

A method for analysis (“The Method”)

Here is a basic method for developing an analysis that moves beyond summary.

1. Notice and focus:

- 1.a. List as many interesting, significant, revealing, or strange details about the text as possible. Remember that even small details can be useful as evidence in analysis.
- 2.a. Choose the three details that you think are most important for understanding the text.
- 3.a. Explain why these three details struck you as the most interesting, significant, revealing, or strange. Ask how these details contribute to your impression of the text as a whole, or how the details relate to each other. Pointing out relations/comparisons/differences is analysis.

2. Find patterns of repetition and contrast:

- 2.a. List **repetitions**—details or words that repeat and write the number of times you see the repetition for each.
- 2.b. List **strands**. Strands are groupings of similar details or words. You should be able to explain the strand’s logic if you list it as a strand—what holds it together?
 - For example, noise/shrieking tone/piercing tone/ugly sound/wail. That is a strand of similar adjectives and/or similar nouns.
- 2.c. List **organizing contrasts** (for example, open/closed, black/white, masculine/feminine, inside/outside, present/remote, self/you). These are also called “binaries.”
 - Binary oppositions are sites of uncertainty, places where there is struggle among different points of view. Finding binaries can help you find what is at stake (for the author and the audience) in the text.
 - In analysis, think critically about binaries and imagine ways to refine and reformulate them as something more complex than either/or. Look for clues that the author is also writing the binary as more complex than it seems at first glance.
- 2.d. Select and list the **two most significant** repetitions, the **two most significant** strands, and the **two most significant** contrasts.
 - The formulation of primary repetitions, strands, or contrasts can reveal what the text (and the text’s author) is about and interested in. This exercise often leads to a next step: what the text (and the author) is worried about or trying to resolve.
- 2.e. Select **one** repetition, **one** strand, or **one** binary that you take to be the most significant for arriving at ideas about what the text communicates. Explain your choice; this explanation might become a thesis statement.

3. Find anomalies:

- 3.a. After you have produced your three lists, selected the most important repetition/strand/contrast from each, and written a paragraph explaining your ranking, look for details that don’t seem to fit any pattern. Find anything that stands out or anything you noticed but couldn’t list as a repetition/strand/binary above. Anomalies—while they can be annoying—are important because noticing them often leads to new and better ideas.
- 3.b. Also look for anything that is *missing*. What does the text leave out or omit, and what are the implications of this omission? Obvious or subtle omissions can open up huge doors for your own analysis.

This is an exercise that develops focused analysis using one representative example.

In the conventional 5-paragraph essay, we generalize in the introduction and then provide lots of (well, three) specific examples or reasons to support our claim. Then we write a conclusion that generalizes, like the introduction did. That's 1 on 10. You are making the same point over and over, but using different examples. Another way to think about analysis is 10 on 1. Start with one representative issue or example (a passage or stanza, for instance) and then make ten different observations or points about it. The goal of this method is to open up your thinking and be surprised/surprising, rather than close down your thinking and be predictable by repeating the same point. This exercise can help generate ideas get you thinking analytically.

What is the 1?

- A representative example, or what you have narrowed your focus to. In our class, it would be a passage or perhaps a stanza of poetry.
- Select the 1 by looking for repetitions and patterns using The Method (see reverse side). Select a passage that seems to be a good example of a particular instance of the pattern. Or, select a passage you highlighted and marked as important.
- You are taking one part of the whole, putting it under a microscope, and generalizing about the whole based on the part.

What is the 10?

- The 10 are observations and interpretive points you make about the 1.
- When the 1 is a passage from a literary text, here are some strategies for thinking of 10 things to say about it:
 - Look at the example and ask what you notice. *What else* do you notice? What does that imply? *What else* does it imply?
 - Use The Method.
 - Locate anomalies and query them.
 - Locate, name, and reformulate binaries.
 - Imagine "what form would x take or what would x look like in today's culture?"
 - Try "it seems to be about x, but it's also about y."
 - Paraphrase (i.e. rewrite in your own words) the example passage three times.
 - Uncover hidden assumptions or implications in the example passage.
 - Repeatedly ask "so what?" about your observations.
 - Seek out conflicting evidence or critical interpretations. These may initially confuse you, but eventually you will come to clarify your own stance, making it stronger in light of the contradictory evidence.
- 10 is an arbitrary number. The goal is to push yourself past the point when your thinking starts to fizzle. So if finding 5 things to say about a passage is comfortable, get a little crazy and find 5 more things to say. You never know what you will discover.