

SOAPSS: A Chart for Critical Reading

When I ask you to “do a SOAPS” for a document, I’m asking you to examine the piece carefully and think deeply about what it tells you. This chart can help you along. As you examine a piece, refer to the information below and create a chart in your notes that allows you to take notes on the Subject, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Speaker, Style, and Scope. I may ask you to only take notes on some of these topics, so pay attention to exactly what you are asked to do.

Subject	The general topic, content and ideas contained in the text. You should be able to state the main subjects in a few words or less. Don’t ask “What is it about?” This too often leads to mere summarization. Instead, ask “What topics are addressed?” There is always more than one topic; be exhaustive. List all categories: explicit AND inferred.
Occasion	The time, place, context, or current situation of the piece. It is important that students understand the context that encouraged the writing or publication to happen, but do not confuse occasion with purpose. Also think of it as the “genesis”—why now, why here? Events surrounding the piece.
Audience	The group of readers to whom this piece is directed. The audience may be one person, a small group, or a large group. Try to be specific as possible in your description. Authors do not just write and hope someone will read; they write for a specific audience and hope for a possible broader audience than intended. Imagine the author having a conversation. Who is sitting across from him/her? Who might try to listen in? What prior knowledge of the audience affects the attitude of the author and the presentation of material? Primary or secondary audience?
Purpose	The reason behind the text or the author’s agenda. This is especially important for examining rhetoric. You can not examine the logic or argument of a piece until you know the reason for the piece or what the author is trying to tell you. What does the author want you to “take away” at the end of the text. Note bias here as well.
Speaker	What is his attitude? Voice which presents the text? In nonfiction it is important not to just identify the author but also analyze the author’s attitude toward the subject and audience and the “tone of voice” used in the selection. If the piece were read aloud, describe the sound you hear in the voice. Be alert to the “voice” manipulating or disguising a potentially offensive attitude of bias: Attitude= situation + opinion Tone= style (diction, imagery, detail, syntax, language)
Style	The individuality of the author—author’s toolbox. Given the choice of many different options in regard to diction, syntax, figurative language, rhetorical strategies, etc. which does the author choose to use and what effect does the author’s selections have on the piece? Rhythm, pace, movement reflect the maturity of the writer.
Scope	Decisions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of material from the text, especially significant if discussing narration. Is there significance in the events the author chooses to use and those not included? Not always used.