



Jan Vermeer, *A Lady Writing a Letter* 1665 - 1666.



Art historical scholarship is rooted in analytic and theoretical writing. In keeping with this foundation, we will begin a writing practice that makes mindful use of art historical methodologies and that builds a critical thinking muscle through the writing of essays that will convey important information and understandings as they apply to key works of art discussed in class, reading assignments, and other materials. You will be offered multiple assignments to choose from that will ask you to write visual analyses of specific works of art, or develop a critical response to readings on relevant works and art historical issues.

One of the required writing assignments will ask students to visit an exhibition featuring works made from the prehistoric period to the middle ages in person, and write a collaborative critical response to the exhibition and works on view.

Additionally, on at least one occasion, students will form small groups to write short essay responses to critical thinking prompts given during class. The date that these writing groups will not be announced ahead, and the assignment may not be made up.

Marjorie Munsterberg's website, [writingaboutart.org](http://writingaboutart.org) and Laurie Schneider Adam's "Approaches to Art" from *Looking at Art* at, <http://www.theslideprojector.com/pdf/files/approachesstoart.pdf> are resources that should help you significantly with your writing assignments in this class.

### Essay Checklist

To earn full credit on writing assignments, essays should:

- Be 4 to 5 pages, double-spaced, 12 pt. font, and 1" margins on all sides;
- Identify works of art with artistic attribution, underlined or *italicized* titles, and dates (in that order), when possible;
- Attempt to address most questions from the essay prompt;
- Include two or more properly formatted Chicago Manual of Style footnote citations to credible, scholarly, college level materials. (Works of art should not be cited unless a point is being made concerning different versions or installations of the work.);
- Present a clear thesis and offer visual and/or scholarly evidence to support your claims;
- and Offer personal insights that demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the subject & reading materials.

Your instructor is always interested in proposals for subjects to write about. If the given writing prompts do not spark your interests, please feel free to propose alternative questions to consider at least one week before the assignment due date.

**Essay 1**

Due Tuesday, September 19

50 points

Read Erwin Panofsky's *Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait*.

Choose an Early Renaissance painting and consider the artist's use of iconography, a.k.a. "disguised symbolism." Panofsky suggested a three step approach to developing an understanding of a work through its iconology: 1. Consider the practical - the general sense of the painting, where your eye is drawn, and what elements your eye returns to repeatedly; 2. Identify the objects and figures depicted in the painting, and decode their symbolic meaning by comparing them to other cultural sources (for example, paintings by the artist's contemporaries, or literary works); 3. Consider the system of symbols that the artist uses to convey meaning and what that system says about the culture that produced it. Use this three step approach to discuss the general sense of the painting, the painting's symbolic meaning, and what that system of meaning reflects about the culture (place and time period) in which the artist lived and worked. Identify at least five objects depicted in the painting and discuss the connotative and denotative meanings of those symbols. Are there other interpretations, perhaps even contrasting interpretations, of this same work? Does the work fit into a geographic and/or historical tradition, or is it unusual in its imagery? Why?

You may find James Hall's *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* useful. In addition, sources like your textbook often provide interpretations of symbols used in paintings of this era.

- or -

Read Jonathan Jones' *Divine Inspiration*.

During the Renaissance, and after, artists regularly painted self-portraits. Choose two artist self-portraits in any media to compare and contrast, and use a biographic approach, as demonstrated in Jones' article, to understand their meaning. When using biography as a method for interpreting meaning, consider the following: 1. What do the details of the artist's life reveal about the work?; 2. How did the important events of the artist's life influence their choice in subject matter, and the manner in which they expressed their subject?; What associations or themes do we identify in the work that may be associated with this personal context or the artist's biography?

Consider how the artists chose to represent themselves, and what larger meaning is conveyed about their profession through their representational choices. What does this sense of their artistic practice convey about the role that the artist and art plays in shaping culture, responding to philosophical and political concerns, and conveying a sense of a larger world view? Do the two artists agree, or contradict, each other's world view and the cultural significance of art?

**Essay 2**

Due Tuesday, October 17

50 points

Use a feminist approach to compare and contrast a work by a female and a male Baroque artist. Consider who the artist assumes the viewer of the work to be, and from whom's perspective the action or story unfolds. Who is the main subject, and what significance does their gender play in understanding the meaning of the work? What subjects exhibit power in the work, and how is that power understood (for example, logical, rebellious, odd, or conforming)? Do all subjects depicted in the work exhibit agency (power, freedom of choice, action)? Is there a gender division in the display of authority and/or action as depicted? Consider whether the work reinforces or critically evaluates gender stereotypes? Finally, discuss how the work was received, and whether the two works were equally valued in their time.

- or -

Compare the three paintings of the Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci (1495 - 1498), Jacopo Tintoretto (1592 - 1594) and Veronese (1573). How are the paintings similar, and how do they differ? Discuss elements in each work that reflect the period and place in which they were made. Consider why each artist portrayed the narrative differently. What influenced the artist's choices, and what did the artist wish to convey about this shared subject?

- or -

Compare the sculptural depictions of David by Donatello (1430 - 1440), Michelangelo (1501 - 1504), and Bernini (1623 - 1624). How are the works similar, and how do they differ? Discuss elements in each work that reflect the period and place in which they were made. Describe the part of the story depicted in each work. How does each statue interact with viewers and the space it occupies? What influenced the artist's choices, and what did the artist wish to convey about this shared subject?

### Architectural Analysis

Due Thursday, November 9

50 points

Design a diagram, or create a model, of an architectural structure from the Renaissance to the early Modern period, making note of important architectural features and technology used to build the work. Be creative! A diagram doesn't have to be two-dimensional, or on 8 ½" X 11" paper, and a model does not have to be tangible. However, assignment responses that are not submitted on paper (such as a digital video) will require the submission of a link, photos, or other record of your creation that can be viewed outside of class.

You may choose to form small groups of two or three to collaborate on this assignment. Be sure that your submission includes the names of all contributors. Please be a considerate and responsible group member by sharing equally in the research and production of the analysis.

### Museum Analysis

Due Thursday, November 30

50 points

Attend a professional exhibition that includes works made between the Renaissance and early Modern periods. The Getty Museum, LACMA, the Huntington Museum, the Norton Simon Museum, and the Bowers Museum regularly feature exhibitions of Renaissance to Modern works. Plan ahead by checking museum websites to be sure that relevant works will be on view when you plan to visit. In addition, read Marjorie Munsterberg's, <http://writingaboutart.org/pages/visualdesc.html> for information on visual description and analysis.

Choose one work seen in person and develop a visual analysis. Visual description involves communicating what you see and feel when viewing a work of art to a general reader who may or may not have experienced the work themselves. For the Museum Analysis, assume that your reader has a background in art, but has not seen the work you are discussing in person. Begin your description with the basics - let your reader know the artist's name, the title of the work (being sure to distinguish the title in your text by italicizing or bolding your font), and the date the work was made. Describe what you see, drawing the viewer's attention to key elements (objects, figures, symbols). Discuss the work's subjects. What are the main components, what is represented, who is portrayed, where does the story take place? While you may want to keep your visual description concise, remember that you cannot assume that what you are seeing and experiencing is universal.

Then, craft a persuasive visual description that supports your thesis and that skillfully utilizes pertinent vocabulary. After discussing the denotative meaning of the work (it's primary and literal features), consider the work's connotative meaning by describing the ideas that are suggested and implied by its formal properties. While this may feel descriptive, what you're focusing on in this section are the

qualities and characteristics of compositional elements such as *atmospheric* perspective, *asymmetrical* balance, *irregular* rhythm, *organic* shapes, *faint* line work, and *bold* color harmonies. The handouts on design and the elements of art from the Getty Museum may be helpful. Refrain from offering iconographic, biographic, or semiotic analysis as much as possible in this essay.

Finally, connect your visual description, denotative consideration, and connotative read into an overall interpretation of the work. What meaning do the objects, subjects, and symbols suggest? What meaning is conveyed by the work's form and visual elements? What story is told, or view of the world expressed by this work of art? If the exhibition venue, layout, and interpretive materials did their work well, your final interpretation should nicely reflect the exhibition's theme and concepts.

Please include a photograph of yourself at the museum with your essay, and remember to list each contributor (if written collaboratively).

### Timeline

Due Thursday, December 7

50 points

Compose a timeline that includes at least ten key historical events (political, cultural and/or social) from the periods we have studied this semester - Renaissance to early Modern periods. Incorporate at least ten important works of art (properly identified) that exemplify the artistic concerns of the era. Include concise explanatory text to connect the key events with the exemplary works of art you have identified. Your timeline should incorporate both text and images. How well you organize this data is one element of your grade.

Rather than consider all of the history we have studied this semester, you may choose to focus on one relevant period. The interactive timeline, *The Top 50 Works of Modern Art* on [artstory.org](http://artstory.org) provides an excellent model.

Please provide a CMS Bibliography to cite at least two credible sources of information you consulted while developing your timeline. This can be printed/glued to the back of your timeline.

The timeline and related Bibliography will need to be submitted on paper at the beginning of class.

### Visual Thinker Lecture Series Report

Due one week after attendance

25 points

Please answer the questions on the Art Department's VTLS form. Copy or photograph the form before submitting at the event. Submit your copy or photo to the instructor in class, or via Blackboard.

You are asked by the department to attend all VTLS events. However, you are only required to report on one VTLS event for credit in this class.

### Extra Credit

Due by Thursday, December 7

maximum 25 points

View the episode on Caravaggio, Bernini, Rembrandt, David, Turner, or Van Gogh from Simon Schama's *The Power of Art* and report on the presentation of information. How was your understanding of this artist's work either extended, confused, or maintained by viewing this documentary? What effect did the documentary have on your appreciation for the works considered during this semester? What new insights can you offer in response to the episode?

<b>AH 201 Point Tally</b>			
	<b>Earned</b>	<b>Points Possible</b>	
<b>Writing Assignments 55%</b>	Essay 1	out of 50 points	275 points
	Essay 2	out of 50 points	
	Group Essay	out of 25 points	
	Museum Analysis	out of 50 points	
	Architectural Analysis	out of 50 points	
	Timeline	out of 50 points	
<b>Exams 30%</b>	Exam 1	out of 50 points	150 points
	Exam 2	out of 50 points	
	Socratic Circle Final Exam	out of 50 points	
<b>Class Participation 15%</b>	Contributions to conversation	out of 25 points	75 points
	Voluntary report on assigned reading	out of 25 points	
	Visual Thinker Lecture series	out of 25 points	
<b>Sub Total</b>			
Extra Credit			max 25 points
<b>Total</b>			out of 500 points

<b>Grading Rubric</b>				
	<b>Deficient 0 - 2 points</b>	<b>Minimal/Basic 3 - 4 points</b>	<b>Proficient 5 - 7 points</b>	<b>Advanced 8 - 10 points</b>
<b>Content and Development</b>	Art not identified and/or unacceptable choice of artwork. Student did not follow assignment guidelines.	Art not fully identified: Title; culture; date. Content is incomplete. Utility of analyzing formal characteristics for understanding artwork is unclear.	Art fully identified: Title; culture; date. Utility of analyzing formal characteristics for understanding artwork is expressed.	Art fully identified: Title; culture; date. Utility of analyzing formal characteristics for understanding artwork is clear.
<b>Analysis</b>	Makes inaccurate statements. Does not address visual images/objects.	Analysis tends to be simplistic, superficial, or implausible. Formal description included but vague. Describes visual images/objects but without formal/ semiotic/ contextual analysis.	Analysis is plausible and begins to account for ambiguity or contradictory evidence. Clear formal description of art to support analysis and references course content. Describes visual images/objects and provides a plausible formal/semiotic/ contextual analysis of them.	Analysis is clear, nuanced, and sophisticated. Clear and well-integrated formal description of art connects to analysis and references course content. Formal/ semiotic / contextual analysis of visual images/ objects is integral to the thesis.
<b>Organization of argument</b>	No discernible organization; minimal or faulty transitions. Student either did not submit the assignment or was unable to demonstrate enough knowledge to receive credit for the assignment.	Organization and structure detract from the message of the writer. Handout or other documentation (if required) incomplete. Paragraphs are disjointed and lack transition.	Structure is mostly clear and easy to follow. Handout or other documentation (if required) is completed. Paragraph transitions present.	Structure of the paper is clear and easy to follow. Handout or other documentation (if required) is thoughtfully completed. Paragraph transitions are logical.
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Vocabulary is not appropriate to the subject.	Vocabulary choices are clear but remain prosaic and banal. Vocabulary is appropriate to the subject, but lacks precision.	Vocabulary choices enhance presentation's effectiveness. Uses art historical terms effectively and treats visual complexity appropriately.	Vocabulary is sophisticated and appropriate to the subject.
<b>Grammar, punctuation, and spelling</b>	Paper contains numerous grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors. Language uses jargon or conversational tone.	Paper contains grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors. Language lacks clarity or includes the use of some jargon or conversational tone.	Rules of grammar, usage, and punctuation are followed; spelling is correct. Language is clear; sentences display varied structure.	Rules of grammar, usage, and punctuation are followed; spelling is correct. Language is clear and precise; sentences display consistently strong, varied structure.

## Principles of Design

The principles of design describe the ways that artists use the elements of art in a work of art.



**Balance** is the distribution of the visual weight of objects, colors, texture, and space. If the design was a scale, these elements should be balanced to make a design feel stable. In symmetrical balance, the elements used on one side of the design are similar to those on the other side; in asymmetrical balance, the sides are different but still look balanced. In radial balance, the elements are arranged around a central point and may be similar.



**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.



**Movement** is the path the viewer's eye takes through the work of art, often to focal areas. Such movement can be directed along lines, edges, shape, and color within the work of art.



**Pattern** is the repeating of an object or symbol all over the work of art.



**Repetition** works with pattern to make the work of art seem active. The repetition of elements of design creates unity within the work of art.



**Proportion** is the feeling of unity created when all parts (sizes, amounts, or number) relate well with each other. When drawing the human figure, proportion can refer to the size of the head compared to the rest of the body.



**Rhythm** is created when one or more elements of design are used repeatedly to create a feeling of organized movement. Rhythm creates a mood like music or dancing. To keep rhythm exciting and active, variety is essential.



**Variety** is the use of several elements of design to hold the viewer's attention and to guide the viewer's eye through and around the work of art.



**Unity** is the feeling of harmony between all parts of the work of art, which creates a sense of completeness.

## Elements of Art

The elements of art are the building blocks used by artists to create a work of art.



**Line** is a mark with greater length than width. Lines can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal; straight or curved; thick or thin.



**Shape** is a closed line. Shapes can be geometric, like squares and circles; or organic, like free-form or natural shapes. Shapes are flat and can express length and width.



**Forms** are three-dimensional shapes expressing length, width, and depth. Balls, cylinders, boxes, and pyramids are forms.



**Space** is the area between and around objects. The space around objects is often called negative space; negative space has shape. Space can also refer to the feeling of depth. Real space is three-dimensional; in visual art, when we create the feeling or illusion of depth, we call it space.



**Color** is light reflected off of objects. Color has three main characteristics: *hue* (the name of the color, such as red, green, blue, etc.), *value* (how light or dark it is), and *intensity* (how bright or dull it is).

- White is pure light; black is the absence of light.
- Primary colors are the only true colors (red, blue, and yellow). All other colors are mixes of primary colors.
- Secondary colors are two primary colors mixed together (green, orange, violet).
- Intermediate colors, sometimes called tertiary colors, are made by mixing a primary and secondary color together. Some examples of intermediate colors are yellow green, blue green, and blue violet.
- Complementary colors are located directly across from each other on the *color wheel* (an arrangement of colors along a circular diagram to show how they are related to one another). Complementary pairs contrast because they share no common colors. For example, red and green are complements, because green is made of blue and yellow. When complementary colors are mixed together, they neutralize each other to make brown.



**Texture** is the surface quality that can be seen and felt. Textures can be rough or smooth, soft or hard. Textures do not always feel the way they look; for example, a drawing of a porcupine may look prickly, but if you touch the drawing, the paper is still smooth.