WRITING WORKSHOP:
Analysis in the Humanities
In this workshop we will:

(1) Examine what “humanities” means in terms of the program here on campus,
(2) describe the interconnectedness of the many Disciplines under the “humanities” department, and (3) discuss the ways in which one may conduct analysis in the humanities using examples that touch on multiple disciplines (particularly art, Philosophy, linguistics and anthropology).
What are/is the humanities?

“We in the College of Arts and Humanities, through the arts, humanities, and interdisciplinary programs, devote our efforts and energy to enhancing the knowledge of every student by providing them with new intellectual skills, increasing their understanding of the human experience, and enriching their lives with an appreciation for the arts and the valuable role that art, in its many forms, plays in our everyday lives. Much of this teaching and mentoring goes on in studios, in computer laboratories, in libraries, and on stages where students get to experience, first-hand, what it is like to try to capture or interpret a part of their own world, using music, drama, sculpture, literature, historical prose, or a digital camera. The liberal arts help individuals make sense out of the present by uncovering the course of human history and examining the creative imagination”—Humanities dept. website
## The Humanities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division of Performing, Visual and Digital Media Arts</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Division of World Cultural Studies</th>
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INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Anthropology

Philosophy

Linguistics

LITERATURE

Music

Women’s Studies

Theatre

ART
How does one conduct analysis in the humanities?
FORM/CONTEXT
FORMAL ANALYSIS:

In theory, treat the work (be it a novel, a photographic image, a philosophical treatise, etc.) as a full and complete meaning-making composition *in and of itself*.
For example:
A FORMAL ANALYSIS OF HALS’ PAINTING:

In Frans Hals’ work, Regentesses of the Old Men’s Alms House, “each woman speaks to us of the human condition with equal importance. Each woman stands out with equal clarity against the enormous dark surface, yet they are linked by a firm rhythmical arrangement and the subdued diagonal pattern formed by their heads and hands. Subtle modulations of the deep, glowing blacks contribute to the harmonious fusion of the whole and for an unforgettable contrast with the powerful whites and vivid flesh tones where the detached strokes reach a peak of breadth and strength” (Slive, Seymour. Frans Hals. London: Phaidon)

Argument

Formal elements that support the author’s argument
So, in **FORMAL** analysis, we make claims about the meaning of paintings, poems, novels, etc, based on their *formal elements*.
In painting, composition, color, contrast, subject, stroke, shadow, and tone are all formal elements that we can use to make a claim about a specific piece of art, just as Slive has...

...Whereas, in poetry, we might examine alliteration, assonance, meter, rhyme, structure, diction, subject, etc.
Discussion:

Q: What do we gain by conducting a FORMAL analysis?

Q: What do we lose?
CONTEXT
ANOTHER EXAMPLE:

Ceci n’est pas une pipe.
Let’s begin with **FORM**.

How might we describe the composition of the piece? Is it more like a piece of high art, or an entry in an encyclopedia?

What about contrast?

And style—Is the painting realistic (3-dimentional, etc)?

Are the colors vivid, bright and appropriate?

How does the artist use shadow?

What do the words mean? Are they the title of the piece or something else?
With a painting like this one, we may certainly begin with a formal analysis, but we are unlikely to really get at its meaning if we stop there. It helps to know who painted it, for example, and when, and what events, ideas, movements, etc, the artist may have been influenced by when producing it. To answer such questions, we must conduct research in order to more effectively contextualize the painting.
To look for academic sources, begin your search here.
First, try a journal search…
Then, a book search perhaps…
Torofind Online Catalog of Books and Other Materials

1 result found, sorted by date.

**Author:** Foucault, Michel

**Title:** This is not a pipe / Michel Foucault; with ill. and letters by René Magritte; translated and edited by James Harkness.


**Location:** 3rd Floor

**Call #:** N673 .M35 F6810 _963

**Status:** CHECK SHelves

**Description:** 86 p. : ill. ; 21 cm.

**Subject:** Magritte, René, 1898-1967.

Art -- Philosophy.

**Notes:** Translation of Cec n'est pas une pipe.
Includes index.
Lucky us! It turns out that our library has a book going by the same title as our painting and, what’s more, the author of the book happens to be a very famous critic/historian/philosopher—Frenchman, Michael Foucault.
In the introduction alone, we learn that out painting, *Ceci n’est pas une Pipe*, was produced by surrealist **Renee Magritte** in **1926**, that the title of the painting reads (in English), **“this is not a pipe,”** and that Magritte and Foucault, our author, were friends and great admirers of one another’s work—good to know.
We also learn that the works of both men were heavily influenced by Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure.
Great! Now, in order to understand Magritte’s silly painting, I might have to understand a philosophical piece of linguistic analysis from the late 1800’s! Can’t wait…
Just like art or poetry, linguistics and philosophy can be analyzed and understood. In order to figure out how to figure out philosophical works, let’s make a list of what not to do:

#1 DO NOT assume that you will understand a work of philosophy after one reading. Multiple readings and careful reflection are often in order when reading philosophical works.

#2 DO NOT skip over words you do not understand. Have a dictionary handy and use it.

#3 DO NOT read passively. Mark your text, take notes, draw diagrams—whatever you need to do to “get it.”

#4 DO NOT ignore your textbook. Assuming that you are reading a work included in a textbook, the editor will often pose questions that will guide you to the most important sections of a text.

#5 DO NOT read every word. Sometimes it pays to look for truth statements and claims rather than wading through all of the examples the author gives.
Language is concrete, no less so than speaking, and this is a help in our study of it. Linguistic signs, though basically psychological, are not abstractions; associations which bear the stamp of collective approval — and which added together constitute language — are realities that have their seat in the brain.

We have just seen that language is a social institution; but several features set it apart from other political, legal, etc. institutions.

We must call in a new type of facts in order to illuminate the special nature of language.

Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems.

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semology (from Greek semon, "sign"). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be, but it has a right to existence, a place started out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts...

Sign, Signified, Signifier

Some people regard language, when reduced to its elements, as a naming-process only — a list of words, each corresponding to the thing that it names. For example:

1. **Arbor**
   - Name: *Arbor*
   - Signified: *tree*
   - Signifier: *Arbor*

   This conception is open to criticism at several points. It assumes that ready-made ideas exist before words; it does not tell us whether a name is vocal or psychological.

The two elements are intimately united, and each recalls the other. Whether we try to find the meaning of the Latin word *arbor* or the word that Latin uses to designate the concept "tree," it is clear that only the associations sanctioned by that language appear to us to conform to reality, and we disregard whatever others might be imagined.

Our definition of the linguistic sign poses an important question of terminology. I call the combination of a concept and a sound-image a sign, but in current usage the term generally designates only a sound-image, a word, for example (arbor, etc.). One tends to forget that *arbor* is called a sign only because it carries the concept "tree," with the result that the idea of the sensory part implies the idea of the whole.
#6 DO NOT ignore diagrams.

Does this look familiar?
Searching for truth claims, I found this:

“The bond between [sound image] and the [concept] is arbitrary”

Q: What does “arbitrary” mean?

Q: In this diagram, which are the “sound images” and which are the “concepts”?
It seems, does it not, that Saussure’s statement (“the bond between the [sound image] and the [concept] is arbitrary”) and Magritte’s painting have the same meaning...Interesting.

In the diagram on the left, Saussure suggests that there is no bond between the word “horse” and the concept of a horse and, in Magritte’s painting, he suggests that there is no bond between the word “pipe” and the concept of a pipe.
This is proven by the simple fact that the concept of a pipe is represented by different words in different languages.

Dutch: “pijp”
German: “rohr”
Russian: “tpy6a”
To finish our analysis, it would make sense to remember our FORMAL Analysis as well as our contextual analysis. We could argue that, by Presenting the image of a pipe above the words “this is not a pipe,” as though it were to appear in an encyclopedia, Renee Magritte references Ferdinand de Saussure and makes fun of our assumption that there is some Connection or “bond” between words and the concepts they represent.
In order to make this argument, we have traversed a large span of the web that is the humanities. Oftentimes this is exactly what it takes to make a strong argument when analyzing works in the humanities.
THANKS