

# The Department of Art and Art History's Writing and Rhetoric Program

Autumn 2007

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- I. Introduction
- II. The Rhetoric of Visual Culture
- III. Studio Program
- IV. Art History
- V. Art Education
- VI. Faculty Awareness and Development
- VII. Assessment

## ✎ I. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Art and Art History at Calvin College views writing and rhetoric as integral to its pedagogical mission. The ability to meet visual sensations and experiences with meaningful linguistic expression is fundamental for studio artists, art historians, and art educators. As with other disciplines across the College, verbal expression is, for us, a central vehicle for the communication of skills, knowledge, and meaning. In contrast, however, to many other departments within the College and especially within the Humanities, our intellectual endeavors are premised *not* upon texts or verbal abstractions but upon objects and images. Overcoming the challenges inherent in this process whereby a sensory experience is cast into language is crucial for both professors and students alike.

In keeping with Calvin's larger writing and rhetoric goals, the Department of Art and Art History strives to nurture the *craft* of writing across our curriculum. Because there are several distinct disciplines housed within our department, specific expectations and strategies of implementation vary. Despite these differences, the role of writing and rhetoric within the fields of Studio Art, Art History, and Art Education starts with one basic dilemma: *what to say in the face of an object?*

This document outlines how each of these respective disciplines works to instill verbal skills suited to the particular demands of studio production, historical engagement of works of art and the built environment, and the teaching of art at the primary and secondary levels (Sections III-V). Within these three areas, attention is paid to how the respective rhetoric expectations comply with the goals of the College Academic Writing Program (notably in terms of frequency, feedback, and variety) and how the cultivation of rhetoric skills are integrated throughout the curriculum for departmental majors. Where appropriate, these three sections also explicate how such skills are addressed within core-credit courses, though the majority of core expectations are addressed in Section II, which deals with our department's primary core offering, *Art 153: Visual Culture*. Finally, this document closes with consideration of faculty development and assessment (Sections VI-VII).

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· This document was prepared by Craig Hanson in 2007 with assistance from Adam Wolpa and Jo-Ann Van Reeuwijk. It replaces the previous departmental writing statement, compiled in 1996.

## œ II. THE RHETORIC OF VISUAL CULTURE

*Art 153: Visual Culture* serves both as a core offering that satisfies student's rhetoric requirement and a point of entry for all students seeking a major or minor from the department. The premise of the course is that visual images are central to the construction – and therefore the comprehension – of culture, that images are themselves the result of historical and social construction, and that images consequently communicate according to the rules of these conventions. Importantly, the department understands the scope of the course as extending far beyond the realm of the fine arts. All visual experience is potentially fair game.

Special attention is paid to issues of audience (including the implicit ethical dimensions of image use), and the course aims to help students both interpret and employ visual images more effectively. Toward this end, the course balances image production with readings and textual-based assignments (roughly in equal parts). Students are required to keep a journal that joins verbal responses and sketches (with several entries required each week) and to make at least one oral presentation. Typically faculty members meet both formally and informally to share ideas and establish continuity through particular assignments that combine verbal and visual expression. The assemblage of a collection, complete with a catalogue, for instance, has been a fairly consistent assignment. Because of the varied character of the course content, students are asked to produce a wide array of writing, ranging from ekphrastic assignments (verbal accounts of individual objects often undertaken as a literary exercise), to synopsis of essays, to film responses. Criteria for grading most assignments (whether involving images, texts, or some combination of the two) concentrate on clarity of meaning and attention to craft (not, significantly, personal aesthetic expression or artistic talent, per se).

## œ III. STUDIO PROGRAM

Language and writing are extremely important in the visual arts, in terms of both practice and theory. Artists as personalities have become currency for their work as they travel to give gallery talks and lectures, as they work in residencies, and as they represent themselves at openings. Such opportunities depend upon well-written proposals, letters, and artist's statements. Contemporary visual artists must be able to articulate their position within an historical and theoretical context that grows increasingly dependent upon highly sophisticated discourse models. The postmodern world of art presents us with the fractured remains of Modernism's Tower of Babel, now broken into a myriad array of languages and styles. The artist's responsibility is to weave this multiplicity into a specific language map for his or her own work and place. The academic artist must pursue excellence in technique and craft, as well as idea and concept, and ultimately his or her writing must elucidate the complexity of form and meaning. Consequently, the department stands committed to strengthening the writing and rhetoric skills of studio majors in connection with the larger liberal arts project. The artist's statement and, to an even greater extent, the critique are the principal targets. The latter – whether expressed in writing or voiced aloud – is part of an ongoing conversation within all studio courses. Well-formulated comments about one's own work and the work of fellow students are emphasized. The critique both facilitates the immediate production at hand and helps hone the verbal skills required for the construction of more substantive theoretical frameworks that structure and explain a larger body of work. A wide variety of concerns come into play including the perennial problem of matching verbal description with visual form, identifying successes and weaknesses, and learning to formulate observations and suggestions in

productive ways that one's peers can understand. Because of the frequency of critiques (though they range in format and scope), students learn largely by first-hand experience and demonstration. In this sense, feedback (at least in the form of the group consensus) is nearly immediate. Moreover, along with verbal feedback on the critique process, the studio provides an additional form of response; the work itself as it takes shape in response to the group's comments points to the effectiveness of the comments.

**INTRODUCTION STUDIO COURSES (ARTS 250, ARTS 251, ARTS 255, ARTS 256, ARTS 257, ARTS 258)** Along with the regular critiques described above, students in introduction studio courses are expected to produce a written critique of the work of another student. They respond anonymously to the work of classmates, addressing successes and failures, the work's content, visual significance, and context. The anonymous format is intended to encourage constructive and thorough feedback. It also serves to introduce a measure of distance that allows students to explore the vital role of the critic in the contemporary art world. Other typical introduction-level assignments include artists' interviews, exhibition reviews, and journaling.

**INTERMEDIATE STUDIO COURSES (ARTS 300, ARTS 301, ARTS 305, ARTS 306, ARTS 307, ARTS 308, ARTS 316)** All students in intermediate studio courses are expected to produce written evaluations of their work and progress for that semester. Students process their engagement with materials, concepts, and the art community by identifying learning moments, strengths and weaknesses, and the trajectory of their work. The assignment is intended to help students begin thinking about a coherent studio practice, and it is a valuable preliminary step to the artist's statement. Students are also encouraged to consider connections between their artistic output and coursework outside the Art and Art History Department. How might a biology course relate, for instance, to their studio work?

**ADVANCED STUDIO COURSES AND INDEPENDENT STUDIES (ARTS 350, ARTS 351, ARTS 355, ARTS 356, ARTS 357, ARTS 358, ARTS 380, ARTS 385, ARTS 390)** To begin the advanced semester, students of all advanced and independent studio courses are asked to provide a written proposal of their projected work for that semester. Since the advanced student is responsible for directing his or her work in support of a developed, coherent, and focused studio practice, the proposal provides a means of motivation, direction, and accountability for self-directed planning. Students are encouraged to fit this proposal into the greater context of their studio major and that of their place in the liberal arts. This is the next step towards a successful artist's statement as well as professional proposals for exhibitions, internships, graduate studies, residencies, grants, and publications.

**SENIOR SEMINAR IN ART (ARTS 395)** As the capstone course, required for all studio art majors, the senior seminar focuses on language and writing in regards to the vocation of the studio artist. Readings for this course emphasize the importance of writing and theory and once again stress the role of an well articulated artistic persona. Students are required to produce a professional packet, containing a cover letter, artist's statement, curriculum vita, and an image list to accompany the documentation of their work. The artist's statement undergoes at least four revisions from the beginning to the end of the semester. Students receive feedback on each draft in order to develop a strong written document that integrates materials, technique, content, and faith. The cover letter that each student produces is tailored to his or her particular interest in the professional world – i.e. graduate school, exhibitions, residencies, employment, or grants. Students in this course gain an understanding of how writing connects theory and practice and the role it plays in the development of an individual's persona.

## IV. ART HISTORY

From its inception as an academic discipline, art history has worked to integrate formalist concerns related to particular objects with broader historical narratives that lend themselves more easily to textual adaptation. To a large extent, art history happens at the intersection of objects and stories. The art history program at Calvin works to instill in students the textual skills required both to address individual objects and to engage those objects in connection with these larger narratives. Students must acquire a specialized vocabulary for discussing styles, techniques, types or ornament, and particular objects. They also must learn to produce certain fundamental modes of art history writing:

- effective description of a work that accounts for a viewer's experience
- essays that compares and contrasts two images
- catalogue entries
- scholarly book reviews
- research papers

Finally, students must learn to lead class discussions of a given reading assignment and to present their own scholarship in a way that demonstrates their ability to employ images effectively within a talk.

In terms of communicating standards and expectations to students in 200-level courses or higher, Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing About Art* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall) serves as a guide. It usefully covers image comparisons, catalogue entries, research methods, modes of documentation, &c.

Most foundational terms are introduced in our two survey courses, and mastery of this material is tested through quizzes and more substantive essay exams. Students are expected to use these building blocks in their written responses to pairs of images. This essay format has stood at the heart of the discipline for over a century, and it figures into all art history courses taught at Calvin. Responses are evaluated on the basis of how well students are able not only to explain an individual image but also how effectively they are able to bring one work to bear upon another. These basic skills are modeled throughout course lectures and in-class exercises, and such comparisons are a regular feature of art history exams, which typically includes two or three essay questions. Students receive feedback in the form of written comments from the professor and examples of particularly successful student responses.

Extended forms of writing such as catalogue entries and research papers are assigned in sections of upper-level courses (200 and above). The art historians consult with each other in order to vary the sorts of assignments offered during any given semester. In terms of these scholarly modes of writing, emphasis is placed on phases of research, and projects are deliberately staged over the course of the semester with manageable pieces turned in incrementally (bibliographies, outlines, initial draft, &c.).

As the culmination of the program, the capstone course in methodology and historiography (ArtH 397) works to underscore the theoretical implications of the role of language within art history while also requiring of students frequent assignments of a more practical bent, ranging from C.V.s, to cover letters, to professional thank-you notes. Students research and presentation skills are ultimately measured according to the papers they present at our annual art history

symposium, held each spring. At the conclusion of the talks, the art history professors assign grades of 1, 2, 3, or 4 (see section VII on assessment) in the following areas:

Rhetorical Presence

- Quality of voice and delivery
- Quality and use of images
- Integration of images and texts

Writing

- Clarity and basic proficiency
- Command of terminology
- Compelling and effective style

Visual Skills

- Compare and contrast skills
- Formal analysis
- Ability to use images to make claims

Argument

- Handling of sources
- Originality of claims advanced
- Synthesis

## œ IV. ART EDUCATION

Communication is critical within the field of art education. Proficient language, writing and verbal skills are integral to the teaching process. As future educators, art education students must become adept at communicating with many different types of learners. To that end, art education courses concentrate on the myriad ways of helping a K-12 student learn and communicate in the visual arts as well as in making connections to and integrating other curricular areas. Teachers must be able to clearly articulate their lesson and unit plans and curriculum overviews. Teachers are required to create meaning and sense for their young students as they guide them through an immense array of images, ideas, cultural artifacts and human responses in today's world.

To accomplish all this, the art education program requires the completion of a broad range of assignments in oral, written and visual rhetoric (a list of requirements for each course is included below). In particular, art education courses emphasize the students' personal philosophy of art and art education, structure in lessons and curriculum, and general cohesiveness. The sequence of art education courses requires art education students to progress to increasingly technical and specific communication assignments. ArtE 210 and ArtE 315 are considered foundational while ArtE 316 and 359 build on that foundation. Students are required to respond in journals and in formal written critiques to works of art – addressing issues of meaning and possible connections to make with children. Reports are required on teaching experiences (service learning) and out-of-class excursions. Most of these assignments are assessed via rubrics and clearly established standards, though the students themselves are also given opportunities to contribute to these rubrics since they will someday have to produce similar standards for their own classrooms. All major assignments are likewise evaluated according to rubrics, a sample of which appears in Appendices A & B.

Proficiency is expected by the end of the foundational courses and into the subsequent ones. Based on our yearly department assessments (of 2006 and 2007) many students earn a 4 on the scale by the time they reach the capstone course.

METHODS FOR THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER (ARTE 210) and INTRODUCTION TO ELEMENTARY ART EDUCATION (ARTE 315) In introducing students to teaching art at the elementary level, these two course employs a variety of writing assignments intended to help students articulate for themselves a definition of art, its place in educational historically and

currently, and its importance for the larger elementary curriculum. Writing is used both as evidence of materials mastered and as a learning process in its own right. Students begin describing and assessing children's art; formulating strategies for implementing different aspects of art within lesson plans (production, aesthetics, art history, art criticism, and multiculturalism); and developing a personal philosophy of art education. Feedback is provided through written comments from the professor (See Appendix A for sample rubric).

Presentation on an artist	10-minute visual and oral presentation
Book report	20-minute visual and oral presentation
Children book presentation	5-10 minute visual and oral presentation
Lesson plans (x2)	4 pages
Unit Plan	10-20 pages
Teach Out (x3)	½ - 1 hour – service hours with art lesson plans and reports
Teach-In	1 hour – ??
Philosophy paper (315 only)	3 pages
Informal writing	Sketchbook/journal
Excursion reports(2)	2-10 pages on community art events or art venues

**SECONDARY ART EDUCATION (ARTE 316)** As an introduction to secondary art education, this course reinforces and builds upon many of the goals of ARTE 210 and ARTE 315. It also uses writing to help students think critically about a variety of problems within the secondary curriculum, including evaluating discipline-based art education (art history, art criticism, art production, and aesthetics) in contrast to most current practices in art education; accounting for the role social interests play in junior-high and high-school students' art work; and responding to cultural and socioeconomic influences that affect secondary students. Feedback is provided through written comments from the professor.

Chapter presentation	20-minute visual and oral presentation
Book report	20-minute visual and oral presentation
Final presentations	30-minute visual and oral presentation
Observation papers (2+)	3-10 pages
Lesson plans (x2)	4 pages
Extended unit plan	10-20 pages
Philosophy of art education	10-20 pages
Assessment strategies (6)	2 pages
Informal Writing	Sketchbook/journal
Excursion reports (2)	2-10 pages on community art events or art venues

**SEMINAR IN PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES IN ART TEACHING (ARTE 359)** Expanding on students' previous coursework, this seminar helps students integrate increasingly complex art education theory into their own teaching practices (through regular journal entries and weekly discussions), create and practice art assessment and management tools, observe and report on area art classrooms and teachers, and finalize their personal philosophies of art education. Feedback is provided through written comments from the professor (See Appendix B for a sample rubric).

Extended unit plan	50+ pages
Daily journal entries	3+ per week
Chapter presentations	1 hour

Student assessment	3-5 pages
Classroom management	3-8 pages
Professional goals	5 pages
Daily lesson plans	3+ pages
Unit plans	5-10 pages
Philosophy of art education	review/supplement
Video tape analysis (2)	2 pages
Formal observations (4)	3-10 pages
Surveys (8)	1-2 pages
Exit interview	Portfolio

## VI. FACULTY AWARENESS AND DEVELOPMENT

In order to extend the value of this document beyond the faculty members who approved it in 2007, the Rhetoric Program Liaison will be responsible for introducing it to new faculty members and generally making them acquainted with the department's expectations regarding writing. The document will also be available through Rhetoric Program's website.

The Art and Art History Department also will continue to engage in an internal dialogue about its writing and rhetorical expectations. In particular, those teaching Art 153 will work on establishing more uniform models for evaluating student work, and studio faculty will attempt to develop a unified set of criteria for an effective artist's statement.

## IV. ASSESSMENT

The current program for assessment within the Department of Art and Art History entails evaluating all spring intermediate studio courses, ArtE 359, and the Art History Symposium. Students in all three areas are graded on performance according to the following scale, as fitted to each discipline and assignment appropriately:

- 4 Exemplary – demonstrates an exceptionally high level of performance
- 3 Proficient – demonstrates a competent level of performance.
- 2 Developing – shows significant weaknesses with further development in order.
- 1 Unacceptable – the performance in this area is below acceptable standards.

Goals and strategies are formulated in response to the annual evaluations. Writing will be part of the assessment project.

In addition (as related to a point made in the previous section), one specific area targeted for improvement is the department's ability to assess in a more consistent manner the results of Art 153 (Visual Culture). The status and effectiveness of writing within the department, along with the usefulness of this document, will be evaluated annually in conjunction with broader curriculum concerns.

## APPENDIX A: SAMPLE ART EDUCATION RUBRIC

### ARTE 210/315: Final Oral Presentation Rubric

	3	2	1
DELIVERY	clear and articulate, modulation, eye-contact minimum hesitation	clear, some hesitation, fair articulation	unclear, much hesitation, articulation needs work
RESEARCH	thorough and multiple sources, clear bibliography	more than one resource, limited bibliography	one resource only, bibliography incomplete
TECHNICAL	several appropriate images, clear handout/outline	some visual images, adequate handout	unclear, no images or handout
ORGANIZATION	clear and maintained outline/intro/summary	organization mostly clear, minimal outline	unclear, no outline, intro, summary
CLASSROOM PRACTICALITY	very practical, considerable hints and suggestions	somewhat practical, some hints and suggestions	little practicality

## APPENDIX B: SAMPLE ART EDUCATION RUBRIC

### ARTE 359 Expanded Unit Plan Scoring Rubric

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

The following scale is used to judge the student's level of performance on each section in Expanded Unit Plan.

**4 = Exemplary:** The student teacher consistently demonstrates an exceptionally high level of performance for a novice in this area.

**3 = Proficient:** The student teacher demonstrates a competent level of performance for a novice in this area.

**2 = Developing:** The candidate shows some significant weaknesses in performance in this area. Further development is needed.

**1 = Unacceptable:** The candidate's performance in this area is below acceptable standards for a novice teacher.

Philosophy of Education	4	3	2	1
The unit includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a clear explanation of which aspects of the teacher's philosophy of education directly apply to this particular unit,</li> <li>a description of the specific materials and strategies in which those aspects are revealed most clearly, and</li> <li>an indication of how the unit will move students to examine, express, and perhaps revise their own worldviews.</li> </ul> Comments:				

Context				4	3	2	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The unit clearly and specifically describes the learners, the classroom, the school, and the communities of the school's constituents as they relate to the unit.</li> <li>It also shows how the teacher's reflections on these people and contexts have affected how he or she responds to various learning styles, intelligences, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.</li> </ul> Comments:							

Theme				4	3	2	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The unit has a clear overall theme.</li> <li>All parts of the unit help to develop that theme.</li> </ul> Comments:							

Goals and Objectives				4	3	2	1
Both the unit objectives and the lesson objectives are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clear,</li> <li>specific, and</li> <li>aligned with Michigan or district standards or curriculum, and</li> <li>connected to potentially observable actions and attitudes.</li> </ul> Comments:							

Planning for Teaching				4	3	2	1
The lessons in the unit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are likely to achieve all the unit objectives,</li> <li>reflect a wise allotment of time,</li> <li>are logically and skillfully sequenced,</li> <li>employ an appropriate variety of activities,</li> <li>are supported by appropriate materials, including the technological,</li> <li>forge interdisciplinary connections when appropriate,</li> <li>make productive connections to students' knowledge, values, and abilities, and</li> <li>show evidence of possible flexibility, as needed.</li> </ul> Comments:							

Assessment				4	3	2	1
Measures of assessment within the unit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are consistent with the underlying philosophy of education,</li> <li>are consistent with the goals for the unit,</li> <li>take into account differences among students, and</li> <li>occur in a logical sequence and at appropriate times (before, during, and after teaching).</li> </ul> Comments:							

Reflection	4	3	2	1
<p>The unit includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accurate and insightful analyses of what in the unit worked well, and</li> <li>• specific descriptions of how the unit could be improved.</li> </ul> <p>Comments:</p>				

Format	4	3	2	1
<p>The unit is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clearly organized,</li> <li>• attractively presented, and</li> <li>• free of errors in grammar, usage, spelling, and punctuation.</li> </ul> <p>Comments:</p>				