

LONG ROAD PHOTOGRAPHY

Analysing a Photograph

Your first reaction to looking at any photograph is probably an immediate response, whether you like it, or not. However, photographs can be analysed in more detail, almost any photograph has a lot to offer if you learn to 'read' it.

The following is an approach you can use when analysing your photographs. They are only guidelines and not all of the questions will be relevant to the particular photograph you are considering, therefore be selective about which ones you choose.

Basic Facts

The title, photographer, and date, will supply the first clues when looking your image and must accompany all the photographs that are used in your research. If the photograph does not have a title or date, refer to it as 'Untitled' and 'Undated' when you write about it.

Description of the Photograph

Describing the photograph in detail will reveal a lot about your interest in the image, so don't be afraid to state the obvious.

- What is the subject matter?
- Is it black & white or colour? Film or digital?
- What type of photograph is it? (Landscape, Fashion, Portrait etc.)
- What is the format? (square, horizontal or vertical)
- What is the tonal range if it is black & white? (Low/high/normal contrast, high key or low key)
- What are the colours like? saturated/desaturated, harmonious/discordant. Do any colours dominate?

Visual Analysis

- What is your eye drawn to first?
- How is your eye led around the frame?
- How has the photographer structured the photograph; with lines, shapes or areas of tone?
- Which other compositional devices has the photographer used?
- How can the photograph be divided into areas; foreground and background?
- Has a dramatic viewpoint been used?
- How is the photograph balanced or unbalanced?
- What type and direction of light has been used? Artificial or natural, bright or diffuse?
- What depth of field has been used? How has this affected the picture?
- What is the importance of film speed or type?
- What use has the photographer made of shutter speed?
- How has the choice of lens or camera had an effect on the photograph?
- What skills must the photographer have used to produce the image?

Personal Analysis

- What were your feelings when you first looked at the photograph?
- How did your reaction to the image change after looking at it for a while?
- How does the photograph capture a mood or feeling?
- What are the hidden meanings in the photograph?
- Does the photograph tell a story, or is it more like a poem?
- What message was the photographer trying to communicate?
- Has text been used in any way? Does this affect your response to the photograph?
- Why did you choose this particular photograph?
- How does this photograph have meaning for you?

You might also choose to include the following in your analysis:

Context

- What events (social/economic/political/cultural) were occurring at the time the photograph was taken? Was the photograph a reaction to any of these events?
- How is the photograph a reflection of the time in which it was taken?
- How does the photograph look dated, how can you tell when it was taken?
- If the photograph is from a series, how does this have an effect on its meaning?
- Was the photograph a response to events in the photographer's personal life?
- How the photograph was originally intended to be seen? Is it still seen in the same context?

Influences

- What was the photographer influenced by whilst producing this image?
- How has the photographer been an influence to other photographers?

Comparisons

- How does the photograph compare to the rest of the photographer's work?
- How does the photograph compare to the work of other photographers?

What Makes a Good Photo Analysis?

- A detailed description that shows the reader how you see the photograph
- Your personal views are expressed and you explain your reasons
- The analysis is informed by the appropriate technical language and good research