

Observation and Response: Observation as problem-solving

Template can be adapted to fit a variety of classes and types of responses

Goals:

Students will:

- Practice observation skills and develop their abilities to find multiple possibilities for interpretation and response to visual material;
- Consider the difference between observation and interpretation;
- Develop descriptive skills;
- Develop research skills by considering a visual text or object as a primary source;

Observation Part I

- 1.) What is the difference between observation and interpretation? Write a short paragraph in your journal (5-6 sentences) defining both, with one example each.
- 2.) Set a timer on your phone or computer (or oven...) and observe the image provided for 1 minute. Quickly write a preliminary research question about it. At first glance, what are you curious about? What do you want to know?
- 3.) Set your timer for 5 minutes and write as many observations as possible about it. Try to keep making observations, even when you feel stuck. Keep returning to the question, "What do I see?" No observation is too big or too small, too obvious or too obscure. You do not need to use complete sentences.
- 4.) Set your timer for another 5 minutes and write as many observations as possible for 5 minutes without using nouns. (Definition of a noun: person, place, thing. Try not to name anything in your observations. Remember that you do not need to use complete sentences. For this round, it is legitimate to just list word ... flowing, linear, active, rounded, ..etc.)
- 5.) For the next round of observations, you will get a bit of language from art history. Please note that this is NOT intended to teach you the finer points of visual analysis; that is a more intensive process than we will engage here. Rather, this is simply intended to help guide your looking processes.
 - a.) Watch the video: [Visual Analysis Tutorial](#)
 - b.) Download the vocabulary sheet
- 6.) Set your timer for 5 minutes, and write as many observations about your image as possible, using the concepts from the video and the terms on the vocabulary sheet as prompts. Again, please note that you are NOT doing a formal visual analysis of your image, but simply paying attention to specific elements such as line, form, color, etc., and writing down what you notice about them. (You may use nouns again. You are welcome.)

- 7.) For this round, imagine that the image will self-destruct in 3 minutes and your observations will be the only record of its existence. Write as much as you can for the next 3 minutes to preserve a record of the image.
- 8.) Take a moment to look at your observations. What do you notice?
- 9.) In your journal, write a 1-page reflection addressing the following questions:
 - a.) Have your definitions of observation and interpretation changed through this activity? Re-write your definitions in light of this experience, changing or expanding on what you wrote previously.
 - b.) What are the benefits of spending a longer time looking at an image? What might you not have seen if you stopped at two minutes? Five minutes? Why might learning to look longer be important?
 - c.) How did the different prompts change the way you looked at the image? What happened with each prompt?
 - Looking “cold”: what happened when you were just told to look with no additional information?
 - Making observations without using nouns- If you found this to be hard, why do you think that is? Why might it be important to do?
 - Using specific vocabulary words as prompts. Did this allow you to find more or different observations?
 - Raising the stakes: what happened in the last minute when you were describing the image for posterity? Did the kind of language you used to describe shift at all? If so, how?
 - Revisit your research question – did you find evidence that might help you find the answers? Or do you have a new question based on what you found? If you were to conduct research on this image, what might the first step be?

Observation on visual element from course content (figure, graph, historical image, artifact, diagram, etc.)

- 1.) Set your timer for 1 minute and observe the visual element Quickly write a preliminary research question about it. At first glance, what are you curious about? What do you want to know?
- 2.) Set the timer for 5 minutes and describe the visual element in your journal with as much detail as you can. Try to keep making observations about the object, even when you feel stuck. Use as many of the techniques we just explored as you can (use terminology from your vocabulary sheet, try not using nouns, etc.) In addition, try to describe it as though you were describing it to someone who is not presently able to see it.
- 3.) Take a moment to look at your observations. What do you notice?

- 4.) Revisit your research question – did you find evidence through observation that might help you find the answers? Or do you have a new question based on what you found? In your journal, re-write your research question. If you were to conduct research on this image, what might the first step be?