

I. GENERAL PURPOSE/AUDIENCE

People write about art to clarify and account for their responses to works that engage them emotionally. Writing about art helps people analyze their feelings and reactions to the work and its relationship to the larger world. Audiences include professors, museum—goers, historians, curators, dealers and collectors, non—artists, and ourselves.

II. TYPES OF WRITING

- Formal analysis (describing the work of art)
- Opposition to formal analysis (examining the work’s social/political context)
- Comparison
- Entry in an exhibition catalog (for museums)
- Historical research
- Criticism/Evaluation
- Reflective essay

III. TYPES OF EVIDENCE

- Primary sources: subject of the study, artwork, what artist has said about work
- Secondary sources: critical or historical accounts about the artist or work, quotes from sources, descriptions, explanations, examples, details
- Gallery works or museum artifacts: installation, video art, performance, new media, graphic design, prints, drawings, paintings, photographs, sculptures, architecture

IV. WRITING CONVENTIONS

- Utilize fair, informed, and thorough sources from research
- Proofread for plausible, coherent, and effective writing
- Use past tense for biographical data about artist’s life
- Use present tense when referring to artwork
- Write in active voice
- Ensure essays include thesis, evidence, organization and transitions, and appropriate documentation

V. COMMON TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Abstraction	Impressionism
Assemblage	Marxist Criticism
Balance	Materialism
Bricolage	Modernism
Chiaroscuro	Nonrepresentational Art
Colonialism	Orientalism
Constructionism	Perspective
Decontextualization	Positive and Negative Space
Deconstructionism	Postcolonialism
Expressionism	Postmodernism
Formalism	Style/Form
Gender Criticism	Tromp-l'oeil

VI. CITATION STYLE

- CMS (Chicago Manual Style) or Turabian are most common in formal publications (Instructor citation requirements may vary)