



Essay #4 Decoding Figures

If I Were You...

I would take a peek at the other handout that offers even more specific advice on how to construct your introduction and supporting paragraphs.

Reminder...

As Bennett insists, "the meaning of a text cannot be separated from its expression, its figures." So, one way to make sense of a text is to explain how it uses figures of speech.

Assignment

Choose a text and ask, "What are the effects of rhetorical and literary figures in this text? What purpose do they serve? And how do they function? In short, your job is to make sense of a text (make claims about its meaning or function) by focusing on figures of speech.

Advice On Organization

You have a couple choices in terms of essay organization.

First, use introduction strategy #2 to introduce your text.

As for supporting paragraphs, you can **dedicate paragraphs to specific figures of speech**. This arrangement allows you to discuss the same figure no matter where you find it in the text. So, one paragraph might focus on the author's use of simile, while another paragraph would focus on the writer's use of personification. This approach works best for longer texts and visual texts.

The beginning of your paragraphs might offer paragraphs along the lines of ...

"Smith uses metaphors to serve a variety of functions."

And within the paragraph, you might say something like, "Smith often uses metaphors to demonize the Catholic church. For example, ..."

Metaphors also allow Smith to elicit sympathy for the workers. In other words, ... For example, ..."

The next paragraph might begin by saying...

"While Smith is fond of metaphor, he seems to find simile even more useful in his attempt to glorify the workers. In other words... For example..."

Or, you can **methodically move through the text, identifying the figures and their effects as you go**. Dedicate paragraphs to manageable portions of the text you're analyzing. This approach works best if you are reading a rather short to medium-length poem. The beginning of your paragraphs might offer paragraphs along the lines of ...

"We first encounter a metaphor that Smith uses to demonize the Catholic church. For example... He then immediately follows with periphrasis that allows Smith to ... For example... This is a particularly clever use of periphrasis because..." He offers us yet another simile when he compares the boss to a dead fish: [and so on].