

Paper Assignment  
Art History 105 - History of Western Art 1

20% of final grade

**Due dates:**

February 26, LRC presentation and help with acquiring paper sources and formatting citations

March 28, Detailed outlines due

April 16 or before, Drafts due

May 9, Final papers due last class

**Length:** 3 pages, double spaced, MLA style citations

-Page 0: Title, Your Name, Course Name/number, Instructor's Name and Date

-Page 1, 2, & 3: paper content, double spaced, 12 pt. font.

-Page 4: Works cited, MLA style

**Paper:** Choose 1 artwork from a time period covered in class. You can select any artwork from Prehistoric times (30,000 BCE) to Late Medieval Italy (13th century CE). In the course textbook, this is about Chapter 1 through Chapter 9. Conduct a formal analysis of the work you selected. Use three scholarly sources, other than your textbook, to provide a context for the artwork you have selected.

**Tips and guidelines**

Step 1, The art!

Choose one piece of art that you feel drawn to, for whatever reason.

Step 2, Brainstorm!

Using the handout on "Analysis," follow those guidelines by writing down your first responses. Or, brainstorm a long list of questions that you feel the work provokes, as we have done in class. This will help you generate ideas for an interpretive thesis.

**Suggestions:**

- a. What is my first response to the work?
- b. When, where, and why was the work made? By whom and for whom? Title?
- c. What did the work originally look like?
- d. Where would the work originally have been seen?
- e. What does the form contribute? (see also chapter 1 in your textbook)
  - size, material, color, composition, shape
- f. What is the subject matter, what is depicted?
- g. Does it appear realistic? naturalistic? idealized? etc.
- h. There are many more questions, these are only a few. Your questions will depend on the artwork's medium - i.e. whether it's a painting or a building.

### Step 3. Organize your notes

Group together or separate your observations based on which notes address similar things. For example, when do some ideas relate to the physical features vs. the information regarding context or symbolism? What is an obvious fact/descriptive element vs. your own reflections?

Are there some notes that may lead to more research? Identify *what* particular notes deal with what, and how they might be used in order to begin to organize the layout of your paper. Depending on your thesis, you may have to leave some topics/ideas out of the paper.

### Step 4. Make an outline

#### Outline Part 1 - Formal Analysis

You have carefully observed the piece of art and taken detailed notes. You have organized the notes into categories and have an idea of how you want to organize and/or develop these ideas. Time for an outline, and to start constructing your formal analysis.

From our reading: "Analysis tries to answer the somewhat odd-sounding question, "How does the work mean?"" In other words, how do elements of form (color, composition, size, etc.) create the meaning of the work?

#### **Important:**

1. Your analysis should have an interpretive thesis - a basic point or argument. If you are having trouble developing a thesis, you may be focusing too much on the "facts" of the image. How do the elements of form affect you? The answer to this will help you develop a thesis. The thesis does not need to be overly complex or mind-blowing, **but it must belong to you.**

2. Formal analysis is, above all, generated by *your close observation*. You will not use outside sources for this part of your paper, unless you are referencing basic facts, such as what museum the work is in. **You cannot use someone else's observations and then cite them.**

3. That being said, it should not be in first person. (Do not write, "I think..."). See sample essay.

Again, see the handout on "Analysis" for definitions and examples.

#### Outline Part 2 - Providing context and using outside sources

In the second part of your paper, you can find and use scholarly resources to expand and support your thesis. Use your notes from your first response to the artwork to get ideas for where more information can backup your main points.

Examples:

-Is your artwork typical of the style of its period/era? Or is it exceptional stylistically?

-Does it follow common conventions of the period?

-What were the special techniques or technologies used in making the work or works that were similar?

-Perhaps you use this section to expand on the work's symbolism and original political, social or economic context. But remember, the information must support your own

thesis.

Step 5, Write a draft

3 pages, with correct citations on 4th page. Include a cover page  
due April 16

Step 6, Outline your draft

From handout, page 111.

To test and help edit/rework your paper, outline the draft by addressing what each paragraph 1. says and 2. does.

This is a similar exercise to Step 3 in some ways in that you are making sure you are writing clearly and following distinct lines of thought. By writing it out in list form, you can see a concise picture of your paper's overall purpose and flow.

For further help, please see:

Barnet, Sylvan. *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, 8th ed. England: Pearson Longman, 2005. Print.

(I have a copy you may borrow. The "Analysis" article is copied from this book.)

Online resources for writing art history papers:

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/academics/writing-program/student-resources/art-history-writing-guide.xml>

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/writers/handouts/WritingAboutArt.shtml>

MLA Guide:

<http://www.cerrocoso.edu/lrc/MLAGuideFinalGibson.pdf>

<http://easybib.com/>