

How Might You Analyze a Work of Art in a Museum?

Core Competency: Communication Skills

Pick a local art museum or gallery where you can encounter art in person. Visit the museum or gallery and write about your experience and one work that you see there. Go through these steps:

- **Find:** Your instructor may have a list of local museums and galleries. If not, or in addition, a map of art museums can be found on our website.
- **Plan:** Plan for your visit by exploring the museum's or gallery's website and find out as much as you can about the museum or gallery before you visit:
 - The location, directions, and hours/days the museum/gallery is open
 - What is and isn't allowed in the galleries
 - What the museum/gallery specializes in
 - How art is organized in the galleries
 - Important works that are on display and temporary exhibitions currently being shown
- **Prepare:** Prepare the following items to bring with you to the museum or gallery:
 - The information you gathered when planning for your visit
 - Your textbook for reference
 - Several sheets of plain, unlined paper or a mobile device with a drawing app to use for drawings
 - Lined paper or a mobile device for taking notes
 - Pencils (pens are typically not allowed), if you decide to bring paper for the drawings and taking notes
 - A device for taking pictures with flash turned off (a flash is typically not allowed)
 - Student ID (often there is a discount for student admission)
- **Visit:** Visit the museum or gallery. Once there:
 - Get a floor plan (if available) so that you can find your way around and mark works of interest
 - Spend some time looking around
 - Take notes about your experience in the museum/gallery:
 - How is the experience different seeing art in person rather than in a book?
 - Do you note any bias in the overall presentation that reinforces stereotypical thinking regarding race, class, or gender? Why or why not?
 - Pick a work of art that interests you and (if allowed) take a picture of it and the label for it, so you will have the photos for later reference
- Sketch the work of art for a few minutes (if you have picked a three-dimensional work, sketch the work from different angles). Don't worry about the quality of your drawing(s). Just put down what you see. As you will recall from Chapter 5, drawing helps us see better and will prepare you for taking notes on the work.
- Take detailed notes about the work you have chosen:
 - What is the title, artist's name, and nationality (if known), date the work was created, and size of the work?
 - What is the purpose of the work (religion, politics and the social order, record, decoration, expression, or community and the environment)? Why do you think the work has this purpose?
 - What is the subject matter of the work?
 - Is the work representational, abstract, or nonrepresentational (if applicable)? How do you know?
 - What four visual elements of art do you think are important in the work (line, shape or mass, texture, light, color, space, or time)? Describe them and be sure to be thorough. For example, don't just say that a work has texture; explain the character of the texture and whether the texture is actual or simulated.
 - What four principles of design do you think are important in the work (unity and variety, balance, emphasis and subordination, scale, proportion, or rhythm)? Describe them and be sure to be thorough. For example, don't just say that a work has balance; explain how the artist created actual (if applicable) and visual weight in the work; whether the work has symmetrical, asymmetrical, or radial balance; and how you know it has this kind of balance.
 - What medium was used to create the work (the type of art and material)? What is the characteristic look of the medium?
 - What is the style of the work or the culture that created the work? What is the characteristic appearance of the work that makes it typical of this style or culture? Why might artists from this culture have created works that look like this? Be sure to consider the date of the work and nationality of the artist.
 - What do you think is the meaning of the work? Why do you think the work has this message based on the purpose, subject matter, form, medium, and style?
- **Write:** Once you are back home, write a four-page paper about your experience and your work of art. The paper should consider each topic about which you took notes.