

WRITING PLAN: ART HISTORY

In many ways, the Art History faculty teaches the same fundamentals of effective writing common to any Humanities discipline. We are interested in developing students' critical thinking skills, whether in written or oral expression, and at every level we stress the importance of certain best practices in writing. These include establishing and supporting a strong thesis; understanding the differences between primary and secondary sources; recognizing the importance of historiography, and of the role that different critical methodologies play in writing; knowing why, when, and how to properly cite sources; discerning the difference between scholarly sources, primary sources and non-academic ones; and approaching each writing project as a series of evolving drafts.

Given the visual nature of our discipline, of course, we also teach writing in ways that are more specific to our field. Most importantly, we teach students to consider works of art as "texts" and to always ground their arguments in visually identifiable evidence – whether discussing a single object, an ephemeral performance, or an entire city. Writing assignments in our courses range from formal analyses to in-depth research projects that demand more sophisticated visual analysis and critical thinking, as well as a working knowledge of art history's fundamental methodologies. In all of these cases, students are asked to consider the works' *context* within their writing – addressing the cultural, ethical, and physical/spatial dimensions of any given artifact – and are expected, too, to engage the reader in a meaningful dialogue with the works (both in terms of exposition and through effective visual illustration). In addition to writing traditionally structured essays, students within our discipline are also asked to write formal and informal reviews of catalogues, exhibitions, and museums; critical reading responses and short précis of articles; and exhibition catalogue essays and entries. The range of these exercises is intended, ultimately, to develop and strengthen students' visual literacy through writing.

Below is a compilation of the types of writing that we teach across our curriculum, as well as a listing of the skills that we hope to foster with these assignments.

100-Level classes:

- Single-object formal analysis (3-5 pages)
- Comparative analysis of two or more works (5-7 pages)
- Research papers involving assigned primary documents (5-7 pages)
- Timed essays (comparative or thematic) for midterm and final exams

Skills fostered at this level:

- Translation of visual observation into written arguments
- Establishment and support of a thesis; effective essay organization
- Proper citation of sources
- Writing of multiple drafts
- Peer editing

200-Level classes:

- Research papers involving multiple works or artists (up to 10 pages)
- Take-home midterms and final essays
- Catalogue, exhibition, and/or museum reviews
- Critical responses to readings

New skills fostered at this level:

- Effective integration of scholarly literature with visual analysis
- Translation of written arguments into oral presentations (and vice versa)
- Ability to isolate an author's thesis and recognize the structure of his/her arguments

300-Level classes:

- Greater frequency of the types of assignments seen at the 200-level
- Required drafts for longer papers (up to 15 pages)
- Essays on assigned topics/themes (5-7 pages)
- Posting informal responses on Blackboard
- Keeping a journal or notebook responding to works, lectures and readings

New skills fostered at this level:

- Ability to write more frequently and extensively
- Greater independence in the editing process
- Learning to use different types of writing – informal responses, journal entries, etc. – in the service of larger (and more formal) projects

400-level and above (Senior Seminar or Honors Theses):

- Substantive, semester-long (or year-long) research projects emphasizing original scholarship
[Senior seminar, 20-25 pages; Honors Theses, 70+ pages)
- Annotated bibliographies
- Extensive, pre-draft outlines and multiple paper drafts

New skills fostered at this level:

- Ability to organize large amounts of material and to pace the schedule of writing
- Recognition (and use) of a particular critical/methodological framework
- Ability to work independently, as well as to give/receive peer criticism effectively