

## Tools for Analyzing Visual Media: An Overview

Because W131 is a course devoted to analytical writing, you will have to learn to analyze a range of texts in different media. In particular, the last two units in the course will ask you to write about a film and a set of photographs, respectively. This handout is an overview of tools you can use to analyze visual media. These tools correspond with more detailed PowerPoint slides with images.

Formal Features	Tool	Definition
	<b>Balance</b>	The distribution of objects in a photograph or scene.
	<b>Color</b>	The use of particular hues, contrasts, lighting, and saturation, and to what effect.
	<b>Contrast</b>	Describes the level of difference between shades of color or degrees of lighting (i.e. an image with “high contrast” would have areas of extreme light and dark)
	<b>Focal Point</b>	The point in a visual text to which the viewer’s eye is drawn (typically through layout and vectors).
	<b>Framing</b>	Describes the use of the edges of the image, as well as vectors within the image, to direct attention, exclude elements, connect or separate participants, etc., and to what effect.
	<b>Layout</b>	The organization of objects in a photograph or scene.
	<b>Lighting</b>	The use of light to draw attention to (or away from) objects in a photograph or scene.
	<b>Negative/Positive Space</b>	Unfilled space in a photograph is referred to as “negative space,” and space filled with something is “positive space.”
	<b>Offer and Demand</b>	A description of whether or not a participant in an image makes eye contact with the viewer, and to what effect.
	<b>Perspective</b>	The angle with which the camera shoots the image or action, both up-and-down and side-to-side.
	<b>Social Distance</b>	How close or far the camera is to the participant, and the consequent social effect of that distance.
<b>Vectors</b>	Lines, especially sight lines, establishing contact or establishing a relationship between elements in an image.	

## Tools for Analyzing Visual Media Continued

Film Features	Tool	Definition
	<b>Character</b>	A description of the behavior, appearance, and personality of a particular person within a film. Also includes common character types.
	<b>Camera Work</b>	In film, includes not only framing, perspective, and social distance, but also a description of the movement of the camera.
	<b>Cut</b>	A “cut” is an editing term that refers to where an editor chooses to start and end each shot within a particular scene. (Literally, it means “cuts” in the strip of film.)
	<b>Dialogue</b>	A description of not only what a character says, but also how he or she says it.
	<b>Editing</b>	In film, refers to the way individual shots are put together in a sequence, including their length, continuity, and tempo?
	<b>Genre</b>	The type of image or film you are working with, the expectations viewers may bring to it, and the typical effect(s) it may have on the viewer.
	<b>Mise-en-scene</b>	Refers to the material composition of a film scene, including props, costumes, placement of characters, lighting, and the overall atmosphere of the scene.
	<b>Point of View</b>	Whose perspective viewers are asked to take on as they view a shot or scene (generally used in film, although sometimes extended to photography).
	<b>Scene</b>	One or more shots that are placed together to form a coherent unit within the film’s overall narrative (story). Scenes <i>usually</i> contain more than one shot, and the beginning and ending of a scene are <i>usually</i> marked by a clearly noticeable cut in the editing.
<b>Shot</b>	A “shot” refers to one continuous, uninterrupted length of film.	
<b>Sound</b>	Includes not only dialogue, but also sound effects and especially music to create a mood, signal certain characters, etc.	