



When we think critically about art, we're not necessarily finding fault with it or evaluating whether it's "good" or "bad" art. Instead, we're questioning our own response to the work and looking for reasons for that response. In other words, we're looking at cause (the characteristics of the artwork) and effect (the response they elicit in us).

If you are asked to analyze a piece of art—which is sometimes called *art analysis*—you can start by considering the different components or features of the artwork. You'll need to consider not just the subject matter, but also aspects of the medium being used. You might also be asked take into account the context in which the art was produced, i.e. how the artwork relates to things outside of itself like individuals, institutions, power structures in society, or distinguishing characteristics of the artist/period/culture.

Below are some questions you can ask yourself when trying to make observations and generate ideas about art.¹

What is your initial reaction to the artwork?

When, where, why, by whom, and for whom was the work made?

Where would the work have been seen? (e.g. a private home, gallery, or public space)

What are the physical properties and form of the artwork (e.g. material, texture, size, colour, composition or arrangement of elements), and what are their effects? See the following pages for more questions about particular types of art.

What meanings and values does this work express?

What does this work say about its creator and the socio-historical context it was created in?

Does the title help explain the meaning of the work?

What is this subject matter, i.e. who or what is in the picture? What, if anything, is happening?

If a figure is present, where is his/her gaze directed compared to the viewers (you or other figures in the picture)?

If two or more figures are present, how are they positioned in relation to each other? Are they looking at each other?

If it is a portrait of a person,

how much of that person is shown, and how much space does he/she fill, and what effect does this have?

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Is it a manipulated photograph (one which has been altered by hand or computer)?

Is it a fabricated photograph (one in which the subject has been constructed or staged)?

Who took the photograph? Was the print produced by the same person who exposed the negative?

What is the title of the work? Did the creator give the title, or was it added later by viewers or cataloguers? Does the title include the date or location?

Is the date that the print was made different from the date the photo was taken?

What type of photographic process was used to produce the negative or the positive print? Why do you think the photographer chose these particular processes?

What are the physical properties of the photograph? For instance,

What are the dimensions of the print, and what effect does this size have on the viewer?

What material is the photo printed on (e.g. paper, metal, silk)? If paper, is it matte, glossy, or somewhere in between?

Has it been trimmed or cropped?

Is the print damaged and faded, or pristine?

For video art, consider:

the impact of the visual images (e.g. their subject matter and sequence)

the use of sound: is there music, dialogue, background noise?

the context: where is the video being shown? How does this affect your reception of the video?

political implications (e.g. whether the content or style of the video satirical or critical)

connections with other art