

Types of Writing Textual Analysis

“Textual analysis does not try to find out what it is that determines the text [. . .] but rather how the text explodes and disperses.” – Roland Barthes (“Textual analysis: Poe’s ‘Valdemar’”)

WHAT IS TEXTUAL ANALYSIS?

Analysis is breaking something down and examining the parts and how they function or interact together. Therefore, textual analysis is looking at the interaction between parts of a text. A text can be written works—such as books, stories, poems, articles, speech transcripts—as well as movies, works of art, and cultural movements or behaviors. Anything that can be read for its signs, patterns, and symbols can be considered a text.

What is the difference between textual analysis and summary writing?

- Summary writing – is descriptive and usually much shorter than the original text.
- Textual analysis – because you are analyzing and expanding ideas, textual analysis can be much longer than the original text. French philosopher Jacques Derrida once wrote an entire piece analyzing the word ‘yes’ in James Joyce’s “Ulysses” (English 1984: *ULYSSES GRAMAPHONE: HEAR SAY YES IN JOYCE*).

You probably engage in some form of textual analysis on a daily basis. If you critique a movie, not just based on its story, but specific categories of the story and presentation, such as the special effects, characters, dialogue, etc, you are using textual analysis. “Reading” in this manner is often more involved and requires more attention to detail. Such careful reading is often referred to as “close reading” and is necessary to begin textual analysis.

GETTING STARTED: CLOSE READING

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE WORK

View, listen to, or read the work several times. Underline or note the parts of the text that stand out to you, looking for patterns and categories that you find in the text. Note any insights, findings, or reactions as you review the text.

ASK QUESTIONS

Below are some sample questions to ask yourself before, during, and after studying the text.

- Audience:** Who is the intended audience?
Why would certain audiences be interested in the text?
- Purpose:** Why did the author write this?
What response is expected from the audience?
- Author:** What do you know about the author's background, personality, and interests?
Can you find evidence of these in the text?
- Technique:** What tools does the author use to persuade or influence the reader?
Consider techniques such as anecdotes, quotes from experts, statistics, figurative language (metaphors, symbolism, and imagery). Also watch for the three forms of persuasion: ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and logos (reason).
- Context:** When and where was the text written?
What are the general themes and trends of the era?
Is there textual evidence that shows that these trends or themes impacted the author’s work?

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WRITE A THESIS STATEMENT

After you have studied the text and asked questions about it, the next step is to decide on the focus of your paper. What is the main point of your paper? A thesis statement should state your position, narrow your topic, and set up a pattern of organization. If you will examine three important passages, indicate that. Thesis statements of one or occasionally two sentences work best.

EXAMPLE: W. H. Auden's use of subtle imagery, persuasive diction, and powerful metaphor leads the reader to conclude that we, like the "Old Masters," should view suffering as an inevitable part of life.

WRITING YOUR PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Your introduction should grab the reader's attention and provide him or her with the necessary information to understand your analysis. This information should provide an introduction to the text being analyzed as well as a short description of its audience and purpose. Briefly address the main issues you will be discussing. Remember, the thesis statement is usually placed at the end of the introduction.

BODY PARAGRAPHS

Each of your body paragraphs should support your thesis statement and explain links between specific quotes and your own analysis. Each paragraph should include the following:

◀ Topic sentence

A topic sentence introduces the main idea of each paragraph and outlines what aspect of the text or rhetorical tool is being analyzed. Topic sentences should support your thesis and also show the scope of the entire paragraph.

◀ Direct quotes or examples from the text

Relevant quotes or examples from the text can illustrate the technique you are analyzing. They should be smoothly integrated into your paper.

◀ Analysis of the quote or example

Analysis is used to make connections between your ideas, the thesis, and the quote or example. It is not just a summary of the text but rather an explanation of how the author's techniques and your chosen quote or example clarify the author's purpose. Remember that a summary condenses and restates portions of the text in your own words whereas an analysis explains the text and shows connections between it and your own ideas.

EXAMPLE: Sample Textual Analysis

Throughout the entire poem, Auden relies on subtle use of diction to persuade his readers that they should become as cold and callous as the "Old Masters" (1). By using

Specific tool used by the author

This is an example of a summary, which does not utilize the same techniques.

Specific tool used by the author: sters, ority- ie view experts, for "they well suffering. The reader n behind that appeal. Au (art) are not necessarily (suffering).

Throughout the entire poem, Auden relies on subtle use of diction to persuade his readers that they should become as cold and callous as the "Old Masters" (1). By using the term Old Masters, Auden is appealing to our sense of authority—our sense that we should respect the view of the Masters or experts, for "they well understood" suffering. The reader must question the logic behind that appeal. Authorities in one field (art) are not necessarily experts in another (suffering).

Smooth integration of direct quote from text

Analysis of the author's appeal to authority

Analysis of the author's technique

Analysis of the author's appeal to authority

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CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, gather all your evidence into a convincing whole. Restate your thesis (but in different words), summarize your analysis, and evaluate the author's effectiveness. It is important not to add any new information here, however make sure your paper leaves the reader feeling satisfied that you know the material, have presented it thoroughly, and have argued your thesis convincingly.

REVISING YOUR DRAFT

Leave your paper alone for a day or two before you begin to revise. Doing this will allow you to come to the revision process mentally and physically refreshed, ready to spot errors and make necessary changes. Be sure to do the following when starting to revise:

- ◀ **Read** your paper aloud. Or better yet, have someone read it with you.
- ◀ **Focus** on organization, clarity, and support first. Is your focus narrow enough? Did you use specific examples to support your thesis? Have you included enough of your own personal analysis?
- ◀ **Proofread** any sentence-level errors (spelling and punctuation mistakes, problems with grammar, etc.)
- ◀ **Bring** a draft to the Writing Center for feedback.