**ART HISTORY GENRE GUIDE**

**CITATION:**

MLA, APA, CHICAGO?
Professors are often open to any citation style as long as the students stay consistent throughout their papers. If professors prefer a certain citation style, they will tell the class or mention it in the syllabus.

**CITING A WORK OF ART (MLA)**

Write the artist’s name, period, title of the work in italics, date, period, medium of the piece, period, medium of the institution that holds the work of art, comma, the location of the institution, period:

**EXAMPLE:**


**WHAT IS AN ART HISTORY PAPER?**

An Art History Paper is a close analysis of a work of art. Successful papers give a) historical context, b) explain the significance of the work (including its influence on other works), c) examines the composition of the piece, d) and may draw connections between the work and social movements. Art History papers are similar to English papers in that they analyze an object and its compositional arguments. They are different in that they value analysis of the influences on the object, and the influence of the object on other works of art.

**APPROACHES:**

**HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH**

The student will summarize historical writings on a topic. They will address both sides of the argument and draw conclusions between authors (Trent University).

**SEMIOTIC APPROACH**

The student will analyze the meaning of symbols and signs within a work of art.

* Most professors allow students to choose their approach. If their chosen methodology doesn’t seem generative, it may be worthwhile to consider different approaches. If the student is having trouble finding sources to support their approach they may need to change approaches!

**THE TUTORING PROCESS**

**AT THE BEGINNING OF THE APPOINTMENT:**

1. Identify what type of paper the student has been assigned, and what their professor values. Some Art History professors assign in-depth, annotated bibliographies because they want students to learn about the research process, while others assign close readings of an object through an approach they’ve talked about in class.
2. Ask for their prompt. Most Art History professors direct students toward certain art pieces and methods of analysis.
3. Ask for their chosen methodology. Art History papers usually use a semiotic approach combined with a historiographical analysis, but students may analyze a work through race, class or queer theory, etc.
4. Ask for them to explain their methodology. Recognize areas where their approach is unclear.

**CAUTION:**

Students should use assigned readings and class discussions as springboards, rather than reiterating what has been said.

**TIP:**

**DO NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THE OBJECT!**

Some students get too caught up in the analysis. Make sure your tutee is referring back to the object.
IF THE STUDENT IS STRUGGLING WITH THE BRAINSTORM PROCESS:

- Have them look through their notes to find a piece of art that seems to inspire an interesting argument.
- Suggest that they meet with their professor. Their professor may allow them to write about a different piece of art that inspires richer commentary.

IF THE STUDENT IS STRUGGLING WITH THE RESEARCH PROCESS:

- Direct them towards the Wikipedia page for the piece they are analyzing. The bottom of the page will include links to scholarly articles.
- Identify if their sources are to be scholarly or informal. Sometimes professors ask students to look at blog posts and on chat rooms to find public reactions to a work of art.
- Make sure they are researching theories about the work of art and its influence, rather than just the historical context. Historical context is important, but should not be the bulk of their bibliography.

PROFESSORS MAY:

- Ask the student to do a close analysis of a work of art that does not include outside research.
- Ask the student to write a research paper on a work of art, including many sources from outside the scope of class readings.

SOURCES:

Many thanks to Dr. Reynolds, Art History Professor at Whitman college, and Emily Pavela, Art History major at Whitman College. Much of the information in this guide comes from interviews with Dr. Reynolds and Ms. Pavela.


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