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

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.]

*****

Source:


Revised 10/12