

Analyze Anything by Greg Fraser and Chad Davidson

In discussing the varying levels of complexity inherent in signs, Fraser and Davidson explain that “layers of significance shift and multiply depending on the cultural and historical contexts in which they appear. In fact, whole cultures themselves can be viewed as extraordinarily complicated and ever-shifting systems of signs. Some contemporary theorists go so far as to suggest that, when it comes right down to it, *everything* is a sign, because everything exists within a meaning-making system of some kind. Nothing, in other words, floats free from the realm of signs that lend significance to our social practice and individual lives” (3).

Conspicuous signs are found primarily in advertisements, films, television, and literature (3). (Signs are more readily available within the aforementioned texts because of their inherent artificiality. Each text has individuals purposely incorporating content and context that then inform the viewer’s conscious or unconscious interpretation of meaning.)

According to semiotics, Davidson and Fraser explain, “meanings are not inherent in, or intrinsically connected to, signs themselves. Instead, meanings are relational, situational. What surrounds the sign defines it, and the sign defines what it surrounds” (7).

Semiotics suggest that “all meaning emerges [...] through relationships between signs. [...] [M]eaning is more of a process, an action, a consequence of signs in context” (8).

A sign, explains Davidson and Fraser, is a “cultural indicator that not only relies on other indicators for identity and meaning, but that also carries ideological baggage. It communicates political, moral, and ethical suggestions” (8).

During the evaluation phase of sign selection, Davidson and Fraser advise that student’s “create careful inventories of textual elements that arouse curiosity and give the reader pause. Such a catalog of semiotic markers invariably leads to deeper understanding of the texts under examination, and also sets the stage for effective sign selection” (27). (A constructive avenue of sign selection and evidence gathering might benefit from the incorporation of Dr. Master’s Mountain of Notes.)

Two avenues of writing with the *Analyze Anything* method is the “Five-Idea Structure for Five-Idea” essay (161) or the “Single-Thesis Structure” essay (162). The “Five-Idea Structure” includes staging, five idea-illustration-interpretation examples, and a conclusion; whereas the “Single-Thesis Structure” includes staging, framing, the idea (or overarching thesis), five examples of illustration-interpretation, and a conclusion.

Glossary for *Analyze Anything*

Sign: They are traditionally a tangible artifact that highlights the artifice inherent in a specific texts that contains a multiplicity of avenues of study. Signs should contain multiple meanings, invite strong interpretations, and pique the reader’s interest (22).

Signal: Interpreted meaning of the sign that the paper focuses on and argues.

Significance: Essentially the “So what?” portion of the thesis.

Picking a Sign

Ladder of Specificity (pp. 20-23): Each step or rung is adding another level of specificity during the creation of an argument. The point is to continue to climb until reaching a subject that is arguable for the length of the student's assignment.

Scrutiny of Sign (pp. 23-28): Playing and pulling apart the sign/subject of study to begin deciphering possible meanings; it necessitates "slowing down and reading attentively" (26).

V.O.I.C.E. Test (pp.44-48): The test verifies the effectiveness of a sign through the following steps: Visibility, Originality, Import, Complexity, and Energy.

Questioning, Staging, and the Generating of Ideas

Driving Theoretical Questions (pp. 52-65): The questions are meant to help derive the meaning(s) and importance of the sign: "An effective group of theoretical questions focuses on *one* unique phenomenon and helps the analyst approach it from a *variety* of interpretive angles" (54-5). Practical questions help to "pin down the specifics of [the] sign within the text or cultural setting" (56). The questions also enable students to develop an academic distance from the sign/subject of their assignment.

Staging (pp.65-73): Staging enables the writer to situate the sign within its cultural and/or historical context, while incorporating and addressing the driving theoretical questions: "[The student] can spotlight [the] sign like the star of a drama, situate it within a specific place and time, and pose a curious interpretive problem or puzzle associated with the phenomenon" (65).

Semiotic Iceberg (pp. 81-84): An illustration of the need to delve deep when exploring a sign, because the larger significance is what the paper should be relying to the reading audience: "What lies above the waterline (the sign that is apparent in literature or culture) turns out to be a tiny piece of an invisible mass of significance. The visible sign [...] is just the tips of the iceberg" (81).

Framing (pp. 110-18): Situates and explores the sign within context, which helps to position the sign and guide to "potentially relevant paths of research" (110).

Researching and Building Essays

Three-"I"ed Monster (pp. 125-34): The three "I"s stand for Idea, Illustration, and Interpretation. The steps for utilizing the Three-"I"ed Monster are as follows: "After declaring the idea in the first sentence (and then restating it in the second), the response quickly moves to illustrations: examples, proof, evidence to buttress the idea. The second paragraph then devotes itself to interpretation" (127).

K.S.A.: Key Skill Assignment, which is the process work for First-Year Writing classes utilizing the *Analyze Anything* method.