

# The Five Analytical Moves for Reading Critically

(from *Writing Analytically* by Rosenwasser and Stephen)

1. Suspend Judgment
2. Define Significant Parts & How They Are Related
3. Make the Implicit Explicit
4. Look for Patterns
5. Keep Reformulating

Move 1) Delay your own **judgment**, especially agree-disagree, like-dislike, etc.

Move 2) In order to define **significant parts** and figure out how they are **related**, readers and writers need to train themselves to attend closely to details. Create in order of importance for the features you discover. Avoid asking yourself: “What do you think?” or “What do you like or dislike?” Instead, ask yourself: “What do you notice?” or “What do you find most interesting, strange, or revealing?”

Move 3) A central activity and goal of analysis is to make the **explicit** (overtly stated) what is **implicit** (suggested). When readers do so, we are addressing the “So What?” question. Repeatedly asking and answering “So What?” is all in the pursuit of implications.

Move 4) When analyzing a text (visual or written) and attempting to uncover significant **patterns** within, one of the best tools to use is *The Method*. When using this tool, one looks for the following:

- **Repetitions**—details or words that repeat and write the number of times you see the repetition for each.
- **Strands**—Strands are groupings of similar details or words. You should be able to explain the strand’s logic if you list it as a strand—what holds it together?
  - For example, noise/shrieking tone/piercing tone/ugly sound/wail. That is a strand of similar adjectives and/or similar nouns.
- **Binaries**—List **organizing contrasts** (for example, open/closed, black/white, masculine/feminine, inside/outside, present/remote, self/you). These are also called “binaries.”
  - Binary oppositions are sites of uncertainty, places where there is struggle among different points of view. Finding binaries can help you find what is at stake (for the author and the audience) in the text.
  - In analysis, think critically about binaries and imagine ways to refine and reformulate them as something more complex than either/or. Look for clues that the author is also writing the binary as more complex than it seems at first glance.
- **Anomalies**—After you have produced your three lists, selected the most important repetition/strand/contrast from each, and written a paragraph explaining your ranking, look for details that don’t seem to fit any pattern. Find anything that stands out or anything you noticed but couldn’t list as a repetition/strand/binary above. Anomalies—while they can be annoying—are important because noticing them often leads to new and better ideas.
- **Omissions**—Also look for anything that is *missing*. What does the text leave out or omit, and what are the implications of this omission? Obvious or subtle omissions can open up huge doors for your own analysis.

Move 5) The preceding 4 analytical moves are basically questions in service of analysis. These questions may produce more questions (rather than clean answers). Keep **reformulating** those questions and explanations and going back to the original text for sustenance.