[](http://college.unc.edu/)

[The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill](http://writingcenter.unc.edu/)

**WHAT IS ART HISTORY?**

Many students do not get a chance to study art history until they take a college course, so art history may be a new field of study for you. Even though you are new to analyzing the visual arts, the skills you have learned in other fields will serve you well in this discipline. If you have ever analyzed a poem or developed an understanding of a historical period, you are prepared to think and write like an art historian. You must still make an argument about something, but in this case you will use art (instead of, say, dialogue from a play) to build and defend your argument.

In writing a formal analysis, focus on creating a logical order so that your reader doesn’t get lost. Don’t ever assume that because your instructor has seen the work, he or she knows what you are talking about. Here are a couple of options:

* summarize the overall appearance, then describe the details of the object
* describe the composition and then move on to a description of the materials used (acrylic, watercolor, plaster)
* begin discussing one side of the work and then move across the object to the other side
* describe things in the order in which they draw your eye around the object, starting with the first thing you notice and moving to the next

Step #1: Choose your work of art to analyze.

Possible Choices

1. by:
2. by:
3. by:

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