

Formal Analysis

Tips & Tricks

Organize

Introduction: The facts about the artwork and a basic description of what you see

Body: Detailed description of what you see, relating it to the elements and principles of art.

Closing: Interpretation and Judgement. Overall, what is the theme and what are the strengths and/or weaknesses according the elements and principles. Make sure you have reasons behind your statements.

Make Sentences Interesting

NO: The texture is

YES: Texture, a dominant element of the piece, is...

YES: As a key element of the work, texture ...

Integrate your vocabulary, elements and principles throughout the writing.

Use the artist's name
Van Gogh utilizes line in.....
Van Gogh suggests a feeling of misery with his imagery of

WRITING ABOUT ART: WHAT IS THE GOAL?

The great aim is accurate, precise and definite description. The first thing is to recognise how extraordinarily difficult this is. It is no mere matter of carefulness; you have to use language, and language is by its very nature a communal thing; that is, it expresses never the exact thing but a compromise — that which is common to you, me and everybody. But each man sees a little differently, and to get out clearly and exactly what he does see, he must have a terrific struggle with language . . . [which] has its own special nature, its own conventions and communal ideas. It is only by a concentrated effort of the mind that you can hold it fixed to your own purpose.¹

The way to breathe life into the description of any object is to apply adjectives to it. A piece of cloth is of little interest for us until we know whether it is starched, handwoven, salmon pink, translucent, knotted, torn, bespangled, or sodden.²

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Interpretation/ Judgement Ways to NOT use "I"

Van Gogh's use of color **seems** to evoke feelings of ...

The wilted flowers **suggest** [this feeling or thought]

Van Gogh's use of dark blue analogous tones may cause **the viewer** to sense a feeling of despair.

NO "You" or "I"
You might use "I" in your judgement of the art, but it is avoidable if you try!

What to call the art:
piece
work
artwork
drawing
painting
rendering
sculpture
digital art

TYPE OF WORDS TO NOT USE
incredible
fantastic
amazing

Title of the Artwork
Italicize or use quotations.
Choose one or the other and use consistently.

Ways to refer to a part or area in this passage
this element or the element
this feature in this section
this portion