

This week you will start on the only major written assignment of the course. You will have until Saturday, June 17 (WEEK 4) to complete this assignment. Choose a work of Modern Art that we have studied so far and appeals to you. You will write a 750 word (3 page) Formal Analysis of that work of art.

Description: A formal analysis is an analysis of the forms appearing in a work of art. These forms are what the artist puts together to give the work its expression and meaning. To aid in writing a formal analysis, you should think as if you were describing the work of art to someone who has never seen it before. When your reader finishes reading your analysis, she/he should have a complete mental picture of what the work looks like.

However, the formal analysis is more than just a description of the work. It should also include a **thesis statement** that reflects your conclusions about the work. The thesis statement may answer a question like one of these: *What do I think is the meaning of this work? What is the message that this work or artist sends to the viewer? What is this work all about?* The thesis statement is an important element. It sets the tone for the entire paper, and sets it apart from being a merely descriptive paper.

Here is a method to help you come up with your thesis statement 1. Record your first impression(s) of the artwork. What stands out? Is there a focal point (an area to which the artist wants your eye to be drawn)? If so, what formal elements led you to this conclusion? Your impressions can help you reach your thesis.

Format for the Paper: At least 750 words, double-spaced, 12 pt type with 1" borders. Make sure you proofread your papers for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and any other errors. **Make sure your paper includes a thesis statement.**

I have included a five-step process to help you structure your formal analysis.

INTRODUCTION; DESCRIPTION; ANALYSIS; INTERPRETATION; and JUDGMENT

STEP ONE - INTRODUCTION

What is the name of the artist?

What is the title of the work (which should be italicized every time you use the title in your paper)?

When was the artwork created?

What kind of artwork is it? What is the medium?

What do you think is the subject of the artwork?

A very brief description of the work

Thesis statement – This is usually the last line or last two lines of your first paragraph. The thesis is very important! Make sure you spend time to develop a clear and well thought-out thesis statement.

STEP TWO - DESCRIPTION

List the literal objects in the painting (trees, people, animals, mountains, rivers...)

If the work has figures, are the proportions believable? Realistic? Describe the pose(s). Is the figure active, calm, graceful, stiff, tense, or relaxed? Does the figure convey a mood? If there are several figures, how do they relate to each other (do they interact? not?)?

Consider the **ART ELEMENTS** that are present in this artwork and describe them:

1. **Line:** Are the outlines (whether perceived or actual) smooth, fuzzy, clear? Are the main lines vertical, horizontal, diagonal, or curved, or a combination of any of these? Are the lines jagged and full of energy? Sketchy? Curvilinear? Bold? Subtle?
2. **Shape:** What shapes can you see in the work? Are the shapes big or small? Are there recurring shapes, or diverse types of shapes? Are they geometric shapes or organic shapes?
3. **Form:** Forms are three-dimensional shapes expressing length, width, and depth. Are there forms visible in the artwork like balls, cylinders, boxes, or pyramids?
4. **Space:** If the artist conveys space, what type of space is used? What is the relation of the main figure to the space around it? Are the main figures entirely within the space (if the artwork is a painting), or are parts of the bodies cut off by the edge of the artwork? Is the setting illusionistic, as if one could enter the space of the painting, or is it flat and two-dimensional, a space that one could not possibly enter?
5. **Texture:** If the work is a sculpture, is the surface smooth and polished or rough? Are there several textures conveyed? Where and How? If a painting, is there any texture to

the paint surface? Are the brushstrokes invisible? Brushy? Sketchy? Loose and flowing? Or tight and controlled?

6. **Color:** What type of colors are used in the work? Bright? Dull? Complimentary? Does the artist use colors to draw your attention to specific areas of the work? How? If a sculpture, examine the color(s) of the medium and how it affects the work.
7. **Value, Light and Shadow:** Are shadows visible? Where? Are there dark shadows, light shadows, or both? How do the shadows affect the work?
8. **Pattern:** Are there repeated patterns in the artwork? Is there a motif that you notice in different places in the work?
8. **Size:** How big is the artwork? Are the figures or objects in the work life-sized, larger or smaller than life? How does the size affect the work?

The artwork you are analyzing may not contain all of these art elements. Typically, several of the art elements are much more important to a work than the others. Take note of which elements are the most important. Which elements seem to jump out at you?

STEP THREE – ANALYSIS

In this step consider the most significant **DESIGN PRINCIPLES** that were used in the artwork. Describe how the artist used them to organize the art elements:

1. **Balance:** is the distribution of the visual weight of objects, colors, texture, and space. Is the work symmetrically balanced, or asymmetrically balanced? Are subjects off-center, placed extremely high or low, left or right in the work? Or is the main subject directly in the center? How does the placement affect the work?
2. **Harmony:** Do all parts of the visual image relate to and complement each other? Do the art elements pull the work together?
3. **Proportion:** Does the whole or even individual parts of the figure(s) or natural objects in the work look natural? Why did you come to this conclusion?
4. **Contrast:** Contrast refers to differences in values, colors, textures, shapes, and other elements. Contrasts create visual excitement, and add interest to the work. If all the elements - value, for example - are the same, the result is monotonous and unexciting.
5. **Movement:** Movement is the path the viewer's eye takes through the work of art, often to focal areas. An artist can direct a viewer's eye to move along lines, edges, shape, and color within the work of art.
6. **Depth:** In Three-Dimensional art, Depth is literally the effect of the third dimension. Is the work shallow or deep? Is the work meant to be seen from all around, or is it meant to be seen from only one spot? Does it stand freely or does it hang on a wall? In Two-dimensional art, Depth is the illusion of a third dimension. The illusion of spatial depth in a two-dimensional work of art can be created in multiple ways: Overlapping, Vertical Placement, Diminishing Size, Atmospheric Perspective, and Linear Perspective.
7. **Emphasis:** Emphasis is the part of the design that catches the viewer's attention. Usually the artist will make one area stand out by contrasting it with other areas. The area could be different in size, color, texture, shape, etc.
8. **Unity:** The feeling of harmony between all parts of the work of art, which creates a sense of completeness. Does the work feel "pulled together" or does it feel like it is deliberately a little shocking? How does the artist make the work feel this way?
9. **Rhythm:** This is created when one or more art elements are used repeatedly to create a feeling of organized movement. To keep rhythm exciting and active, variety is essential.
10. **Variety:** This is how the artist uses several art elements hold the viewer's attention and to guide the viewer's eye through and around the work of art. How does the artist keep the work from becoming too comfortable or boring to look at? Does something jump out at you when you look at the work?
11. **Composition:** How are the parts of the work arranged? Is there a stable or unstable composition? Is it dynamic? Full of movement? Or is it static?
14. **Mood:** Do you sense an overall mood in the artwork? Perhaps several different moods? If so, describe them. How does the mood interpret how you view the work?

Once you have spent some time describing and analyzing your work, notice if your first impression of the work has changed, now that you have taken a closer look. How? If you came up with a thesis statement before doing this in-depth description and analysis, you may want to change it if your impression of the work has changed. Your thesis statement should reflect your view of the object.

STEP FOUR – INTERPRETATION

Based on what you have learned so far about the artwork, what do you think the artist was trying to say? What else was happening in the world when this work was created? Do you think that it is relevant to the work?

Why did the artist create this artwork? What do you think it means? What feelings do you have when looking at this artwork? Do you think there are things in the artwork that represent other things – are there symbols?

STEP FIVE – JUDGMENT

Do you like this artwork? Do you think it is a good artwork? Do you think it is an important artwork? Would you display this artwork in your home? Is this artwork good enough to put in a museum?

Justify your opinion. Explain why you feel the way you do about this artwork based on what you have learned about it.

Your paper should have a sense of order, moving purposefully through your description with regard to specific elements (ex: one paragraph may deal with composition, another with a description of the figures, another with the background, another about line, etc.).

Finally, in your conclusion (the final paragraph) you should end your paper with a restatement of your thesis. Do not just answer the questions! You may use the questions to help create a thoughtful structure for your paper.

It is important to remember that this paper is a strictly formal analysis; **NO RESEARCH IS NECESSARY IN THIS PAPER.** In other words, you are strictly relying on your ability to visually 'read' a work of art and make interpretations about it based on your analysis of it. Remember that your analysis should not be just a mechanical, physical description. Do not just answer the questions and paste them all together. Use descriptive language and adjectives to describe the artwork. Begin with a general description of the work, and then move on to the more specific elements.

Do not cut and paste from other people's work, books or the Internet. This is considered plagiarism and will result in a failing grade.

You will submit this Formal Analysis in the WEEK 4 Module. Write your Formal Analysis as a Word Document, and then copy and paste the text into the Assignment Submission Box provided. You may also attach the Word File with your submission.