

Writing across the Curriculum 2017
Writing-Related Student Learning Outcomes
Art History
School of Visual Arts and Design

Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to use the specific terminology connected with formal analysis as well as to hone your skills at looking and then describing what you see. The goal of the essay is to focus only on the formal elements of the work and to avoid any interpretation of the works meaning or symbolism. No research should be done in connection to your selected artwork.

Audience:

Your audience is the general public, albeit, someone who has an interest in art. It might help to consider that the person for whom this is written cannot see the artwork that you are describing.

Genre:

This type of analysis of a work of art and descriptive writing would most frequently be found in professional or discipline specific writing such as art brochures, catalog descriptions, press releases, and sales descriptions.

Selection:

Choose one work of art (either from the assigned group of images or one that you can visit in person).¹ Based on your selection, please write a formal analysis of the work of art.

The formal analysis of a work of art includes a discussion of the formal characteristics within the work and the overall impression created by those formal elements.

Please organize your paper into the following eight sections or paragraphs. You should address as many of the questions in that section as possible. Please note that in many cases elements from each category will coincide with other elements.

Describe:

What is the overall aesthetic impact of the work? What is the first impression it creates? What made you choose this work do discuss?

Color: What colors are used? Are they bright or subdued? Might they have faded over time? Are they warm or cool? How are highlights and lowlights created? (Note: color is considered the most emotional and expressive of the formal elements). Is it the dominant element? How does color choice play into the overall effect, mood, subject

Line:

Are forms bounded by strong outlines or are they indistinct? Do lines appear within forms? What is the quality of the line (hard, soft, nervous, calm, stiff, limp, jerky, curving, smooth, straight)?

¹ This will be determined based on the focus of the course and the Instructor

Shape:

What shapes are identifiable within the work (circle, square, triangle, pyramid, cube, etc.)? What shapes/forms are used for emphasis or drama? How do the shapes in the composition fit together? Are the shapes simple or complex?

Texture:

Consider implied textures within the work (furry, lacey, thorny, wet) as well as the surface texture... What textures are created as a result of the choice of medium? Does the surface texture animate, inform, or distract from the subject or composition? How do the surfaces/textures interact with light? Do they seem smooth, rough, soft, hard, wet, dry, etc.?

Scale: How big is it? Tiny, life-size, colossal? How does scale impact subject and medium?

Space:

In painting: Is 3-dimensional space indicated through some kind of perspective system (linear, atmospheric, overlap, size diminution, etc.)? In sculpture: Does the form seem solid or does it enclose voids? Does it extend into space or seem compact and closed? Architecture: What kind of space does the building enclose? What space is created on the interior and exterior? Are they harmonious or not?

Light:

Is there light, implied or actual, in the work? What kind of light, what color? Is the action of natural light considered in the work? Is there an identifiable light source? If so where?

Format:

The paper should be roughly 1200 words (4 – 6 pages) and 2 double-spaced.

Please use Times New Roman font in 12-point type.

Make sure there are page numbers at the bottom of each page and your name at the top right of each page.

Include on a separate page at the end of your paper the image that you have written about.

Please staple the pages together.

This assignment is due at the beginning of class.

Formal Analysis Rubric

Formal Elements	Excellent: 10	Good: 8	Fair: 6	Poor: 4	Total
Description Purpose/Audience Eight sections (L,Sh,T,Sc,Sp,L)					
Mechanics	Excellent: 10	Good: 8	Fair 6	Poor: 4	
Length, Word Count, Spacing, Font, Name, Staples, Page #s Image					
Final Total (out of 20)					

Formal Elements:

Excellent: Response exhibits thorough analysis and vivid descriptions for all elements.

Good: Response is accurate and thorough with some description for most elements.

Fair: Response lacks thoroughness and has little description only a few of elements.

Poor: Response does not describe or address the formal elements.

Mechanics:

Excellent: All format directions precisely followed.

Good: Most format directions followed.

Fair: Half of format directions followed.

Poor: Few format directions followed.