

Questions for Genre Analysis

Genre analysis is a way to examine a model text to determine how that type of text is written—what features are necessary in order for the text to be considered part of that genre? You might think of it as a form of reverse engineering. You take an existing document in a certain field and work backward from that to identify how that field expects such a document to be written.

Genre analysis focuses on what the author is doing (as opposed to the content or what they are saying). What is the author doing at the rhetorical or sentence level that allows a reader to understand the text as part of the target genre? For instance, think about the differences between a resume and a cover letter, or between a personal journal entry and a written reflection for a class. In each pair, the content may be similar. What the author does in the text (how the audience is addressed, the type of vocabulary used, etc.) may be very different. The questions below can help you work with model texts, but do not feel constrained to note only aspects of writing mentioned below. The list is not meant to be exhaustive.

Rhetorical (global) level

- Structure
 - How is the text organized, and how is that structure made apparent to readers?
 - How are sections and sub-sections labeled?
 - What is the thesis and where is it located? What expectations does it set up? How does the text deliver on those expectations?
 - How does the structure guide and support the thesis?
 - How is the structure used to develop the argument?
 - When and how are terms defined?
- Audience
 - Where and how is the audience indicated?
 - Is it clear what the audience can be expected to already know or believe?
 - How does the text engage with its target audience?
- Purpose
 - Where and how is the overall purpose indicated?
 - Identify moves in the introduction.
 - Where and how is the scope of the research indicated?
 - Where and how is the writer's position established? How is the research gap indicated?
 - Where and how does the writer indicate how the gap will be filled by this research?
 - Identify moves in other sections of the paper. What is the author doing (as opposed to saying)?

- Support (Data & Literature)
 - How are claims stated and supported?
 - How much context or background is provided?
 - Is data presented using charts, tables, figures, etc.?
 - What type and amount of evidence is used, and how is it used?
 - How is the credibility of the evidence indicated?

Sentence level

- How is the document formatted (e.g., margins, headings, citation styles, etc.)?
- Are direct quotations used, and, if so, how long do they tend to be?
- How are citations indicated (e.g., author referred to in-text or just parenthetical)?
- How are a majority of sentences structured and connected within the document? Does sentence structure change depending on the placement in the text?
- How long do sentences tend to be?
- Are there types of punctuation that are never used (e.g., dashes)?
- What sorts of transitions or other signpost phrases are used?
- What types of field-specific words or phrases are used?
- How much repetition of words (as opposed to using synonyms) occurs?
- What types of abbreviations are used? Are they defined first?
- To what degree does the writer indicate level of certainty by hedging? For what sort of material is hedging used?
- What verb tenses are used? Are they used differently in different sections?
- Is passive or active voice used?
- Are first-person pronouns used? Singular I or plural we? Is the use of these pronouns limited to certain sections of the document? How extensive is their use (e.g., do a majority of sentences start with I or we, or only a few)?
- How concise is the writing?

Voice

- How confident does the author sound and how can you tell (e.g., certain words, phrasing, etc.)?
- How and where does the author use self-reference or metadiscourse (e.g., “we will explain” or “as explained in the previous section”)?
- How formal or informal is the tone? What causes that level of formality?
- Does the author use idiomatic expressions?