

Semiotic Analysis

1. Study the artifact (advertisement, poster, etc.): Look carefully at its signs, its goals, its meanings. Ask in a general sense: what is this artifact *really* trying to sell?
2. Unpack the artifact: identify between four and six significant signs.
3. Perform initial analysis: For each sign, identify the signifier and signified.
4. Construct initial constellation: Identify the theme (eg., wealth, beauty, authority) that is common to three or more signs.
5. Remove outliers: Narrow your constellation to three signs that most directly relate to your chosen theme.
6. Propose ideology: Draft a brief sentence that offers an attitude or advocates an action related to the theme (eg., wealth is good, beauty requires youth, authority is necessary).

Note: your ideology should not involve the product or service that being sold. You should not propose, "Microsoft is good," for example. Revealing ideology demands that you unpack the foundational theme, the unspoken truth of the artifact. What idea does it try to sell? What way of living in the world does it advertise?

7. Draft your body section: Organize this section around how the three signs support the ideology. In each subsection (or separate paragraph, should page length allow), relate a significant signifier to a signified that correlates to the proposed ideology. Thus, an artifact that includes an American Flag (sign) might concentrate on the red stripes (signifier) that evoke courage (signified). Explain how the relationship between the three signs supports the underlying ideology.
8. Refine ideology: Limit your ideology to three words. One should be the theme and one should offer an attitude and/or action related to your chosen theme. Refine body paragraph accordingly.
9. Develop introductory paragraph: Grab the reader's attention with your first sentence. After that, consider the following questions: why was this artifact produced? What recent news story relates to this artifact? Why should we learn about this artifact? Toward the end of the paragraph, preview your three signs and your ideology. Be brief and specific in your forecast.
10. Develop conclusion paragraph: Summarize your three signs and ideology. Be brief and specific in your summary. Wrap up with a few sentences on implications that answer the "so what" question. Consider the following questions. So what have we learned from this analysis? What kind of world is evoked by this ideology? What does the ideology fail to reveal about ways to live in the world? Ensure that the last sentence is thought-provoking.
11. Edit and revise: Read your paper with particular attention to flow, correctness, precision, and the rules of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Strive to reduce clutter and improve clarity.
12. Reread topic sentences: Do they preview the main ideas of their paragraphs? Exception: First paragraph topic sentence can be more non-traditional.
13. Reread concluding sentences: Do they set up transitions to forthcoming paragraphs? Exception: Last paragraph concluding sentence can be more non-traditional.
14. Evidence check: Ensure that quotations and/or paraphrases are purposeful and properly cited. Particularly effective uses of evidence include brief citations in both introductory and concluding paragraphs.
15. Reality-check: Share your edited draft with a friend, loved one, and/or trusted colleague. If that person finds your writing to be well crafted and your reasoning to be sound, you're ready to submit a draft to your professor.