

Formal Analysis Questions: Photography

Medium, Technique, Materials

Which technique was used to make the photograph? Is it analog or digital?
Is the choice of print size expressive?

Composition and Subject Matter

Is the work representational (with recognizable figures and objects), abstract, or a combination of both?
Does the work suggest a narrative (a story) or a sense of time?
What is the focus of the composition?
What sort of space was the photographer in? Public? Private? Natural or arranged?
Are certain parts of the photograph in stronger focus or blurred?
What was included in the shot? What did the photographer crop out of the scene?
What framing devices are used (aside from the actual frame, if there is one)?

If your work is figural

What is the relationship of your gaze to the figure's gaze or figures' gazes (for example, is the figure looking at you)? If there is more than one figure, do they look at each other?
Is the figure (or are the figures) placed in a setting? If so, what is their relationship to that setting?

Light, Color, Perspective

How many light sources are present in the work? How are dark and light passages used in the photograph? Would you describe the light as expressive?
Is the photograph black and white or color? If there are colors, are they warm, cool, or monochrome? Saturated or muted?
Where did the photographer stand to take this photograph? Does the angle of vision (eye level or slightly or greatly above or below eye level) say something?

Function and Context

What might be significant about the time period in which the photograph was created?
If the artist is known, what do we know about his or her training and career?
If the artist is unknown, what kind of person might have created it?
Was the work a commission, or did the artist create the work independently?
What was the original context for the work? How was it used?
Was it a singular object or a multiple?
Was the work well received? How has the public's opinion of the work changed?

Collecting History and Museology

What is the present state or condition of this photograph? What has led to this state?
What is the museum's title or description of the work? How does it affect your interpretation of the work?
When did the work come into the collection? What is its provenance?
With which area of the collection is it associated?
How is it displayed, and in relation to which other objects? How is it lit?
How are visitors expected to read this object in a museum setting?