

Developing language – showing analysis and evaluation

(example from undergraduate politics)

The following activity, based on authentic student writing, aims to help you notice ways in which you can build evaluation into your writing, and also how you can use language to help compare and contrast the texts you read: a skill that is key to writing in Politics. Each of the paragraphs below reviews three or four important writers in relation to a particular theme.

TASK 1

Read this paragraph. What do you think about it? What's good? What could be improved?

Version 1

In 'The Political Approach to Human Behaviours', Leftwich says that politics is 'the universal and timeless process which organises and expresses the interaction of people, resources and power'. He says that politics is intrinsic to human behaviour and is constantly present in any situation of life no matter how mundane it may seem.

Crick discusses power from a state-centred perspective. He has a diplomatic theory of what politics is, i.e. politics is like a negotiation whose central point or theme is power. Weber says that political activity encompasses all forms of conflict over the use of state power. He also says that the state has a special ability to enforce political decisions thanks to its monopoly of the legitimate means of coercion.

TASK 2

Now read the paragraph again. Underline what has been added/changed? What is the effect of these additions/changes?

Version 2

In 'The Political Approach to Human Behaviours', Leftwich posits an interesting idea/theory, namely that politics is 'the universal and timeless process which organises and expresses the interaction of people, resources and power'. Leftwich places little emphasis on the state since politics is not merely concerned with matters regarding the state but rather, politics is intrinsic to human behaviour and is constantly present in any situation of life no matter how mundane it may seem.

Crick mostly discusses power from a state-centred perspective. He has a diplomatic theory of what politics is, i.e. politics is like a negotiation whose central point or theme is power. Weber's view of political activity is broad, encompassing all forms of conflict over the use of state power. He also emphasises the special nature of that power: the state's ability to enforce political decisions thanks to its monopoly of the legitimate means of coercion.

TASK 3

The paragraph has now been changed again. Underline what has been added? What is the effect of these additions/changes?

Version 3

Although power is of utmost importance in all three texts, there are vast differences between Weber and Crick on the one hand, and Leftwich on the other. In 'The Political Approach to Human Behaviours', Leftwich posits an interesting idea/theory, namely that politics is 'the universal and timeless process which organises and expresses the interaction of people, resources and power'. Leftwich places little emphasis on the state since, according to him, politics is not merely concerned with matters regarding the state but rather, politics is intrinsic to human behaviour and is constantly present in any situation of life no matter how mundane it may seem.

In contrast to Leftwich, Weber and Crick mostly discuss power from a more state-centred perspective. A key difference between the two is that Crick has a more diplomatic theory of what politics is, i.e. politics is like a negotiation whose central point or theme is power. Weber's view of political activity is broader, encompassing all forms of conflict over the use of state power. He also emphasises the special nature of that power: the state's ability to enforce political decisions thanks to its monopoly of the legitimate means of coercion.

TASK 4

Evaluation and comparison (similarity and difference) can be signalled in a range of ways. Here are some more example paragraphs. Read them through noticing (underlining) how the writer signals evaluation and comparison. Think also about how these paragraphs could be improved.

1.

The most captivating statement drawn from any of the four texts is perhaps one made by Weber in saying: "The concept is extremely broad and comprises any kind of independent leadership in action". This is key to believing in politics as a whole, and indeed as a state of mind, is key to human existence and nature. This is also summed up by Crick: "To be political is to be active and engaged with power". Power is key to human-kind, politics on top of this has been directly related towards power. To a certain degree we all want power, whether that be in wealth or political leadership. Here, Crick agrees with Weber in an unspecific manner: politics is portrayed as being always existent within every human; power comes hand-in-hand with politics.

2.

All four authors unravel the meaning of politics and power in their pieces and come to different conclusions. Weber says that politics is the striving to share power with the state since, in public politics at least, the state is supremely dominant. In his piece Crick gives a

much broader meaning to the term politics as he views it as taking place in all aspects of human life. Leftwich would agree since he writes that politics is the interaction of people over resources and power, and this occurs all the time. Leftwich continues to say that politics is more than straightforward power grabbing and is more about natural compromise that must hold a “human community” (Weber) together. All four authors agree that politics in some form is concerned with the interaction between people. Crick believes that politics is a means of organising society and not a naturally occurring phenomena. Schwarzmantel argues that politics is centred around the struggle of politicians for power “to share power with the state” (Weber)

3.

Generally all three writers agree that politics is power. However, Weber believes that power has a hierarchical element to it: your importance and dominance politically influence the amount of political power that you have. According to Weber, the state is at the top of the political hierarchy. Since its politics are the most powerful and most influential, it can effect others in the hierarchy. That is why the state is known for its ‘high politics’.

In contrast Crick believes that political power should be shared between different groups practising politics to resolve differing interests, though more political power should be given to those of importance and who can benefit the community. Leftwich believes that power is everywhere, and that there is always a struggle for power. In addition politics can exist without the state, since we need political power first to have order.

Teacher version with changes/key points underlined

Task 2 - The phrases underlined showing evaluation and also wider knowledge (e.g. what an author doesn't say as well as what he does)

In 'The Political Approach to Human Behaviours', Leftwich posits an interesting idea/theory, namely that politics is 'the universal and timeless process which organises and expresses the interaction of people, resources and power'. Leftwich places little emphasis on the state since politics is not merely concerned with matters regarding the state but rather, politics is intrinsic to human behaviour and is constantly present in any situation of life no matter how mundane it may seem.

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Task 3 - These are sentences and phrases synthesising the texts and bringing out similarity and difference.

Although power is of utmost importance in all three texts, there are vast differences between Weber and Crick on the one hand, and Leftwich on the other. In 'The Political Approach to Human Behaviours', Leftwich posits an interesting idea/theory, namely that politics is 'the universal and timeless process which organises and expresses the interaction of people, resources and power'. Leftwich places little emphasis on the state since, according to him, politics is not merely concerned with matters regarding the state but rather, politics is intrinsic to human behaviour and is constantly present in any situation of life no matter how mundane it may seem.

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Task 4 - All of these paragraphs were perceived by Politics teachers to have a greater degree of successful evaluation and analysis than those in the previous tasks – focus discussion where and how this appears in the texts.