

**HOW TO ANALYSE A WORK OF ART**

**IN ITS CONTEXT?**

**A Short Guideline for the Analysis of an Artwork**

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**For this response paper, you have to choose a work of art from a museum or an exhibition you visited. You can also write on a site-specific artwork (sculpture or monument).**

**Step I – Basic Information**

1. Choice of the artifact: HOW and WHY is this considered a significant work of art?  
Subject Matter (Topic): Who or What is represented?)
2. Artist or Architect (Who made it?)
3. Date (When was it made? Is it a copy or an original work? Was it made before or after other similar works?)
4. Origin (Where was it made? For whom? Is it typical of the art of a period and/or geographical area?)
5. Location (Where is the work of art now? Where was it originally placed? If the work of art is displaced, did its perception change? Could and can it be seen on all sides, or just on one? (Original location-current location)
6. Technique and Material (What materials is it made of? How was it executed? Size?)
7. Where did you take this information from? (Museum, gallery, artist's statement...) Indicate in a foot- or endnote.

**Step II – Short Description**

Describe the work in a few sentences. What do you see – what does it look like? Is it a representation of something, an abstraction or a non-objective work?

**Step III – Form**

Describe the formal features of the artifact with the help of the vocabulary you learned throughout the course.

**Art Elements:**

1. Line (straight, curved, angular, flowing, horizontal, vertical, diagonal, contour, thick, thin, implied etc.)
2. Shape (what shapes are created and how)
3. Light and Value (source, flat, strong, contrasting, even, values, emphasis, shadows)
4. Color (primary, secondary, mixed, complimentary, warm, cool, decorative, values)
5. Texture and Pattern (real, implied, repeating)
6. Space (depth, overlapping, kinds of perspective)
7. Time and Motion

[https://twp.duke.edu/uploads/assets/visual\\_analysis.pdf](https://twp.duke.edu/uploads/assets/visual_analysis.pdf)

<https://artcritic101.wordpress.com/formal-art-critique/>

<http://ualr.edu/art/art-history-resources/papers-and-projects/guidelines-for-analysis-of-art/>

## Principles of Design

1. Unity and Variety
  2. Balance (symmetry, asymmetry)
  3. Emphasis and Subordination
  4. Scale and Proportion (weight, how objects or figures relate to each other and the setting)
  5. Mass/Volume (three-dimensional art)
  6. Rhythm
  7. Function/Setting (architecture)
  8. Interior/Exterior Relationship (architecture)
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## Step IV - Context

**This paragraph is the most important part of your second response paper.** Context refers to religion, politics, social structures and hierarchies, cultural practices and traditions, intellectual currents etc.

Methods of engaging in contextual analysis are: the history of ideas, materialism, feminism, Cultural Studies and post-colonial theories.

**You can either develop your arguments within a theoretical framework and use the artwork you write about to illustrate your point; or you can choose an artwork and analyze it with the aid of one of the methods discussed in class or in the course reading. You may choose a topic of the chapter “Art’s Context” in Anna D’Alleva – *Methods & Theories of Art History*, Laurence King Publishing, 2012.**

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## Step IV – Conclusion Remarks and Opinions

After you have completed your analysis and inferred on it, elaborate by including some conclusive remarks. This is the part of the paper where you can give your personal informed opinion on the artwork and its context based on your analysis.

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## General Remarks

1. Pay attention to the date the paper is due. **Due date: April 29, 2020 (submission on Turnitin).**
2. Guidelines for assignment: (3-5 pages, minimum of 1200 words, double spaced, in Times or Times New Roman, 12 t. font)
3. **Include an image of the discussed artwork.**
4. Tense: use the present tense in describing works of art.
5. **Any information you use from another source must be documented with a footnote.** Failure to do so is considered plagiarism. **You have to give at least three bibliographical references in the correct format (Chicago style).**
6. Ask your teaching assistant for help if needed.