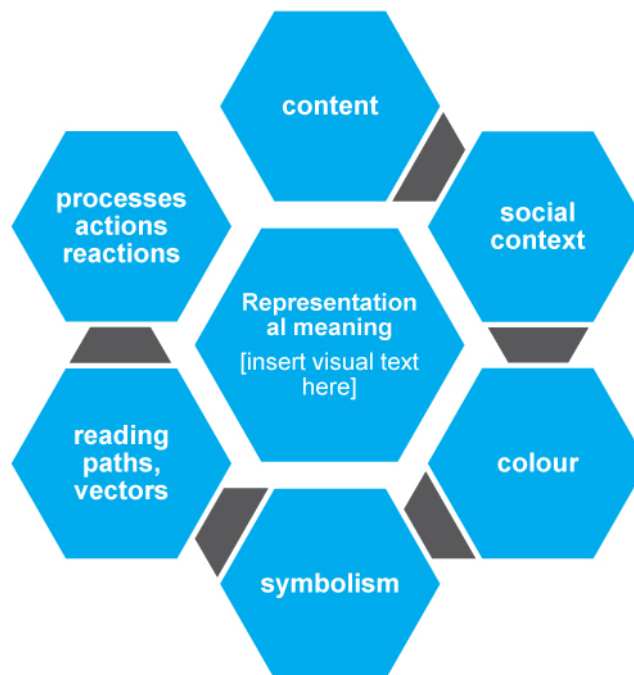# Question Prompts for Analysing Visual and Multimodal Texts

1. Representational meaning

Representational meaning prompts

Content: What is the text about? What is the purpose of the text? What is the subject of the text? Who can you see? What can you see? Who or what is in the text and/or represented by the text? Who has been excluded or marginalised in the text? How would the meaning of the text alter if one of these subjects were removed or changed?

Processes – actions and reactions: What is going on? What is happening in the text? How is it happening? What transactions/exchanges are shown? Who or what is involved in the transaction? Who is acting? Who is reacting? Who or what are they reacting to? How are they reacting? Is the interaction realistic or exaggerated? How would the meaning of the text alter if one of these actions or interactions were removed or changed in some way?

Social context: When and where was the text created? Who is/was the intended audience? Think about context of the text in terms of the time, place, culture and society. How would our understanding of the text shift if the social context for the image was removed or altered?

Reading paths and vectors: What is the reading path in the text? (Usually starts with the most salient image moving to least salient – left to right, top to bottom.) Think about the lines (vectors)

that draw the viewer's eye along reading paths towards identified focal points. Where are your eyes drawn to? What vectors (visible/invisible lines) lead you from one participant to another? (Gaze, protrusions, gesture can indicate a vector.) What focal point/s for the vectors can you identify? How are these vectors used to frame the subject of the text? How would our understanding of the text alter if a vector were removed or altered, changing the reading path?

Colour: What colours are used in the text? How are the colours used (and/or organised) in the text? Why are the colours used (and/or organised) in this way? Are the colours used to symbolise something (a culture, emotion, brand, product); create mood, impact or contrast; or attract attention? How do the colours make you feel? How would our understanding of the text alter if one or more colours were removed or altered?

Symbolism: What symbols are identified in the text? How are symbols used in the text? Look for symbolic images, logos, language, typography, colours and shapes used to represent ideas. How would our understanding of the text alter if the symbols were removed or altered?

2. Interactive meaning
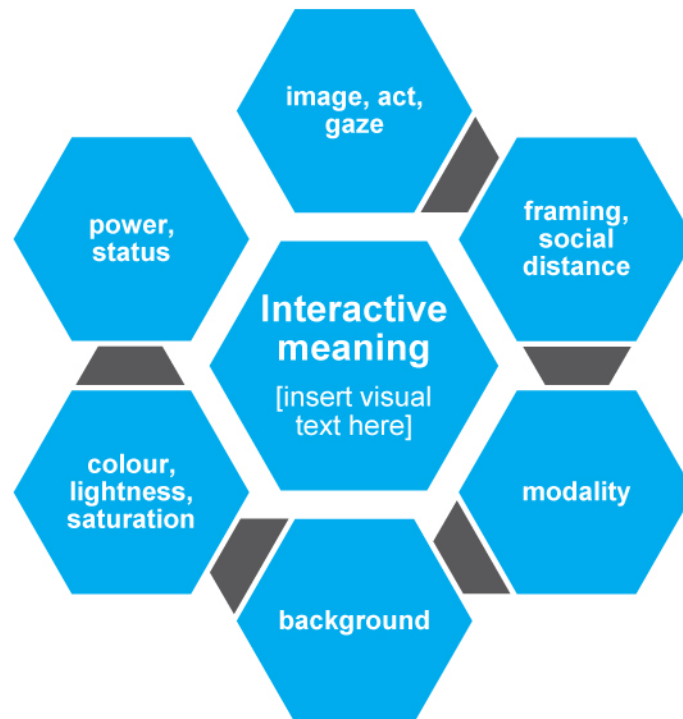
Interactive meaning prompts

Within the text and between the text and the viewer:

Image, act and gaze (demand/offer): How does the composer use gaze to engage with the viewer of the text? Does the subject's gaze demand attention? For example, does the subject simulate direct attention by looking (gazing) directly at the viewer of the text? Or is the subject's gaze an offer – ambiguous, open to diverse interpretation? What is the emotion and/or the relationship expressed in the gaze? What does the gaze suggest about how the subjects feel? What does the gaze suggest about the relationship between subjects in the text?

Framing and social distance: What is framed within the visual field of the text? How is framing used within the visual field of the text to create social distance? How does the framing let you determine the social distance between subjects in the visual field? How much space is shown between the characters? What is suggested by characters who are close to (or far away from) each other? Is the relationship between subjects private or public? Does the framing include or exclude subjects within the visual field? Does the framing allow the interactions to be viewed from a public perspective (long shot); a social perspective (full shot); a personal perspective (medium shot); or an intimate perspective (close-up shot)? Look for any internal or external framing. Is it

framing for enclosure (strong framing) or framing for openness (weak framing)? Is it framing designed to isolate part of the visual field or is it framing designed to include?

Modality: What level of realism is suggested by the text? What level of realism is suggested by the modalities of the different images and backgrounds within the text? Are the images drawn realistically with great detail – to make them seem more real, in the present or factual (high modality)? Do the images lack detail – to make them seem vague or abstract, from a fantasy, an idealised world or fictional future (low modality)? Are different modalities used within the visual field of the text?

Background: Is the background contextualised or non-contextualised? Is the context cultural, historical, situational or personal? Does the context provide clues as to the place, time and/or setting? What is the modality of the background – is it real or abstract? How does the context or lack of context of the background interact with the other images and shapes in the text?

Colour, lightness and saturation: How is colour, lightness or saturation used to create an interaction between different elements in the visual text? How is colour, lightness or saturation used to create an interaction between the text and the viewer? For example, warm colours bring the viewer closer; cool colours keep the viewer at a distance. A feeling of heat is created by using overexposed colours; a feeling of coolness or isolation by using underexposed colours. What is the degree of brightness across the text? Is the brightness evenly distributed across the text? What is the direction of the light source? (Shadows suggest concealment; bright light suggests hope or significance; soft lighting suggests romance.) How are shade, shadow and light used to indicate time of day? How is brightness, shade or shadow used to make parts of the text stand out?

Power and status: How are power and status demonstrated by the interactions and relationships suggested within the text? How are power and status suggested between the text and the viewer? How does the text make you feel? Are you dominated, abused, revered or applauded by the text?

3. Compositional meaning
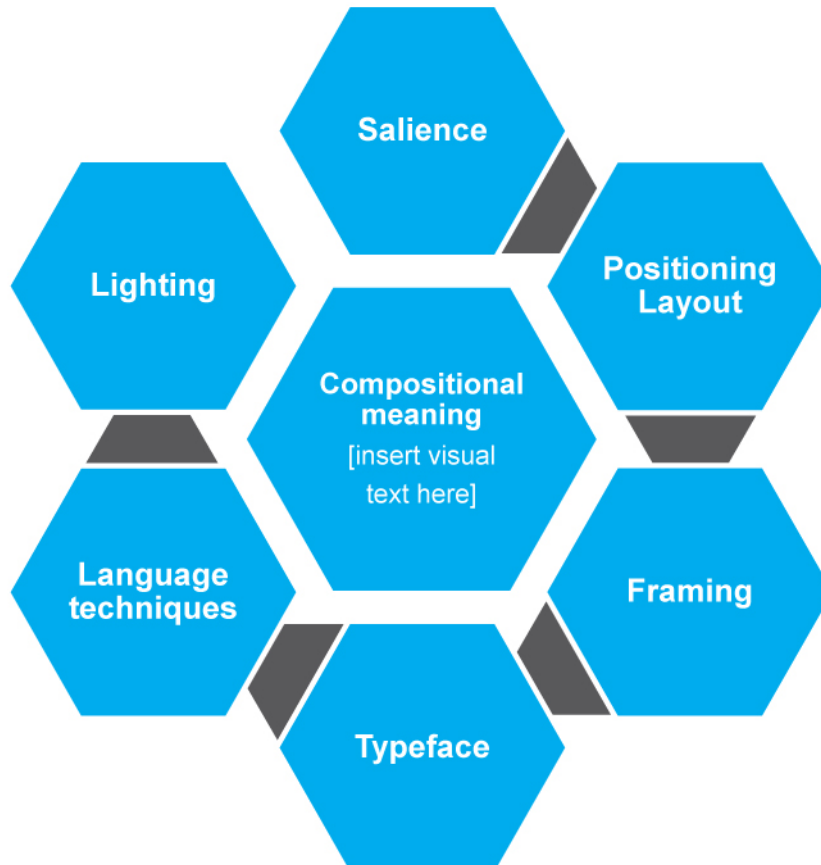
Compositional meaning prompts

Salience: What is the first thing you notice when you look at the image? (Size, focus, colour and distance can give visual weight to a participant.) What catches your attention? Which subject do you see first? What is its size in relation to other subjects in the field of view – larger or smaller? Where is the subject positioned - in the background or foreground? What is the subject's colour/brightness in relation to the other subjects and background in the text? What are the reasons why this subject is the salient image for the text?

Positioning and layout: Where are the different text elements positioned – top/bottom, centre/margins, left/right? Are they in the foreground, mid-ground or background? How are the elements arranged with respect to each other – juxtaposition? Are different text elements close together or far apart? Are different elements in the top third, middle third or bottom third? (Rule of Thirds). What angle are the participants viewed from? (Vertical angle determines power – viewed from above suggests the viewer is in a position of power, viewed from below suggests participant

has power over the viewer, viewed straight on suggests equality between participants and viewer.) Which position increases the prominence/dominance of the participants? Which position decreases the importance/dominance of the participants? Which position changes the focus of the visual text? Where is the first place/last place the eye looks on a visual text? Think about the layout of the elements in terms of balance, proportion, shape, and use of space. How does the position of whitespace affect the text?

Framing: What is framed within the visual field of the text? How is framing used within the visual field of the text to create strong and weak subjects? Does the framing include or exclude the viewer? What perspective does the framing encourage in the viewer of the text – a public perspective (long shot); a social perspective (full shot); a personal perspective (medium shot); or an intimate perspective (close- up shot)?

Typeface: How does the use of font, capitals/lower case, size, weight, italics, bold make parts of the visual text prominent or less prominent?

Language techniques: How are language techniques used to communicate different messages in the text – the use of repetition, imperative, puns, alliteration, pronouns (that exclude or include), rhetorical questions, emotive language, jargon, parallel construction, slogan, minor sentences, contractions, colloquialisms, metaphors, similes, etc.?

Lighting: What are the differences between light and dark within and across the visual text? Are the differences in lighting strong, weak or minimal?