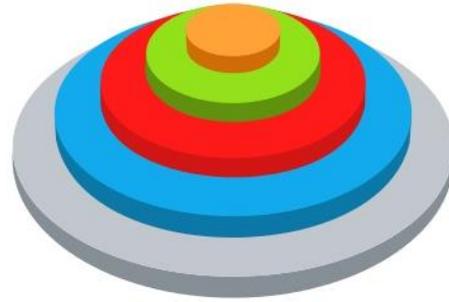


Practical Guide on How to Perform a Textual Analysis and Transform Analytical Thought into a Well-Crafted Written Composition about Literature

Authors are artists and literature is art. While they don't use paint brushes or charcoal pencils to depict and connect ideas and images, one can decode and decipher their written passages in a manner that reveals the multivalence of text. The multiple reading levels of analysis can then be transformed into a single paragraph.



→ **1st Reading Level:** the straightforward details of the plot and context; also you can sometimes find information in the way that words are visually arranged on the page (author intent)



→ **2nd Reading Level:** the meaning found in the plot and context, and also the non-literal information embedded in the artistry of author 'tricks', such as connotation, imagery, symbol, metaphor, and any of the many literary and language devices (author intent)



→ **3rd Reading Level:** the connections found among significant quotations within a single text as you 'build a case' for comprehending and interpreting the complexity of a text's major concepts; additionally, this level is about the connections found among multiple texts as they 'talk' to one another (reader intent)



→ **4th Reading Level:** the connections found when a text or group of texts is subject to your interpretation according to the principles and concepts found outside of the text; this is the use of literary theory or historical analysis or gender studies, or any of the many possible well-established 'lenses' through which you can view text(s) (reader intent)

SAMPLE NOTES USING THE FOUR READING LEVELS

Quotation: “Who’s there?”(1.1.1) – from *Hamlet*



→ **1st Reading Level:** This is the first line of the play and it is a question in response to a sound or a feeling that is not written into the text, which we are calling “Act Zero”; Bernardo, the guard, is standing on top of the castle walls having previously seen a ghost two nights in a row; he is also fearful because Denmark is busy preparing for an attack from Norway (author intent)



→ **2nd Reading Level:** Bernardo shows both fear and courage in his question; he has to defend and attack at once; he also shows that he believes that the ghost is a who to be named and not ignored; is the disturbance from the ghost again or a Norwegian soldier? (author intent)



→ **3rd Reading Level:** This question connects to other moments in the play where Prince Hamlet creates a variety of “who’s” in Castle Elsinore; the “antic disposition” that Hamlet puts on is the single most important line displaying his intent to pretend to be in madness and act unlike himself; also, as the theme of spying is built throughout the play, this first line could easily connect to many instances of wondering whether or not one is being watched; one could further argue that this question of who is related to the question of Godot (in *Waiting For Godot*) and who is he, if he indeed is, since he never shows up (reader intent)



→ **4th Reading Level:** Philosophy could be used to analyze this line because of the many existentialist questions and moments in the play as a whole; Hamlet, whether for show or not, consistently wonders about the purpose of human life on earth, and therefore ‘who is there’ serves as an interesting question that permeates throughout the play; also of use could be a cultural and historical perspective on the belief system regarding spirits, ghosts, afterlife, and underworld during Shakespeare’s day, or perhaps even during 1100’s Denmark (reader intent)

Analytical Body Paragraph Composition:

The first line of the play indicates mystery not only atop the castle walls but also within Prince Hamlet himself.¹ When Barnardo gets startled because of war preparations and a visit from a ghost, he exclaims, “Who’s there?”(1.1.1)² He experiences bravery and fear whilst saying this line, and this duality connects to the unknown presence in the ether, down below on the battlefield, and also within the characters’ minds.³ Due to the many questions that this play presents, most famously ‘to be or not to be’(3.1.64), one can easily enter a mode of philosophical musing about the characters and the play itself having enough awareness to know that they indeed exist extemporaneously.⁴ For what if the play within the play structures that Shakespeare codes into this storyline serve as a methodology to further and more closely come in contact with a textual self-reflection and self-awareness.⁵ Perhaps the play invites us to question our own inner “who’s” as we interface with Prince Hamlet’s various versions and ‘plays’.⁶ This also connects to some of the larger problems of the play with Hamlet putting on an ‘antic disposition’(1.5.192).⁷ Throughout the play, this dilemma of knowing which ‘who’ is there becomes a large part of the story and the philosophical questions that Shakespeare explores.⁸

Sentence #1 – should contain a 3rd or 4th Reading Level idea – this is your paragraph’s topic sentence and should offer a sneak preview of your concluding thought

Sentence #2 – should contain your quotation which you integrate into your own sentence – should contain mostly 1st Reading Level ideas, and may have a sprinkle of 2nd Reading Level ideas – this sentence is where you contextualize the quotation and help place the usage of the quotation in your paragraph in order to later discuss your 3rd or 4th Reading Level idea that you named in Sentence #1

Sentence #3 – should contain 1st and 2nd Reading Level ideas – this is where you make sense of using the quotation and show how it is important to highlight in the studied text

Sentence #4 – should contain 2nd and 3rd Reading Level ideas – this is where you really start to break away from the plot and the context of the quotation, and instead move towards bigger analytical thoughts in the 3rd and 4th Reading Levels

Sentence #5 – should contain 3rd and 4th Reading Level ideas – by now you are likely done with the 2nd Reading Level

Sentence #6 – should only contain 3rd and 4th Reading Level ideas

Sentence #7 and beyond – should only contain 3rd and 4th Reading Level ideas and don’t forget to add a transition to your next body paragraph