about the value he has attached to merchandise for a television show—in his case, a Kermit the Frog alarm clock. In an essay, compare and contrast how popular culture has affected these two writers. How do their respective points of view affect their experiences and attitudes? You might consider, for example, how each writer acquired the merchandise and why, or the meanings they see in their toys. Be sure to include examples from both essays to support your comparison.

WRITING WITH THE METHOD

DIVISION OR ANALYSIS

Select one of the following topics, or any other topic they suggest, for an essay developed by analysis. Be sure to choose a topic you care about so that analysis is a means of communicating an idea, not an end in itself.

People, Animals, and Objects

1. The personality of a friend or relative
 2. The personality of a typical politician, teacher, or other professional
 3. An animal such as a cat, dog, horse, cow, spider, or bat
 4. A machine or an appliance such as a solar panel, hybrid engine, harvesting combine, smartphone, tablet, hair dryer, or toaster
 5. A nonmotorized vehicle such as a skateboard, in-line skate, bicycle, or snowboard
 6. A building such as a hospital, theater, or sports arena
- Ideas
7. The perfect marriage
 8. The perfect crime
 9. A theory or concept in a field such as psychology, sociology, economics, biology, physics, engineering, or astronomy
 10. The evidence in a political argument (written, spoken, or reported in the news)
 11. A liberal arts education

Aspects of Culture

12. A stereotype
13. A style of dress or "look" such as that associated with the typical hipster, bodybuilder, or outdoors enthusiast
14. A typical hero or villain in children's movies, science fiction, or romance novels
15. A popular Web site or Internet meme
16. A literary work: short story, novel, poem, essay
17. A visual work: painting, sculpture, building
18. A musical work: song, concerto, symphony, opera
19. A performance: sports, acting, dance, music, speech
20. The slang of a particular group or occupation

WRITING ABOUT THE THEME

LOOKING AT POPULAR CULTURE

1. The essays by Scott Adams (p. 156), Pat Mora (p. 162), and Andrew Warren (p. 171) all include the theme that what you see — whether in entertainment, advertising, or consumer products — is not all you get. Think of something you have used, heard, seen, or otherwise experienced in popular culture that made you suspect a hidden message or agenda. Consider, for example, a childhood toy, a popular breakfast cereal, a political speech, a magazine, a textbook, a video game, a movie, or a visit to a theme park. Using the essays in this chapter as models, write an analysis of your subject, making sure to divide it into distinct elements and to conclude it by reassembling those elements into a new whole.
2. Pat Mora and Luci Tapahonso (p. 149) both analyze advertising aimed at minority groups. Mora calls for an awakening to negative "images that bind" Mexican American girls and young women. Tapahonso, in contrast, thinks that American Indians found cause for celebration in a positive commercial that "showed Indians as we live today." What do you think of niche advertising? Is Mora's concern justified, or are the ads she singles out unusual? How common are ads like the one Tapahonso analyzes? Consider ads you've seen, or pay close attention to the ads as you're watching television or surfing the Internet over a week or so. Then write an essay addressing whether advertisers seem to treat the differences among people fairly or to exploit those differences. Are there notable exceptions in either case?
3. Jon Pareles (p. 149), Luci Tapahonso, Pat Mora, and Andrew Warren all write seriously about popular culture, a subject that some people would consider trivial and unworthy of critical attention. How informative and useful are such analyses? Where does each selection tell us something significant about ourselves, or in contrast, where does it fail in trying to make the trivial seem important? Is popular culture — music, television, film, books, restaurant chains — best looked at critically, best ignored, or best simply enjoyed? Explain your answer in an essay, using plenty of examples to support your thesis.