

CIA: Textual Interrogation

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All body paragraphs should be organized in the following manner: Claim, Illustration, Analysis.

Claim: The first sentence of each paragraph should be a claim. Like any good topic sentence, this claim should encompass the paragraph's main idea, a mini-argument of sorts. Claims need to be debatable—well-supported, but debatable all the same. Claims should be one sentence long—no more.

Illustration: This is the easiest part of writing a paragraph, although it is somewhat technically difficult. Remember, you never just toss a quotation into a paragraph. Always introduce the quote and offer proper MLA citations (*Harbrace* ch. 41). The illustration should be no more than three sentences in length; otherwise you will need to consult your handbook for using block MLA quotations. I strongly recommend avoiding lengthy quotations as they seriously detract from your ability to analyze small, manageable signs or pieces of text.

Analysis: This is the most difficult part of paragraph drafting. This requires critical thought, driving questions, and understanding the potential meanings for chosen signs. The most important part of analyzing a sign or piece of text is to consider the “*Why?*” question. You may well need to begin with an observation in order to move toward a meaningful analysis, but your analysis must feature some kind of critical inquiry, not just regurgitated text or summary. This should comprise the bulk of the paragraph, usually 3-6 sentences.

All that said, you may find that you need to begin with the illustration in order to develop a textual sign worthy of analysis. Remember, your goal is to interrogate the text, which means you may often need to back into the questioning by way of observation. You can have an observation without a claim, but never a claim without first making some observation about the text.

Observation: anything we can point to in the text.

Claim: some critical commentary about an observation.