The Photograph/Visual Analysis Essay

All images possess an idea or claim. In a visual analysis essay, students are provided with one or more photographs and are expected to describe the image(s) and discuss how the image is presented to the viewer (also known as the composition). The student will choose a theme that they think the picture(s) is trying to make & then analyze the meaning of the image(s).

In order to write an effective visual analysis essay, the student should consider the purpose of the artist, the photographer’s audience, the composition of the image(s), and the historical meaning of the image(s). A well-written visual analysis will also evaluate the effectiveness of the image(s) in contemporary times in order to show why the image remains important today.

The most common method for writing a photograph essay is the five-paragraph approach, which includes all four components of an essay. This consists of:

• An Introductory paragraph: The writer will provide basic facts about the picture. Get the reader interested in the image(s) by using one of the following methods:

Describe the image(s) vividly through the use of adjectives and describing words.

Discuss how the image(s) was created.

Explain the purpose of the artist(s).

Give interesting or relevant facts about the image or artist.

Talk about a controversy or misunderstanding about the art.

Your thesis will tell the reader the meaning of this image (Kearney, 2020).

• Three Body paragraphs: Each body paragraph will contain a topic sentence – or the main idea of the body paragraph—example(s) supporting the topic sentence’s claim, an analysis of why the example(s) are important, connecting the body paragraph to the thesis/argument and a transition from one paragraph to the next.

• A Conclusion: Do not just repeat your thesis. It is the writer’s last chance to let the reader understand why the thesis statement is important and to
demonstrate how the evidence used is connected, not random. Kearney (2020) suggests to:

I. Compare the reception of the image by the audience who first saw it with your own ideas, or with the way people today might interpret the picture.

II. Speculate on what the artist would think about the way his picture has been viewed over time.

*Citation*: This is used to prove that your assignment is academically honest. At Bow Valley College, most writing assignments will require the student to use APA Citation. Go to the [Library Website](#) to learn how to properly cite your work.

Note: While this is an excellent source of reference, students are encouraged to check their syllabus and/or rubric to ensure they include all requirements of an assignment.
References