

## WRITING ABOUT IMAGINATIVE TEXTS

### – WEEK 1 –

DOC 3 introduces a new set of analytical and writing strategies that build on the strategies of argumentation introduced in DOC 1 and 2. DOC 1 and 2 focused on learning how to write clear, logical arguments based on evidence from various academic and legal readings. DOC 3 asks you to use those skills of argumentation to support an interpretation of a still wider variety of cultural and imaginative texts within their social and historical contexts.

In DOC 3, you will be analyzing texts such as films, advertisements, short stories, photographs, poems, songs, and novels. Imaginative cultural texts such as these contain meanings and arguments that are carefully constructed and indirectly presented. As a viewer of a film, for example, you may realize that something significant is happening in the lives of the characters, and yet neither the director, nor the narrator, nor any character in the film steps in and directly tells you how to interpret the meaning of what has happened. Instead, the events and details of the film work together to suggest their significance within the film. You as the viewer must “connect the dots” and *interpret* what you believe to be the film’s overall meanings. Similarly, readers of novels, short stories, photographs, ads, and other imaginative texts need to interpret how elements and details in these texts work together to create themes and meanings.

As a reader and interpreter of imaginative texts, then, your role resembles that of a sociologist, historian, or anthropologist. You analyze the details in texts, identify possible patterns suggested by groups of details, and interpret possible meanings or themes suggested by those groups of details. A stronger interpretation will place your analysis of evidence within the text’s social and historical era. For example, to interpret a photograph from the 1930s you would list the details that you see in the photograph; categorize similar/related or contrasting details; identify thematic patterns suggested by similar and conflicting details; and then examine those themes within the social/historical context of the 1930s. Patterns of details in a photo by Dorothea Lange that represent working-class people in a sympathetic manner (and thereby suggest a possible theme), for instance, could be situated within the tensions of the Depression Era. The details in Lange’s photo could also be compared with details and themes represented in other photographs or texts from the same time period. In both cases, an in-depth interpretation begins with a close analysis of the text’s details.

As a writer in DOC 3, you will be analyzing and interpreting several primary texts. As Ann Raimes explains,

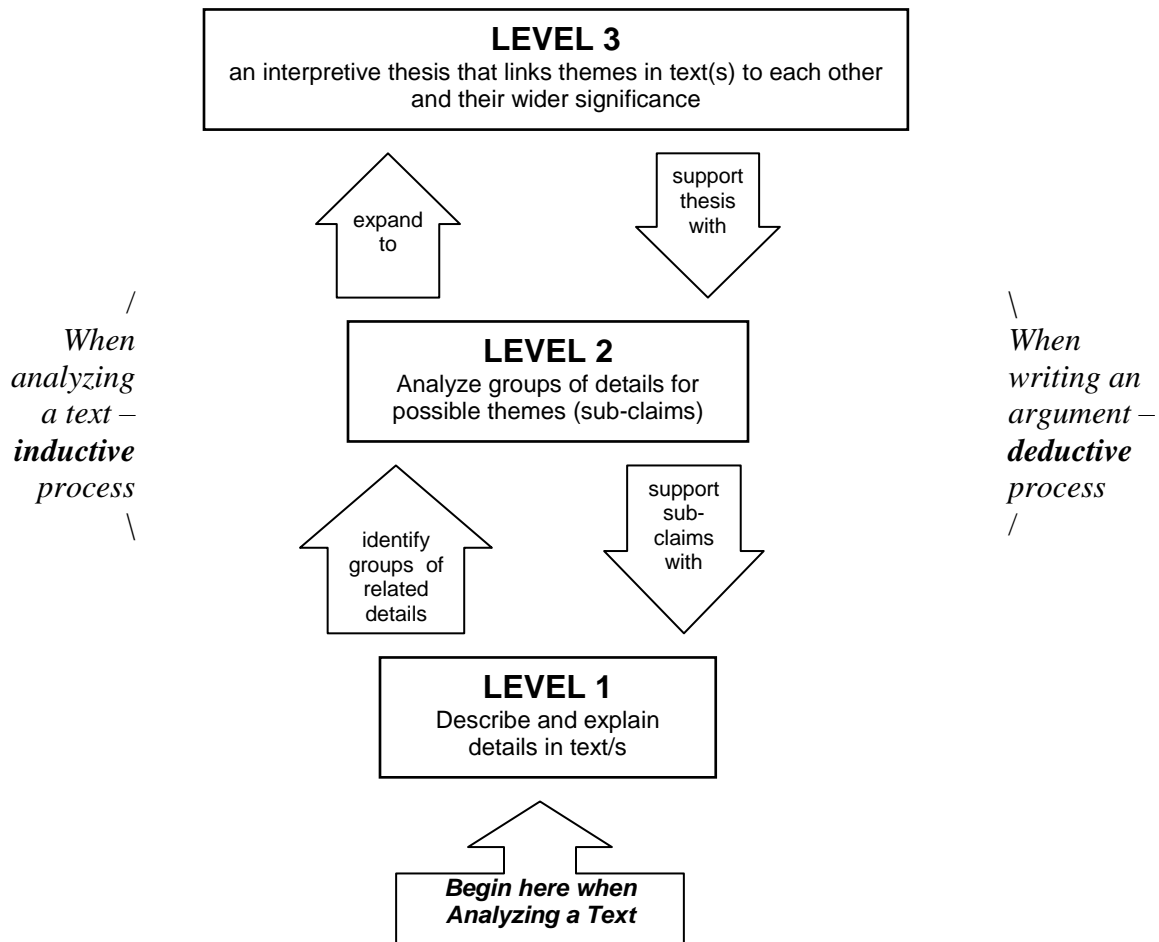
**Primary sources** are the firsthand... or original materials that researchers study and analyze... [including] memoirs, government statistics... works of art, literature, and architecture... performances and programs... [Whereas] **secondary sources** are analytical works that comment on and interpret other works... Examples include reviews, discussions, biographies, critical studies... class lectures, and electronic discussions.

*Keys for Writers*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2005, 83-84

The degree to which you **explain** the evidence in a text and **connect** the evidence to your **interpretation** of the text’s meaning will determine the effectiveness of your paper. The graph and chart on the following page represent the process of moving from describing textual details (Level 1), to analyzing related and contrasting textual details (Level 2), to creating an interpretive thesis of the overall text, linking themes to their wider significance (Level 3).

– WEEKS 1 through 3 –

Begin at Level 1:



In analyzing cultural texts, then, writers begin with an “inductive” process: doing a close-reading of a text’s details suggests possible themes and then an overall interpretation of the text or texts. When drafting the paper, however, the writer must build on their inductive analysis and create a supporting “deductive” argument which includes topic sentence thematic claims and evidence that explain how your evidence strongly implies thematic connections which support your overall interpretation. In other words:

**For an Inductive Interpretation of Texts**

**Level 1** – *Describe* (and generally characterize) significant evidence, details and elements of the texts you’re analyzing.

**Level 2** – *Identify groups of* related details. Is a pattern of related details found in two or more key passages or scenes? Compare and contrast the details and thematic patterns in the text (and possibly compare them with those found in another text from the same era depending on assignment).

**Level 3** – Develop a thesis that clearly *interprets* the themes suggested by the related details in the text(s) and links them to their wider significance.

**When drafting a paper** --Based on your close reading of the text(s)’ details, identify your supporting thematic claims suggested by related details in your topic sentences, and explain within your paragraphs how your evidence supports your thematic claims and overall interpretation. Voila! The interpretive circle is complete. Revise your draft, peer edit, revise again, and turn in your paper.