VISUAL ANALYSIS

Analyzing visuals can be different from analyzing text. However, both have very similar rhetorical situations. Like texts, visuals also have authors, although we call them creators (artists, painters, sculptors, or designers). For film, we might refer to the writer or the director.

Visual have purposes (and intent).

Visuals have audiences.

Visual exist in both specific times and in specific spaces/locations.

Visuals have stances (sometimes called a tone or mood).

Start with the basic questions of any rhetorical situation?
Who is the author/creator/artist? How do you know?
Who is the audience? How do you know?
What is the purpose? How do you know?
When was the visual made?
Where was the visual made?
Does the visual have an obvious stance, even tone or mood?

Visuals also have their own affordances. An affordance refers to anything that is readily perceivable. Affordances are things like color, size, shape, etc. Below is a series of questions which can help you to analyze both static visual and film.

MEDIUM
What is the medium of the visual (e.g., paper, canvas, digital/screen, stone, film, etc.)?
What materials are used/present?
What techniques are used?

LAYOUT
Does the visual have a layout or an arrangement/organization?
How are elements arranged on the page?
Describe background objects.
Describe foreground objects.

COLOR
Does the visual have color?
What colors are used?
Is there an obvious color scheme?
Does the visual include any colors outside the color scheme? How are they used? Explain.
Are the colors harmonious (pleasing to the eye)?
Or, are the colors dissonant (offensive to the eye)?

Are there patterns? Are the patterns harmonious or dissonant? Explain.
Are the colors cool or warm?
Do you perceive any symbolism with the use of the colors? If so, explain.
Do you experience any physical sensations or mental sensations viewing the document?

LIGHT
Is the visual bright or dark?
Is there a contrast between light colors and dark colors? How? Explain.

FOCUS
What is the subject of the visual?
What is the focal point for the audience?
What path do your eyes take around the visual?
Are there different characters/objects? What are they? Do they seem to have a hierarchy? Explain/describe.

TEXT
Does the visual have text?
Does the text have any special treatment (bold, super size, kerning, leading, etc.)?
What typefaces are used?
What size are the typefaces?
Does the text help or assist in presenting information?
Does the text include any titles, headings, or other type which informs or credits the artist (and/or their team)?

SIZE & SHAPE/PERSPECTIVE
Does the visual make use of size/proportion?
Does the visual make use of shape or different shapes?
Is scale of objects in the visual normal/realistic?
Are items exaggerated or understated?

SPACE & DIMENSIONALITY
Does the visual play with space? How? Describe this use of space.
Is the item confined to the page? Is the item 2D (i.e., has a flat surface, like a square)?
Does the item take up space beyond the page? Is the item 3D (i.e., has volume, like a cube)?

ORNAMENTATION
Are there any visual metaphors?
Is there any visual repetition?
Is there symmetry?
Is there asymmetry?
Is there filtering?
Does the visual include any allusions to other visual works or does the visual seem to be inspired by something else? What similarities do you see?

ARGUMENT OR MESSAGE
Does the visual portray a message? If so, what is the message?
Does the visual include an argument? What is the claim? What is the support?
Is the argument explicit (easily understood) or implicit (more implied and more difficult to understand)?
Are any forms of natural support presented? Facts? Laws/Codes? Expert testimony?
Do you notice any tensions
Do you notice any strong forms of contrast?

ETHOS
Does the artist/director present any information connected to them (even a signature may count)?

PATHOS
Does the author use disturbing imagery or disturbing subjects?
Does the artist/director use anything which is aesthetically pleasing to the eye? If so, explain.
Do you detect any story or narrative?
Are there any emotional scenes or objects?

INTERACTIVITY
Is the visual interactive? Or, does the visual demand some sort of use of perspective by the audience?

CONTENT (FOR FILM)
What is the film about? What happens in the film?
Provide a brief summary.

CAMERA/ANGLES/SHOTS (FOR FILM)
Discuss the camera angles.
Are there any closeups?
Any use of long shots?
Any use of wide shots?

SETS (FOR FILM)
What kinds of sets are used? Explain.

COSTUME (FOR FILM)
Does the film contain any special costumes? Describe them.

EDITING/TECHNIQUES (FOR FILM)
Any use of special effects?
Any use of animation?
Any use of montage?
Any other cinematic techniques that you recognize?

SOUND (FOR FILM)
Is there music?
Is there speech (or a voice over)?
Is the voice over narrative? Explain.
Is there a soundscape?
Do you detect any use of foley techniques (i.e., the reproduction of everyday sounds that are added to film)?
What elements of the score or soundtrack helpful? Explain.

SPEED/FLOW (FOR FILM)
Does the visual contain motion?
Is the motion linear, directed, or sporadic?
Does speed matter to the visual?
Does the artist/director use speed in the presentation?
Does the artist/director use quick cuts or different angles in the visual?

EVALUATION
What emotions does the visual evoke? How does the visual make you feel?
Did the film do well at the box office?
Did the film meet with critical acclaim?
Did the film win any awards?