

## The Saylor Foundation's ARTH210 Worksheet

Many factors come together in creating an engaging work of art. Art analysis refers to the process of “breaking down” or “isolating” these factors into various physical, visual, and psychological categories. The chart below will introduce you to the various factors you should consider as you determine the prominent elements in a specific work of art.

FORM	SUBJECT MATTER	CONTENT
<p><b>Physical properties; style, including, but not limited to:</b></p> <p><i>Basic:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Material (medium)</li> <li>-Technique (application)</li> <li>-Visual elements (color, and line)</li> <li>-Composition (the organization of the elements)</li> <li>-Spatial organization (dimension, perspective, viewpoint)</li> </ul> <p><i>Stylistic:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Geometric</li> <li>-Organic</li> <li>-Naturalistic</li> <li>-Etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Genre</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-For example: landscape; still life; religious scene; nude; portrait; everyday life [genre]; geometric abstraction</li> </ul> <p><b>Specific subject</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-For example: fruit; street scene, figures playing cards</li> </ul> <p><b>Iconography</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Relates to subject matter</li> <li>-Symbolic images or forms</li> </ul> <p><b>In Abstract Art...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-There is no iconography in the conventional sense; the subject might be the relationship of forms, color perception, human gesture; at the same time any “markings” may evoke meanings or figurative references</li> </ul>	<p><b>Meaning; messages; themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What the artist <b>intended</b> and what viewers bring from their own experiences</li> </ul> <p><b>Contexts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Involves circumstances at the time of production, for example, the artist's life, politics, location, patronage</li> </ul>

## **“THE FIVE Ws” of Art Analysis**

In conjunction with the chart above, you should familiarize yourself with the "5 W's" of art analysis, which are:

### **WHO (context)**

Information about the artist and the patrons (if the work has been commissioned)

### **WHAT (form/subject matter)**

Object type, use, main subject, medium, technique

### **WHERE (context)**

Location if *in situ* (such as a building or public sculpture), or place of origin

### **WHEN (context)**

Approximate date of creation

### **WHY (content)**

Intended practical and/or symbolic function

## **Essay Writing: Providing a Basic Art Description**

The following should generally be given near the start of an essay about a specific work:

-**Artist** (if known) or culture (probable)

-**Approximate date**

-**Location** (city) if *in situ* or place of origin (probable); note: not necessarily where the item is now, except if you are writing a travel piece or a piece about the collection it is currently in. What is important for meaning is where it was created (context).

-**Object type** (e.g., general, such as portrait painting; stained glass window)

-**A prominent aspect of its form** upon first viewing

-**A prominent aspect of its content or context** upon first viewing.

The last two elements will presumably be developed within the essay.

## **ARTH210: American Art Resources**

Please use the list below for excellent supplemental information and/or images that relate to many of the topics covered in our course.

### *Museum/Institutional Sites*

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Reading Room and Online Catalogue  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>

Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
[www.lacma.org](http://www.lacma.org)

Metropolitan Museum of Art:  
[www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.  
[www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov)

Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts  
[www.pafa.org](http://www.pafa.org)

Philadelphia Museum of Art  
[www.philamuseum.org](http://www.philamuseum.org)

Smithsonian American Art Museum  
<http://americanart.si.edu/>

Yale University Art Gallery  
<http://artgallery.yale.edu/>

*Other Websites for Art History, with emphasis on European and American art (includes images, articles, and other references):*

[www.artcyclopedia.com](http://www.artcyclopedia.com)

Artcyclopedia (art in museums, historical through contemporary)

<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/index.htm>

Encyclopedia of Irish and World Art: 2010 (art glossaries, timelines, information on movements; image links)

<http://www.wga.hu/>

Web Gallery of Art (17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century art; excellent images)

