

 **Essay Writing Guide**  
**2017**



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## **What is an essay?**

The word *essay* derives, via the French *essai*, from the Latin *exagium*, which translates as ‘a weighing’. An essay, in this sense, is a relatively short written composition that *assays* or ‘tests’ an idea – ‘weighing it up’, so to speak. An academic essay has a particular structure and set of conventions that must be followed, and it is the purpose of this *Guide* to explain this structure and these conventions and to provide advice that should make what can be a daunting task a little easier. **Do not try to read it all at once. Refer to specific sections as needed.**

An essay ‘weighs’ its main idea or topic by building an *argument*. This word is not being used in the everyday sense, for a dispute or fight between people. In its original sense, argument means ‘evidence’ or ‘proof’; ultimately, it refers to something that brings *clarity* to a topic. An essay attempts to make a particular point by giving clear definitions and explanations of key terms and ideas and by providing evidence or proof that allows readers to make up their minds about the topic it discusses. It is an exploration or investigation of issues arising from an essay topic.

## **Choosing a topic**

The first step in building an argument is to have a clearly defined topic about which to write. The *Art History and Theory Course Information Booklet*, as is usual in an undergraduate degree, provides a list of essay topics from which to choose. Further on in your study, you may have to come up with a defined topic for yourself.

There are several factors to consider when selecting an essay topic. The topic that most interests you or about which you already have a lot to say is not necessarily best one to pick. Having pre-existing strong opinions about a topic can get in the way of effective research and argument.

A topic formulated as a direct question – a series of questions is even better – can help to focus the writing of the essay. Take time, though, to think through the key terms of such a topic to ensure you understand these before committing to writing about it.

When an essay topic is not phrased as a direct question, read it carefully to uncover exactly what it is asking.

- **Consider key verbs:** e.g. discuss, show, investigate, examine, outline, assess, summarise. Some imply more specific directives than others.

*Assess* and *examine* indicate that the essay will require the exercise of judgement, weighing evidence, and reaching definite conclusions. *Summarise* and *outline*, on the other hand, suggest that the essay will be more concerned with presenting and organising information.

Even when an essay topic asks something as general as *discuss*, it is still necessary to provide evidence that supports the main points, and to organise information into a logical structure that readers can follow.



- **Break down the topic into its component instructions.**

Make a set of dot points of the key terms, concepts, historical periods, artists, etc., that the topic lists, as well as any specific instructions it gives.

For example, take topic #5 in the *Course Information Booklet*:

5. Medieval art often shows a dialogue between the earthly and divine worlds. Using selected examples from the period, examine the depiction of human figures and their interactions with the world of the spirit. How can you account for the lack of naturalism in many of these works?

Such a list would look something like this:

- Medieval
- dialogue
- earthly and divine worlds
- **select** examples
- **examine**
- depiction of human figures [earthly]
- interactions [dialogue]
- the world of the spirit [divine]
- **account**
- naturalism → lack of naturalism

This kind of list can be used to make organising or clarifying notes. In the list above, I have bolded the essay topic's three direct *instructions*. Note how the instruction *select* is hidden in the adjective 'selected'. I have also put key terms from the start of the topic in square brackets next to the later parts that relate back to them. I have put an arrow from 'naturalism' to 'lack of naturalism' to show that the essay will have first define or explore 'naturalism' before it can move on to account for the 'lack' of naturalism in Medieval art.

- **Make brief explanatory notes for each item on this list.**

These notes will become the basis for research and are also the beginnings of a clear essay structure.

## **Research**

From the French verb *rechercher*, to research is to 'go seeking for' information on a particular topic. It is something that humans do all the time: hearing and enjoying a new song and wanting to know more about it, for instance, one might ask a knowledgeable friend, visit a music store, read a music magazine, or use the internet to discover more about it.

When it comes to an academic essay, however, information on a topic must come from *reliable sources*.

These will typically be books from established publishers, articles in peer-reviewed journals, exhibition



catalogues, interviews with artists or commentators in magazines or web-publications, and perhaps educational, governmental, or institutional websites.

### **Sources of information**

The beginning of any research should be the *Art History and Theory Course Information Booklet*. A list of '**Recommended Readings**' follows the summary of each weekly lecture, and it is from these lectures that the essay topics are drawn. Some of the essay topics themselves have suggested readings attached to them. Most or all of the 'Recommended Readings' can be found in the library at Adelaide Central School of Art. The *Art History and Theory Course Reader* will also contain useful material on most topics.

These may be all the required sources in the first years of study. Later it will be necessary to explore a wider range of materials and learn how to assess their worth.

### **What is a reliable source?**

A *reliable source* is one that has passed through some kind of screening process before appearing in public. Publishers have professional editors who assess and correct submitted texts before they are published. Likewise, academic journals employ experts in the relevant fields to review and assess articles before publication. While exhibition catalogues and interviews may not always pass through this process, these are still acceptable sources because they present the actual words and opinions of artists and curators: these are *primary sources*. Images of works of art, used to illustrate a point or as the subject of analysis, are also primary sources.

It is a good idea, in general, to scrutinise for possible bias any source intended as evidence.

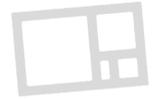
### **Websites as sources**

It is most difficult to assess the reliability of websites as sources. A blog is not usually considered a reliable source of information for an academic essay. But an artist's own blog, as a *primary source*, would be an acceptable source. Sites that are concerned with promoting a particular product or opinion are not usually considered reliable sources of information.

A website is more likely to be a reliable source of information if it has in its address **.edu** (an educational institution, e.g. university), **.gov** (government), or **.org** (a not-for-profit organisation). Nevertheless, it pays to take time to look around the site and determine exactly who is putting the information out there and why.

### **Where to find journal articles**

Besides books, articles in peer-reviewed journals are the most important source of information when it comes to writing essays. The academic world is based largely on the writing of essays, and it is through publication in journals devoted to their special field that most academics develop their careers. Journals, therefore, will typically present the most up-to-date information on most topics. Libraries tend to hold more journals in



electronic databases than in hard-copy on the shelves, so it is important to learn the basics of how to use these.

Adelaide Central School of Art subscribes to *Oxford Art Online* and the Arts and Humanities series of *Very Short Introductions*. Both resources are available both *on-* and *off-campus*. Login details can be obtained from the Librarian or Administration.

**Oxford Art Online** is primarily a reference resource: a big digital encyclopaedia of art. It is strong on the basic facts – timelines, biographies, summaries, overviews, bibliographies, etc. – which makes it an excellent starting point for research on any topic.

<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/>

**Very Short Introductions** provides online access to 236 complete books, covering Archaeology, Architecture, Art, Biography, Classical Studies, Egyptology, History, Linguistics, Literature, Media Studies, Music, Performing Arts, Philosophy, Religion, and Society and Culture. The series offers scholarly yet accessible overviews of specific topics within the various disciplines. For many Level 1 and Level 2 students, these are excellent sources in themselves; for Level 3 and Honours students, they remain a fundamental starting point for further thinking and research.

<http://www.veryshortintroductions.com/>

The **Barr-Smith Library** at Adelaide University and the **City West** campus of the library of the University of South Australia allow *on-campus* database access to members of the public.

The **National Library of Australia** provides *off-campus* access to registered Australian citizens. It is *absolutely free* to get a National Library of Australia card: <http://www.nla.gov.au/getalibrarycard/>.

These libraries have sections of their websites devoted to their database collections, organised in alphabetical order. A good database for a beginner to start with is **JSTOR**.

### Searching databases for articles

With more experience in a field of research, database searching will become more refined. Search engines are usually set by default to sort in order of 'Relevance'. In most cases, it should remain on this setting. When searches become more specific, setting it to order from 'Newest' to oldest can also be useful.

For the topic concerning Medieval art (see above), typing the words 'Medieval art heaven earth' into the search bar would be a good start. This brings up as the **most relevant result** an article from the journal *Leonardo*, entitled 'Heaven and Earth Reconciled: The Common Vision of Renaissance Art and Science'. A quick glance at its first paragraph shows that it discusses how early Renaissance artists and philosophers were



'seeking to break down the Medieval dichotomy between heaven and earth'.<sup>1</sup> This is already providing some information of relevance to the essay topic.

A broad search like this will usually turn up a lot of irrelevant articles. Take a brief sift through the first few pages of search results and pick three or four that from their titles, abstracts, and/or opening paragraphs seem the most relevant, download, and read them.

**Make sure you attend the workshops especially devoted to this important aspect of research and make use of the Online Resources Wiki on Adelaide Central School of Art's website:**

<http://acsalibraryonlineresources.wikispaces.com/>.

### **Reading for a purpose**

While all of us read all the time – online, magazines, books – the type of reading required when researching for an academic essay is of a special kind. You will be reading *for a purpose*, and this can best be characterised as reading *deeply* and *critically*. 'Critical' in this sense does not mean 'criticising' as it would be used in day-to-day life. Rather, from the Greek verb *krinein*, which translates as 'to separate' or 'distinguish' one thing from another, it refers to *making judgements* and *assessing* about the reading material.

- **Read *deeply*** so as to give full attention to the author's choice of words, argumentation, and handling of evidence.
- **Read *critically*** in order to assess the author's choices, arguments, and use of evidence. Determine their relevance and applicability to your essay topic, but also their clarity and persuasiveness in context.

Reading like this is a skill that will grow stronger with practice. Adapt the instructions given in this *Guide* as a tool for assessing others' writings.

### **Taking notes**

Read the most relevant, interesting or challenging sources more than once. To read something *three times* is optimal for a piece of writing the length of a standard academic article or book chapter.

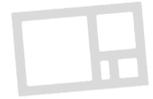
Have the dot points and brief notes taken from the essay topic to hand while reading the collected information. Keep these in mind; perhaps use them as headings under which to arrange the notes.

- *Do not* take a lot of notes on the **first reading**. Try to gain a general impression of what the piece is about.

After reading the entire piece, write a brief summary (around a paragraph) of the author's main argument.

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<sup>1</sup> George J. Grinnell, 'Heaven and Earth Reconciled: The Common Vision of Renaissance Art and Science', *Leonardo* 21.2 (1988), 195.



- On the **second reading**, make a short note (a sentence or two) after reading each paragraph. Summarise the main point of the paragraph and its relevance to the author's main argument.
- On the **third and final reading**, take detailed notes of passages for quotation, paraphrase or summary in your own essay, draft commentaries on sections that are difficult or controversial, and of interesting facts and references that need following up.

**Take care to note down correct page numbers, names, dates, and other important details.**

### **Bibliographical details**

In most cases, an academic essay will require a *Bibliography*, so it is very important to keep a detailed list of everything that you read. Take care to note the necessary details to compile this list in the appropriate format. Note these down *exactly* as they appear in the source.

In most **books**, these details can be found on the page behind the title page:

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All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published by  
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Kessler, Herbert L., 1941–  
    Spiritual seeing : picturing God's invisibility in medieval art / Herbert L.  
    Kessler.  
        p. cm. — (The Middle Ages series)  
        Includes bibliographical references and index.  
        ISBN 0-8122-3560-6 (alk. paper)  
        1. Christian art and symbolism—Medieval, 500–1500. 2. Image  
        (Theology)—History of doctrines—Middle Ages, 600–1500. I. Title.  
    II. Series  
    BR115.A8 K47 2000  
    246'.1—dc21

00-029939

Note the author's full name, the book's full title, the place of publication, the publisher, and the year of publication: e.g. Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: picturing God's invisibility in medieval art*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, and 2000.

**Journal articles** will usually have all these details on a cover page when downloaded or otherwise connected to the article on the database:

The screenshot shows the JSTOR interface for an article. At the top, there are navigation links: JSTOR HOME, SEARCH, BROWSE, and MyJSTOR. The main header features the CHICAGO JOURNALS logo and a search bar. Below the header, the article title is 'Symbolism and Purpose in an Early Christian Martyr Chapel: The Case of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, Milan' by Gillian MacKie. The journal is identified as 'Gesta', Vol. 34, No. 2 (1995), pp. 91-101. There are buttons for 'DOWNLOAD PDF', 'CITATION TOOLS', and 'JOURNAL INFO'. A navigation bar at the bottom of the article section includes 'Article', 'Thumbnails', and 'References' tabs, along with 'Previous Item' and 'Next Item' links. The main content area shows the article title and author information: GILLIAN MACKIE, University of Victoria.

Note the author's full name, the article's full title, the name of the journal, the volume, issue, and year, and the page numbers on which the article appears: e.g. Gillian McKie, 'Symbolism and Purpose in an Early Christian Martyr Chapel: The Case of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, Milan', *Gesta*, volume 34, number 2, 1995, pages 91-101.

For **web sources**, at least record the correct and full web address: e.g.

[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/deth/hd\\_deth.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/deth/hd_deth.htm).

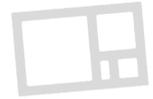
Many online articles actually *do* have titles, authors, etc. Make sure to look for and take note of these items also. For example, the example just used is an article called 'Art and Death in the Middle Ages', its author is Sigrid Goldiner, and it comes from The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

For other types of sources, including works of art, refer to the information below on **Referencing** to determine what information needs to be collected.

### **Essay plan**

It is beneficial to establish a clearly laid-out essay structure before commencing writing. This helps to organise both one's thoughts and the information to be presented. In Art History and Theory 1:1, preparing an Essay Plan is one of the assessable tasks.

**Do not think of an essay as a race from 0 to 1500 (or whatever) words. With a well-conceived plan, you will, in fact, be writing a connected series of mini-essays on specific topics, each of no more than 300 words.**



## Word count

The first step is to take note of the *word count* assigned for the particular essay topic. If this is given in the form *xxx-xxx words* (e.g. 500-800 words), then the lesser number is the *absolute minimum* and the greater is the *absolute maximum*. However, if it is given in the form *xxx words* (e.g. 1500 words), then there is usually an *allowable variation of 10% either way*. For an essay of 1500 words, then, the minimum length would be 1350 words and the maximum would be 1650 words.

It is necessary to work within these limits. An essay will not receive a better mark just because it is longer. Many times, all this proves is lack of strong argumentation and/or rigorous editing.

## Establishing structure

Given that a workable paragraph length is around 200-300 words, dividing the total word count by these figures gives a rough guide to the number of paragraphs the essay should include. So, an essay of 1500 words will be made up of between five and eight paragraphs.

One paragraph will be an **introduction** and another will be a **conclusion**. This leaves between three and six paragraphs to form the main body of the essay. This can be considered as **one or two paragraphs each on three main points**. Although a longer essay could extend to five or more main points, it is good to try to stick to a guide of three main points even for longer essays; for instance, a 3000 word essay might spend three or four paragraphs investigating one of its main points.

## Formulating a thesis statement

In order to discern and arrange the three main points of an essay topic, it is necessary to first formulate a *thesis statement*. This clearly states the essay's particular 'take' on its topic: the *position* to be argued. The *three main points* of the essay comprise the argument that explains and supports this position.

The basis for the thesis statement is the essay topic itself. Taking into consideration both the initial breakdown of the topic and the most thought-provoking aspects of the research, **restate the essay topic as a case that can be argued**. You can ask your lecturer for assistance with this stage.

A thesis statement derived from the example above concerning Medieval art might look something like this:

Depictions of interactions between the human and divine worlds in Medieval works of art display a lack of naturalism. This can be accounted for by ... etc.

## Advice on logical structure

The process of researching and note-taking should already have provided some idea of the most interesting and/or significant points needing to be raised. As most essays in Art History and Theory need to include detailed *visual analyses* of at least one or two works of art, it is useful also to try and organise the essay around these key paragraphs.



A shorter essay will usually move from explanation of basic facts and terms to the more critical points that require the presentation and evaluation of supportive evidence. Paragraphs explaining and clarifying general facts, terms, and concepts must come before the presentation of specific proofs or more detailed analysis.

Consider your readers when constructing a plan. *Do not* present your research in the order it was discovered or write a 'narrative' about the research process. Create a **logical structure** that moves from general to specific, from overview to analysis, and which introduces in the earlier sections the information that is assumed in the later sections.

If there are many facts to present, allow for paragraphs or sections of paragraphs for the declaration of *your* point of view on these facts.

If it is necessary to compare and/or contrast two or more pieces of evidence, or consider conflicting points of view on the same topic, then at least three paragraphs are required: a general introduction to the evidence or topic, a consideration of one evidence/point of view, and a consideration of the second in light of the first (and vice versa).

### **Introduction and Conclusion**

An academic essay must have a formal *introduction* and *conclusion*. Each of these is a paragraph, roughly 10-20% of the total length of the essay. For a 1500 word essay, this would be between 150 and 300 words.

Take time to study the introductions and conclusions of the academic essays you read as part of your research. You should be able to tell, just from an essay's introduction and conclusion, exactly what's going on in the rest of it.

The **introduction** must introduce both the topic that is being written about and the structure of the essay itself. It provides readers with a guide through the essay: a series of signposts that they can recognise as they follow the argument.

The introduction must include the thesis statement and a brief summary of the essay's main points, important facts, and/or evidence, in the order these will appear. It does not include detailed exposition or analysis.

The **conclusion** restates the thesis statement and summarises the evidence and interpretations that supported the essay's central argument. It should not present any new evidence, but it can make new claims if these stem from the summing up of the argument. It should leave a *clear and strong message* that readers can take away with them.



## **General Advice about Writing**

There is no particular academic style required to write a successful essay at university. Aside from the proper referencing conventions, when it comes to the actual style of your writing, the only necessary thing is *clarity*.

- Write in simple sentences.

It is helpful to adopt the motto, '**One sentence = one thought**'.

If the conjunction 'and' is frequently connecting the parts of sentences, it is probably the case that more than one thought is being crammed into each sentence. Stop and consider whether or not the information after 'and' deserves its own sentence.

- Avoid using unfamiliar words.

When required to use technical terms – this will become necessary – make understanding and defining them part of the research.

Include a section in the essay that declares your understanding and clarifies definitions.

With the exception of slang, it is acceptable to write your essay using the vocabulary you would use to explain the same information to a classmate.

- Do not rely on clichés – the kind of everyday phrase that a contestant on a reality TV show might use to sum up his or her experience – to make your point.

Avoid generalisations, choose your words with precision, and focus on specific details rather than 'the big picture'.

## **Paragraphs**

Every paragraph mirrors the essay structure. Each paragraph has its own particular topic, introduction, conclusion, and in between, consideration of evidence that supports its main point. Whereas in the essay structure, the basic unit of sense was the paragraph, in the paragraph, the basic unit of sense is the sentence.

Declare at the outset of a paragraph exactly what is to be found within it.

This is a **topic sentence**; it is the equivalent to an essay's thesis statement.

Clarify any issues that this topic raises, or terms and concepts that need to be defined.

Introduce evidence and provide appropriate context.

Present the evidence in the appropriate manner.

Restate or explain the evidence *in your own words*.

Analyse or interpret this evidence. Make reference to the interpretations of previous critics.

Summarise the relevance of this evidence and its interpretation to the essay's main argument.



More information on **Handling Evidence** can be found below.

Finally, connect this summary with an indication of what is to follow in the next paragraph. It is important to formally introduce and conclude each paragraph, as this allows readers to easily follow the argument.

A paragraph should be around a dozen sentences of between 10 and 30 words each. Until you are comfortable with the essay form, following through this formula as closely as possible, paragraph to paragraph, should make the task easier.

### **Sentences**

The basic unit of sense in a paragraph is the sentence. Proper grammatical structure and use of punctuation is just as important as choice of words when it comes to ensuring that readers can make sense of a sentence.

A sentence must begin with a **capital letter** and end with a **full-stop**.

A sentence must also have a **subject**.  
This is the *who* or *what* that the sentence is about.

A sentence must also have a **finite verb**.  
A *verb* is a word for an action (a 'doing word'), and a *finite verb* denotes an action that takes place in time – in the past, the present, or the future.

The *subject* and *finite verb* are intimately connected, as it must always be the subject that does the action described by the finite verb.

- Hanging on the wall in the gallery. ☒  
**No subject or finite verb.**
- The painting hanging on the wall in the gallery. ☒  
**Still no finite verb.**
- The painting is/was hanging on the wall in the gallery. ☑
- The painting hangs on the wall in the gallery. ☑

**The last is best because it uses fewer words to say the same thing.**

### **Tense**

An academic essay will maintain the *present tense* throughout.

This essay *seeks* to explain ...

So-and-so *argues* ....



The past tense may be used when providing historical context.

Leonardo da Vinci  *painted* the Mona Lisa between 1503 and 1506.

But the present tense is used when analysing a work of art, even if it was completed long ago.

Da Vinci  *uses* light brushstrokes to  *create* ...

### Grammatical Agreement

It is necessary to maintain  *grammatical agreement*  between the parts of a sentence.

If the  *subject*  is  **plural**  (more than one), then the  *verb*  must be plural also.

**Singular:**  The duck waddles.

**Plural:**  The ducks waddle.

If the  *subject*  is  **first person**  (i.e. 'I'), then the  *verb*  must be first person; if the  *subject*  is  **third person**  (i.e. 'he' or 'she'), then the  *verb*  must be third person.

**First person:**  I understand.

**Third person:**  She understands.

Maintain the same verb form throughout each sentence, including in complex lists.

### Punctuation

Several items of punctuation, other than the full-stop, are used to coordinate writing. It is important to understand their particular uses, as these are as significant as the choice of words in helping readers understand.

There are a lot of rules to remember in what follows. There is no need to remember all of them while writing; the important thing is to let it flow. However,  *always*  allow enough time to  **proof-read**  your work. Have this section of the  *Guide*  nearby when on the look-out for grammatical errors during the proof-reading process

### Apostrophes

The  *apostrophe*  ( ' ) has two uses in English: to mark a  *contraction*  or to indicate  *possession* . Do not confuse the two!

- A  **contraction**  occurs in such words as  *don't*  (do not),  *I'll*  (I will),  *it's*  (it is),  *g'day*  (good day), etc. Avoid the use of contractions in an academic essay, as these tend to suggest informality or a too-casual attitude.



The rules governing the use of the **possessive** apostrophe are complicated. What follows are merely the basics.

Never use an apostrophe for the possessive pronouns, *his, hers, theirs, ours, yours*, and, especially, *its*.

For singular nouns add an apostrophe plus **s** after the final letter:

The student'**s** essay (one student).

The artist'**s** palette (one artist).

For plural nouns ending in **s** add an apostrophe after the final **s**:

The students' essays (more than one student).

The artists' works (more than one artist).

For plural nouns not ending in **s** (e.g. children, people, women, men, sheep) add an apostrophe plus **s** after the final letter:

The women'**s** business.

The sheep'**s** wool.

When two nouns share possession, only the final one has the apostrophe:

Fred and Julie'**s** cat (one cat).

When two nouns do not share possession, both must have an apostrophe:

Fred'**s** and Julie'**s** cars (two cars).

Proper names ending in **s** must have an **-s** ending after the apostrophe:

Nicholas'**s** glasses.

Elvis'**s** singing.

Never use an apostrophe to make a plural:

There are three cat'**s** in the painting. ☒

Dates do not have apostrophes:

1900'**s** ☒

1900**s** ☒



## Commas

The rules governing the use of the comma ( , ) are somewhat flexible, and there are many. This *Guide* will suggest only the most common and least problematic uses.

- A comma connects two parts of a sentence linked by a *conjunction*, such as 'and', 'but', 'yet', or 'or'.

Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* has long been admired, *yet* the source of her enigmatic smile remains a mystery.

It is good idea to remember the rule of 'one sentence = one thought' here. Most conjunctions clearly indicate the way the two parts of the sentence fit together, that this is *one thought with two parts*. The point of the previous sentence, for instance, is not that the *Mona Lisa* has been long admired, but that her smile remains mysterious. The first part serves to strengthen the point being made in the second. But if the link between the two parts of the sentence is unclear – this is typically the case when the conjunction is 'and' – then it is usually safer to make two separate sentences.

A comma is used to introduce a short quotation:

John Donne wrote, 'No man is an island'.

A **colon** should be used to introduce longer quotations.

Commas are used to separate non-essential or clarifying interjections in what is an otherwise grammatically complete sentence (i.e. one that has a subject and a finite verb).

William Blake, *who was a poet as well as a painter and printmaker*, utilised relief etching in the production of his Prophetic Books.

Make sure, in these instances, the interjection is marked by a comma on both sides.

Another version of the above is when the interjection precedes the subject: '*A poet as well as a painter and printmaker*, William Blake utilised ... ' etc. In these cases, the introductory clause should be brief and uncomplicated and *must* apply to the subject of the sentence.

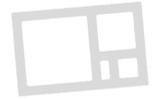
Phrases in which the interjection, or modifying phrase, becomes detached from the subject are called **dangling modifiers**. This common error can have unintentionally funny consequences:

Hanging on the wall, the critic admired the painting. ☒

Never join two grammatically complete sentences (i.e. with a subject and finite verb) using a comma. This very common error is known as a **comma splice** or **run-on sentence**:

During the long weekend it rained a little, it was wonderful after so much hot weather. ☒

In these instances, a semi-colon or full-stop should be used instead.



## Semi-colons

There are only *two* correct uses of the *semi-colon* (;). One is to clearly separate items in a complex list. The other is to join what would otherwise be two grammatically complete sentences, for the purpose of creating a balanced structure. This is particularly useful for making comparison or contrast. Keep in mind, however, the rule of 'one sentence = one thought' when constructing a sentence in this fashion. If it is two different thoughts, use a full-stop instead of a semi-colon; if it is one thought with two parts, then a semi-colon is appropriate.

To separate complex or wordy items on a list:

The exhibition was held at several major Australian cities: Sydney, New South Wales; Melbourne, Victoria; and Adelaide, South Australia.

To join what would otherwise be two grammatically complete sentences:

Many students study Art History and Theory; few students become Art Historians.

Note that both sides of the semi-colon have a grammatical subject ('students') and finite verb ('study', 'become'). Note also how the sentence is balanced by the contrast between 'many' and 'few', and that the main point of this sentence is not that many students study Art History and Theory, but that few students become Art Historians: it is one thought with two parts.

Do not use semicolons in place of a comma or colon.

The students were asked to bring three things to drawing class; compressed charcoal, a sheet of Canson mid-grey paper, and an eraser. ☒

The above is incorrect because the section that follows the semi-colon does not have a finite verb.

Always use a semi-colon and comma to surround a conjunctive adverb (i.e. however, therefore, furthermore, etc.)

Many students study Art History and Theory; however, few students become Art Historians.

## Colons

The *colon* (:) is used to introduce a complex list or a quotation, or to emphasise an important or summarising point.

Do not use a colon after a verb or a preposition (i.e. 'on', 'in', 'about', etc.):

There *were*: books, magazines, and CDs in the shop. ☒

Information can be found *in*: books and magazines. ☒

To introduce a list:

Everyone was asked to bring the following: paints, palette, brushes, and a canvas board.



A colon is not required if the list is a short one that can be easily understood. If the list is introduced by such phrases as 'including' or 'such as', then a colon is unnecessary.

To introduce longer quotations:

The lecturer said: 'Please practice your written English by writing a little bit every day.'

To emphasize an important or summarising point:

Buy now: pay later.

After abandoning all traditional methods of applying paint to canvas, Jackson Pollock was left with just one unexplored alternative: the drip method.

### **Inclusive Language**

Language *must* acknowledge the social and cultural diversity of contemporary Australian society. Moreover, state and federal legislation make it unlawful to discriminate, using words, against people on the basis of their sex, marital status, sexuality, pregnancy, race, national or ethnic origins, disability, age and religion.

It should be easy to refrain from using words or expressions that actively offend, humiliate, intimidate, or create a hostile environment for any of your fellow students or staff. What is more difficult, but no less important, is to avoid the habitual uses of language that unconsciously marginalise, trivialise, render invisible, or perpetuate negative stereotypes about, any individual or group.

*Inclusive language* acknowledges and respects social and cultural diversity, but at the same time, places the focus on people as *individuals* first and foremost, regardless of social and cultural backgrounds. Reference to an individual's attributes is only appropriate if it is relevant to the context. If unsure, please check with your lecturers.

Some positive examples:

Humans, humankind (*not* man, mankind)

an Aboriginal person

an Indigenous – or Greek, or Arabic, or Chinese, or Indian, or German, etc. – Australian

a gay man

a lesbian

a bisexual woman / a bisexual man

a transgender person

a transsexual person

a person with a disability



a person with epilepsy, or cerebral palsy, or learning difficulties, or who is blind, etc.  
a younger/older person  
partner (rather than husband/wife)  
sculptor, actor, author, etc. (rather than sculptress, actress, authoress, etc.)  
Spokesperson, Chairperson, etc. (rather than Chairman, etc.)  
he or she, his or her, etc. (instead of just he or his) – only use 'their' if it is a plural subject

This section has been adapted from Flinders University's 'Inclusive Language Guide'. For more information, see:

[http://www.flinders.edu.au/equal-opportunity/tools\\_resources/publications/inclusive\\_language.cfm](http://www.flinders.edu.au/equal-opportunity/tools_resources/publications/inclusive_language.cfm).

### **Argumentation**

In order to write critically, it is useful to adopt a detached tone. Overreliance on personal opinion prevents deep engagement with a topic and interferes with critical thinking. Avoid the overuse of phrases like 'I believe' or 'I think'. It is a given that the author is making the claims in the essay. The overall effect of such phrases is to weaken the authority of the author's voice.

Include sentences within each paragraph that 'signpost' the moves an argument is making. Employing transition words like *however*, *moreover*, *furthermore*, *because*, and *therefore* is a handy way of helping readers understand the relationship between the parts of an argument.

Remember, though, the rule about conjunctive adverbs and semi-colons (above); also, the word 'because' is the one conjunction that in most cases *does not* require commas.

### **Handling evidence**

In most cases, a paragraph in an academic essay will be 'hooked' around a particular piece of evidence. This could be a quotation from a book or article, or a work of art. In any case, the principles of handling evidence remain the same.

Introduce evidence with an introductory or explanatory sentence, providing appropriate context, i.e. who? what? why? where? how? *Never* begin a paragraph with a quotation.

It is better to rely on summary and paraphrase than on extensive quotation. Use **quotations** only where the *original source* is particularly controversial, interesting, or forceful.

Always explain a quotation in your own words immediately after citing it.

All quotations must be completely accurate, grammatically integrated into the sentence in which they appear, and properly formatted.



Use single quotation marks ( ' ' ) throughout. For quotations within quotations use double quotation marks ( ' " " ' ). Longer quotations, taking up more than three lines on the page, should appear as an indented block without quotation marks.

This line is *indented*. The 'Tab' key on your keyboard will make an indent.

Do not use ellipses ( ... ) at the start or end of quotations, as the quotation marks clearly delimit the extent of the quotation. An ellipse should be used only to mark where a passage has been *left out* of a quotation:

Elkins writes, 'The reception of Heidegger ... varies widely from writers whose work is deeply informed by his texts ... to those who adapt his ideas for rhetorical purposes.'<sup>2</sup>

This should not be done in a way that misrepresents the source.

If the evidence is a **work of art**, highlight *specific features* that exemplify the claims that it has been selected to support. The more specific the features (e.g. colour, materials, brushstrokes, imagery, etc.) the better. Take time to find exactly the right words to *describe* these. This is, perhaps, the hardest yet most important skill to learn in Art History.

After leveraging evidence, take time to summarise its importance to the thesis statement. Relate it back to what has preceded, noting specific connections or contradictions with other evidence that has been brought forward.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is treated as a serious act of academic misconduct. Plagiarism is broadly defined as knowingly presenting another person's ideas, findings or work as one's own by copying or reproducing the work without due acknowledgement of the source. Plagiarism may take several forms:

Paraphrasing another person's work, with minor changes but with the essential form, meaning and progression of ideas maintained.

Direct duplication and copying another person's work.

Piecing together sections of the work of others into a new whole.

Producing assignments in conjunction with other people which should be the student's own independent work.

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<sup>2</sup> James Elkins, *Is Art History Global?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 48.  
Art History and Theory Essay Writing Guide 2015 v.1



Copying and pasting sections of text from Internet sources without indicating their source.

**Extensive unacknowledged copying will automatically result in a failed assignment.**

It is the responsibility of all students to safeguard against plagiarism of their written work and assignments, their computer discs and notes. Should you have any reason to believe that your work has been plagiarised or copied, you should immediately report the matter to the Head of the relevant department.

### **Referencing**

One of the main features separating academic publications from non-academic is the convention of *referencing*. This is practice of providing notes to the reader about the source of an author's information and arguments. This allows readers to test the validity of an author's use of evidence or to more deeply engage with his or her research.

There are several different referencing systems used in academic publications. While it will be useful to become acquainted with all of them, it is the purpose of this *Guide* to demonstrate only the **author-title footnote system**, which is the one at use at Adelaide Central School of Art.

The School follows *The Oxford Art Journal*, which itself follows *The Oxford Guide to Style*. Those who want to go deeper should consider purchasing or downloading: R. M. Ritter, *The Oxford Guide to Style* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

Details for *The Oxford Art Journal* can be found here:

[http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our\\_journals/oxartj/for\\_authors/](http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/oxartj/for_authors/).

### **Inserting footnotes using Word**

On both PC and Mac, *Word* has a function for inserting footnotes. On **PC**, there is a tab at the top of the screen called 'References'. To insert a footnote, click on this tab and then click the big button 'AB<sup>1</sup> Insert Footnote'. Do not change to default settings unless you know what you are doing. On a **Mac**, select 'Insert', then 'Footnote' from the menu.

A reference should be inserted *after* the next major piece of punctuation. For a direct quotation that itself is not a complete sentence and does not end with a full-stop, it comes after the quotation mark or comma (if there is one). For summaries or paraphrases, or quotations that are full sentences, the reference should come at the end of the sentence, after the full-stop.

- Kemal and Gaskell explain that 'art criticism is inherent in art history,<sup>1</sup> which demonstrates the importance of visual analysis.
- Kemal and Gaskell emphasise the vital importance of art criticism to the writing of art history.<sup>1</sup>



Each footnote is automatically assigned a number and a space at the bottom of the page in which to type the reference information. For the first reference, the full bibliographical details must be given. For each subsequent reference, just the author's last name and a shortened version of the title suffice. While acceptable, it is best to avoid the use of the old-fashioned Latin abbreviations 'ibid.' and 'op. cit.'.

## Books

### References for books form the basis from which other forms of reference are derived.

This is the basic format for a reference to a **book**:

<sup>1</sup> Author's Name, *Title in Italics* (Place of Publication: Publisher, Date), page numbers.

Book titles are *always* put in italics ('ctrl-I' on the keyboard). Titles are separated from sub-titles by a colon.

Whether quoting, paraphrasing, or summarising, *always* make reference to specific pages. For multiple pages in sequence, use a dash: e.g. 14-17. For multiple pages not in sequence, use a comma: e.g. 14, 17, 21.

**First reference:** David Carrier, *Principles of Art History Writing* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 14.

**Subsequent references:** Carrier, *Principles*, 19.

### Edited books:

**First reference:** Matthew Rampley et al (eds.), *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, Brill's Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History 4 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), xiv-xviii.

**Subsequent references:** Rampley et al, *Art History*, xviii.

When there are more than three authors or editors, only the first is given, with the French *et al* ('and the rest') given in place of the others' names.

### Chapters and Articles in Books:

**First reference:** Ralph Dekoninck and Joël Roucloux, 'Art History in France: A Conflict of Traditions', in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, ed. Matthew Rampley et al, Brill's Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History 4 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), 315-334.

**Subsequent references:** Dekoninck & Roucloux, 'Art History in France', 326.



On the first reference, the full span of pages numbers covered by the article should be given. To specify the page upon which the specific reference is found, one writes e.g. 315-334 at 326.

### Journal Articles:

**First reference:** Sharon Gregory, 'Caravaggio and Vasari's "Lives"', *Artibus et Historiae* 32.64 (2011), 167-191.

Keith Christiansen, 'Early Renaissance Narrative Painting in Italy', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series 41.2 (Autumn, 1983), 3-48.

**Subsequent references:** Gregory, 'Caravaggio', 172.

Christiansen, 'Early Renaissance Narrative Painting', 31-32.

### Newspapers and Magazines:

**First reference:** B. Treloar, 'Grains of sense', *The Australian*, 18 Jan. 2000, 3.

**Subsequent references:** Treloar, 'Grains', 3.

### Audio and visual broadcasts and recordings:

**First reference:** Lightnin' Hopkins, *The Complete Aladdin Recordings* (EMI Blues Series, CDP-7-96843-2) (two volume compact disc set).

*This is Spinal Tap: A Rockumentary by Marti Di Bergi*, dir. Rob Reiner (Embassy Pictures, 1983).

'Secrets of Lost Empires', *Nova* (PBS), KHET Honolulu, 26 May 1998.

**Subsequent references:** Hopkins, *Aladdin Recordings*.

*This is Spinal Tap*.

'Secrets of Lost Empires'.

### Electronic Data:

A basic template for many electronic references might include the following classes of information:

Author or editor name, 'Title of article or section used', *Title of complete work* [type of medium], (date created, published, or posted (day month year) ) <address of electronic source> pagination or online equivalent, date accessed.

Where elements of this format cannot be found, a basic author and/or title, web address, and date accessed will suffice.



### Works of art:

The basic formula for referencing a work of art is as follows.

|                               |                                      |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Figure number                 | Fig. 1                               |
| Artist's name and dates       | Carlo Crivellii (b.1430/35 – d.1495) |
| <i>Title</i>                  | <i>Madonna della Candeletta</i>      |
| Date of work                  | 1490-92                              |
| Medium                        | oil on panel                         |
| Dimensions (height by width)  | 218 x 75 cm                          |
| Collection (where it is held) | Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan           |

A caption should always appear beside or below any image reproduced in an essay. If the image is sourced from a book, website, etc., the details of this source must be included also.

### Bibliography

A bibliography, the list of books and other sources used to write an essay, should come at the end of the essay. It is organised in alphabetical order by the authors' last names. The details will be the same as used in footnotes, but the format is as follows:

CARRIER, David. 1993. *Principles of Art History Writing*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

GREGORY, Sharon. 2011. 'Caravaggio and Vasari's "Lives"'. *Artibus et Historiae* 32.64, 167-191.

Note that page numbers are *only* to be recorded for articles or essay within journals or books, etc., and this should be the full page span of the article.

### Presentation of essays

Essays must be presented in the following way:

Leave a wide (4 cm) margin on the left-hand side of the paper for lecturer's comments.

Print on one side of paper only. Do not place individual pages in plastic sleeves. This only hinders the lecturer's efforts to write comments or corrections on your essay.

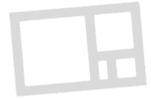
Use double spacing.

Insert page numbers. On Microsoft Word, click the 'Insert' tab at the top of the screen then select 'Page Number' from the menu.

Bibliography to be placed at end of essay. Essays without a bibliography will not be accepted.

Footnotes to be placed at bottom of each page separated from the text by a solid line across the page.

Reread and proof your essay before submission.



All assignments must have a completed essay cover sheet attached. These are available from the front desk or from the School's website. Your name, unit details and date must appear on the first page of your essay, ideally in a footer. State the essay title in full at the top of the first page of your essay.