

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)
- Criticism/ 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

- Thesis, support (evidence), organization and transitions, correctness, and documentation are all important considerations in art.

V. Common terms and concepts:

Abstraction	Gender criticism
Assemblage	Formalism
Balance	Materialism
Positive and Negative Space	Expressionism
Bricolage	Orientalism
Ekphrasis	Impressionism
Perspective	Realism
Deconstructionism	Postmodernism
Constructionism	Modernism
Decontextualization	Tempera
Freudian criticism	Tromp-l'oeil
Marxist Criticism	Non-representational art
Colonialism	
Post-colonialism	
Style/ form	
Chiaroscuro	

VI. Citation Style

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

Source:

Barnet, Sylvan. *A Short Guide to Writing about Art*. 10th ed. Boston: Prentice Hall, 2011.