

Critical questions of language analysis

Whatever the text, always ask the following questions. If you can answer all of them accurately and specifically, you will be able to produce an effective language analysis.

- 1 What is the issue and what are its implications? (For example, the issue may be: should schools be allowed to conduct random drug tests? The wider implications relate to issues of privacy, safety, health, etc.)
- 2 Who are the stakeholders or parties involved? What do they stand to gain or lose?
- 3 What type of text is it and why has this text type been chosen?
- 4 When was the text created? Is it in response to other texts? Is any background knowledge required?
- 5 What is the author's overall purpose? What point of view is put forth? What are the ideas/arguments put forth in support of this view?
- 6 Who is the author? Do they have a vested interest? Is their identity impacting on their viewpoint? On the audience?
- 7 Who are the target audiences? How is this made apparent?
- 8 How does the author want to position the audience on the issue?
- 9 What persuasive language strategies (verbal, non-verbal, visual) are predominant? Why have these strategies been chosen? (Consider how different choices might have made a different impact.)
- 10 How do the persuasive strategies reflect and support the author's intentions?

Remember: the aim is to consider 'the whole package'. A written text will consist mainly of verbal language, but don't forget to consider any relevant aspects of design and layout, and any visual images or symbols that accompany the words. Also, don't forget to carefully consider the context in which the text appeared, as this can change quite significantly the way it is read by an audience.

Note-taking

Detailed note-taking should form a regular component of your language analysis work. Regardless of the text type you are asked to analyse, always strive to either:

- write notes or construct a table, using appropriate headings and subheadings
- annotate a print text with handwritten comments in the margins, or
- use hypertext to make notes on electronic documents/ texts.

Your notes should always include a summary of the specific impact or effect of key language choices. Ask yourself: how does the author want the audience groups to think, feel or respond at key moments?

