

Sticks and stones  
make break my  
bones, but words will  
never hurt me essay  
sample



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

“ Finding a trail” is an essay from author David Cavitch’s book *Life Studies: An Analytic Reader* in which he wants good readers to become good writers. Cavitch believes we have to read intellectually, imaginative, and analytically to get a clear perception and firm emotional response. Reading and writing are acquired abilities that no one is born with. The basic premise of analysis is that style and form work together with ideas and emotions. So to keep track of these, a reader has to be systematic, and the full analysis must accumulate step by step. A reader should be able to focus their attention and give an essay your undivided attention while you discover and express spoken inflections to the writing. You should always approach a selection with the intention to read it word by word. You are not reading for the broad outline or vague gist of what is said, but grasp the full substance, both explicit and implicit, and to see how the essay is developed. You should begin with the title because the title is part of the essay, be aware of what the title tells you are leads you to expect. All titles are worth reconsidering after you know where the whole essay leads.

Continue your analytic methods as you move through the essay. Underline or circle whatever sounds important as you read, circle words you don’t understand so you can try to figure out what they mean from the context. Write from the margins; you will come back to them too. Readers and writers learn a great deal from using the dictionary constantly. A reader should begin reading with good intentions to read analytically but find that your attention is waning and your mind wandering. Don’t succumb to passivity reading pages without noting or remembering what they are about, try to put the author’s point into your words, even if you doubt or don’t like what is

said. Get the ideas up off the page and into your head. Don't hesitate to include personal associations in your margin comments, connections you make while reading help you to assimilate and thoroughly comprehend new material. A good way to proceed analytically is to note how each paragraph serves the writer's purpose. Identify what seems to be the main substance of important paragraphs. Of course, you know the usefulness of locating the topic sentence, topic sentence states the main substance and often appear in the first or second sentence.

Does the paragraph build up to a conclusive statement at the end? Identify the substance and development, look for the transitions. Paragraphs cannot be jumbled into another sentence and still work effectively in an essay. As you observe an author's paragraph development and organization, you will acquire a sense of the author's goal in writing the essay. Your responses and observations have to be articulate in words in order to become coherent ideas. If you have to find your own topic after reading an essay, rely on your responses to the reading. The mixing of identities across generations is something you can discover in your own experience. Don't worry about connecting up the jumble of thoughts that may cover your sheet of paper.

To turn your rough material into a well-formed draft, think of yourself laying out a trail that your reader must be able to follow. Try to establish a purpose or central idea for each paragraph. Do not hesitate to write paragraphs that are longer than you find in most newspapers and most magazines.

Emphasize what you mean; don't just repeat the author. You can make your sentences more analytic by revising parts that begin with when and after;

remember that your intended meaning is expressed by both what you say  
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and how you say it. All writing has to validate what it says. Remember from your readings that there is a rich variety of ways to begin and end an essay. These briefs advise about writing should remind you that readers and writers confront much of the same problems. Writing is difficult for everyone, so you should never lose your nerve.