



Writing About Art (6th Edition)

By Henry M. Sayre

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This straightforward guide prepares students to describe, interpret, and write about works of art in meaningful and lasting terms. Designed as a supplement to Art History survey and period texts, this efficient book features a step-by-step approach to writing—from choosing a work to write about, to essay organization, to research techniques, to footnote form, to preparing the final essay. For beginners as well as more advanced students.

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Editorial Review

From the Publisher

This new edition continues to prepare students for written description and interpretation of art. A perfect supplement to Art History survey and period texts, this book is a step-by-step process-- from choosing your piece to preparing the final essay-- for beginners as well as more advanced students.

From the Back Cover

This straightforward guide prepares students to describe, interpret, and write about works of art in meaningful and lasting terms. Designed as a supplement to Art History survey and period texts, this efficient book features a step-by-step approach to writing--from choosing a work to write about, to essay organization, to research techniques, to footnote form, to preparing the final essay. For beginners as well as more advanced students.

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As a teacher of undergraduate courses in art appreciation and art history, I have always felt that one of the most important activities students engage in is writing. It is my conviction that the better, and the sooner, students write about what they see, the better they will see. To write about art is to engage in the best process I know for organizing—and even recognizing—your thoughts and feelings about the visual world.

This book is addressed to you, the student of art. I hope that it will help you to write about art more effectively and thus teach you, through the process of writing, how to see works of art in more meaningful and lasting terms. Many of you are already effective writers; many of you may still lack the confidence you need to feel that you write well. If you are reading this book, you almost surely find the problem of writing about art a vexing one. If the visual arts expressed the same things in the same way as the verbal arts, then why would anyone bother to paint or sculpt or take photographs in the first place? Most people feel that images tend to "say" things that words can't. For them, being asked to write about art is like being asked to express the inexpressible.

Without denying the uniqueness of the visual experience, let me suggest that works of art are a form of address, directed at you, their audience. Like most forms of address, they demand a response. To write about a work of art is to respond in what for most of us is the most readily available means. To demonstrate the kinds of response a work of art might generate, I have written, in this book, about works of art that have excited me—and continue to excite me—and I have also included several responses to works of art written by my students. These essays were generated in my classes; if they are not always the "best" imaginable response to a given assignment, they represent an effort on my part to choose the kind of writing that you can learn from best. For that reason as well, I have used passages from renowned critics or historians only sparingly. I have nothing against aspiring writers attempting to imitate the best practicing critics and historians, but imitation is difficult for many students and not, I believe, the most effective way to teach writing. The business of a book such as this is to build confidence, to give you a foundation upon which you can improve. Judging from the overwhelmingly positive student reception to this book, I can't help but think that good student writing is a more useful model than the stylistic subtleties of professionally wrought prose, though we can still learn from the latter.

For this, the fourth edition of Writing About Art, I have made several changes. When this book was first published in 1989, the World Wide Web was still something of a dream. When the second edition of this

book was published in 1995, I began my discussion on research methods as follows: "First, go to the card catalog. It may or may not be an actual 'catalog'—libraries are rapidly converting their catalogs to database formats, accessible at computer stations.' Today, there may still be a few libraries that are not "on-line," but I don't know where they are. Though I sometimes think that the technology is changing as rapidly as I can write a sentence, in this edition, as in the last, I have tried to address the changing environment of research and writing in art. Images are far more readily available. Databases are becoming increasingly sophisticated. And I have tried to give some idea of the increasingly rich resources available in the exploding world of the information highway, particularly the World Wide Web.

I have also responded to the request of numerous teachers and incorporated into these pages a "finished" essay by a renowned scholar—Erwin Panofsky's famous treatment of the double portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and Jeanne Cenami. It is a classic, an essay that has served as a model for writing about art down to the present day. The book is now "bracketed" by Panofsky's essay at the beginning and a very good student essay at the end. Between the two, I hope all students can discover a way that they themselves can write successfully about art.

Finally, let me say that I hope this book convinces you that writing about art is a rewarding and pleasurable experience, an act of exploration and discovery in some ways comparable to the creative act itself. At the very least, this book should help you to write better exams and papers in your art appreciation and art history courses. In the end, I hope the book increases your confidence—and joy—in the process of writing itself.

Henry Sayre

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Donald Chapin:

Nowadays reading books be a little more than want or need but also work as a life style. This reading practice give you lot of advantages. The advantages you got of course the knowledge the actual information inside the book which improve your knowledge and information. The knowledge you get based on what kind of guide you read, if you want have more knowledge just go with schooling books but if you want sense happy read one together with theme for entertaining like comic or novel. Typically the Writing About Art (6th Edition) is kind of reserve which is giving the reader unstable experience.

Douglas Elem:

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