

As you read the passage below, consider how Dana Gioia uses

- evidence, such as facts or examples, to support claims.
- reasoning to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence.
- stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.

Adapted from Dana Gioia, “Why Literature Matters” ©2005 by The New York Times Company. Originally published April 10, 2005.

[A] strange thing has happened in the American arts during the past quarter century. While income rose to unforeseen levels, college attendance ballooned, and access to information increased enormously, the interest young Americans showed in the arts—and especially literature—actually diminished.

According to the 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, a population study designed and commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts (and executed by the US Bureau of the Census), arts participation by Americans has declined for eight of the nine major forms that are measured....The declines have been most severe among younger adults (ages 18–24). The most worrisome finding in the 2002 study, however, is the declining percentage of Americans, especially young adults, reading literature.

That individuals at a time of crucial intellectual and emotional development bypass the joys and challenges of literature is a troubling trend. If it were true that they substituted histories, biographies, or political works for literature, one might not worry. But book reading of any kind is falling as well.

That such a longstanding and fundamental cultural activity should slip so swiftly, especially among young adults, signifies deep transformations in contemporary life. To

Commented [1]: Identifies the problem-- interest in literature has declined. What are the consequences? You can bet the author will tell you.

Commented [2]: Authority: this is a reliable source, conducting a detailed study. This is not one person's opinion. It is measurable.

Commented [3]: Oooh, severe.

Commented [4]: Now I too am worried.

Commented [5]: positive, happy

Commented [6]: Also, troubled.

call attention to the trend, the Arts Endowment issued the reading portion of the Survey as a separate report, "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America."

The decline in reading has consequences that go beyond literature. The significance of reading has become a persistent theme in the business world. The February issue of *Wired* magazine, for example, sketches a new set of mental skills and habits proper to the 21st century, aptitudes decidedly literary in character: not "linear, logical, analytical talents," author Daniel Pink states, but "the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative." When asked what kind of talents they like to see in management positions, business leaders consistently set imagination, creativity, and higher-order thinking at the top.

Ironically, the value of reading and the intellectual faculties that it inculcates appear most clearly as active and engaged literacy declines. There is now a growing awareness of the consequences of nonreading to the workplace. In 2001 the National Association of Manufacturers polled its members on skill deficiencies among employees. Among hourly workers, poor reading skills ranked second, and 38 percent of employers complained that local schools inadequately taught reading comprehension.

The decline of reading is also taking its toll in the civic sphere.... A 2003 study of 15- to 26-year-olds' civic knowledge by the National Conference of State Legislatures concluded, "Young people do not understand the ideals of citizenship... and their appreciation and support of American democracy is limited."

It is probably no surprise that declining rates of literary reading coincide with declining levels of historical and political awareness among young people. One of the surprising findings of "Reading at Risk" was that literary readers are markedly more civically engaged than nonreaders, scoring two to four times more likely to perform charity work, visit a museum, or attend a sporting event. One reason for their higher social and cultural interactions may lie in the kind of civic and historical knowledge that comes with literary reading....

Commented [7]: I've heard of that! That's a published magazine! (Not that anyone reads magazines anymore. Certainly no one ages 18-24.) But it's another authoritative source.

Commented [8]: Here's the actual claim, mostly implied before, but here outright stated: Just as young people have stopped reading, the value of reading is more important than ever, leaving those people who are not practicing literacy at a disadvantage.

Commented [9]: Here is part of the author's claim: lack of literacy hurts people in their workplace. A practical consequence of not reading.

Commented [10]: ANOTHER authority.

Commented [11]: ANOTHER poll and statistics.

Commented [12]: ANOTHER study.

Commented [13]: ANOTHER authority. Not really very subtle, is it?

Commented [14]: Another consequence of not reading: you lack political/social awareness and contribute nothing to your own society.

The evidence of literature's importance to civic, personal, and economic health is too strong to ignore. The decline of literary reading foreshadows serious long-term social and economic problems, and it is time to bring literature and the other arts into discussions of public policy. Libraries, schools, and public agencies do noble work, but addressing the reading issue will require the leadership of politicians and the business community as well....

Reading is not a timeless, universal capability. Advanced literacy is a specific intellectual skill and social habit that depends on a great many educational, cultural, and economic factors. As more Americans lose this capability, our nation becomes less informed, active, and independent-minded. These are not the qualities that a free, innovative, or productive society can afford to lose.

Write an essay in which you explain **how** Dana Gioia builds an argument to persuade his audience that the decline of reading in America will have a negative effect on society. In your essay, analyze how Gioia uses one or more of the features in the directions that precede the passage (or features of your own choice) to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of his argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant features of the passage.

Commented [15]: Remember, HOW: strategies and methods.

Your essay should not explain whether you agree with Gioia's claims, but rather explain how Gioia builds an argument to persuade his audience.

Remember, your introduction should be a short, direct paragraph that does all of the following:

1. Introduce the main idea discussed in the article in a broad way. (1-2 sentences)
2. Connect the broad concept to the article and the author directly. (Try to do in one sentence.)
3. Identify the main methods used by the author and state how these contribute to the success of the argument. (1-2 sentences).

Structure for each body paragraph:

1. Topic sentence that indicates the technique.
2. An analysis point that explains the intended effect of the technique.
3. Evidence from the article.
4. A concluding sentence that ties the evidence back to the main point of the paragraph.

Structure for a conclusion:

1. Some restatement of the major techniques discussed in the essay.
2. A statement about how these techniques drive home the main idea of the article.

So take a look at this:

INTRODUCTION

We all know that reading is a fundamental skill, crucially important to one's ability to communicate with others and understand the world, but like many precious things, we may not realize its full worth until we lose it. In his article, "Why Literature Matters," Dana Gioia makes the case that literacy is the lifeblood of an advanced, modern, and productive populace, and that declining reading rates, especially in younger people, can have devastating consequences on the communal health of American society. Gioia's argument is ultimately successful because of his authoritatively supported statistics, the organizational sequencing of his reasoning, and carefully-selected diction.

BODY PARAGRAPH 1 - GIOIA'S USE OF AUTHORITY & STATISTICS

Almost immediately, Gioia roots his argument in authoritative external sources of information and support. The major purpose for doing this is to lend factual weight and reliability to his claims, thereby avoiding the risk of seeming like a sole, opinionated voice-- one person alone, complaining about how everything in society is going wrong. Right after introducing the major problem of young Americans reading less, Gioia proves this is not a random observation, but a fact revealed by an official survey done by the National Endowment of the Arts. When discussing the dire consequences a lack of reading may have on the business world, Gioia supports his reasoning with the expertise of Daniel Pink of *Wired* magazine; he later builds on this evidence by supplying a statistic about the woeful lack of literacy skills in the workplace from the National Association of Manufacturers. Lastly, when addressing young people's ignorance of civic institutions and social causes, Gioia again grounds his conclusions not on arbitrary opinion, but on concrete statistical evidence from the National Conference of State Legislatures. The end result of this technique is that Gioia's reasoning appears not only sound, but undeniable: with so much statistical support from such widely known and well-respected sources, no one can argue with the conclusion that society would pay an enormous price for its failure to read.

Commented [16]: Introduces the main idea in a broad way.

Commented [17]: Connects the broad concept to the author's main idea.

Commented [18]: Three ideas:
 1. authoritative evidence
 2. organized reasoning
 3. word choice

These will ultimately become three paragraphs. Sometimes people like to write the intro last. That's totally fine-- but you should at least have your main ideas outlined before writing your body paragraphs.

Commented [19]: Topic sentence-- What is the technique you are discussing?

Commented [20]: Analysis point-- What is the reason this technique is being used?

Commented [21]: Evidence from the reading

Commented [22]: After supplying evidence, reconnect back to the paragraph's main point.

BODY PARAGRAPH 2 - GIOIA'S SEQUENCE AND REASONING

Gioia guides his reader inexorably to this conclusion by organizing his essay as sequence of unseen effects of the problem he identifies. Not content simply to suggest that literature's decline is a shame in and of itself, Gioia connects the paucity of readership to economic and political ruin. Gioia notes, "The decline in reading has consequences that go beyond literature. The significance of reading has become a persistent theme in the business world." He then goes on to explain how reading sparks the inventiveness and creativity needed in the modern workplace. Not stopping at only how this trend may affect one's wallet, or indeed the economy as a whole, Gioia intensifies his argumentative reasoning, showing that widespread failure to read threatens the very fabric of society. Observing a connection between reading and civic engagement, Gioia explains that "literary readers are markedly more civically engaged than nonreaders, scoring two to four times more likely to perform charity work, visit a museum, or attend a sporting event," while those who do not read remain ignorant, unengaged, and disconnected from the kinds of activities that keep our civilization connected. Organizing his reasoning in this way draws the reader to the conclusion that the minimization of literature has terrible effects that extend into the far reaches of American society.

Commented [23]: Topic sentence - What's the technique?

Commented [24]: Analysis point - What is the effect of the technique?

Commented [25]: Evidence from the article.

Commented [26]: Connect back to the main point of the paragraph.

BODY PARAGRAPH 3 - GIOIA'S WORD CHOICE

Lastly, Gioia uses powerful words to arouse feelings and emotions around both reading and the failure to read. Young people's tendency not to read is described in words that spark fear and uncertainty, while reading is coded through the article's diction as responsible and healthful. Gioia begins by noting that the reading habits of young people have suffered a "severe" drop. He avoids a neutral descriptor like "noteworthy" or "statistically relevant"; the use of "severe" implies the decline's suddenness and negative impact. Later, discussing the same trend, he uses words like "troubling" and "worrisome." Before even describing the far-reaching effects, Gioia has set the reader up to fear the outcome through his word choices. Any time he is describing the act of reading itself, he is always careful to use words that suggest its pleasurable feeling and salutary effects, highlighting its "joys and challenges" on the individual level, while also observing how reading contributes to Americans being "active" and "independent-minded." The dichotomy present in Gioia's diction positions the reader to accept even more fully on an emotional level the dangers of a society that chooses not to read.

Commented [27]: Topic sentence- what's the technique?

Commented [28]: Analysis point - what's the effect of the technique?

Commented [29]: Evidence from the reading

Commented [30]: Connect back to the main point of the paragraph.

CONCLUSION

With his authoritative facts, logical reasoning, and powerful diction, Gioia confidently establishes the cost that America would pay for its failure to crack open a book. Society would be hollowed out, diminished financially, and left with its civic bonds weakened.

Gioia's article inspires one to champion the cause of reading, because our very future may depend on it.

