Writing and Research in Art History
Standards and Expectations for an Art History Paper

1. Standards and expectations for an art history paper

What does your art history professor expect in a paper?

First, read your instructor’s assignment carefully to determine any special requirements for particular assignments; those special requirements take precedence over the suggestions below; in general, we want papers to have the following:

- an interesting and insightful title (a title page is not necessary, except for papers of substantial length); tip: isolate the key words and/or concepts in your thesis statement and use them to create a short title
- double-spacing
- an easy to read, 10 to 12 character-per-inch font (neither "compressed" nor "expanded")
- 1" margins on all sides
- page numbers
- either foot- or endnotes, using Chicago Manual of Style, 15th edition (unless you are instructed otherwise)
- a bibliography or works cited page (consult your professor as to which)
- italicize or underline titles of works of art; do not put quote marks around them

We also expect papers to have these basic parts:

Introductory Paragraph: Your thesis
Your first paragraph introduces the concept, issues, or questions that form the subject of your paper; thus it includes a thesis statement presenting a brief overview of the argument of your paper. Further, it specifies how you will support this argument—what sort of evidence you will examine, whether visual or textual or of some other type—and notes what perspectives or explanations you will consider. With this information, you essentially set out for your reader the organization of your paper. If your paper focuses on a small number of specific works of art, include their titles (italicize titles or underline them) and, if known, their artists and dates. If possible, your paper should additionally include information such as original location and current location, medium, and size; sometimes that fits best in a foot- or endnote, unless the data forms an important part of your subsequent argument, in which case it belongs in your main text. Develop your argument as if you are addressing an intelligent reader with a general knowledge of whatever your class is about.

Body of the Paper
Each paragraph contains evidence to support your thesis statement and forms a coherent unit focused on a single main element of that thesis; ordered in a logical sequence, paragraphs demonstrate the validity of your argument. Summarize each paragraph’s main point in your topic sentence, generally the first in the paragraph. As you edit your paper, check each paragraph to make sure that you have not included material in one that would more appropriately fit in another. In your argument, be certain to consider formal qualities of your work, along with elements of its content (e.g., meaning, iconography, original function) and its historical/cultural context.

Conclusions
Briefly summarize your principal arguments by referring to the ideas in your thesis statement, and explain
how your analysis contributes to our understanding of the problem. While generally this is not the time to introduce completely new materials, you may wish to offer speculations as part of your conclusion, or suggest new directions for further study.

2. Grading guidelines and expectations

How will we evaluate your work?

Papers will be graded for both form (clarity, accuracy, and persuasiveness of writing) and content (the quality of your research, if relevant, plus the thoughtfulness of your own ideas and contributions to the issues at hand).

Grade of "A": A clearly and persuasively written treatment of the your topic, thorough and insightful, with original and informative ideas based on careful research and/or thoughtful reassessment of the issue(s) involved. The writing is not hampered by grammatical or stylistic problems, but is notable for its clarity and verbal fluency.

Grade of "B": A good paper in most ways, but generally less thoughtful than "A" work and/or less successfully written. In a research paper, a student may clearly develop information about a topic rather than argue a thesis. While the writing style may be less fluid or sophisticated than the "A" paper's, it remains quite competent and easily readable.

Grade of "C": An essay that demonstrates only some understanding of the assignment’s concepts or only partially succeeds in arguing a thesis; the writing may be comprehensible but often awkward, and grammatical errors make understanding it an effort.

Grade of "D": Seriously flawed work that lacks necessary understanding of the material and fails to articulate a coherent argument. Such a paper may rely heavily on quotations and others' work, rather than developing original and thoughtful ideas. The writing demonstrates carelessness through grammatical errors, mistaken wording, and/or typos.

Grade of "F": The paper fails to address the assignment in fundamental ways and likely shows signs of lack of effort.