

“How to write a multimodal analysis”

What are the goals of the document?

The document is intended for university students of a basic studies level course on academic writing in English. Students learn about multimodality in class and are then asked to write an analytical essay. This how-to text includes the writing instructions.

The instructions were written for a course booklet and follow its style guide. Although it is tempting to make revisions to it, I have decided to feature the text here as I wrote it for the actual course booklet.

Why this document?

This document shows my ability to consider the reader’s needs and adapt my writing to a specific context. What do the students need to know to write their essay? What types of questions might they have? I tried to consider as many of these aspects as possible, as concisely as I could.

What challenges did I face?

Analytical essays had not been written in this course before, so I really needed to put myself in the reader’s shoes and consider what they would need to know to complete the task.

What skills (besides writing) did I need to employ?

Research skills and previous knowledge in multimodality. Experience in knowing my target audience and their needs and applying this information to my writing. Adapting structures that were previously familiar to students into a new context.

HOW TO WRITE A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

THE PURPOSE of an analytical text is to describe and explain your interpretations.

IT UTILIZES analytical tools (methods) and frameworks that allow you to go into detail in your analysis and lend credibility to it.

IT TAKES AN INTERPRETATIVE STAND. Providing an analysis means offering an (educated) opinion about a *text's* meanings in its context. Your reader will understand your perspective if you:

- describe and justify your analytical interpretations clearly in the text (including relevant examples);
- propose what your interpretations suggest about the text, its goals, and its contextual meaning or importance.

THE TONE is neutral and controlled: be objective, logical, and respectful.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

- Assume your reader does not immediately perceive things similarly to you.
- Assume your reader is as intelligent as you.

Selecting your topic is an important step to ensure that on one hand, you can go into detail in your analysis, and on the other, there is enough material to discuss. If your text is especially rich with multimodal material, it is advisable to narrow down your topic instead of mechanically listing details without any space left for discussing their combined meanings. Consequently, the first step is to select and potentially narrow down your topic and examine which aspects of it are most relevant to discuss.

Some suggested texts for analysis might include:

- 2-3 multimodal images and their comparison
- A short Tiktok video, movie trailer, or music video
- A website's front page
- A chapter in a language textbook
- A cutscene in a video game, or a short gameplay segment, like a tutorial

To summarize a **step-by-step guide**:

1) Select your text (object of analysis). Keep it relatively small and simple to also keep your workload reasonable.

- 2) Choose the analytical tools/methods/resources to use. For example, does it make sense to focus on the visuals and make use of tools for image analysis?
- 3) Make detailed notes of the text's modes and the text's context.
- 4) Write your analysis, using the terminology from the course materials. Include examples!

Your analysis should be written in such a way that a reader who, for example, has not seen the video can still follow your argumentation. Provide descriptions of the text when relevant. If your analysis includes images, please submit them with your paper. Screenshots can be included of videos or even websites (but use 4 at maximum).

In terms of a formal tone, citation style, expected length, and other writing guidelines, follow the same instructions as for the expository paper.

For a list of references on tools for multimodal analysis, please refer to the lecture materials.

PLAN OF A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

1. INTRODUCTION: introduce the topic of your analysis

- i. Give definitions and describe the context of the text you have chosen for analysis.
- ii. Write a clear Thesis Statement: Finnish writers should note that the Thesis Statement comes at the end of the introduction.

2. ANALYSIS AND SUPPORT

- i. Factual support (especially in the form of analytical frameworks and toolkits); remember to cite the resources that you use. Your own interpretations outside formal frameworks can also be used if they clearly and credibly support the analysis, especially when you discuss what the combination of different modes or elements suggests.
- ii. The analysis should proceed in a logical order, from one category to another and from general observations to more specific ones.
- iii. When there is room for different interpretations, remember to discuss these in connection with your own.
 - i. Hedging and modality to express analysis at different levels of certainty (*might, could, can; seem, appear, suggest...*)

- iv. NOTE: in social science research it is generally inappropriate to claim you have 'proven' something. Instead use terms like "The evidence suggests...", "The data indicate...".

3. CONCLUSION

- i. Should logically follow from the analytical points
- ii. Combined, what do the details presented in the analysis suggest about the analysed text and the context in which it was produced and consumed?