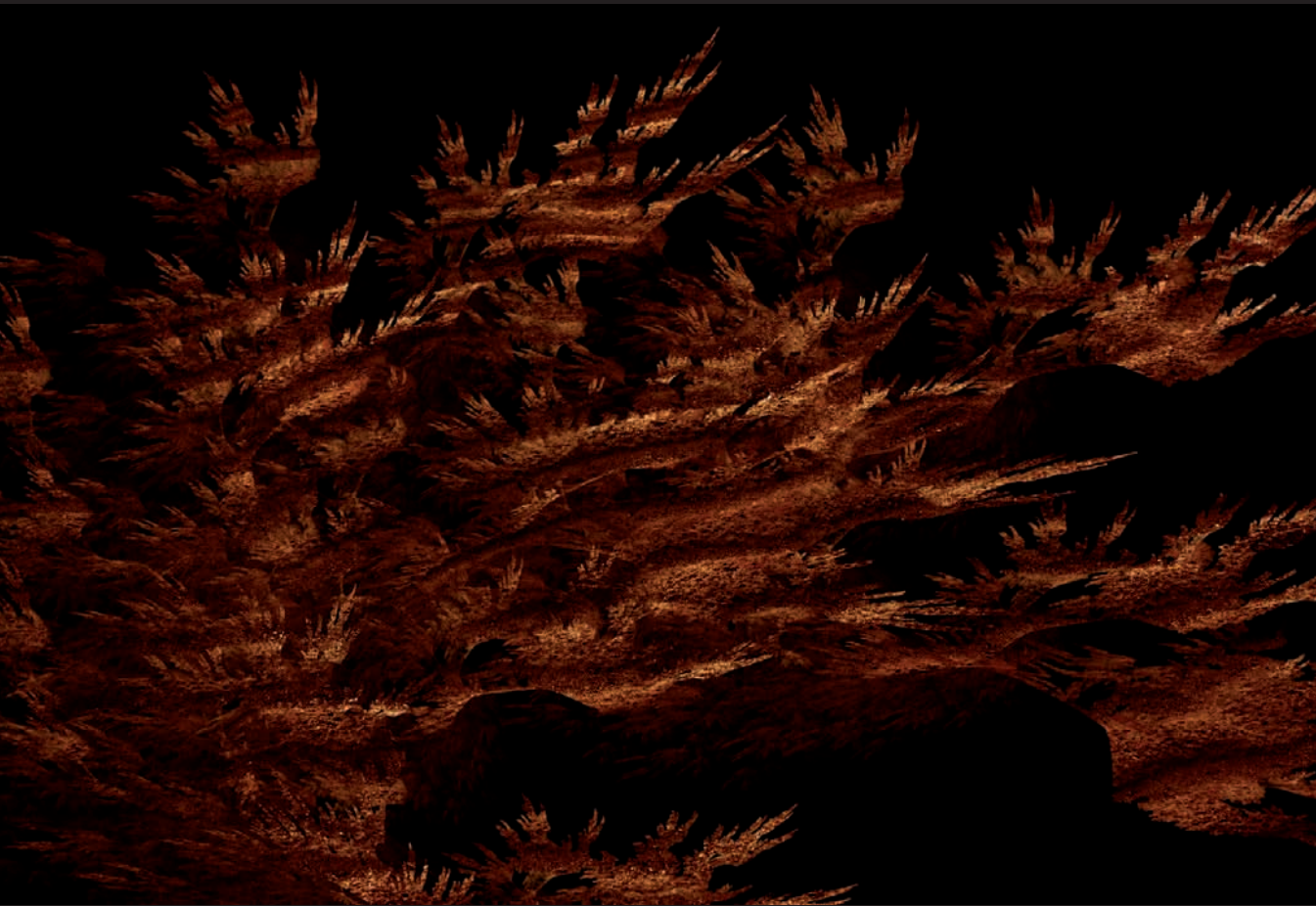# REASON TO WRITE

GINA L. VALLIS

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.

If the image were a piece of art, and not an advertisement, Blair's analysis might end there. However, this is an advertisement, and therefore Blair utilizes a different analytical strategy to continue: a rhetorical analysis.

6 RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

A rhetorical analysis places a given communication within the context of the elements that govern its communication. In rhetoric, there are five basic elements that qualify something as a communication:

A speaker	(one who sends a message)
An audience	(one who receives a message)
A message	(what is being transmitted)
An intention	(the purpose of that transmission)
A vehicle	(the form that message takes)

These elements do not have to be physically present. A speaker of an advertisement could be a corporation. An audience of a billboard on the freeway could be drivers on the road. A speaker is the name for the narrator of a book one is reading, and when one reads that book, one is the audience.

A great deal of information can be gained from rhetorical analysis, because it exposes the underlying ideology of a given communication.

SAMPLE RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Because Blair remains conscious of the rhetorical situation in which this image operates, in the world, he also performs a rhetorical analysis.

If the image that Blair analyzes were a political poster designed to persuade people regarding the importance of ending racism, one would expect to see the following, in a rhetorical analysis:

Speaker:	Group of political activists
Audience:	The general public (i.e.: on a street)

Message:	"Racial prejudice should be ended"
Intention:	To persuade people that racial prejudice should be ended
Vehicle:	A public context (e.g.: a billboard)

However, since the image that Blair analyses is, instead, an advertisement for Benetton Clothing®, one would *expect* to find the following:

Speaker:	United Colors of Benetton Clothing Company®
Audience:	Middle-class consumers
Message:	"Benetton Clothing® is good/fashionable/valuable"
Intention:	To sell Benetton Clothing®
Vehicle:	Various

In his rhetorical analysis, however, Blair does not find either of these to be the case. Instead, he establishes the following:

Speaker:	United Colors of Benetton Clothing Company®
Audience:	Upper middle-class, predominantly white, predominantly liberal, readership of the *New Yorker*, where the advertisement appeared
Message:	"Racial prejudice should be ended"
Intention:	To sell Benetton Clothing®
Vehicle:	Advertisement in a magazine

In performing this analysis, Blair notes important patterns that do not fit, and draws conclusions from those patterns. Thus, he notes the following discrepancies, as a result of that rhetorical analysis:

• The audience is a primarily upper middle-class white liberal readership, which excludes one of the figures depicted within the advertisement

• The intention of the sender (to sell Benetton Clothing®) is fundamentally unrelated to the message ("Racial prejudice should be ended")

Blair returns these analyses to his initial question, which was:

> How does this image attempt to persuade its audience?

His answer is the following:

> They [Benetton the clothing company] supply no [direct] reasons for buying the product or patronizing the company. ...What the ad does is identify Benetton with the self-image of the racial attitudes held by *The New Yorker* reader. ...Benetton is conveying the message, "We share your color-blind ideals, your opposition to racism, and your recognition of the problems facing the ideal of blacks and whites living in harmony, and your desire to see them overcome" (23)

In other words, the advertisement attempts to persuade its audience not by making an argument for some special quality about the clothing, itself, but precisely by avoiding making that argument.

The advertisement appeals to its readership, instead, by creating an association between social values commonly held by that readership, and the product that is being sold, even though the two are not related. That there is no relationship is obvious, but not immediately apparent, unless one analyzes the image in a way that employs critical thinking.

Blair's essay addresses a larger question of the difference between persuasion and argumentation, within visual images. This single reading is a part of his answer to that question. In this way, observations drawn from individual analyses can be organized in such a way as to build a reasonable series of conclusions that lead to an answer to a larger question.

Wherever there is detail, analysis can be performed—in any discipline, with any material. What is requires is recognizing that no detail is unimportant.

7 REVIEW

CHAPTER REVIEW

The information to be taken from this chapter is that there are three important things to remember when performing analysis: slow down; begin with the obvious; do not take anything for granted. Analysis is the primary tool for moving a question to an answer, in academic writing, and not opinion, or misuse of secondary sources to reiterate established knowledge.

Analysis is a process of breaking something down into its constituent parts, and is based upon five specific steps:

Step 1: Ask a question based upon an observation

Step 2: Identify specific instances or samples

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

We do analysis all the time; critical thinking offers specific tools regarding how to do analysis self-consciously, so that one can draw conclusions that are valid.

Although analysis always generally follows these steps, there are specific types of analyses that are especially useful for the analysis of such things as a visual image (formalist analysis) or a communication situation (rhetorical analysis).

VOCABULARY REVIEW

analysis
The act of breaking an object/idea/issue down, into constituent parts, for the purpose of gaining knowledge about that object/idea/issue

defamiliarization effect
From art and literary theory, a moment of sudden insight created by the denaturalization of a common experience or typical way of understanding something

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

GRAMMAR REVIEW

Common Knowledge vs. Specialized Knowledge:

This is a difficult rule to understand, because it depends upon both who is writing, and also to whom one is writing.

A biologist writing an article for a journal of biology, for other biologists to read, would not have to explain the definition of and source for the term *mitochondria*. A sociologist, writing an article for a journal of sociology, would not have to explain the definition of *intergenerational mobility*.

However, a sociologist would have to define *mitochrondria* to his her or audience of other sociologists, and a biologist would have to define *intergenerational mobility* to his or her audience of other biologists, should the terms happen to arise in the article being written.

In an undergraduate paper, written for an undergraduate journal, any specialized term in any given disciplinary field—that is, any term that the common person on the street would not access easily—falls under specialized knowledge, and must be defined, even if the student, and/or students in general, would probably recognize the term.

8 PERFORMING ANALYSIS

On the following pages, you will find:

Step 4: Analysis Guide

Example Analysis Guide

STEP 4: ANALYSIS GUIDE, (OR) HOW TO ROLLER SKATE

Analysis can be messy, so it's best to go ahead and start with paper and a pen, instead of trying to type out your findings, right away.

Step 1: Locate the observation that led to your question

Whether you are aware of it, or not, your question is based upon an observation. In other words, initially you observed something, and wondered why that was so.

> Example: Disney films are for children, but the main characters are young adults. Why?

> Example: The word "ghetto" was once used to be a noun, but now it is used as an adjective. Why?

1. *State your observation, and the question that arose from that observation.*

Step 2: Identify specific instances or samples

In order to perform analysis, one must have material to work with. No question exists in a vacuum. All you need is to find something that can be broken down into its constituent parts, and that, in being broken down, will yield information. If there are a lot of examples, you will need to limit them in a way that makes sense to your question.

> Example: 10 Top Disney Feature Films 1940–2000

> Example: Use of the word "ghetto," from its first usage, through to the present time, and the details of real-world instances, as well as definitions/associations that the word had, then, and that the word has, now. Specific situations of its usage.

2. *Identify the specific instances or samples from which you will draw your analysis.*

Step 3: Gather details from those specifics

On a separate piece of paper, write (don't type) every single detail that you find within those representative samples.

Begin with the five most obvious details

3. *Find at least 15–20 (the more, the better) details, and write them on your piece of paper. If you have too many details, return to step 2 and limit your*

*samples in a logical way that relates to your question. If you cannot find
enough examples, well…look harder.*

Step 4: Identify patterns within those details or data

Patterns describe relationships. Think of this as a game. What is the same about these
details? What is different? Which ones repeat? Which ones don't? Look very, very
closely, and say anything about details that represent any kind of pattern. The kinds
of patterns you find could include, among others:

- similarity
- repetition
- contrast
- exception

- difference
- opposition
- association
- sequence

- disjunction
- causation
- correlation
- group/s

4. *Identify patterns within your details, using any means of creating
   a relationship.*

Step 5: Draw conclusions from those patterns

Once you have established a series of patterns from detail, your next task is to note the
way in which these patterns will begin to suggest categories—what patterns tend to
be dominant within the details, what fits, what doesn't fit, and why. These categories
become conclusions: things that you can say, reasonably, about what you are analyzing,
and become a part of the way that you can offer answers in relationship to your question.

5. *Draw conclusions from the patterns you find, based upon the dominant
   categories they suggest. Note any anomalies—details that don't fit any
   categories. These are often excellent places for insight into your question.*

EXAMPLE ANALYSIS GUIDE

Step 1: Locate the observation that led to your question

For his paper, a student[3] made two important and linked observations: 1) movie posters are required to offer a lot of information to an audience, all at once; 2) the genre of the film—whether it is a romantic film, or a comedy, etc.—is the primary information offered in movie posters.

> Movie posters are primarily designed to give information about the genre of a film to an audience that views the poster. How do movie posters communicate genre to the audience?

Step 2: Identify specific instances or samples

> I will draw my samples from movie posters found online from across four genres: romance; horror; adventure; and comedy. I will limit my samples to the top five films, within those genres, in the previous year.

Step 3: Gather details from those specifics

This student found the following "obvious" details about movie posters:

- Movie posters are released before the film is released
- Movie posters usually consist of both visuals and text
- Movie posters usually consist of more visuals than text
- Movie posters are advertisements for the film
- Movie posters are placed in public spaces, both real and virtual
- Movie posters consistently transmit specific types of information
- The type of information transmitted often depends on the genre
- The information that movie posters transmit is sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit
- Movie titles are poor transmitters regarding the genre of a film. For example, a film titled *Brakeslam* (year) could be a romance, a comedy, a horror film, etc.

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[3] Writing 2. Spring 2008. UCSB.

- The information that all movie posters provide is usually:
  - The genre of the film
  - The studio
  - The director
  - The date of release
  - The title of the film
  - The film rating (e.g.: "R" rating)
- The information that movie posters sometimes provide is:

  The main actor/s

  A "catchphrase" or explanatory line

  The origin of the story (e.g.: a book or "true story")

Step 4: Identify patterns within those details or data

- Certain information is typically provided visually, including genre
- Certain information is typically provided in text, including: Studio; Title of film; Date of release
- Certain information is typically provided both visually and in text, including: main actors
- The way that information is presented is often determined by genre

This student then went on to create a substantial list based upon detail gathered from posters within his samples, drawn from top films, in four genres, over the period of one year.

Step 5: Draw conclusions from those patterns

The following is an incomplete list of what this student found, which he offered accompanied by visuals of film posters that he imbedded into the body of his paper:

Since genre is typically provided visually, genres fall into specific patterns, leading to the following conclusions:

Romance:

- Two main characters tended to be visually dominant, with faces the largest, often cut off at shoulders or waist, although sometimes full body depictions.

- Two main characters are often in physical contact, or in a position indicating the initial nature of their relationship (e.g.: antagonistic)
- Male tends to be higher in visual field than female.
- Third figure may be present, if it is a "love triangle" story.
- Other visual elements tend to be minimal, with second most typical visual element being setting (office, beach, etc.).
- Often includes catchphrase that highlights main dilemma.

Horror:

- Most likely to have no fully represented human figure present
- Any depiction of visible full-body human is usually in shadow or masked
- Least explicitly informative, most implicit
- Very typical to offer a single body part either entering visual field (an arm, etc.), or filling substantial portion of visual field.
- Body part (arm, leg, and often eye) is often mixed with other imagery implying violence to the body, such as wires, knives, etc.
- Least likely to include informative text.
- Often has catchphrase that offers a direct address to the viewer, sometimes in the form of a threatening invitation.
- More likely to have a minimalist background.
- Rarely includes supplementary visuals.

After establishing these details across all four genres, primarily visually, and often according to implicit cues that the audience has learned to expect, this student then examined posters that "didn't fit" the dominant categories of his analysis.

This part of his analysis included hybrid genres (e.g.: a romantic-comedy), as well as crossovers; films that seemed like they should be in one genre, but that contained visual cues that indicated that they were in another genre.

In this way, this student was able to establish that while a film such as *Twilight* (2008) could be considered a part of the horror genre, since it depicts supernatural creatures traditionally a part of that genre (i.e.: vampires and werewolves), his analysis suggested that it is visually depicted, in film posters, as a part of the romance genre—which it is.