

GUIDANCE ON WRITING PAPERS

First, a few miscellaneous details. Papers should be typed and double-spaced with a standard typeface. Paragraphs should be indented at the beginning, except for the first sentence of the first paragraph, which should be flush with the left margin; do not place an extra blank line between paragraphs. The front page of your paper will be a title page with your name, the title of your paper, the course number and meeting time (day and hour), and my name. Pages should be numbered. The paper must be at least five pages; the title page does not count as a page. This is not primarily a research paper, but if you wish to quote something in the Gardner text, cite the source in parentheses in the main body of the text simply as, e.g., "(Gardner), since you do not have page numbers in the online version of the text." If you cite another source, use Chicago style citation with footnotes or endnotes, and bibliography. Short quotations can be put in quotation marks; longer quotations (of more than three lines) should be offset with wider margins and single-spaced within the main body of your paper. Acquaint yourself with the university's rules concerning plagiarism. Any interpretation, argument or line of reasoning that you derive from another source must be noted with the precise bibliographical reference. If you include any of the original wording of that source, you must *also* use quotation marks. An end-note in your text *without* quotation marks means that the content of that sentence is taken from the source, but the writing is completely your own. *Any* significant resemblance in phrasing with the source would constitute plagiarism; changing a few words here and there does not help.

In writing about works of art, use the past tense to describe actions that happened in the past. You would say: "Leonardo painted the *Last Supper* in c. 1495-98." But when you are describing things visible in or qualities about a work of art, the tense will usually shift to the present, because you are describing a physical object that still exists. Thus: "In the *Last Supper*, the disciples are represented with a variety of poses, gestures and facial expressions as they react to Christ's words." Note also that titles of works of art must be either italicized or underlined: do not use quotation marks. When you mention works of art for the first time, give the name of the artist, the full title of the work, the date, and where the work currently resides (e.g., name of museum and city) in parentheses, e.g., : "...the Master of the Straus Madonna's *Virgin and Child* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), of c. 1395-1400...". Subsequent references to the same work can employ a shortened, simplified version of the title if the latter is rather long.

Papers will be graded equally on both writing and content. Be attentive to grammar and spelling: if you are not sure about the spelling of a word, consult a dictionary. Proofread your paper carefully. Remember that writing quality includes issues of grammar and spelling, but also subtler aspects of style and exposition. For example:

(1) The organization of the paper should be clear and logical. Begin with an introductory paragraph that culminates in a thesis (usually the last sentence of the first paragraph), which is the main idea or argument that you will be discussing in the paper. For the small, non-research papers in this course, the "thesis" need not be terribly original or complex (though if you want to try for that, by all means go ahead!). Something like this might serve: "In this paper, I will demonstrate how each of the paintings exemplifies stylistic features characteristic of its period and artistic culture." The essential thing is that the thesis sentence tell the reader what the paper will be about, which in this case would be both the works of art (these may be referred to or described in greater detail elsewhere in the introductory paragraph) but also what your conceptual

approach to them will be—how you will be discussing them, and what you will be trying to explain about them.

(2) The body of the paper will then consist of a series of paragraphs. Paragraphs exist for a reason: a paragraph should be about a definable topic that is a subset of the larger subject of the entire paper. Paragraphs should be of a reasonable size. If a paragraph consists of only a couple of sentences, that suggests it does not contain enough information to justify it standing alone as a paragraph: perhaps it should be tacked on to the end of the preceding paragraph, or the beginning of the next. If a paragraph goes on for a couple of pages, then consider that you might be cramming too much into it and that it would better be broken up into smaller paragraphs. There should be a logical “flow” from one sentence to the next, and also from one paragraph to the next, a logical structure to your argument and how it progresses from beginning to end. The last paragraph of the paper will then summarize your main points and contain a conclusion of some kind: this will refer back to your thesis sentence in some way and show the reader how your paper has answered what you set out to investigate.

There are a few conventions to keep in mind when writing art history, but for the most part if you write well, then you will be able to write well about art. There is no esoteric key to understanding art. We are looking at physical objects made by human beings, and trying to explain how they came about, why they look the way they do, why they represent what they do, how they functioned in the context of their own culture, and what meanings they had for their viewers. Some of this can only be got by deeper research into the historical contexts of the works. For the papers you will write in this course, however, the only “contextual” material you are expected to have is what you read in the textbook, discussed in lecture, or what you have been provided as part of the paper assignment. The emphasis is on close looking at the objects in the museum, and training your eye to see what is visually significant about them, and then relating those observations to the historical context of the works. I am interested in your close visual observation of and thinking about these objects in the context of what you know about their culture. Do not describe details of the paintings merely for the sake of describing them. Your visual observations should express some underlying idea or argument.

Finally: the papers in this course are NOT about whether you like or dislike the works of art. Avoid making judgments about the quality, or what you think the quality is (good or bad) of the art. The more time you spend trying to understand works of art rather than “judging” them, the better. This course is not primarily about art appreciation but about art history. By all means enjoy the works, but first let that enjoyment be historically informed.