Chapter 2: Close Reading the Art and Craft of Analysis
there, and what an excess of positive ions there, that positive potential, is a far more
mechanistic than that.

Annotating a text requires reading with a pen or pencil in hand. If you are not allowed to write in your book, write on Post-it notes. As you read, circle words you don't know, or write them on the Post-it notes. Identify main ideas — thesis statements, topic sentences — and also words, phrases, or sentences that appeal to you or that you don't understand. Look for figures of speech, or tropes, such as metaphors, similes, and personification — as well as imagery and detail. If you don't know the technical term for something, just describe it. For example, if you come across an adjective-adj-
nom combination that seems contradictory, such as "negator abundance," and you don't know that the term for it is "anomalous," you might still note the juxtaposition of two words that have opposite meanings. Use the margins or Post-it notes to ask questions or to comment on what you have read. In short, as you read, listen to the voice in your head, and write down what that voice is saying.

Following is an annotated version of the Didion passage:

There is something, in the Los Angeles air this afternoon, something, some quality, some tension. What it means I don't know, but I know it and almost everyone I know today knows it too. We know it because we see it. The baby of the neighborhood, with the telephone company, then cut my lines and lied about it, gossips; and even in the air. To live with the Santa Ana is to accept, consciously or unconsciously, a deeply mechanical view of human behavior.

I recall being told, when I first moved to Los Angeles and was living on an isolated beach, that the Indians would throw themselves into the sea when the bad wind blew. I could see why. The Pacific turned dusky during a Santa Ana period, and one woke in the night troubled not only by the squawks screaming in the olive trees but by the excitement of the sea. From the smoldering forest the sky had a sort of heat, the kind of light sometimes called "earthquake weather." My only neighbor would not come out of her house for days, and there were no lights at night, and her husband roamed the Place with his shotgun. One day he would tell me that he had heard a report of the next morning.

"On nights like that, Raymond Chandler once wrote
about the Santa Ana, something hoary party ends in a fight. Melk.

little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks. Anything can happen."

That was the kind of wind it was. I did not know then that there was any basis for the wind, but it turns out to be another of those cases in which science bears out folk wisdom. The Santa Ana, which is named for one of the canyons it rushes through, is a foehn wind, like the foehn of Austria and Switzerland and the harmful of Israel. There are a number of persistent, remarkable winds, perhaps the best known of which are the mistral of France and the Mediterranean foehn, but a foehn wind has distinctive characteristics: it occurs on the leeward slope of a mountain range and, although the air begins as a cold mass, it is warmed as it comes down the mountain and appears finally as a hot dry wind. Whenever and wherever foehn or katabatic winds blow, the usual does not occur: the wind, because it is so cold, is not an enemy of man. In Switzerland, for instance, the wind is considered to be beneficial, because blood does not clot normally during a foehn. A few years ago an Israeli physicist discovered that not only during such winds, but for the ten to twelve hours which precede them, the air carries an unusually high ratio of positive to negative ions. No one seems to know exactly why that should be.
Dialectical Journal

Another way to interact with a text is to keep a dialectical journal, or double entry notebook. Dialectical journals use columns to represent visually the conversation between the text and the reader. Let’s look at a dialectical journal set up with note taking on the left (in this case, sections of the text you think are important) and with note making on the right (your comments).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOTE TAKING</th>
<th>NOTE MAKING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;By night like that,&quot; Raymond Chandler once wrote about the Santa Ana, &quot;every bozo party ends in a fight. Each little wisp flared the edge of the cutting knife and studied their husband's necks. Anything can happen.&quot;</td>
<td>What it means in that tonight a Santa Ana will begin to blow, a hot wind from the northeast whining down through the Cajon and San Gabriel Passes, blowing up sand storms out along Route 66, drying the hills and the nerves to flash point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;Drying the hills and the nerves&quot; — example of zoegeia, makes connection between nature and human behavior. Long sentence wording to the end — a &quot;flash point&quot; — like the winds &quot;whistling&quot; down the panes and causing humans to act crazy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chandler, who wrote crime fiction, was known for his hard-boiled style and cynicism. His quotation offers another image that supports Didion’s view of the Santa Ana winds’ effects on human behavior.</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whenever and wherever fire blows, doctors hear about headaches and nausea and allergies, about “somnolence,” about “depression.” In Los Angeles some teachers do not attempt to conduct formal classes during a Santa Ana, because the children become unbearable. In Sonora last the</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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Breaking the text into small sections helps you notice the details in Didion’s writing: specific word and sentence choices. For example, she connects seemingly different things in the same grammatical construction ("drying the hills and the nerves"); the technical name for this figure of speech is zoegeia). She also alludes to crime writer Raymond Chandler, to facts, even to some scientific data. Collecting these bits of information from the text and considering their impression on you prepares you to answer the following questions about Didion’s style: What effect is she striving for? How does the effect serve the purpose of her writing?

Graphic Organizer

A third way to organize your thoughts about a specific text is to use a graphic organizer. Your teacher may divide the text for you, or you may divide it yourself as you begin your analysis. Use the paragraph divisions as the text as natural breaking points, or perhaps consider smaller sections that reveal interesting stylistic choices. Although a graphic organizer takes time to complete, it lets you gather a great deal of information to analyze as you prepare to write an essay. The accompanying graphic organizer below asks you to copy something the writer has said, then restate it in your own words; text you analyze how the writer makes the point and what the effect on the reader is. Note that you become increasingly analytical as you move across the columns to the right.
There is something uneasy in the Los Angeles air this afternoon, some unnamed illness. What it means is that tonight a Santa Ana will begin to blow. The wind from the southeast is going to blow through the Cajon and San Gregorio Passes, blowing up sand storms out along Route 126. Dust fills the hills and makes the air too thick to breathe. For a few days now we will see smoke back in the canyon, and the smoke is in the air. I have never had the chance to observe the Santa Ana in dust, but I know it, and almost everyone I know talks about it too. We know it because we feel it. The baby imitates. The mud imitates. The wind whines. The wind whines. The wind whines.

The winds are creepy. They grab at leaves, tugging out branches, making them fall. People keep saying, "Is that the wind?" because babies and maids at home change. The speaker picks a fight and then gives it up. The Santa Ana winds make us think that human behavior can be explained in terms of physical causes and processes.

I recall being told, when I first moved to Los Angeles, that I was living on an isolated beach, that the Indians would throw themselves into the sea when the wind blew. I could see why. The Pacific turned emerald green during a Santa Ana wind, and the water of the night, that not the only by the sand creeks flowing in the small creeks but by the waves that ocean. The tide was normal. The sky had a yellow cast, the kind of light sometimes called 'sandcast.' My only neighbor would not come out of his house for days, and there were no lights at night, and her husband mowed the place with a machine. One day he told me that he had heard a Pete, the next a rattlesnake.

Doblin talks about her early evening walks with the wind, plus the following day. She mentions the wind, plus the sand storms coming in the Santa Ana winds.

Subordinate clause in the middle of that first sentence: "when I first moved to Los Angeles and was living on an isolated beach."

"Peacocks screaming in the olive trees"

Compound sentence: My only neighbor would not come out of his house for days, and there were no lights at night, and her husband mowed the place with a machine.

"Machine" is associated with revolutions in banana republics, upheavals. Suggests danger.

Giving the wind a human quality makes it even more threatening.

Cumulative sentence

Makes her point by accumulating details about what it means that the Santa Ana is beginning to blow.

Two short sentences: "the baby imitates. The wind whines."

"rekinfe"

Those simple sentences reduce human behavior to ineluctable evidence. We can't argue with what we see so clearly.

Though she's talking about starting an argument with the phone company, the wind makes us think of starting a fire. Like the wind does up in the hills.

The clause accentuates Doblin's isolation and because it's so long almost makes her experience more important than the Indians who throw themselves into the ocean.

Kind of an upside-down image. Peacocks are usually regal and elegant; these are screaming. Also olive trees are associated with peace (the olive branch). Supports the idea that the Santa Ana turns everything upside down. "And" as the coordinating conjunction makes the wife hiding and the husband with the machete equally important.
The following essay analyzes how Joan Didion creates a sense of foreboding that, in turn, helps her to develop her argument about the winds' effects on human behavior.

**Joan Didion's Santa Ana Winds: A Mechanistic View of Nature**

_by Jane Knobler_

The continuous description of Los Angeles preceding the arrival of the Santa Ana wind, juxtaposed with a scientific-explanatory development of Joan Didion's view that human behavior is basically a result of mechanics. She recreates the tense, stifling atmosphere that precedes the wind and argues that its effect on the people of Los Angeles can be explained by science. The wind, like a 1940s detective film, highlights the strangeness of a wind affecting behavior even before the wind has begun to blow.

The effect of Didion's fiction in the first part of the essay is to create foreboding terms in the reader in the sense of "strangers," causing arguments to be "indecisive," one head "machete" for protection. The reader is reminded of the ease with which disaster comes to the West Coast. It is a threat, a madness, murder can happen at a moment.

Didion quotes a writer who describes effects of the wind as causing women want to kill their husbands. She also notes folklore sometimes has a basis in truth.

The Santa Ana, which is named for one of the canyons it rashes through, is a hot wind, like the fohn of Austria and Switzerland and the harm of Israel. A few years ago an Israeli physical discovered that not only does this wind, but for the ten or twelve hours which precede them, the air carries an unusually high ratio of positive to negative ions.

This section gives scientific facts about the Santa Ana wind, including its name, fohn. Didion names other winds like it in other parts of the world, but says the fohn has its own characteristics. She names some of the effects the hot air has on people in various places.

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<td>The details accumulate, ending in &quot;hot dry wind&quot; to create a picture of the &quot;persistent malevolent winds.&quot;</td>
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Complex sentence: "There are a number of persistent malevolent winds, perhaps the best known of which are the rains of France and the Mediterranean storm, but a fohn wind has distinctive characteristics: it occurs on the leeward slope of a mountain range and, although the air begins as a cold mass, it is warmed as it comes down the mountain and appears finally as a hot dry wind."

The word choice in the second part of the essay is more scientific; Didion provides names for these dangerous winds as well as statistics and facts about the "suicide rate," "unmanageable" children, and a "fortuitous circumstance for crime." She supports her view that living in Los Angeles requires an understanding that human behavior is often out of our control. The dark atmosphere the Santa Ana wind creates has concrete, discernible consequences that can be reported in terms of misbehavior and death. The word choice of the preceding terms that precedes the Santa Ana wind is highlighted when it is followed by the facts about the evil wind.

Didion's choice and accumulation of detail also heighten the sense of foreboding. The coming of the wind has negative effects on the baby who "tells" and the maid who "dies;" it causes the "absence of mind." The world is in an unnatural state. One cannot treat one's expectations or perceptions. The long cumulative sentence that describes the "persistent malevolent winds" begins by naming other winds, moves to the wind's beginning as a "cold mass," and ends with the increasingly frightening "hot dry wind." These last three words summarize what is "malevolent" in the beginning of the sentence. The wind's "positive ions" seem at first a scientific explanation, but a second look shows them to be another perversion of nature. Wind should be cold; this wind blows hot. Something positive should bring happiness. These positive ions make us unhappy. Nature is a force to be reckoned with; all of our good intentions cannot stand up to the Santa Ana wind.

The evil Santa Ana winds have a negative effect on human behavior. When they are coming, the only course is to take one's bed. Otherwise, one may risk behavio