

Aphorism Analysis Assignment

Value: 30% of course grade

Down Draft Due Date:

Up Draft Due Date:

Rationale

This assignment is meant to help you deepen your critical thinking and understanding of writing by closely analyzing an aphorism on writing crafted by someone else. Your analysis of the aphorism will draw on skills that we have developed in this unit: 1) analyzing of the use of language in an aphorism; 2) evaluating the validity and truthfulness of an aphorism.; 3) demonstrating authority by taking stances on the meaning of an aphorism; and 4) using concrete evidence from the aphorism to support your stance. In addition, the work you'll do for this project addresses all of the course goals of ENGL 101.

Task Instructions for Aphorism Analysis

You are going to analyze one of the aphorisms written by one of your classmates. To complete the analysis, you will:

- Read over the list of aphorisms written by several of your classmates. Read through all of your classmates' aphorisms and select the one that you'd like to write about for this assignment.
- Annotate the chosen aphorism by focusing on the language and structural elements.
- Develop your interpretation and evaluation of the aphorism by thinking critically in the pre-writing process.
- Write an analytical essay in which you respond both generously and critically to that aphorism, explaining what you think the aphorism gets right and/or wrong about writing.

As you plan your essay, think about why you chose that particular aphorism to respond to. In other words, why is it important to respond to this aphorism? What is it about this aphorism that—from your thoughtful perspective—needs to be amplified, corrected, or nuanced? Who needs to take this aphorism to heart, or for whom could it be misleading or even dangerous? These considerations might help you provide context for your response (in the introduction section of your essay) and/or explain why your response matters (in the concluding section of your essay).

Throughout your essay, pay careful attention to the precise wording of the aphorism. Make it clear how you interpret the aphorism (and that your interpretation is reasonable), and present relevant, specific support for your claims about what the aphorism gets right and/or wrong about writing.

Assessment

I'll assess your essay using a rubric that includes these criteria:

[This file is supplemental material to Sean Barnette and James A. Anderson, Jr., *Saying More with Less: Using Aphorisms to Promote Critical Reading and Authority in the First-Year Writing Classroom*, prompt 10.1 (2026), doi: 10.31719/pjaw.v10i1.216]

- Does the essay make clear, accurate, and insightful claims—both generous and critical—about the aphorism?
- Does the essay refer explicitly and purposefully to the most relevant language in the aphorism?
- Does the essay include sufficient evidence and reasoning to support its claims?
- Is the essay clearly and effectively organized?
- Does the essay demonstrate appropriate audience awareness?
- Is the essay revised and well proofread?