A4 Practice Essays: Evidence and Argument

Art Appreciation · Semester 1

Overview:

Read one complete model and a selected paragraph of the other during December 8–10, on an evening separate from the Sontag selection. Compare one passage using the A4 criteria. No separate written response is collected. Reading, models and essay writing share the existing thirty-minute daily allowance.

Authored practice models:

The following two complete responses were written with Codex as teaching models. They are **not past student work, not published essays and not previously marked exemplars**. They answer the same preparation question and use the same supplied visual cases, so their reasoning can be compared. Their teaching comments are judgments about the authored models, not recorded student grades. The practice question is not a set A4 option.

Practice question: What can a digital copy help a viewer understand, and what can it leave out?

Visual references: the supplied digital image of Hokusai's Under the Wave off Kanagawa, Met impression JP1847, and the supplied scan of a Minolta XE-7 advertisement. The course archive labels the advertisement 1976; its original magazine/publication is unidentified. A classroom comparison is the situation examined here. No actual social-media repost, advertising campaign result or audience response is being claimed.

Model A

Approximately 1,040 words, excluding the teaching commentary and references.

Digital copies need context

A digital copy can make an image available without making its history or purpose equally clear. This matters because access and understanding are different achievements. A viewer may inspect details more easily on a screen while losing information about the object's scale, material or intended audience. Comparing the supplied digital reproduction of Hokusai's Under the Wave off Kanagawa with a scanned Minolta advertisement shows that these gains and losses are

specific. A useful copy supports close examination, but the viewer also needs enough context to distinguish what the image displays from what its display cannot establish. Greater availability creates an opportunity for interpretation rather than guaranteeing it.

In Hokusai's image, the small triangular mountain sits beneath the large curling wave. The curved boats occupy the same unsettled space as the water, while the clustered heads of their occupants repeat along their narrow lengths. These relationships support a reading of human vulnerability, but they also show an organized design. The foreground wave's pointed foam reaches across the sky, while the distant mountain remains compact and still. The contrast depends on relative scale and placement. A digital reproduction preserves enough of these relationships to let a viewer explain why the wave dominates. The image does more than provide an illustration of the general statement that nature is powerful.

The digital file also allows a viewer to return to those relationships and compare different parts of the composition. Yet enlarging the file does not enlarge the historical object. The Met identifies this impression as a woodblock print measuring 25.7 by 37.9 centimeters, made around 1830–32 (Met, object details). Those facts change the encounter one imagines. An image filling a large screen may feel monumental, while the printed sheet has a different physical scale. Its visible warm background cannot by itself establish how its colors originally appeared, how the paper has changed or which conditions affected this impression. The copy gives visual evidence, but it does not contain its own complete explanation.

The Minolta advertisement presents another problem. Its large camera occupies much of the left page. Across the pale right page, a human shadow reaches outward, while compact columns of text describe the equipment. The headline says, “When you are the camera and the camera is you.” The combination links the buyer's body and identity to the device. The camera is shown as a substantial, carefully described object; the human figure is indirect and shadowy. That difference encourages a reading in which the product supplies the viewer with an expanded capacity to act. This is an interpretation of the arrangement, not proof that readers bought the camera or felt more creative.

Reading the advertisement as a classroom scan changes its likely function. A teacher can ask students to examine the relationship between self-expression and equipment rather than consider purchasing the product. The small technical text becomes evidence of the advertiser's promise, and the brand name becomes an object of analysis. However, identifying that promise requires keeping the words with the picture. A crop containing only the shadow might support several interpretations but would conceal much of the commercial argument. What disappears is not simply extra information around an independent image. The surrounding words help establish the relation between the pictured equipment and the imagined user.

Steyerl's account of circulation helps explain why a copy's value cannot be settled by resolution alone. She connects access with both alternative cultural exchange and commercial exploitation (2009, sections 5–6). Applied here, her argument directs attention to what viewers can do with a circulating copy. The same downloadable file could support patient study, decorative reuse or a misleading claim. Its availability does not determine which of those uses occurs. Nor does it establish the image's actual route: without evidence of transfers, I cannot describe this classroom file as the outcome of a particular chain of reposts.

Kissick adds a useful complication by considering communities that deliberately limit their public visibility (2021, pp. 6–8, 10–11). This challenges the assumption that wider distribution is always the best condition for cultural exchange. A small discussion can make room for shared references and disagreement that an isolated encounter with a public image does not provide. That does not prove private groups understand images better. It suggests a narrower claim: the organization of attention and conversation matters alongside the number of people who can obtain a file. A copied image becomes useful through a relationship between viewers, supporting information and a purpose for looking.

A serious objection is that this argument asks too much of reproduction. A digital image need not replace the object or provide every historical fact to be valuable. A museum label also leaves things out, and visiting a museum does not guarantee careful looking. This objection limits the comparison: physical presence should not become an automatic standard of

understanding. The Hokusai copy already supports a detailed account of composition, while the advertisement scan makes its verbal and visual argument inspectable. Neither achievement should be dismissed because the viewer is using a reproduction. The relevant question is which claim the available evidence can support.

That distinction also prevents uncertainty from becoming an excuse to say nothing. I can explain the opposition between the small mountain and the large wave because it is visible in the supplied image. I need a source for the print's dimensions because those are not visible at a fixed scale on screen. I can interpret the advertisement's relation between camera and user, but I cannot infer its effect on sales. Each kind of claim requires a different kind of support. This approach gives a viewer some control over interpretation without pretending the copy supplies unrestricted knowledge.

Digital copies therefore help most when they make examination possible and keep the limits of that examination clear. Hokusai's composition and Minolta's commercial address survive in the supplied reproductions, although the material encounter and original viewing situations do not. Context can recover some information without recreating those situations completely. The comparison supports a qualified answer: access becomes understanding through the viewer's questions, attention to details and use of sources. A copy's shortcomings are reasons to specify an argument's reach, while its availability remains a substantial resource for making an argument at all.

Reading Model A

- The opening answers the question and defines a distinction the cases can test.
- Paragraphs 2–5 explain how visible relationships support interpretations. Facts from a museum record are distinguished from things visible in a file.
- The two readings create a problem about conditions of attention, rather than appearing as separate book reports.
- The objection limits the preference for physical presence and leads to a more precise judgment.

- The final paragraphs specify what further evidence would be needed. The model avoids invented image histories and audience effects.

Indicative judgment: the argument and evidence are in the Convincing/Perceptive range. A fuller account of the original advertisement's publication context would strengthen the second case. The model identifies that missing context rather than inventing it.

Model B

Approximately 1,070 words, excluding the teaching commentary and references.

Digital copies make images easier to understand

Digital copies are useful because they allow more people to see images. Many people cannot travel to museums or buy old magazines, so a copy gives them an opportunity they would otherwise miss. This is important for education because students need examples when they learn about art and photography. Hokusai's Under the Wave off Kanagawa and the Minolta camera advertisement are both interesting images that can be studied digitally. The first shows an important work of art and the second shows how photography was advertised. Although seeing an original has advantages, digital copies generally make images easier to understand because they are convenient and can be shared.

Hokusai's print shows a large wave, several boats and Mount Fuji. The wave is much bigger than the mountain, even though a mountain would be larger in reality. This makes the picture dramatic and gives the viewer something to notice. The people in the boats look small and seem to be in danger. There are different shades of blue, a pale sky and areas of white foam. These details show that the picture is carefully designed. The wave is the most noticeable part, which helps explain why the work is often called The Great Wave. Viewers can see these things in a digital reproduction without needing the original print.

The Met dates the work to around 1830–32 and identifies its medium as woodblock printing (object details). This is useful information because it tells us when and how it was made. A digital copy also helps preserve knowledge of the past for a new audience.

Students can compare the print with images from their own lives and discover that art from another time can still interest them. Looking at the image closely is important, and a screen makes that possible. It is reasonable to say that the reproduction has helped students understand the work, because they can describe details they would not know if they had never seen it.

The Minolta advertisement is different because it was designed to sell a camera. The camera is very large on the left and a shadow of a person appears on the right. The text talks about features and explains what the equipment can do. It also connects the camera with the person using it. This gives the advertisement a message about identity and creativity. A viewer can understand that the company wanted people to feel a connection with the product. The contrast between the large camera and the shadow is effective because it attracts attention. It is an example of advertising using both a picture and words to communicate.

The advertisement is labeled 1976 in the course archive, although its original magazine is not identified. Even with that missing information, it is interesting to see how old advertising resembles advertising today. Companies still want to show that products can improve people's lives. A camera helps people take pictures, and pictures can preserve memories or express ideas. For this reason, the advertisement can be connected with a wider discussion of photography. Students can think about the promises companies make and compare them with their own experiences. The scan is especially helpful because it makes the small writing available to read as well as the main picture.

Steyerl discusses the circulation of images and the way that access can exist alongside commercial exploitation (2009, sections 5–6). This applies to both examples because copies allow images to move beyond their original situations. A copy of Hokusai can be educational, while an advertisement can still be commercial even when it is reproduced. People can use copies in different ways. This shows that technology can have positive and negative effects, depending on how it is used. It is therefore important to think carefully about an image's context and purpose. We should avoid deciding that every copy is good or every copy is bad.

Kissick writes about smaller communities and cultural activity that limits public visibility (2021, pp. 6–8, 10–11). This is another example of how people can choose different forms of communication. Some people prefer a large audience, while others prefer people they know. Both approaches can be useful in different situations. His discussion also shows that the internet is not only one thing. It contains many places and kinds of exchange. A student might discuss a digital image with a friend or with a whole class. Those conversations can be interesting because different people notice different details. This adds another benefit to having images that are easy to share.

Some people would argue that seeing the original is better. A print has a real size and material that a screen cannot reproduce in exactly the same way. The colors may also appear different, and the viewer can pay attention to the object as a physical thing. These are reasonable points, and they explain why people continue visiting museums. However, this does not remove the usefulness of a copy. A person who cannot visit the museum still needs some way to see the work. It would be unfair to suggest that this person cannot understand anything about art. Digital access makes education possible for people in many different circumstances.

Digital images are also convenient for comparing examples. A teacher can put the Hokusai print next to the Minolta advertisement, even though the two images come from different times and have different purposes. This allows a class to discuss art and advertising together. Students can identify differences, such as one being a landscape and the other being a product advertisement. They can also identify similarities, because both images are designed and both can attract an audience. Comparison is a useful way of learning, and it would be harder without reproductions. Therefore the technology supports the teacher's work and gives students a wider range of examples.

Overall, digital copies make images easier to understand because they increase access and make comparison possible. Hokusai's print can teach students about art, while the Minolta advertisement can teach them about photography and marketing. Steyerl and Kissick also help us think about how images circulate and how people communicate. There are limitations, especially the loss of the original physical object, but the benefits are still

important. People should use the copies carefully and consider their contexts. If viewers look closely and read the available information, they can learn a great deal from images that would otherwise be difficult for them to obtain.

Reading Model B

- The essay is fluent and uses accurate basic source claims. Its limitations concern reasoning, not English proficiency.
- “Easier to describe” gradually becomes “easier to understand” without a clear account of what understanding requires. The main claim needs a sharper definition.
- The visual descriptions are relevant, but words such as “dramatic” and “effective” do not explain enough of the mechanisms. The analysis rarely changes the conclusion.
- The readings are summarized in separate paragraphs. The tension between wider access and deliberately limited circulation is acknowledged but not worked through.
- The objection shows that copies are useful to someone who cannot visit a museum. It does not establish that a copy makes the work easier to understand than the original.
- The conclusion repeats the opening judgment. A revision should choose one claim and show exactly what evidence supports it, instead of adding more writers or examples.

Indicative judgment: largely Competent, with Partial features in the critical dialogue and qualification. It meets the basic task structure and uses sources, but does not sustain the more precise reasoning of Model A. These are illustrative criterion judgments, not a percentage conversion or student mark.

References for the practice models

- Hokusai, Katsushika. Under the Wave off Kanagawa, ca. 1830–32. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, JP1847. Object record. Visual observations refer to the supplied local image of this impression.

- Minolta. XE-7 camera advertisement. Course archive labels it 1976. Supplied scan; original publication unidentified. Visual analysis refers to the actual scan, not an assumed magazine layout beyond the two-page image supplied.
- Steyerl, Hito. “In Defense of the Poor Image.” e-flux journal 10, November 2009, sections 5–6. Text.
- Kissick, Dean. “Hello Darkness.” New Models, April 2021. Supplied PDF, pp. 6–8 and 10–11. Publisher.

Printable models: Download both full practice essays and commentary.