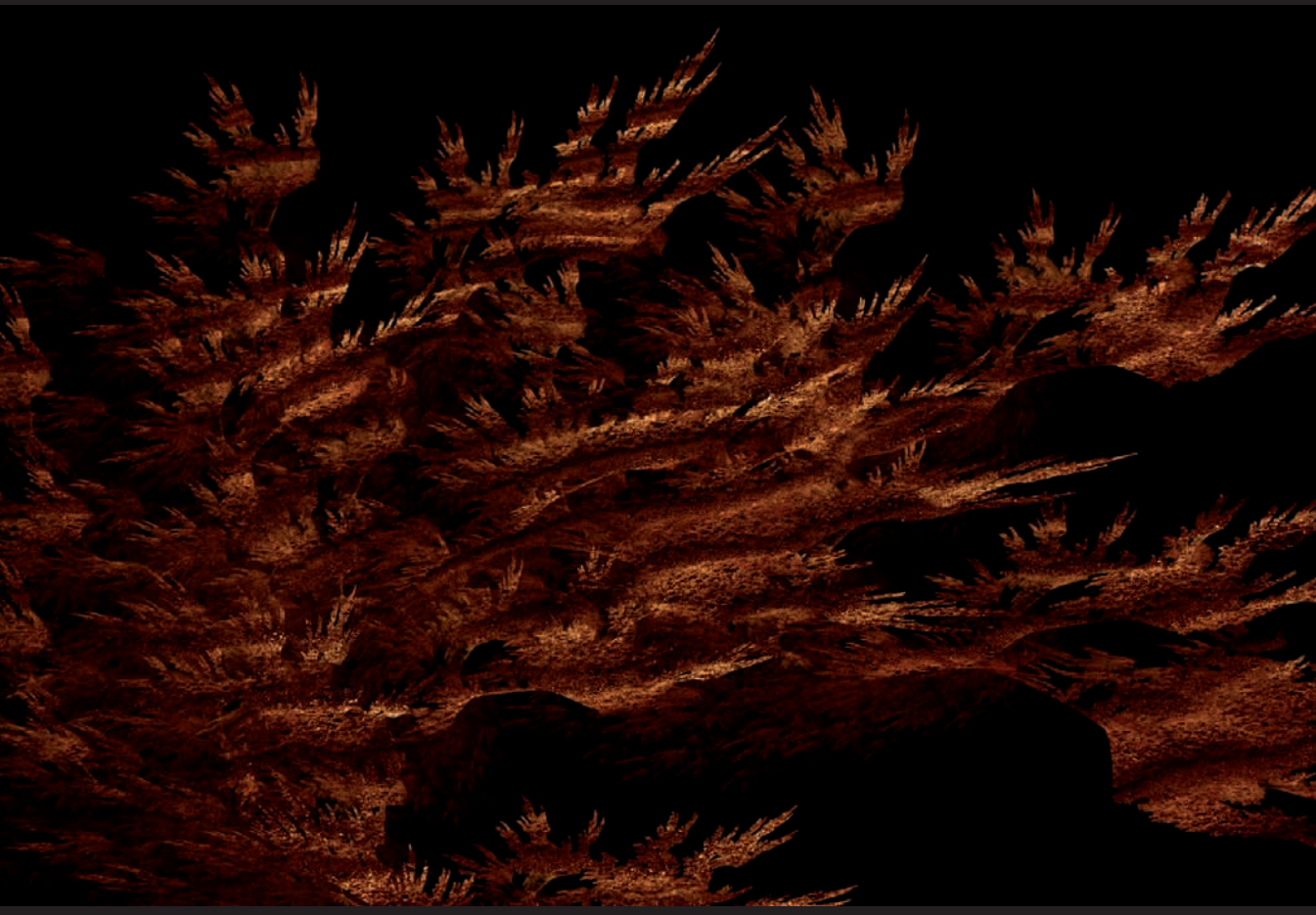
REASON TO WRITE



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smaller point, or just to situate the context of the question—but never, ever, for the purpose of answering the primary question. That wheel has already been invented. One cannot claim the ideas of others as one's own; it is one of the subtlest forms of plagiarism.

3 TYPES OF ANALYSIS: GENERAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter, we will cover the steps of general analysis, as well as two specific types of general analysis: Formalist Analysis, and Rhetorical Analysis.

People usually already know that, in general, analysis has nothing to do with facts memorized, and everything to do with acquiring a specific proficiency. While the following would be simplified, let's say that a scholar has a question. That question is:

> What force causes many objects to fall downward
> when dropped from a height?

Since Newton, and others, have already been so kind as to look into this question for us, we know that the answer to this question is, in part: "gravity."

Let's imagine, however, that we don't yet know the answer to the question: What force causes many objects to fall downward? Here's how we would use analysis to begin to answer that question.

Analysis begins with two steps, often called a *demonstration*.

Step 1: Ask a question based upon an observation

Step 2: Identify specific instances or samples or examples

Thus, our scientist may begin with the following:

Step 1: Many objects fall downward when dropped. What force causes these objects to fall downward?

Step 2: Rocks, eggs, cannon balls, and vases will fall downward when dropped from a height.

While these are important first steps to analysis, the analysis is, at this point, incomplete. The question as to what forces causes this downward motion has been posed, but has not yet been answered. This is a part of the problem with the five-paragraph form, which is drawn from *demonstration*: a statement of observation (objects fall downward) followed by examples that are treated as "proofs" (rocks, eggs, cannon

balls, and vases fall downward), followed by a repetition of the initial observation (objects fall downward).

In other words, anyone can observe that objects tend to fall downward from a height, and list some examples of objects doing so. It still doesn't answer the question of what force causes them to do so—and it never will.

This formula is incomplete without an answer to the question posed, which is *why* these objects fall downward. Because the question is ignored, even though examples are given, it is not a complete analysis.

What our scientists needs, at this point, are the next steps to analysis:

DEFINITION

pattern: a discernable combination of qualities that form a kind of relationship between two or more elements, including physical, temporal, or spatial relationships.

Step 3: Gather details, or data

Step 4: Identify ***patterns*** within those details or data

Step 5: Draw conclusions from those patterns

Our scientist, then, might go through the following steps:

Step 3: Beginning with the most obvious, the scientist will gather *a lot* of details—or data—regarding objects dropped from a height (whether they fall downward, or not).

Step 4: Once the scientist has acquired enough detail, beginning with the most obvious, he or she will examine that detail and begin to look for *patterns* within that detail.

Step 5: Each pattern that the scientist finds will suggest a certain conclusion. As each pattern leads to a conclusion, the scientist: 1) gathers true information about this force; 2) recognizes additional patterns that lead to further conclusions.

Thus, in gathering detail, certain patterns will suggest themselves, and those patterns will lead to other questions, such as:

- Why don't birds fall out of the sky?
- Why do boats float miles above the ground when in water, but would fall downward if at such a height, on land?
- Do all objects drop at the same speed?

- At what point does an object that is thrown upward begin to fall downward?
- When I pick an object up, and it is heavy, is that related to this force?
- If the Earth is round, are objects moving downward, really, or toward a center? Why is this different?
- Is rain being pulled downward by this force? Why isn't wind pulled downward?
- Is this force something intrinsic to the object, or is it a result of a relationship between one object, and another object?

While anyone with the most basic knowledge of physics would know the answer to these questions, what the list illustrates is that questions often lead to questions. Some people complain that, at the center of a critical question, there often seem to be simply a whole lot more questions.

There is a reason for this. Analysis is a process whereby one answers a question by breaking it up into manageable parts. Analysis produces a lot of questions, simply because analysis requires a lot of answers in order to get to the truth. The element of critical thinking, as it applies to analysis, is to take care to do the steps slowly, exhaustively, and in order.

Example:

One writing student[1] asked the question:

> What are some elements that highly rated Reality TV shows have in common that might explain the appeal of the genre?

She became interested in the genre because, in making it unfamiliar, she noted that reality TV seemed to be a hybrid of three different genres: the documentary, the game show, and the drama.

To initiate her analysis, this student began to gather information, beginning with the most obvious.

1. In the first part of her analysis, she went through a process of delimitation. There were many Reality TV shows, and she couldn't look at all of them. She didn't want to pick at random. So, she chose to limited her analysis to the twenty-five most popular Reality TV shows.

[1] Writing 50 (Writing and Research). Winter 2010. UCSB.

2. Once she had established her samples in these top twenty-five shows, she looked for the five most obvious pieces of information she needed to establish, in relationship to her question:

   - The name of the show
   - The television network
   - The date the show first aired
   - The show's current ratings
   - How many seasons the show had run

3. Her second set of details, of which the following is an abbreviated list, allowed her to begin to establish patterns among details, and included details gathered from such questions as:

   - What advertising was typically aired during the course of a given show?
   - Did the show involve audience involvement, and, if so, to what degree, and in what form?
   - If it did do so, in what way did the show engage in a process of eliminating contestants? Who had control of how contestants were eliminated?
   - If an incentive was offered, what incentives were offered to the contestants, including cash prizes?
   - Did the show fall into a category involved fantastical situations (stranded on an island) or "everyday" situations (cameras placed in a room), or a mixture of both?
   - Did the show function by placing participants in competition with one another, or in a relationship of cooperation, or both, and in what way?
   - What specific kind of relationship, if any, did the show place into conflict, including: between strangers; between teams; among teammates; in romantic relationships; in friendship; in family relationships?
   - Was the show filmed on a stage set, or at a specific location? How important was that location, to the show?
   - Did participant involvement in the show rely primarily on skill, or on luck? If skill, what skill was called for?

From this process, this student gathered a great deal of insight regarding the appeal of top Reality TV shows.

Another student became interested in the way in which the physical topography of a university could affect the potential interactions between three groups, those groups being: 1) students; 2) the university, including faculty; 3) the community, composed of people living in that community.[2]

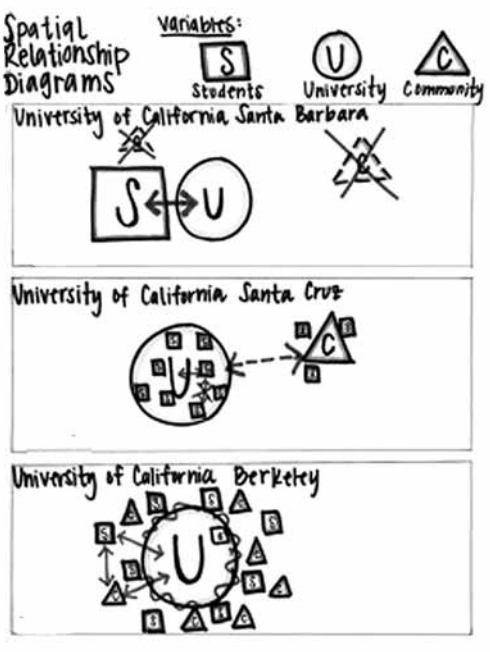
This student limited her analysis to three campuses that were very similar in other ways (each from the University of California), but had radically different topographies that created a very different spatial configuration between these groups. The three campuses were:

University of California Santa Barbara

University of California Santa Cruz

University of California Berkeley

Fig. 2. Student Portfolio.



While she would eventually look at a limited range of secondary sources for other variables, such as undergraduate/graduate student ratio, her initial strategy for accessing the physical topography of these relationships involved drawing herself a visual. She assigned a key in order to indicate the typical spatial relationships between students housing and communal areas (squares), campus and faculty areas (circles) and the community (triangles) in which the university was located.

In the most general terms, then, analysis involves training in the ability to perform the following series of actions, until the question is answered:

Step 1: Ask a question based upon an observation

Step 2: Identify specific instances or samples

[2] Writing 50. Winter 2010. UCSB.

Step 3: Gather details, or data, from those specifics

Step 4: Identify patterns within those details or data

Step 5: Draw conclusions from those patterns

These five basic steps to analysis apply, across disciplines, and in real-world situations. They work whether one is trying to understand a natural law, or perform an analysis of a sample in a laboratory, or interpret a poem, or solve a case, or examine an archeological dig, or understand a work of art, or conduct a psychological experiment, etc.

4 ANALYSIS AND ROLLER SKATING

> "Knowledge is not made for understanding. It is made for cutting."
>
> —*Michel Foucault*

The difficult thing about analysis is that it's like trying to explain how to use one's muscles to roller skate—it's a complex act that people who roller skate just kind of learn to do. Analysis may seem like some sophisticated academic skill, but, in fact, we walk around doing complex analysis all the time. We perform analyses daily because we are reasoning beings.

Analysis is fundamental to reasoning. We perform analysis on a daily basis about people and situations, by establishing criteria through which we can break down information that we receive, compare it to previous experience and ways of understanding, identify patterns from detail that we observe, and draw conclusions, often without doing so consciously.

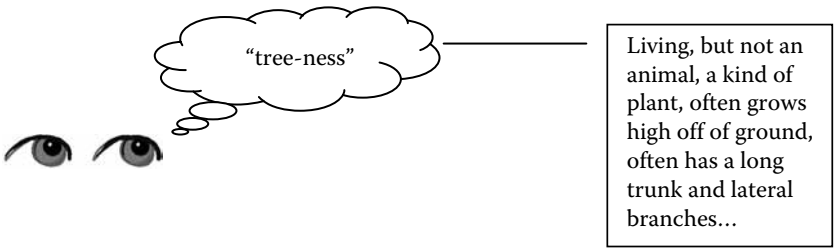
Patterns are important. The most basic patterns that we observe in detail are those that allow comparison and categorization: likeness; difference; repetition; contrast. These patterns are so pervasive to human experience that they function even in the very language that we use.

Let's take something as basic as the word "tree." We would probably agree that no two trees are exactly alike. We would also probably agree that an Oak, and a Spruce, and a Pine, and a Bonsai are not alike, either. Yet all of these things in the world are called, in English, "trees."

Yet how can things that are so different all be called the same thing? When we say or write the word "tree," we often assume that we are referring to those leafy green tall

things out there in the world, even if they do differ from one another. Yet that is not quite accurate.

When one uses the word "tree," one is referring not to those green leafy things in the world, but rather to something called a *concept*. A concept is a category of things in the world. One is not referring to something in the world. Rather, one is referring to a concept of "tree-ness":



Language is made up of concepts because we draw distinctions between things that are alike, and things that are not alike, according to specific, concrete details.

A specific tree fits into our concept of "tree-ness" because it has a lot of important qualities that are alike, even if it has a few that are not alike. These qualities make up categories through which we order our perception of the world, and how we speak of it. "Trees," for example, fit into the larger category of "things that are living."

It is true that "tree-ness" may be like a "rock-ness," because they both may have hard surfaces upon which one could sit. That's a pattern. However, because we care about much more than just potential seats, when trying to make sense of the world, the pattern is just not a very important one.

We tend to pay attention to patterns that are important to us. Patterns form rules, and repetitions, and regularities, Without going too deep down the rabbit hole, one can also think about the following:

- A tree is a plant, but a "plant" is just another concept that includes other things such as bushes, weeds, grasses, vegetables, fruits, etc.
- This means that concepts are both associative—connected—and also placed within a taxonomy (types and subtypes). Thus, one can say: "All trees are plants," but one cannot say: "All plants are trees."
- We can stretch the concept of "tree-ness" into the icon, wherein we draw a tree, and point to the drawing and say: "That's a tree," but it would be a drawing, and not a tree.

- We can stretch the concept of "tree" into analogy, and speak of a "family tree," which is definitely not a plant.

Language is flexible because it is not made of the stuff of the world; it is formed in our heads as systems of patterns and categories that allow us to order what would otherwise be chaotic.

This cluster of similarities and differences becomes a conceptual category to which things in the world either fit ("It's a tree!"), or don't fit ("Oh, it's just a rock"). For as long as a given thing we encounter in the world fits our concept of "tree-ness," then we can accept that the leafy thing (over there) is both completely unique (no tree is like any other tree), and also, at the same time, simply a "tree," just like any other.

To really get to this idea, one could say that any tree in the word is what one could call "lack-full." It is lacking in that no single tree fully lives up to its concept—it would be very difficult to find *The Tree*. Yet even if no tree is The Tree, each tree in the world is also fully described by the concept, because it is not anything *but* a tree.

Without these conceptual patterns, every tall leafy thing we encountered would have to be considered a different thing, and we'd have to come up with a different name for each and every single one. That would be confusing, not to mention time-consuming.

However, we're saved from such a fate because we are already reasoning, analytical beings. We already break things down into their constituent elements, and find patterns within and between those elements (things with bark, leaves, stems, etc.) to organize the world. In other words, analysis is not a skill that we have to learn in school; we acquire it very early.

Thinking, which includes analysis, is an activity in which we engage, whether we are writing, or not. However, writing involves a self-conscious act of analysis. To write is to follow the steps of analysis, in order to recognize those patterns that allow us to draw conclusions about the world. Critical thinking is paying attention to how we do that process.

There are different kinds of analysis, each yielding its own tools for performing the steps, but the general steps are always the same: Ask a question; Gather details; Establish patterns; Draw conclusions. We do this every day. The analytical skill we need, in order to think critically in employing analysis, and write effectively, is the ability to do these steps *on purpose*.

5 FORMALIST ANALYSIS

A formalist analysis can be applied to different questions, but is especially effective in the analysis of visual images, such as: 1) A work of art, or; 2) Visual images combined with text, such as an advertisement, or; 3) Sequential images, such as comics or film. Formalist analysis is a nice way to introduce analysis, because the detail is available in one place: the image at which one is directing one's attention. This area is called the ***visual field***.

DEFINITION

visual field: from visual studies, indicates a two-dimensional area in which elements have been manipulated in order to create a visual effect (e.g.: a painting, a photograph, an advertisement). This should not be confused with **field of vision**, which indicates all that a single hypothetical viewer would be able to see, from a given position.

Because a given visual field is limited, it serves as an easier example for beginning to understand the way that analysis functions.

SAMPLE FORMALIST ANALYSIS

In "The Possibility and Actuality of Visual Arguments," J. Anthony Blair performs a formalist analysis in order to answer the question: "Do Images Argue?" We know that images can be persuasive; what Blair wants to know is if there can be a translation between visual persuasion and formal argumentation in language. In other words: Can the persuasive quality of an image be called an argument if it can be translated into written premises and a conclusion?

As a part of that essay, Blair performs a formalist analysis of an advertisement for a United Colors of Benetton Clothing® advertisement, in light of the question:

> How does this image attempt to persuade its audience?

In dealing with images, there are analytical tools that one can use. A very sophisticated formalist analysis might take into account visual elements such as balance, composition, contrast, depth of field, hue, color, etc. However, one does not have to go so deeply into such specialized knowledge to simply pay attention to the image at which one is looking.

At one point, Blair concentrates his attention upon the visual field of a single advertisement from Benneton Clothing Company®, and begins his analysis of that image.

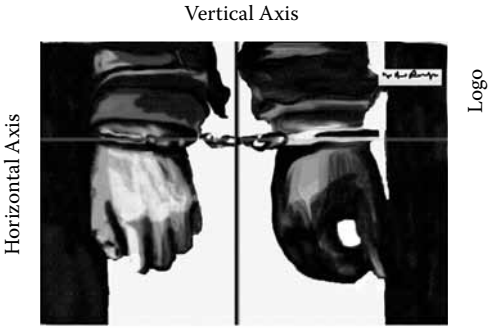


Fig. 3. G. Vallis. Illustration inspired by United Colors of Benetton® advertisement "Handcuffs."

Gather Detail

Blair begins by making a series of "obvious" observations in which he pays sharp attention to the details of the advertisement:

- There are two figures within the advertisement that mirror one another. One could draw a vertical line down the center of this image, and each side would basically match
- By far, the most noticeable difference between these mirrored image is that the one hand in the advertisement is that of a black man, and the other of a white man
- The horizontal element that links the two mirrored images by crossing the center of the visual field is one of handcuffs
- Both men are casually well-dressed in similar clothing

Recognize Patterns/Draws Conclusions:

From gathering detail, Blair notes patterns in relationship to that detail.

Pattern: The black-and-white image emphasizes that the mirrored images are the same in almost all ways, including clothing, stance, positioning of hands, lack of jewelry or other indicator of difference

Conclusion 1: The similarity of the mirrored images indicates that the relationship between the two figures is central to the message of the advertisement

Conclusion 2: A central part of that message is the lack of difference between these two men

Pattern: The lack of difference emphasizes the one important difference: one of the men depicted is black, and the other is depicted as white

Conclusion 3: The message being conveyed regarding the relationship between these two figures is one that both indicates a lack of difference

between these two figures, and emphasizes a single difference, specifically in regard to race

Pattern: The element that links the two mirror images is one of handcuffs

Conclusion 4: Because it links the two mirror images, the handcuffs describe the relationship between these figures

Conclusion 5: Handcuffs carry negative associations such as prison, inability to escape, and oppression. Those associations are meant to describe something about the relationship between these two figures

Pattern: Neither figure is depicted as taking more space within the visual field, or as having control over the handcuffs, or as significantly taller, or in any way dominant over the other

Conclusion 6: The associations that attend the handcuffs apply to both men, equally. This is not something one man is doing to the other, but a relationship in which both are trapped

Conclusion 7: Because the handcuffs indicate both a relationship and powerlessness, the relationship is involuntary, on both sides

This is how Blair not only draws his conclusions, but also supports those conclusions, for the reader, using concrete details from his analysis. In drawing those conclusions, he reassembles the details in order to show what he has found. He identifies the advertisement as one that delivers a series of messages:

- "We are locked together, whites and blacks"
- "There is no escaping our condition together in the country and the world; we are the prisoners of our own prejudices."
- "The identical clothing suggests equality"; "Freedom for either one entails freedom for the other"
- "We are joined together"; "We are prisoners of our attitudes"
- "Racism is unjustified and should be ended" (8)

The conclusions that Blair draws from the detail of the advertisement seem reasonable because anyone looking at the advertisement will see them. They are drawn from paying attention to the details of the obvious.