Writing About Art

I. General Purpose

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

II. Types of Assignments

- Formal Analysis (analysis of the form)
  - Opposition to Formal Analysis, “deconstructs” the work to reveal the deeper political or social realities that the artist meant to convey
- Comparison
- Entry in an Exhibition Catalog (for museum-goers)
- Review
- Historical Research (fact-finding)
- Criticisms/evaluation
- Artist statements
- Artist proposals
- Personal response
- Reflective essays

III. Types of Evidence

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

IV. Writing Conventions

- Research should be fair, informed, and thorough
- Writing should be plausible, coherent, effective
- Use past tense for biographical data about artist’s life
- Use present tense when referring to art work
- Write in active voice

Revised 10/12
• Thesis, support (evidence), organization and transitions, correctness, and documentation are all important considerations in art.

V. Common terms and concepts:

Abstraction  
Assemblage  
Balance  
Positive and Negative Space  
Bricolage  
Ekphrasis  
Perspective  
Deconstructionism  
Constructionism  
Decontextualization  
Freudian criticism  
Marxist Criticism  
Colonialism  
Post-colonialism  
Style/ form  
Chiaroscuro  

Gender criticism  
Formalism  
Materialism  
Expressionism  
Orientalism  
Impressionism  
Realism  
Postmodernism  
Modernism  
Tempera  
Tromp-l’oeil  
Non-representational art

VI. Citation Style

CMS (Chicago Manual of Style)  
[MLA is sometimes used. Clarify with your professor which one is preferred.]

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Source: