

**1) Thesis**

Your paper should have a clearly stated and narrowly focused thesis statement or question. In other words, what question are you going to ask about this work or issue or theory, or what point are you going to make about it? In this way, by constructing an argument based on your reading of the image(s) and your research, your own voice as the writer should remain clear and dominant, and you'll avoid ending up with a summary or report.

**2) Supporting Evidence**

Without supporting evidence your assertions will seem to the reader like unconvincing generalizations. Evidence can come from various sources:

a) *internal evidence*, related directly to the image itself and coming from a close reading of the visual text. This would consist of a close technical, stylistic and/or iconographic (i.e., subject matter) analysis;

b) *external evidence*, related to contextual issues, which could include biographical information pertinent to your thesis as well as a consideration of the larger context in which the work was made (historical, political, literary, religious, or social, including issues of gender, race, and/or class).

There is a difference between *primary source material* (including quotes by the artist or contemporaries of the artist), and *secondary sources* (including the work of recent scholars). To be as convincing as possible, your evidence should come from a variety of sources. Be especially careful not to rely exclusively on a single secondary source. Read as many different viewpoints as you can, sifting through the various ideas, thinking about what makes sense and what doesn't. Also make sure that your own voice as the writer remains the dominant voice: you should be in control of the various sources that you use, rather than being controlled by them. One way to do that is to start by personally confronting the primary material (look closely and seriously at the image, or read and reread the primary text). Then formulate your own carefully reasoned ideas before turning to the secondary sources, though of course you will learn a great deal from those secondary sources that will certainly affect your thinking. But do get in the habit of being an argumentative and critical reader rather than a passive, accepting one: evaluate your sources' assertions, question their biases, look for opposing theories.

**3) Use of sources**

Find scholarly books and journal articles for your sources, rather than popular or general references. There are two major periodical indexes that are especially good for scholarly articles about art. *The Art Index* is a multi-volume hard-copy index located in the reference section of the library. It's also now available on-line via the library home-page (go to Search Tools, then Research Databases, then Art, then Art Index). The on-line version is much quicker and easier to use, although it doesn't go back beyond the mid 1980s. Many excellent groundbreaking articles were written before that date, so I suggest starting your search on-line and then moving to the hard-copy version for earlier articles, if needed (though the footnotes of recent articles and/or books on the topic should point you in the direction of significant earlier work). *JStor* also provides access to a large array of art history journals.

Look for sources that are as specifically related to your topic as possible. It is sometimes helpful to start the process by reading the relevant entry in one of the art encyclopedias in our library's reference section, and then to find the relevant section in an art history survey book (e.g., Janson's *History of Art* or Gardner's *Art Through the Ages*), and then to read about the artist or issue or period in a more specialized book on that particular period (e.g., Hartt's *History of Italian Renaissance Art* or Snyder's *Northern Renaissance Art* or Arnason's *History of Modern Art*). But these should be treated as background, and you should not have to rely on the encyclopedias or general survey books for your information (and by extension, an encyclopedia or a survey like Janson or Gardner should probably not appear in your bibliography unless that's really the only place you've been able to find the particular idea or information).

Our library's interlibrary loan service is invaluable, but remember that you should allow at least two weeks lead time. Interlibrary loan forms are available at the main desk of the library, or can also be accessed via the library's home page (under 'Services').

Build your bibliography by using our library's on-line search engines and paper indexes, looking at the on-line collections of some of the major research libraries (e.g., Harvard, Yale, Columbia), and checking the footnotes and bibliographies of the books and articles you've already found in order to see what sources those scholars used. Also check to see where a specific work of art is located, and if it's in a public museum find out whether there's a catalogue of that collection that would have information on the work (I have a number of museum catalogues, as does the library). Don't hesitate to ask the librarians for help. Also remember that I have a personal collection of books that might include something relevant to your project, and I'll be glad to loan those to you.

Be careful of the Internet. It can be an excellent resource for images and also for specialized archival material and other information. But there's also a lot out there that is either bad or biased information, and thus essentially worthless, or that is so general that it's no better than an encyclopedia as a source. You should get in the habit of carefully and critically evaluating all your sources, but especially those that appear on the Internet. Is there an author, are the author's credentials evident, are there footnotes and a bibliography so that the author's assertions could be checked, etc.? *Wikipedia* should never be used as a source for a college paper!

#### **4) Documentation**

Use the Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines for doing parenthetical citations and a Works Cited or Bibliography page (the difference between a Works Cited page and a Bibliography is that the Works Cited page just includes works that you actually cite parenthetically in your text, whereas a bibliography can include other works that you consulted during your research and that were valuable for your project, but that didn't actually get cited).

##### *Parenthetical Citations:*

For a parenthetical citation, give the author's last name followed directly by the page number. The closing period comes after the citation: (Smith 47).

For two authors: (Smith and Jones 47).

For multiple pages: (Smith and Jones 47-48).

If there is no author, give an abbreviated version of whatever appears first in your Works Cited entry, which is usually the title: (*Paintings of Raphael* 47), in the case of a book, or ("Paintings of Raphael" 47) if it's an article.

##### *Works Cited or Bibliography Pages:*

The entries should be in alphabetical order, and should not be numbered. There should be no separate categories for books and articles. Works of art should not be included. The first line should be flush with the left margin, and any subsequent lines in an entry should be indented.

Here are some guidelines for Works Cited entries in the MLA format:

1) For a standard book with one author:

Smith, Jane. *The Paintings of Raphael*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2000.

2) For a book with two or more authors:

Smith, Jane, and Robert Jones. *The Art of William Blake*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

[UP stands for University Press]

3) For a book with no author:

*Sculpture in the Age of the Medici*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998.

4) For a book with no publication date:

*Image and Patron*. New York: Phaidon, n.d. [n.d. stands for 'no date'; similarly, n.p. stands for 'no place of publication']

5) For two or more works by the same author, only give the author's name in the first entry. The second entry should replace the author's name with 3 hyphens. The entries should be in alphabetical order by title:

Smith, Jane. *Art in the Age of Raphael*. London: Ashgate, 2001.

---. *The Paintings of Raphael*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2000.

6) For an article in an anthology:

Smith, Jane. "Raphael's Madonnas." *Art of the High Renaissance*. Ed. Patrick Morris. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998.

7) For a scholarly article in a journal:

Smith, Robert S. "Raphael's Early Paintings." *The Art Bulletin* 55 (1997): 308-56.

8) For an on-line personal or professional web site, give the author(s), the title (or a description such as Home Page if no title is available), the date of posting or the latest update, the name of any organization associated with the site, the date of access, and the URL (in pointed brackets):

Webster, Peter. Raphael. 2 Feb. 2000. 25 March 2001. <<http://www.harvard.edu/webster/renaissance>>.

Felluga, Dino. Undergraduate Guide to Literary Theory. 17 Dec. 1999. Purdue University. 15 Nov. 2000.

<<http://omni.cc.purdue.edu/%7Efelluga/theory2.html>>.

For complete information about the MLA format, see *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or a style manual such as Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*, or an on-line site such as [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_mla.html#Electronic](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html#Electronic).

## 5) Tone and Audience

Unless you're told otherwise, your art history papers fall into the category of formal analysis. They are not personal musings or informal responses to the art, which would be more suitable to a journal or to class discussion. This is not to say, however, that you can't use the first person in your paper. You are the one asking the question, asserting the thesis, making the argument, weaving together the supporting evidence, and drawing the conclusion -- and that should be clear to the reader. But think as you write about what kind of language to choose, and what tone to use.

You can assume that your reader is someone generally educated in the language of art, but don't assume that he or she has particular knowledge about the issue.

Use sexually inclusive language. Repeated use of "he or she" can get awkward, so pluralizing the whole sentence can be a useful alternative.

## 6) References to art works, illustrations, captions, and List of Illustrations

A title of an art work is treated like the title of a book: underlined or italicized.

When you refer to a work of art in your paper, include the date, if known. You might also need to include the work's location, especially if that information is needed to specify which work you're discussing (e.g., Raphael did many paintings of the Virgin and Child, and in order to clarify which one you mean you probably need to give the current museum location as well as the date). The general assumption is that a work is an oil painting unless you specify otherwise.

In most cases you should include digital illustrations copied into your Word document. Put the illustrations, which can either be in black and white or color, at the back of your paper (not incorporated into the body of the paper, which would

make it difficult to determine the length). If you have illustrations, you should include parenthetical references to the figure numbers after you cite the works (see examples below).

There are various ways to handle these references. One option is to include all relevant information in the text when you refer to a work. For example:

- a) Michelangelo's *Creation of Eve* (fig. 1), part of his fresco cycle in the Sistine Chapel, Rome, that dates from 1508-12, represents...
- b) Rembrandt's pen and ink sketch of *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (Washington, National Gallery)(fig. 3) has been dated to around 1635.
- c) Manet's *Olympia* (fig. 5), exhibited in the 1865 Salon and now in the Louvre, ...
- d) *Autumn Leaves* (Manchester City Art Galleries)(fig. 8), painted in 1856 by Millais...
- e) ... as can be seen in Edward Burne-Jones' study for a mosaic in the American Protestant Church in Rome, *Head of Christ* (c.1875, watercolor, Manchester City Art Galleries)(fig. 2).

This can get awkward and obtrusive, though, especially if there's a lot of information. So many writers prefer to include in the text just the information that's necessary for a clear identification of the work. Beneath each illustration you should include a caption that gives the figure number, the artist's name, the title (underlined or italicized), the date, the medium, and the location, as well as information about the source of the illustration. If you prefer, you could simply give the figure number, artist, and title in the caption, and then give the more complete information on a separate sheet of paper entitled List of Illustrations attached to the back of the paper just before the bibliography:

Here is an example of a full caption (or entry in a List of Illustrations):

Fig. 1. Arthur Hughes, *April Love*, 1855-56, oil on canvas (Tate Gallery, London). Source: Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon, 1999), Fig. 308.

[Note: if Lambourne is included in your bibliography or Works Cited, you can simply list it in the following way: Source: Lambourne, Fig. 308].

## 7) Quotes

Primary quotes (e.g., words by the artist or a contemporary critic) are valuable as a means of substantiating your thesis, but be sparing in your use of secondary quotes. Otherwise your paper might end up looking like a patchwork quilt of others' words.

When you use a quote, don't just drop it in. Introduce it with some kind of preliminary phrase:

As the nineteenth-century art critic Ruskin argued, "... " (35).

The author of a monograph on Michelangelo observed that "... " (Hibbard 27).

Some scholars have speculated about Rembrandt's affiliation with the Mennonites: "... " (Judson 135-36).

Van Gogh described his reaction in a letter to his brother Theo: "... " (qtd. in Percy 18).

(Notice the use of punctuation leading up to a quote. Many students are confused about when to use a comma or a colon, or when to move directly into the quote without any punctuation.)

If you bring a name into the text of your paper, it's usually helpful to explain who that person is (this is not necessary in a professional art-historical article but is often a good idea in an undergraduate paper). In general, I'd recommend keeping scholars' names in the parenthetical citation rather than bringing them into the body of your paper, unless you're planning on dealing with their theories in a substantial way.

## 8) Grammar

Obviously relatively minor problems like grammatical and typographical errors are much less important in writing a successful and meaningful paper than larger-order issues like content (e.g., careful focus of your thesis and clear development of that thesis) and voice (maintaining the strength of your personal voice, especially important as you interact with your sources). BUT they are still elements in the process of communicating your ideas, and persistent problems can interrupt the flow of your ideas (like boulders in a stream) or can be confusing and annoying for your readers (like static on a TV screen). I strongly encourage you to get in the habit of reading and re-reading everything you write before you turn it in (even early drafts). Proofreading is often helped by reading each sentence out loud. Spell-check is useful, but you can't rely on it absolutely since it doesn't catch a lot of problems. Here are some common problems often seen in papers, listed here in no particular order of importance:

### 1) use of apostrophes (Hacker 212-14)

- a) in contractions: it's = it is
- b) in possessive situations: the animal's tail, the animals' tails

### 2) use of commas (Hacker 193-207)

- a) to set off clauses at the beginning of a sentence:

incorrect: Although, she said she'd come at noon she didn't arrive until 1:00.  
correct: Although she said she'd come at noon, she didn't arrive until 1:00.

- b) to set off secondary clauses in the middle of a sentence (in which case you need two commas, one at each end of the clause):

incorrect: I saw the cat, which moved like a well-oiled machine creep with cunning ease toward the bird.  
correct: I saw the cat, which moved like a well-oiled machine, creep with cunning ease toward the bird.

- c) not to separate two complete sentences (which would be a comma splice; Hacker 161- 66):

incorrect: Mary hopped on the bus for her weekly trip to town, she needed some groceries.  
correct: Mary hopped on the bus for her weekly trip to town, since she needed some groceries; or Mary hopped on the bus for her weekly trip to town; she needed some groceries.

- d) place commas in a sentence where your voice naturally pauses:

incorrect: I was hoping to get the newspaper before my father read the headlines but, he found it before I could hide it.  
correct: I was hoping to get the newspaper before my father read the headlines, but he found it before I could hide it.

### 3) subject-verb agreement (Hacker 121-27)

- a) it's easy to get confused by secondary clauses that come between the subject and the verb, but remember that they don't affect the need for subject-verb agreement:

incorrect: The purpose for giving so many examples are to reinforce the point.  
correct: The purpose for giving so many examples is to reinforce the point.

Work Cited: Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. 3rd ed. Boston: St. Martin's, 1995.

**USEFUL REFERENCES** (AC 323, 324, or the Library)

Barnet, Sylvan. *A Short Guide to Writing about Art*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

Jones, Lois Swan. *Art Information: Research Methods and Resources*. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1990.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Art Information and the Internet*. Phoenix: Oryx, 1999.

Reid, Donna K. *Thinking and Writing About Art History*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000.

Sayre, Henry M. *Writing about Art*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1989.