

Four Steps to Art Criticism Paper

Prepare a one to two page, typewritten analysis using the *Four Steps to Art Criticism* on one piece of artwork viewed at the Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum OR at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art.

- A. Label and number each of the four steps.
- B. A reproduction of the artwork must accompany the report.
- C. Add a brief statement about your museum visit.

Four Steps to Art Criticism

HOW TO TALK ABOUT WORKS OF ART

Art Criticism can be defined as expressed opinion—spoken or written—about works of art. It is not necessarily negative: it can include praise, comparison, description and explanation as well as disapproval. You need to learn the skills of art criticism so that you do not have to depend on the opinions of others. “One mark of an educated person is that ability to recognize and evaluate excellence independently” (Edmund Feldman, *Art: Image and Idea*).

Art is a triple experience—visual, emotional, and intellectual. A certain amount of emotional response is inevitable, since we can hardly look at anything without reacting to it one way or the other. This response depends on the material the artist offers us and on our willingness and capacity to respond.

When dealing with intellectual enjoyment of a work of art, our reaction is less immediate. It is more a matter of learning.

This is where the average person begins to protest his ignorance of what art is all about. This protest is a natural defense in a time when art is subjected to so much intellectual snobbery. The layman takes refuge in the conviction that all intellectualization about art is snobbery. In its trite form, the protest is the familiar “I don’t know anything about art, but I know what I like.” Translated into more formal jargon the same thing can be said this way: “Intellectual understanding of art is not prerequisite to emotional response.”

We are concerned with visual, emotional and intellectual elements in art—seeing, feeling, and thinking.

Four Steps to Art Criticism is designed to aid in better understanding these aspects of art.

The Process:

DESCRIPTION: What? Observe, touch, perceive, know, see, recognize, identify, list, define, name, label, inventory.

Name the items you see:

THINGS (if applicable)	ART ELEMENTS	TECHNIQUES
1. People 2. Trees 3. Animals 4. Buildings 5. Sky (etc.)	1. Color 2. Line 3. Value 4. Shape 5. Texture/Pattern 6. Space	1. Mode: painting, drawing, sculpture, print, etc. 2. Media: oil, watercolor, acrylic, ink, stone, wood, metal, etc.

ANALYSIS: How? Take apart, separate, break down, interrelate, compare, contrast, examine, distinguish between, differentiate among, sort, categorize. List the principles of organization present. Describe relationships among things you see: size relationships, shape relationships, color relationships, textural relationships, value relationships, and space and volume relationships. Using the language of art and design, we can analyze the composition of a work.

PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATION OR DESIGN:

1. Harmony
 - A. Unity
 - B. Variety
2. Movement/Rhythm
3. Scale and Proportion
4. Emphasis and Subordination
5. Balance

INTERPRETATION: Why? What meaning does the work have? To the artist? To you? To society? What single large IDEA or CONCEPT sums up or unifies the message or the artwork? What effect does the past experience of the viewer have? Are there symbols present? Does the artwork follow a theme? Is there a metaphor? What is the intention of the artist? What is the artist trying to say?

JUDGMENT OR EVALUATION (Informed Preference; Decision): What do you think about the work of art and why?

- a. Does it make you feel good? Bad? Sad? Lonely?
- b. Does it vividly express an emotion or feeling you can share?
- c. Does it promote a specific idea or purpose?

- d. Judge it against the criteria of: success, originality, level of craftsmanship, artistic and aesthetic merit, etc.
- e. Do you like it? Why or why not?
- f. Where would you hang or place it?