

Appendix B: Assignment Foregrounding Pattern + Interpretation

Entering a Conversation

Overview

In your academic writing, you will often be asked to synthesize and respond to the research and writings of other scholars in order to insert your own voice into a conversation. For instance, researched essays respond to what others have said or argued about an issue. Scientific studies begin with a review of other experiments on a topic. Business proposals survey current practices or approaches to a problem. Reviews of research studies (often called literature reviews) synthesize and evaluate a large number of studies on a topic.

This assignment asks you to practice the work of synthesizing and responding to others' writing in order to stake out your own position. However, instead of analyzing difficult texts on an academic topic, you will instead work with criticism from popular culture. This allows you to practice academic writing without the burden of also working to understand difficult academic subjects.

The Details

Pick a cultural artifact (a movie, TV show, video game or musical album) that is no more than two years old and has received mixed reviews from critics. Write a 3-5 page argument that identifies patterns, or trends, in the reviews and evaluates them using your own analysis of the cultural artifact. Your argument must fairly and respectfully respond to exceptions to your argument and interpretations that differ from your own.

Your argument must:

- include a short summary of the artifact you are defending
- paraphrase or quote at least three sources with which you disagree
- paraphrase or quote at least two sources with which you agree

Goals

This assignment is designed to give you practice

- **identifying patterns** (or trends) in the sources you cite (for instance, you may note that a majority of reviews criticize a particular actor or note “plot holes” in a film);
- **identifying patterns** in the artifacts you analyze (for instance, you may note a pattern of strong special effects in a video game or a pattern of “body humor” in a show);

- **interpreting** these patterns to support or reject an overall evaluation of your artifact;
- responding to **exceptions**, both to the patterns you identify and the interpretations you make;
- writing a **thesis-driven** argument; and
- paraphrasing and quoting from other authors as you insert your voice into ongoing arguments.

Evaluation Criteria:

Criteria	Goal
Analysis	The essay argues for patterns in the reviews you cite and in the artifact you analyze. The essay interprets these patterns in order to support or reject particular evaluations of your artifact.
Exceptions	Exceptions to the author's main arguments (or counter-arguments) are considered with respect and either conceded to or countered with logical arguments.
Organization	The essay uses a thesis-driven structure that places main arguments in the thesis and topic sentences. Each individual paragraph emphasizes one unique main idea that is clearly connected to the thesis statement. Paragraphs are arranged according to a logical principle and connected to one another with coherent transitions.
Mechanics & Style	The essay demonstrates appropriate word choices, a formal tone, grammatically correct sentences, and a correctly formatted list of works cited.

How this assignment will help you with other academic writing

This essay asks you to define patterns in the work you read and analyze and interpret these patterns for a particular purpose. We call this strategy **pattern+interpretation**. In this assignment, you are arguing for patterns in *texts*; in other academic writing, you may be arguing for patterns in *data*, *observations* or *practices*. However, regardless of *what* you are analyzing, the basic pattern+ interpretation strategy remains consistent. In a nutshell, it consists of

1. identifying a pattern
2. providing evidence to support that pattern and
3. interpreting that pattern to make or support an argument

This essay asks you to identify patterns across multiple texts. This is in many ways similar to a common assignment in the social sciences and sciences called a *literature review*. A literature review asks you to identify patterns in research methodologies or results across multiple research studies.

Another major component of this essay involves handling **exceptions** (or counter-arguments) to your argument. All academic disciplines require writers to

acknowledge and respond to exceptions to their arguments. It is a particularly common—and challenging—part of research writing in science and engineering, where writers need to explain unexpected results, concede weakness in methods, or reconcile conflicting interpretations of quantitative data.

As with other assignments this semester, this essay requires a **thesis-driven** (or thesis-first) organizational structure that gives you practice situating your main claims in places that readers are most likely to focus on.

Appendix C: Analyzing Unfamiliar Academic Genres

*TOPOI**

Definitions

Pattern + Interpretation

A writer using the pattern + interpretation topos identifies a pattern (such as a recurring theme) in the primary material under analysis and uses this pattern to generate or support an interpretation.

Conceptual Lens

The conceptual lens topos uses a concept—a term, theory, or hypothesis—to organize observations about the phenomenon under study.

Comparison

The comparison topos is used to illustrate the relationship between or among the items being studied or analyzed. It can often, though not always, be identified by the use of comparative adjectives or adverbs (as in, “simpler,” “faster,” “larger”).

Exception

The exception topos is used to explain aberrant or unexpected results, couch negatives as positives, concede weaknesses in methods, or to acknowledge other anomalies in the analysis.

Questions

1. Does the text make substantial use of **pattern + interpretation**?
 - Is the pattern found in a text; across multiple texts; in numbers, figures, or data; in observations or workplace practices; in something else?
 - What interpretation is drawn from this pattern?
2. Does the text make substantial use of **conceptual lens**?