

AP Art History

Critical Analysis

Art Criticism System Instructions

(Adapted from a system developed by Edmund Feldman.)

Note: This is just one system of criticism, but for it to work, it must be done in the order listed, no steps can be omitted. You will notice that it is human nature to want to skip to judgment or interpretation. Try to resist this at first!

1. **DESCRIPTION** This is always the first step. Before writing, take a few moments to carefully look at the image. Next, you are just going to list the things you literally see. You will also include the date, size, artist, media, and sometimes where the artwork is or was done. *Be careful not to interpret*: for example just say a woman holding a child and not mother and child. No judgments are made at this point.

2. **ANALYSIS** This is a formal analysis of the relationships among the elements and principles used in the work of art. Ask yourself how the artist is using the elements and principles for visual effect. For example, color and shape may be achieving balance and contrast in the composition. You should be specific in where you see the elements and principles in the artwork.

Note: The Description and Analysis steps accomplish the following:

- They encourage a complete examination of the artwork
- They help avoid the viewer's tendency to jump to conclusions
- They build skills of observation
- They accumulate the facts necessary for critical interpretation
- They help establish a consensus for public criticism

3. **INTERPRETATION:** This is the stage of looking at art where you attempt to determine what idea or concept seems to sum up or unify all the separate traits of the artwork. Based upon description and analysis, what is the artist trying to say? *You can use biographical or historical information if that is known at this stage.* Your personal interpretation will be based on your life experiences so they most likely will be different from the artist's.

4. **JUDGEMENT:** Finally, after the above steps are complete ask yourself, "Is this a successful work of art?" There are two ways to answer this question: Personal judgment and aesthetic judgment. A personal judgment is largely based on opinion and "gut feeling". An aesthetic judgment will weigh the above the analysis and judge the success of the work based on one of the following categories, or Theories and Qualities of Art:

- Imitationalism and Literal Qualities: focuses on realistic presentation.
- Formalism and Design Qualities: composition is most important fact of the art (strong use of elements and principles of design, perhaps in their pure form).
- Emotional and Expressive Qualities: strong communication of feelings, moods or idea.

A work may fit into any or all of these categories, and may be successful in one but not another. A critical analysis will favor aesthetic judgment over personal judgment.

5. **JUDGING A FUNCTIONAL OBJECT:** To judge a functional object (chairs, buildings, etc) repeats steps 1 and 2, then skip 3 and 4 on this handout. For the Interpretation step consider the purpose of the object as its meaning. For the judgment step consider how the object works when it is used.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS**Rubric**

AP Art History

Watson

Artist: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

Source/Page #: _____

Name:

Date:

OBJECTIVE: Write a 4-paragraph Critical Analysis of a work from the assigned chapter based on the 4-step system of art criticism: Description, Analysis, Interpretation, and Judgment. [note: if addressing work outside the textbook (but in lecture, for example), please copy and paste image into document and indicate source.]

- 4**
20 points
Describes work in great detail. Analyzes with a high degree of specificity how the elements and principles of art are used in the work. Thorough and well-reasoned interpretation of artwork's meaning or function, making connections to information beyond the image. Final judgment is a balanced combination of aesthetic quality and personal response. Discussion is full, well-structured and without significant errors.
- 3**
18 points
Describes work with some detail. Analyzes with a fair degree of specificity how the elements and principles of art are used in the work. Basic interpretation of artwork's meaning or function, based on surface information. Final judgment contains some analysis of aesthetic quality or personal response, but may be unbalanced. Discussion is not as full or well-structured, and may contain errors.
- 2**
16 points
Limited or general description; more detail needed. Analyzes how the elements and principles of art are used in the work in a general way, but more specificity is needed. Interpretation of artwork's meaning or function is poorly reasoned or insufficient. Final judgment is unbalanced, based mostly on aesthetics or opinion. Writing lacks structure, or contains significant errors affecting quality of writing.
- 1**
14 points
Many inaccurate, incomplete or missing elements. Little to no use of detail in description. Analysis lacks depth. Interpretation is faulty or poorly reasoned. Final judgment based entirely on opinion or value judgments. Poorly structured, incomplete or with significant errors throughout.
- 0**
No work submitted, work submitted with whole sections missing
OR
Response is without merit because it addresses artwork from a different chapter

Note: Grade may be lowered for being late or incomplete

COMMENTS: