Taking Texts Apart

Otherwise Known as **ANALYSIS**

Conquering the Navigation

Throughout this presentation you will find links to more information. You probably won't need all of them, but you will need some.

When you see a bright green word, you can click that and get more information. After you've clicked, the word will turn to a darker green.

The new pages will have green headings instead of the aqua ones you see here, so you will know where you are. Examples have a nice butterscotch heading.

When you're finished, simply click your browser's "Back" button to return to the main presentation.

If you would like to open the presentation in a new window, use the "Ctrl" key while you click.
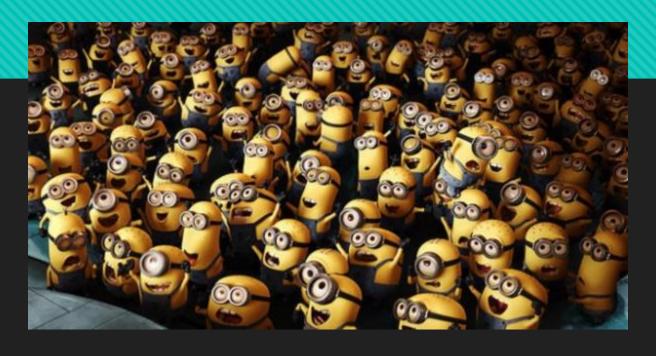
Taking A Text Apart

The Virginia Placement Test is going to ask you to do some reading and decide what the reading means. For information on how to make the reading easier, see Understanding What You Read.

THIS section will help you answer the questions that have to do with analyzing what you read—just a scary word for taking it apart to see what makes it tick.

Spot the Audience

Simply put, a text's *audience* is the people the author wants to talk to.

There are many, many audiences. Any group can be an audience: college students, moms, nursing professionals, baseball players, five-year-olds . . . Anybody. But they're not the SAME audience, and your job will be to figure out who's the target for a particular piece.

Yes, minions are an audience.

HOW to Tag an Audience

Ask yourself some questions as you read:

Does the writer ever address a group directly, like parents or students?

Does the writer explain some words, or assume that the reader already knows them?

Does the writer explain ideas, or assume that the reader already knows what they mean?

What kind of words does the writer choose—simple, complicated, friendly, formal?

Check out some examples of <u>audience</u> here.

Figure Out the Purpose

Purpose is the "why" in writing. The VPT will ask you to look for the reasons an author would create a text.

Most things are written for one of three reasons—to inform, to persuade, and to entertain—but these can be broken down into more specific categories that you can learn more about by looking at *Purposeful Terms*.

Arguments: The Purpose with a Purpose

No, not the kind you have with someone else over who left the fridge open. In reading, an argument is a text whose purpose is to persuade you to do, change, or believe something.

In academic writing, it may be the most important sort, so we're going to look at it in detail., plus, the VPT will ask you to identify the main point of an argument, so be ready.

Argument Dissected

An argument is made up of claims, support, and counter-claims.

Translated, this means the argument asserts that something is true, explains why it's true using outside evidence, and then explains why the opposite argument is wrong.

"Childhood vaccinations are important, because they prevent dangerous childhood diseases and pose minimal risk. The Center for Disease Control has data going back almost a hundred years that demonstrates the benefit of vaccination, while studies that linked vaccination to autism and other problems have been proven wrong in controlled studies."

Here is the claim (the main point).

Here is the supporting evidence.

Here is the counter-claim and why it's wrong.

Figure Out the "Tone" of a Text

The VPT will ask you to choose a "tone" for a reading selection. This just means that you need to read and decide whether the writing is formal or informal, objective or subjective, persuasive, emotional, or humorous.

Sometimes tone can be threatening, or scary, or funny, or sarcastic.

Tone is closely tied to purpose, and remember, most writing is designed either to inform, persuade, or entertain. If you know WHY someone is writing, you can easily pick out the tone.

For some further help with tone, check out our handy examples here.

Spotting "Point of View"

The perspective a writer takes is called his or her "point of view." That means, whose eyes are you seeing this subject from?

Sometimes this is easy to detect, but other times its harder. Still, you have to know the writer's point of view in order to analyze or evaluate a text.

Check out the specifics on point of view here.

Separate Fact From Fiction

Simply put, facts can be, and are, supported by external sources, hard data, and real experiences.

Opinions are what the writer believes the facts *mean*.

Two writers can look at the same facts and have two completely different opinions, but you can find out more about spotting an opinion here.

How to Evaluate a Text

The VPT is going to ask you what a particular text is good for. That's known as evaluation, and it's tied to purpose.

A biology textbook is not much good as humor, but it's great for learning about animals.

A funny essay on coffee shops is good for entertainment, but it won't help you make a decision about fair trade coffee.

Evaluate a text by asking yourself what its purpose is, and then asking yourself if it serves that purpose.

Click here to find out more about evaluating a text.

A Final, Very Important Tip

The VPT in English is going to offer you some readings and you will have to decide what they mean, who they're written for, and what their purpose is. Don't panic! Take the pre- and post-tests on this section to practice and remember:

READ THE QUESTION FIRST!

Then you know what to look for in the reading, and you can see whether the test is looking for audience, purpose, tone, point-of-view, or evaluation.