Welcome

These are the directions for the Writing in the Humanities Art Analysis Essay for ENC 1101 - Composition 1 at St. Petersburg College.

The online version of these directions with a navigational feature is available online at http://spcollege.libguides.com/artanalysisessay. A table of contents appears below to mimic this feature.

As you move through these directions, please be sure to read thoroughly and to take notes, especially on ideas that are new to you or on material about which you might have questions that your instructor can help you address.

Table of Contents

- A Few Words About Genre
- Starting The Essay
- Organizing the Essay
  - Paragraph 1
  - Thesis
  - Paragraph 2
  - Paragraph 3
  - Paragraph 4
  - Paragraph 5
- Developing the Essay
- Outlining the Essay
- Audience, Style, Language
- Researching the Essay
- Formatting the Essay
- Peculiarities in Writing about Art
- Essay Length
- Example Essay
- Additional Resources: Writing Aids

A Few Words About Genre:

The term genre is used in music, literature, and art to define works that share certain conventions or subject matter. For instance, film critics use broad terms, such as romance, horror, or drama, but those terms often become more focused to a more narrow form of film, such as romantic comedy, sci-fi thriller, or war drama. These more narrow forms define a genre.

Similarly, in writing--even academic writing--genres exist. They may show up in a humanities, psychology, or biology course and range from a simple descriptive essay to a comprehensive IMRAD science report. The humanities and other fields require deep forms of
analysis, whether it be rhetorical analysis, cultural analysis, or statistical analysis, or even a SWOT analysis.

In this assignment, you will perform an art analysis, where you will describe and analyze the content, form, and context of an image. The skills used here are transferable to many other acts of writing and communication. In fact, since so much of writing is situated--that is, the writer's message is based on rhetorical elements such as audience, context, or conventions--writing in a variety of genres gives writers practice in adapting their message to the situation.

To learn more about genres, see this resource.

Starting the Essay:

1. Click on this link for pre-selected images from SPC's Online Library database, ArtStor. You may need to disable popup blockers to see the ArtStor viewer with all of the images. Alternatively, you can view the images as a PowerPoint or PDF, but ArtStor's viewer offers greater ability to focus on the subject.

2. If necessary, log in with your Borrower ID (Student Number) and PIN (last four digits of your SSN or 9999 if international student);

3. Note: To access the images, you may need to click on “allow popups” in your browser and then reload the page for the photos to show. In ArtStor, you can zoom in and zoom out on the photos, seeing components of the photo not easily seen from afar. See these icons to zoom:

Also, be sure to read the long version of the caption by clicking on .

4. Select an image about which you think you can perform an effective analysis and compose 500-700 words. Don’t worry if you are not sure how to perform an analysis. You will learn more through these assignment guidelines and through the course modules!

5. To download the image, you will need to register for free in ArtStor.

Note: if you wish to discuss an image, not found among the pre-selected choices but otherwise found in the ArtStor database, then ask your instructor for approval. Your instructor may also consider the option of visiting a museum for this assignment. Please ask for clarification.
Paragraph 1 - Introduction:

Be sure to click the button at the bottom on the images in Arstor (or look in the description portion of the PowerPoint slide) to locate general information about the image. Begin the essay by providing the following:

1. Name of the artwork
2. Name of the artist
3. Date
4. Material or type (e.g., silk screen ink)
5. Location of the work (e.g., museum name or physical location if a monument or architectural work)

The items do not have to appear in this order, but all five should be included in the introduction. Your introduction should be at least four-to-five well-formed sentences (yes, sentences joined by a coordinating conjunction (i.e., and, but, or, nor, for, yet, so) count as two sentences).

Thesis:

Conventionally, essay writers place their thesis at the end of the first paragraph following general background information. This sentence guides your readers, like a roadmap, introducing them to the points you wish to make before the travel begins.

Example thesis:

Warhol’s Statue of Liberty depicts a grid of several smaller images of Lady Liberty decentered on the canvas, features a fading effect of blue and red spray paint padded by an inordinate amount of white negative space, and represents America’s Pop Art movement so closely tied to the artist’s name.

This thesis:

- begins with a description: “depicts a grid of several smaller images of Lady Liberty decentered on canvas”
- presents important artistic elements: “features a fading effect of blue and red spray paint padded by an inordinate amount of white negative space”
- connects the work to a broader context: “represents America’s Pop Art movement so closely tied to the artist’s name”

Using precise, vivid language engages the reader and hones your ability to articulate complex ideas.

Here are some examples of verbs that can build your ideas:

Depicts, describes, emphasizes, features, represents, includes, incorporates, presents, evokes, embodies, portrays, accentuates, includes, signifies, exemplifies, comprises, expresses, reveals
Paragraph 2 – Description:

Place your image nearby this paragraph with the techniques learned in Working with Images found in the "Writing in the Humanities: Drafting" module, and describe the overall subject matter of the image. What is its appearance? What is the action or event, if any, occurring in the image? Use concrete rather than abstract language to describe. For instance, do not write, "The painting is beautiful." Instead, write, "The painting features shades of green, blue, and red throughout, giving it a dynamic contrast of colors." Remember, the description is not the analysis yet. Below is an example of a description of Andy Warhol's Statue of Liberty from the sample essay for this unit.

Sample Description

To briefly describe Warhol’s Statue of Liberty, it is perhaps best to begin with the twelve repeating images that appear in a grid form and consist of the full monument of the Statue of Liberty facing out with her left arm bent, holding a tablet (see Fig. 1). Lady Liberty raises her right arm skyward with a torch emerging from her hand, although this light is not completely visible in all twelve images. While the monument appears in the foreground of each of the twelve images, the bay and horizon serve as a backdrop to the statue. The horizon is colored in bluish gray in the bottommost nine of the twelve images and in red in the topmost three. The artist uniquely positions all twelve images to the right side of the canvas, leaving about a third of the work with nothing but white space. Overall, the creation takes the already well-recognized Statue of Liberty and updates its design for a new generation.

Paragraph 3 - Element Analysis

Using vocabulary learned from this video, which is also found in the course modules, break down and communicate the elements of the image in an in-depth way. This part should be more significant than the description. You are essentially taking the larger view from the description and now putting a finer point on it. To assist you in the analysis, Purdue’s spatial approach to viewing the image might help. Pepper, Brizee, and Angeli describe this approach below.

A spatial ordering covers the parts of a document in the order the eye is likely to scan them . . . There are no unwavering guidelines for this, but you can use the following general guidelines.

- Left to right and top to down is still the normal reading and scanning pattern for English-speaking countries.
- The eye will naturally look for centers. This may be the technical center of the page or the center of the largest item on the page.
- Lines are often used to provide directions and paths for the eye to follow.

Review paragraph three of the sample essay below for an example of a finished analysis of artistic elements.

Sample Element Analysis (excerpt)

In analyzing the work, lines, shapes, colors, and space combine with and separate from one another to create Warhol’s distinctive design. Probably the most prominent feature of the work is the gridlines forming twelve full rectangles and four partial ones. Additionally, with the work repeating the same image throughout, Lady Liberty standing in the foreground of a solidly colored Upper New York Bay creates twelve squares, each capped by a seemingly spray-painted, circle-like shroud. The blue-gray spray paint dominates three-quarters of the images of the Statue of Liberty, and this coloring practically spatters on most, if not all, of Lady Liberty in the second row of the grid (the first row in blue-gray), but the paint covers less of the statue as viewers move their eyes down the canvas, demonstrating the artist’s use of an uneven fading effect in its design.
Paragraph 4 - Contextual Analysis:

The power of an image is the context in which it is used. Images stand as visual symbols to ideas, events, or principles larger than themselves. In this section of the essay, you should research the context of your image by finding one article from Gale Virtual Reference Library. Here, you will discover and communicate the meaning and relevance of the artist's life and ideas to his/her work. Or you might also consider the time period, country, community, or social issues surrounding your image. For instance, if analyzing a work by Claude Monet, you might write about its relevance to nineteenth century Impressionism, and you might ask, "What central characteristics to that artistic movement does the work contain?" An excerpt from the sample essay appears below; note how it uses research to speak to the context of the work.

Sample Contextual Analysis (excerpt)

As with practically any work of art, Warhol’s Statue of Liberty stands to make a statement about culture itself, and while such a message may not be immediately understood, it helps to turn to another one of Warhol’s works of art from the same year, 1962, for a bit of revelation. The Marilyn Diptych, similar to Statue of Liberty, repeats the image of the late actress in row after row, using the same fading effect. As Gyure points out, this repetition "exemplified Hollywood's commodification of the individual" (186). Likewise, then, Statue of Liberty seems to deliver the same message as The Marilyn Diptych, but in this case it is not a Hollywood star who has been commodified; it is freedom, liberty, and America itself that can be bought and sold.

Paragraph 5 - Conclusion:

Conclude by summarizing your essay and rephrasing your thesis. Do not just repeat your thesis in your conclusion, however. Instead, review your thesis, along with the major highlights in your essay, and perhaps make each point a sentence, followed by a call to action or look to the future.

See the example, below, that shows the comparison and connection between thesis and conclusion. Note how each point in the thesis is rephrased--and slightly augmented by other essay content--in the second through the fourth sentence in the conclusion. Also, note how, in the conclusion, the first sentence creates a topic sentence, giving a focus to the ending, while the last sentence looks back and then to the future of Warhol's work.

Thesis: Warhol’s Statue of Liberty depicts a grid of several smaller images of Lady Liberty decentered on the canvas, features a fading effect of blue and red spray paint padded by an inordinate amount of white negative space, and represents America’s Pop Art movement so closely tied to the artist’s name.

Conclusion: Although seemingly simple in design, Warhol’s Statue of Liberty becomes deeply meaningful on closer look. The grid-like nature and repetition of the same image of the Statue of Liberty monument in four rows of three defines the work’s uniqueness. The linearity, coupled with splattered color patterns and the content’s largely off-centered positioning, speaks to the artist’s affinity for juxtaposing artistic elements against each other. Moreover, the context of Statue of Liberty represents the Pop Art movement in America that drew attention to the over-commodification of not only household products but also big ideas. Although created in a generation known for civil rights activism, Flower Power, and recreational drugs, such presentation and representation in Warhol’s Statue of Liberty has just as much to say today, as it did then, and assuredly, it will speak to generations in the future.

To learn more about general essay organization, see this and that resource.
Developing the Essay:

Your arguments should be logical and supported by well-developed ideas and unified, coherent, tightly bridged paragraphs. Use transitions between sentences and paragraphs to help the flow of reading. Sustain sentence variety, so that reading is not choppy, and refer to The Writing in the Humanities Essay Outline assignment in the prewriting module to help with developing paragraphs for this essay. The same outline appears in this guide.

To learn more about Development, see this resource.

Essay Outline:

Below is the essay outline that students in the course are required to complete in WIH: Pre-Writing Module. It should help you organize and develop the ideas and structure for your essay.

- Art Analysis Essay Outline

Audience, Style & Language:

Audience: Write for educated individuals ages 16-65, meaning with such a wide audience that you should not assume that your readers know everything you do, or that you know everything your readers do.

Style & Language:
Write consistently in third-person point of view (i.e., avoid I, me, my, we, us, our, you, your).

As Roy Peter Clark recommends, activate your verbs, and keep your subjects and verbs as close to the front of the sentence as possible. Use there is/there are/is/it is/it was (i.e., expletive constructions) sparingly at the front-end of a sentence.

Use academic, formal prose containing no slang, contractions, jargon, or gender-biased language. Concerning that last limitation, make sure your nouns and pronouns agree; choose plural subjects over singular subjects (e.g., use individuals instead of individual). See examples and explanations below:

NO: The reader can see that this work of art is about science; they can more specifically see that it is about the scientific discovery of planetary debris.

Why: reader is singular, and they is plural, so the noun and pronoun do not agree.

NO: The reader can see that this work of art is about scientific discovery; he can more specifically see that it is about the scientific discovery of planetary debris.

Why: using the pronoun he assumes a masculine reader and is, therefore, gender biased.
**YES/NO:** The *reader* can see that this work of art is about scientific discovery; *he or she* can more specifically see that it is about the scientific discovery of planetary debris.

**Why:** While gender neutral, and technically correct, using the pronouns *he or she* elongates the thought and will irritate readers.

**YES:** *Readers* can see that the poem is about scientific discovery; they can more specifically see that it is about the scientific discovery of planetary debris.

**Why:** using the plural subject *readers* avoids the gender-bias problem because the writer can now use *they* as a pronoun, instead of *he*. It also avoids the awkward problem of *he or she*. Finally, it avoids the problem of noun and pronoun disagreement.

To learn more about style within writing, see this resource.

**Researching the Essay:**

What does the image mean? What does it say about the artist's ideas, the time period, the community or country, or the social issues of the time?

The analyst's job is not complete until s/he delves deeper into the sometimes murky nature of the meaning behind an artistic work. That's why in this essay you will need to research the context (i.e., the meaning and relevance) of your image by finding, using, and citing one article from Gale Virtual Reference Library. Visit this video to find out how to search Gale Virtual Reference Library. You can also use other library databases, such as Humanities Source Complete, Oxford Art Online, or JSTOR.

In addition to citing the article, you will also need to cite your selected image.

Both the article and the image should be cited in MLA format. Use this resource to find out how to cite your image in MLA 8th edition format.

The "Researching Context" discussion forum in Writing in the Humanities: Prewriting module will walk you through searching for an article, but you will want to understand how to incorporate both in-text and end citations into your essay. To do so, please watch the videos below:

- Purdue OWL Vidcast: MLA List of Works Cited
- Creating MLA In-Text Citations
Formatting the Essay:
This essay will use MLA style and formatting, which is normally used for writing in subjects in the humanities, such as literature, religion, art, and music. That said, the entire essay should:

1. Be double spaced, including the Works Cited page
2. Contain one-inch margins all the way around, which is standard for Microsoft Word
3. Present headers with your last name and page number in the top right corner of each page
4. Feature, on the first page only, your name, the professor's name, the course number (i.e., ENC 1101), and the date in military format (i.e., 15 July 2017) in the top left corner--in that order--one subsequent double-spaced line after another.
5. Include, one double space below the four items listed above, an original title--do not just call it the assignment title or the name of the artwork--centered.

You can watch a video on how to format according to MLA guidelines here.

Peculiarities to Know When Writing about Art:
Artistic Titles: The style guide published by the Modern Language Association (MLA), which is the guide humanities disciplines normally use, recommends that works of art appear in italics and that each of the major words in the title are capitalized.

For example:

NO: The last supper or The last supper

YES: The Last Supper

Please note: some of the titles for images in the ArtStor database have a variation of uppercase and lowercase in their titles in the caption. Ensure you change those titles to match the appropriate style referenced here.

Tense in Artistic Works: Write about literary/artistic/cinematic works in present tense. Treat it as a living work.

For example:

NO: The Mona Lisa was a half-length portrait of a woman by the Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci.

YES: The Mona Lisa is a half-length portrait of a woman by the Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci.
Essay Length:
For this essay, the length should be between 500 and 700 words.
Because it is relatively short, you will want to make every word and idea count!

Essay Example:
- Writing in the Humanities Essay

(parts of this essay are interspersed throughout the Organizing the Essay section of this document)

Writing Aids:
You might like to refer to the following documents for assistance with your essay:

1. Analyzing Visual Documents
2. Elements of Analysis
3. Organizing Your Analysis
4. Description
5. Writing About Photographs