**SAYS / DOES ANALYSIS CHART**

When reading text closely, consider what it *does* as well as what it *says.* When you do this, you are thinking about how language *functions,* a dimension that’s distinct from what language *says.*

“Says statements” *summarize* the content of text.

“Does statements” *describe* construction, organization, and form with as little reference to content as possible.

Basically, says/does analysis involves grappling with the difference between the content (*says*) and the function and form (*does*) of a text as represented by its language. While exploring the distinction between form and content may seem challenging, it is a useful tool during close reading and analysis of text.

It’s often harder to write *does* statements than *says* statements. Most of you have been asked to write content summaries, so *says* statements probably won’t seem too odd or strange. Here are some consecutive paragraphs from Donald Murray’s “The Stranger in the Photo Is Me” essay,

followed by a says/does statement:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Paragraph from the essay** | **What the paragraph “says”** | **What the paragraph “does”** |
| I was never one to make a big deal over snapshots; I never spent long evenings with the family photograph album. Let’s get on with the living. To heck with yesterday, what are we going to do tomorrow? But with the accumulation of yesterdays and the possibility of shrinking tomorrows, I find myself returning, as many over 60s do, for a second glance and a third at family photos that snatch a moment from time. | Photos were never really important to the author of this personal narrative; he wants to live life, not dwell on the past. However, as he ages and reflects on his dwindling future, he finds that he is looking at family snapshots again and again. | In paragraph 1, the author of this personal essay *introduces* a subject and *conveys* his initial attitude toward it. He *notes* a change in his attitude and *refers* to a related change in his habits. |
| In looking at mine, I become aware that it is so recent in the stretch of man’s history that we have been able to stop time in this way and hold still for reflection. Vermeer is one of my favorite painters because of that sense of suspended time, with both clock and calendar held so wonderfully, so terribly still.  | As a result of looking at these pictures, he thinks about the relatively short time people have had the ability to capture moments with a camera. He thinks of how Vermeer, one of his favorite artists, did so in his paintings, long ago. | In this paragraph, the author *further reflects* on the general subject. He *elaborates* on this idea; he *illustrates* his thinking when he *makes* a historical reference; he *cites* a personal preference involving a related object. |
| The people in the snapshots are all strangers. My parents young, caught before I arrived or as they were when I saw them as towering grown-ups. They seemed so old then and so young now. And I am, to me, the strangest of all. | Looking at family photos again, he notes that the people look different in the photos taken when he was just a child. Looking at the images, he remembers that back then these people seemed and looked so old, and now they look so young. He then says that his own images strike him as the most strange. | In this paragraph, the author *focuses* on particular, personal objects associated with his subject. Extending his observations, he *cites* a paradox. He then *focuses* more narrowly on the subject and himself. |

A reference to content in a *does* statement is generalized or referred to as a type. For instance, Murray’s comments about Vermeer may be called “a historical reference” in a *does* analysis. In another example, when Murray “cites a paradox” he observes the discrepancy between how people appeared in life (old) and how they now look in photos.

A “Says/Does Analysis” of a text results in a *descriptive outline.* Here are some words and phrases that describe what the language of a particular text or portion of it might *do:*

categorize

cite

compare

contrast

convey

deepen

describe

develop

elaborate

evaluate

exemplify

explain

focus on

illustrate

introduce

itemize

list

make a reference to

narrate

note

offer a hypothesis

predict

provide an example

provide history

reason

refer

reflect

state a proposition

support

synthesize

trace