

A guide to writing Art criticism

General reaction

What is your first response to this work?
How does this make you feel?
What does it make you think?
What does it remind you of?

Now, consider how and where you saw the work.
Did you see the original on a gallery?
If so, then you can fully appreciate the scale, colour and textures.

Did you see a picture of it on the internet or in a book? If so you need to find out further information about the original, including dimensions and if an outdoor piece, the original setting.

Description

Thematic, Formal and Technical qualities

What images do you see?
What colours/forms/textures are there?
Are there any outstanding or unusual features you notice?
What else do you see?
How has the artist made use of light/dark areas, and/or rough or unusual textures?
How do you think this work was made?
What types of techniques can you see, such as brushstrokes/sculptural finish/photographic finish, etc?
What is the artists view point? What are your clues?

Formal relationship of Shapes and Images

What colours/shapes/textures/lines dominate the work? Why?
Are their significant negative areas/spaces in the work?
Is there a sense of movement? If so, what elements and or principles cause it?
Do you see contrast? What causes it?
If there are figures, where are they looking/facing?
Where does the focus lie in this work?
What causes you to look there?
Is there a single focus? Why/Why not?
What features cause us to see it that way?

Formal Characterization

What mood is presented? How are we meant to feel in the presence of this piece? Why?
What's the evidence?
Why are we meant to focus where we do?
Is this realistic? Formalistic? Expressive? Is this slick, aggressive, bold, intellectual, overpowering, timid, monumental, fluid, abstract, static, rythmic, ...How/ Why? Whats the evidence?

Contextual Examination

When and where was the Art done?
What did the artist said about this piece of work? What did other critiques or artists say about it?
Was there anything happening in the artists life or in the society or the greater world around them that may have influenced their work?
What was the artists point or intention?
How does it reflect that place and that time?
What style is it considered to be?
Does it have, or ever had, a FUNCTIONAL or a RELIGIOUS purpose? If so, what?
What influenced its production?
What impact did the work had on work that came later on or in society in general?
What does the work tell us about the people who originally made it and used it?

Interpretation

What do you think this work means?
If the work is highly abstract, what does it remind you of?
What title would you give it if you were the artist, and what?

Evaluation

Have your perceptions/feelings about this work changed since you started critiquing it? If so, how?
Does the work exhibit a high degree of technical, compositional and/or conceptual skill?
Do you think this is an effective piece of work? Why/why not and what criteria do you base your answer on? (your answer could involve, skills, processes, expressive power, beauty and other qualities found in the work.