



Visual Analysis Essay

Before writing a Visual Analysis essay, students ought to review and be familiar with the UWC's *Toulmin Analysis* handout and all the related material in their textbooks. Knowing how to write a general analysis is crucial when applying analysis to a visual subject. As with other types of analysis essays, identifying the main message or claim being presented within the subject ought to be the first step. For this handout, consider the image below as a hypothetical subject.



PROCEDURE:

Step 1: Identify the claim or issue being presented by the image (see example image above).

Ex. This painting identifies the various emotions that Jesus' disciples experienced the night before His crucifixion.

Step 2: Explain how the content supports the claim.

Ex. The man to Jesus' immediate left appears relaxed because his eyes are closed, while the man on his right is holding out his arms in a confused and confounded manner.

Step 3: Identify icons and symbols. This is where the supporting content is dissected in closer detail.

Ex. The crowdedness of the room symbolizes the emotional discomfort felt by the disciples.

Step 4: Discuss the emotional and mental responses incurred within the viewer.

Ex. The tense and emotionally varied atmosphere upon the painted faces elicits curiosity and awe from the observer who may speculate about the exact context of the scene.

Step 5: Research the context of the work being analyzed to provide further insight to the reader.

Ex: Most people think that this painting is intended to capture the moment after Jesus revealed that one of his disciples would betray him. Knowing this, the dramatic body language of the subjects is warranted.

WRITING PROCESS:

Introduction: Briefly describe the subject being analyzed. General information about the creator and the significance of the piece should be mentioned, including birth and death of the creator and relevant details concerning the time period. At the end of the introduction, include a bold thesis statement. For more information on creating a thesis statement, see the UWC’s “[Writing a Thesis](#)” handout.

Body Paragraphs: Each question answered in the five steps listed above should be thoroughly described within their own body paragraph. Arrange the paragraphs in the order that the steps are listed. In other words, the first paragraph should describe the question answered in step one, the second paragraph should describe the question answered in step two and so on. Make sure that each paragraph contains a topic sentence that summarizes and introduces the question being addressed or answered. For more information on creating a topic sentence, see the UWC’s “[Topic Sentences](#)” handout.

Conclusion: A conclusion should mirror the introduction and reiterate the thesis, *but not word for word*. Re-state the thesis differently than it was stated in the introduction. Summarize the information covered within the essay using a few sentences. Remember, a conclusion paragraph should *not mention any new information that was not addressed within the essay*. For more information on creating a conclusion, see the UWC’s “[Writing a Conclusion](#)” handout.

“The Last Supper” analyzed within the examples:

Wikimedia Commons, “File: Giampietrino-Last-Supper-ca-1520.jpg.” *Wikimedia Commons*, 2014.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giampietrino-Last-Supper-ca-1520.jpg>