

Seven Questions to ask about scholarly writing.

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ACTSISS: Argument, Context, Tone, Sources, Ideology, Strengths & weaknesses, Stakes

1) What is the major **argument** of the piece?

a. In an essay or analytical book, find the thesis sentence/paragraph. In a memoir, novel, film, etc., you will have to ask yourself: what is this piece trying to tell me?

b. What sub-arguments support the major argument?

2) What is the scholarly **context**? What are the secondary sources – the other scholarship – that the piece uses as support? What other scholar(s) is the author agreeing with or disagreeing with?

(You don't necessarily need to know every minor debate here, but if someone is naming names -- disagreeing with x scholar or using y theorist as their model – then you will want to be attentive to that.)

3) How would you describe the **tone** or style of the piece?

4) What **sources**, evidence, or images does the piece use to make its argument?

5) What is the **ideology**? What overall perspective or value system shapes the argument?

6) What are the **strengths and weaknesses of the analysis** and/or presentation?

a. You might agree or disagree with the ideology, and so you could critique the piece from that perspective.

b. Or you might agree with all or part of the underlying view, but still find weaknesses of argumentation or evidence. Similarly, you might disagree overall, but find strengths in the specifics.

c. In other words, although your opinion will matter here, answering this question is not just a matter of expressing your opinion.

7) What are the **stakes**? What matters and why does it matter in the piece's argument or the vision? What larger debates, concerns, and/or problems is it addressing?