

An Interdisciplinary Approach: Writing Centers Turning Towards the Field of Art History to Explain Analytical Writing

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How can writing centers help students learn how to write analytically?

Methods

Observations

- 1) I observed working in a writing center that students tend to struggle with too many quotes and minimal analysis or lack of context due to the fear of summary
- 2) I learned how to write analytically from the field of art history
- 3) I questioned how I could help students understand what analysis is

Academic Research

- 1) I researched analytical writing: Writing analytically is defined as the ability to interpret and evaluate texts, construct logical arguments based on substantive claims, and marshal appropriate evidence in support of these claims
- 2) I researched art historical approaches to analysis and focused on Erwin Panofsky's approach due to its framework approach to analysis

Panofsky's Approach Used in Writing Centers

Pre-Iconographic approach in writing centers:

Restating the Quote

- A necessary step if the quote is from another time period, is niche or complicated, etc.
- This step clarifies the quote to a general audience

Iconographic approach in writing centers:

Recognizable Features

- Includes knowledge already presented in the work
- This step ensures the quote makes sense in the context of the paper
- Allows the quote to have substance outside the quote itself

Iconological approach in writing centers: Writer's Argument

- Connects the quote to the argument
- Emphasizes how the quote supports the writer's argument
- This step allows the quote to become the support for the author and their claims rather than the use of the quote being the central part of the paper

Paragraph Example

While Huxley doesn't outright claim the similarities between this dystopian society and the system of Christianity, similarities can be drawn through John and our three characters Lenina, Bernard, and Helmholtz. During John's conversation with the controller he says, "But isn't it natural to feel that there is a God?", and the controller responds, "People believe in God because they have been conditioned to believe in God" (Huxley, 180). Just as John feels it's innate to believe in God because he was raised in a society where people believed in God, Lenina was raised in a society where it was innate for her to want to be a Beta and not an Epsilon. As Bernard responded to a statement that Lenina said about not wanting to be an Epsilon, "And if you were Epsilon... your conditioning would have made you no less thankful you weren't a Beta or Alpha" (Huxley, 58). Both John and Lenina were conditioned to believe what best suited the societies they grew up in.

Panofsky's Approach

- **Pre-Iconographic analysis:** Basic formal analysis that eliminates references to outside sources. Describes subject, line, color, etc.
- **Iconographic analysis:** The recognizability of the subject matter of the story; socially recognizable features in the work
- **Iconological analysis:** Considers the context in which the work was created including the artists, patron, cultural style, etc. and how those factors influence the meaning of the work

Explanation

Pre-iconographic:

- Tree in the foreground, a town in the middle ground, and rolling hills in the background
- All the strokes in the painting are done with short hashed looking lines
- The yellow stars in the blue sky dominate most of the composition

Iconographic Analysis:

- The characteristic brushstrokes and the emphasis of the dominating sky implies this is The Starry Night by Van Gogh

Iconological Analysis:

- Researching the date this was made (1889) and the artist, one would learn this piece was painted during Van Gogh's stay at an insane asylum after he admitted himself due to a mental breakdown
- This painting holds more meaning than just being a starry night but represents the difficulties Van Gogh faced navigating his mental illness at the insane asylum

Painting Example



Applications

How can tutors help students understand where they can improve in analysis?

1) Lack of analysis due to the overuse of quotes

- Establish the student's argument for the paper
- Discuss reasoning for a specific quote
 - How does it connect with the student's argument?
- Most times the student knows why they chose a quote, they just don't have it written down
- This step can be resolved using the iconological step

2) Lack of context due to the fear of summary

- Students have fears of summary due to professors emphasizing minimal summary evolving into some having no context at all
- This can cause many issues including confusing and unclear arguments
- Use iconographic approach to show why summary for context's sake is necessary and how it is not the same as summary for summary's sake

Concerns

Concern 1: Students will lose their individual writing style if they all use the same schema

- Each student interprets the same quotes differently therefore saying something unique each time
- Discursive elements appear in people's writing whether intentional or not
- Panofsky's approach allows students to create clear, coherent, and well thought out ideas without erasing their voice

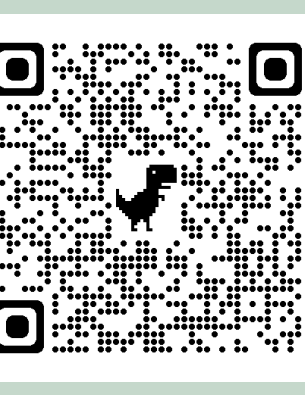
Concern 2: A student's papers will become formulaic in itself

- Not all quotes need three sentences each paralleling the three levels of analysis
- The schema is flexible, fitting to the needs of the student and paper
- This is a framework allowing students to breakdown and understand the evidence they chose

Significance

Writing centers utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to explain analysis allows students a new perspective in learning to write analytically. A framework, such as Panofsky's Approach to Analysis, provided to students at writing centers serves many functions:

- It allows the students to understand which elements of analysis they struggle at and then how to strengthen those areas
- It allows them to find their voice in their papers
- It gives the students a resource so they can practice analytical writing on their own



Contact Information