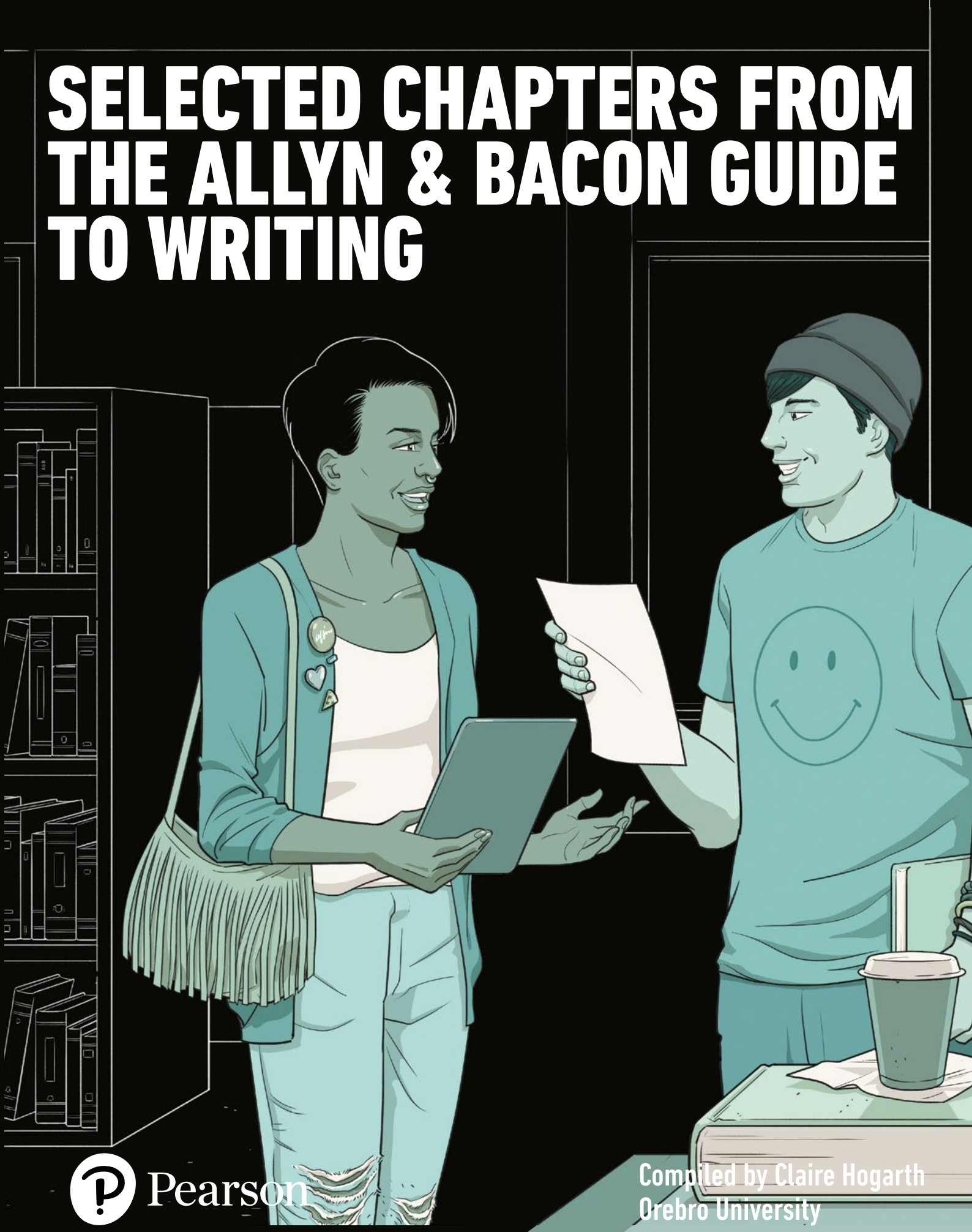
SELECTED CHAPTERS FROM THE ALLYN & BACON GUIDE TO WRITING



Pearson

Compiled by Claire Hogarth
Orebro University

Selected Chapters from The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing

This documentary photograph of a celebratory scene following the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989 uses elements of framing, orientation, focus, balance, and color to convey the dominant impression of a life-changing explosion of energy and emotion triggered by this significant event. This distance photo is divided into three horizontal bands—the sky, the wall, and the celebratory crowd—but the focal point is the yelling, triumphant German youth sitting astride the wall, wearing jeans, a studded belt, and a black jacket. The graffiti indicate that the photo was taken from the West Berlin side (East Berliners were not permitted to get close to the wall), and the light post between the two cranes was probably used to illuminate the no-person zone on the communist side.

Every aspect of the photograph suggests energy. In contrast with the mostly homogeneous sky, the wall and the crowd contain many diverse elements. The wall is heavily graffitied in many colors, and the crowd is composed of many people. The wall looks crowded, tattered, and dirty, something to be torn down rather than cleaned up. Most of the graffiti consist of tags, people's response to the ugly obstruction of the wall; West Berliners had no power to destroy the wall, but they could mark it up. The slightly blurred crowd of heads suggests that the people are in motion. At first it is hard to tell if they are angry protesters storming the wall or celebrators cheering on the German youth. The photograph captures this dual emotion—anger and joy—all at once.

At the center of the photograph is the German youth, whose dark jacket makes him stand out against the light blue sky. A few days earlier the wall had fenced him in (at that time, it would have been unthinkable even to approach the wall lest he be shot by border guards). Now he rides the wall like an American cowboy at a rodeo. He has conquered the wall. He has become transformed from prisoner to liberator. His cowboy gesture, reflecting European fascination with American cowboy movies, becomes the symbol of the ideological West, the land of freedom, now the wave of the future for these reunited countries. He holds in his hand a tool (a hammer or chisel?) used to chip away the wall symbolically, but the position of his arm and hand suggests a cowboy with a pistol.

What makes this photograph so powerful is the distance. Had Turnley used a telescopic lens to focus on the German youth up close, the photograph would have been about the youth himself, a personal story. But by placing the youth into a larger frame that includes the crowd, the long expanse of ugly wall, and the cranes and lamppost behind the wall, Turnley suggests both the enormous public and political nature of this event and the implications for individual lives. The youth appears to be the first of the energized crowd to demonstrate the conquering of the powerful barrier that had shaped so many German lives for almost three decades. Thus the composition of this photo packs many layers of meaning and symbolism into its depiction of this historic event.

For Writing and Discussion

Analyzing the Compositional Features and Rhetorical Effect of Photographs

The photographs shown in Figures 10.5 and 10.6 come from news coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis in the Middle East and Europe. According to Amnesty International, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the World Bank, by 2016 nearly 5 million Syrians had fled violent conflict and instability in their country, with millions living

precariously in refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. Thousands of these displaced people have risked the dangerous passage by small boats to Greece in hopes of resettling in European Union countries; however, closed borders have left thousands of people impoverished and stranded in crowded refugee camps. Photographs like these shown here have influenced world opinion and policies.

Analyze these news photographs using the questions in the list "Recording Your First Responses to Photographs" and the features and questions explained in Strategies Chart 10.2. Examine the features (lighting, angle and orientation, framing, and so forth) to explore the dominant impression conveyed by each photograph. Make notes that you can share with a group or your class.

Then, in groups or as a whole class, consider the rhetorical effect of these photographs by discussing your responses to these questions:

1. Which photograph would you use if you were designing a poster to appeal for donations to refugee camps? Explain.
2. Which photograph would you use to accompany an informational report on the urgency and complexity of the refugee crisis? Explain.

Figure 10.5 Syrian Refugees

Figure 10.6 Syrian Refugees at the European Border

Analyzing paintings

10.2 Analyze paintings with attention to their compositional features, artistic technique, historical context, and cultural messages or meaning.

When you are analyzing a painting, many of the strategies used for analyzing documentary photographs still apply. With paintings, you also look carefully at the subject matter (the setting, the people or objects in the setting, the arrangement in space, the clothing, the gaze of persons, the implied narrative story, and so forth). Likewise, you consider the painter's distance from the subject, the angle of orientation, the framing, and other features that paintings share with photographs. Additionally, your analysis of paintings will be enriched if you consider, as you did with documentary photographs, the context in which the painting was originally created and originally viewed as well as your own cultural context and place of viewing.

But painters—by means of their choice of paints, their brushstrokes, their artistic vision, and their methods of representation—often do something quite different from photographers. For example, they can paint mythological or imaginary subjects and can achieve nonrepresentational effects not associated with a camera, such as a medieval allegorical style or the striking distortions of Cubism. Also, the ways that historical periods and cultural traditions influence painters' choices of subject matter, medium, and style affect what viewers see and feel about paintings. Background on the artist and his or her culture, historical period, and style of paintings (for example, Baroque, Impressionism, Expressionism, and Cubism) can be found in sources such as the Oxford Art Online database. In analyzing paintings, art critics and historians often contrast paintings that have similar subject matter (for example, two portraits of a hero, two paintings of a biblical scene, two landscapes) but that create very different dominant impressions and effects on viewers.

How to Analyze a Painting

Just as with photographs, you should ground your interpretation of a painting in close observation. Many of the elements introduced in the Strategies Chart 10.2 for analyzing photographs can apply or be adapted to the analysis of paintings. In addition, you will want to use Strategies Chart 10.3 to examine the unique elements of the paintings you are analyzing.

Strategies Chart 10.3 Strategies for Analyzing the Unique Elements of Paintings

Elements to Analyze	Questions to Ask about Rhetorical Effect
Design and shape of the painting: The width to height, division into parts, and proportional relationship of parts influence the impression of the painting.	What is the viewer's impression of the shape of the painting and the relationship of its parts? How does line organize the painting? Is the painting organized along diagonal, horizontal, or vertical lines?
Medium, technique, and brushstrokes: The material with which the painting is made (for example, pen and ink, tempera/ water colors, charcoal, oil paints on paper or canvas) and the thickness and style of brushstrokes determine the artistic effect.	In what medium is the artist working? How does the medium contribute to the impression of the painting? Are brushstrokes sharp and distinct or thick, layered, or fused? Are they delicate and precise, or are they vigorous? What effect does the awareness or lack of awareness of brushstrokes have on the appearance of the painting?

Sample Analysis of a Painting

As an example of an analysis of a painting, we offer an interpretation of *Museum Security (Broadway Meltdown),* a painting by Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988), a young black Neo-Expressionist artist working in the 1980s. (See Figure 10.7, a photograph of the painting being viewed by a museum visitor.) Basquiat brought political urgency to the role of the individual in society and art. Of Puerto Rican and Haitian descent, Basquiat spoke three languages from an early age: English, Spanish, and French. His mother encouraged his artistic ability from the time Basquiat was young, regularly taking him to museums. Basquiat's family ties to Haiti and Puerto Rico, along with his experience as a black artist in New York, influenced his work, which frequently referenced Puerto Rican and Haitian politics. Although Basquiat died at age twenty-seven of a heroin overdose, he was prolific during his short life, working in many different mediums and collaborating with artists and musicians such as Andy Warhol, Keith Haring, and David Bowie.

In his 1983 piece *Museum Security (Broadway Meltdown),* Basquiat brings into focus the tensions in an artist's relationship with money, property, and surveillance, drawing on his history with graffiti and his experience with art institutions. Basquiat first gained recognition as one-half of the street art duo SAMO, which spray-painted poetic, political, and surrealist tags in and around Lower Manhattan, attacking consumerism and the avant-garde art scene. After SAMO broke up, Basquiat began painting on canvas. Known for his focus on the individual and the artist as hero, Basquiat often painted single figures, emphasizing the head with hats or crowns, or simply painted isolated heads. He portrayed black men policed by and resisting white societal control.

Museum Security echoes Basquiat's graffiti past in a striking, dense piece, characterized by his usual flurry of text, codes, and symbols, which initially overwhelms viewers. The large, seven-foot square canvas is painted in acrylic and oil stick. It is covered with swathes of black and off-white paint and a patch of paper collage, which serve as the background for multicolored text and the occasional image. At the center, hemmed in by this text, is a face with bared teeth and angry eyebrows, drawn in multicolored lines, controlled by the surrounding text while

Figure 10.7 Photograph of Museum Visitor Observing Basquiat's *Museum Security (Broadway Meltdown)* (1983)

simultaneously bursting out of it. The painting at first feels busy. The few images in the piece are drawn in a flat style, but the variety of colors, repeated text, and street art techniques and aesthetics create depth. With the exception of bright, primary red, the colors are muted. Greens, tinged with blue, chalky pinks, and dull golden-yellows, contribute to the painting's distinctive texture.

As the viewer begins to focus on individual words, some of Basquiat's famous dichotomies—such as corporate conformity versus artistic expression, surveillance versus privacy, and control versus freedom—come into focus also. The collage of words, sometimes crossed out and rewritten, recalls Basquiat's work with SAMO and reads like an anticapitalist, anticolonialist litany: "sheriff," "law," "asbestos," "Hooverville" (a reference to Depression-era shantytown homelessness); "priceless art," "museum security," and the word "NEW" embedded in a comic-book drawing of an explosion. Another symbolic word, repeated several times, is "Papa Doc"—a reference to François Duvalier, President of Haiti from 1957 to 1971, who assumed the title "President for Life" and who represented totalitarian-style regimes and extreme political control over the public. This dictator had special significance for Basquiat because his paternal grandparents had been jailed under Duvalier's presidency, and Basquiat's father left Haiti when he was twenty. Basquiat includes references to currency as well, but in surprisingly small quantities—5 cents, 400 yen—drawing attention to disparities in wealth.

Through the painting's references to museums and museum security, Basquiat highlights questions related to public access to art. Historically, museums and art collectors have played their own complex role in colonialism, racism, and classism and have often neglected or excluded artists of color. Although Basquiat gained fame and respect among living artists during his short lifetime, he was frequently frustrated by institutional and structural exclusion. Mounted in a museum, *Museum Security* calls ironic attention to what counts as "museum-worthy." The painting's resemblance to street art makes it an agent of tension and rebellion that seems to mock the elitist values of the cultural space where it is exhibited. One of the great ironies of this painting is that on February 13, 2013, as reported by Bloomberg News, it was sold by Christie's auction house for approximately $14 million.

For Writing and Discussion

Contrasting the Compositional Features of Two Paintings

This exercise asks you to apply the ideas and questions presented in Strategies Chart 10.2 about analyzing photographs and Strategies Chart 10.3 on analyzing paintings to examine the painting ***Reload*** by contemporary Native American artist Natalie Ball, shown in Figure 10.8, and to compare and contrast it with Basquiat's painting in Figure 10.7. Natalie Ball, who holds a degree in Ethnic Studies and Indigenous Visual Arts from the University of Oregon and a Master in Maori Visual Arts from Massey University, New Zealand, works in painting, textiles, and figurative sculpture. She uses her art to speak to her complex ancestry—African-American, Anglo, and Native American (Modoc and Klamath tribes). In a 2012 interview for the ***Contemporary North American Indigenous Blog***, she described her artwork as her "attempt at meshing historical narratives with counter memory, a type of political fantasy, to warrant suspicion as to what is the truth in order to challenge inconsistent and problematic historical narratives belonging to Native America." She painted ***Reload*** in 2007; the medium is acrylic and oil stick on canvas.

Working individually or in groups, analyze Ball's painting and then find some points of commonality or difference with Basquiat's painting. As you do your analysis, consider these questions: Why did Ball title her painting *Reload*? What view or feeling about life or about her world is she trying to convey? How is her vision similar to or different from Basquiat's? What ways of seeing or thinking are these paintings persuading you to adopt? How do these contemporary paintings by artists from underrepresented groups challenge dominant white culture and express alternative views?

Figure 10.8 Natalie Ball's *Reload* (2007)

Analyzing advertisements and advocacy posters

10.3 Analyze print ads and advocacy posters with attention to their compositional features, their integrated use of images and words, and their persuasive appeals to a targeted audience.

The images in advertisements are fascinating to analyze. Like other images, they employ the rhetorical strategies we described in the section on documentary photographs. Often, the ad's words (called the *copy*) also contribute to its rhetorical effect. Moreover, ads make a more direct and constant demand on us than do documentary photographs and paintings. Advertising, a multibillion-dollar global industry whose business is communicating across a wide range of media (the *media landscape*) to stimulate the purchase of products or services, comes to us in multiple forms: not just as slick, glamorous magazine ads, but also as direct mail, billboards, radio and television commercials, e-advertisements, bus ads, banners, pop-ups, and spam. Because of advertising's powerful role in shaping