

An Introduction to Informational Textual Analysis: Read as a Reader, *not* as a Teacher

If textual analysis is a new skill, or one that has not been practiced regularly, consider this guide as a way to get started analyzing expository texts (e.g., traditional speeches, arguments, historical documents, primary source documents, essays, newspaper/magazine articles, and advertisements). This process will help guide your instructional decision-making while strengthening your understanding about the text(s) you wish to teach.

Literal: Questions for readers new to expository textual analysis. These questions are intended to deepen a surface-level understanding of an expository text.

Evaluative: Questions for readers who feel comfortable analyzing key ideas and details and want to begin understanding the author's craft and structure.

Metaphorical: Questions for readers who are ready to deconstruct the subtle nuances of text and evaluate the author's choices in the text as a whole as well as the impact the text has on the audience.

Readers do not have to stick with one level at a time; in fact, readers adept at textual analysis should maneuver between all levels, depending on the text. Like students, adept readers also mark the text as they are reading, jotting down new ideas and gathering textual support. Readers may also want to develop new questions that stem from those listed below, or even branch out to construct completely new ones of their own. Reader questions are best developed when anchored by: What does the author claim (literal)? Why does the author make the claim (evaluative)? What does the claim mean (metaphorical)?

Literal	Questions to Ask Yourself as You Analyze the Text (NOT FOR STUDENTS)
Consider the audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To whom is the author writing? How do you know? • What does your knowledge about the audience tell you about the piece as a whole?
Consider the key individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the key individuals in the text? How do you know? • How does the author make connections among and distinctions between key individuals?
Consider the key events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are key events addressed or written about? Why were these key events?
Consider the key ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the topic? • What is the author's key idea(s)? How do you know?
Consider the author's claim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the author's stance? What does the author claim? • What support does the author have for his/her claim? • What is the overall argument, in one sentence? What does the author want the audience to believe? • Does the author address and define a counterclaim? What impact does addressing the counterclaim have on the piece?
Evaluative	Questions to Ask Yourself as You Analyze the Text (NOT FOR STUDENTS)
Consider the figurative language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do you notice literal and extended metaphors/similes? What do they mean? Evaluate the impact of the metaphor on the piece as a whole. Why would the author include a metaphor? • Where do you notice personification? Is the personification extended or short?

	<p>Why would the author include personification? What impact does the personification have on the piece?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the author include imagery? Why would the author include imagery at this point in the expository piece? What impact does the imagery have on the piece? Do you understand the claim, topic, or stance better because of the imagery used?
Consider the word choice and connotation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the author's word choice? What is the connotation of his words and phrases? • Does the author use words with strong connotation? Where are they? Words with a weaker connotation? Where are they? What impact do those words have on the piece? • Is there dialect? If so, why did the author choose to include it? • Does the author maintain a formal or informal speech? Why would the author choose to maintain formality or informality? What impact do the levels of formality have on the piece?
Consider the length of paragraphs and sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the author have a mix of longer and shorter paragraphs, or are they about the same? What impact does paragraph length have on the piece? • Does the author have a mix of longer and shorter sentences, or are they about the same? What impact does sentence length have on the piece?
Consider connections to other texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the ideas in this text remind you of another text, either narrative or expository? What connections can you make? Does this text deepen your understanding of the other text, or does the other text deepen your understanding of the narrative you are currently reading?
Consider the audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To whom is the author writing? How do you know? How does your knowledge of the audience impact your understanding of the piece? • Are you the intended audience? If so, how does the author speak to you? If not, what questions do you have and do you feel disconnected?
Consider the historical, social, or economic impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the context of the expository piece? When was the piece written? • Whom in society does the expository revere, ignore, or put down? Does the text glorify the wealthy, famous and proud, or the powerless and oppressed? How does the glorification of specific groups impact your understanding of the text? • Does the text make the reader feel content about the world, or does the text make the reader want to alter, fix, or change the world?
Consider the structure of the text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What comes first? What comes after? How is it built? Does the narrative follow a sequential time-line, a logical sequence, a problem-solution-resolution? How are chapters divided? How is the message arranged? • What does the structure reveal about the author's overall message?
Consider the use of Rhetoric and Rhetorical Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the author employ any use of rhetorical strategies (e.g., ambiguity, analogy, anaphora, annotations, anecdotes, bandwagon appeals, caricatures, parallelism)? How do the rhetorical strategies strengthen the author's argument? • Does the author appeal to the reader's logos, pathos, or ethos? How? What impact do such appeals have on the piece and the reader?
Consider the syntax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the punctuation: Does the author mix internal punctuation like semicolons, colons, and commas? Where do the punctuation marks appear? Are they visual clues that lead the reader to a deeper understanding of the text? • Does the author intrude with the use of asides or parenthetical interruptions? What impact does the author's intrusion have on the piece? • Does the author use headings and subheadings? What impact do the headings and subheadings have on the piece?

Consider how the author creates specific effects, like humor, irony, or suspense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the author go out of his way to create humor, suspense, irony, or fear? What is the topic? Why would the author go through grave lengths to create a certain response for a certain topic? • Does the response clash with the topic (e.g., humor at a funeral) or give extended support for the topic (e.g., humor at a carnival)?
Consider the fluidity of the text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the piece fluid or choppy? Why would the author write a choppy piece? What impact does the fluidity of the piece have on the story?
Metaphorical	Questions to Ask Yourself as You Analyze the Text (NOT FOR STUDENTS)
Consider connections across the piece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a recurring motif, symbol or abstract idea? (e.g., think of President Obama's "Yes We Can") In what context does it show up? Does the recurring idea mean the same throughout the piece, or does the meaning change depending on the context? • Does the beginning of the piece lead any insight to the middle or the end? • Does the end of the piece circle back to the beginning? What impact does circling back have on the narrative? • Evaluate the author's decision to include ideas or symbols across the piece.
Consider connections between pieces (allusion) or to the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any biblical allusions? Are the allusions clear and direct, or are the obscure and abstract? Why would the author allude to the bible? How does the allusion alter, change, impact, or deepen the message? • Are there any other cultural or historical allusions? Evaluate the impact of the allusions on the piece.