

OPTIC STRATEGY FOR VISUAL ANALYSIS

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Curtis Newbold

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O-P-T-I-C STRATEGY FOR VISUAL ANALYSIS

The OPTIC Strategy for Visual Analysis is a simple method of rhetorical criticism designed to help with the process of analyzing visuals. OPTIC is an acronym, standing for Overview, Parts, Title, Interrelationship, and Conclusion. By following the five steps of the OPTIC strategy, you can take nearly any visual artifact (like a poster, painting, advertisement, video clip, cartoon, and so forth) and develop a good sense for what the visual was intending to portray and how effective it may be in portraying it. See the graphic here, or read the description in larger text below.

OPTIC

STRATEGY FOR VISUAL ANALYSIS

The OPTIC Strategy is a 5-step method used to analyze visuals of all kinds, ranging from fine art paintings to photographs to graphic design to advertisements and even to charts and graphs. Follow the steps below to effectively analyze what's happening rhetorically in the visual you're reviewing.

OVERVIEW

STEP 1: SUMMARIZE THE OVERALL CONCEPT. Explain the visual in just enough detail to provide the overall gist of the image; imagine describing the image to someone who cannot see it.

EXAMPLE Van Gogh's THE STARRY NIGHT depicts a town at night, with what appears to be a church as the central building, with a starry sky and rolling hills in the background.



PARTS

STEP 2: DESCRIBE THE PARTS. Identify the visual elements that make up the entire composition. Consider the identifiable objects in the piece (such as buildings, shapes, icons, people, and so forth) as well as more abstract visual elements, like colors, textures, typefaces, organizational layout, groupings, patterns, and so forth. **EXAMPLE:** A Dark, curving tree near the front of the image. Rolling blue hills in the distance. A grouping of buildings at the lower region of the image, depicting a village surrounding a large church with steeple. Yellow, circular and abstract stars in the sky. The dark and blue colors are prominent with accents in yellow to highlight light. Eerie, abstract swirl design and texture throughout.

TITLE

STEP 3: EXPLAIN THE TITLE & CREATOR. Use the name of the piece and describe the creator/artist to analyze the message the artist may have been trying to convey. Understanding the title and author can provide clarity, historical context, and meaning to a piece. **EXAMPLE:** Vincent van Gogh, who painted THE STARRY NIGHT in 1889, painted this image from a lunatic asylum where he was self-admitted. THE STARRY NIGHT is one of 21 paintings van Gogh painted while looking out his barred windows; the image depicts one of many different ways in which van Gogh may have perceived the world.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS

STEP 4: EXPLAIN HOW THE PARTS RELATE TO THE WHOLE. Look at the items in the visual holistically; that is to say, see how all of the combined elements together make for interesting meanings. How do the colors, buildings, shapes, locations, and so forth combine to make for an interesting communication and reading? **EXAMPLE:** The abstract composition with the uneven and swirling lines amidst a dark scene interestingly contrast against the brightness of the yellow stars and shining lights below.

CONCLUSION

STEP 5: CONCLUDE WITH A STRONG ANALYSIS. Now that you've described the many pieces of the visual, you're in position to make interesting claims about the visual as an entire composition. Provide an analysis that gives insight into what the painting may be trying to portray. **EXAMPLE:** Vincent van Gogh's THE STARRY NIGHT positions us, the viewer, inside his confined world within an asylum. We see his perspective of a world where he once lived, through a lens void of the bars in the windows through which he saw. THE STARRY NIGHT provides glimpses of hope amongst an otherwise dreary and somewhat ominous world, a world that is constantly seeking peace amidst uncertainty and despair.

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