


INTRODUCTION

Some of the first comments that students make are: “I chose to study Fine Art to make art not to write” or, “I don’t need to write or talk about my art, it speaks for itself”. While artworks are considered an extension of texts, writing is a part of everyday life no matter what career you follow. Writing is even more a part of your life while you are at university. In order to achieve your degree or diploma you need to show a certain number of skills, no matter what field you are in. Without learning the discipline specific writing skills found in this handbook you will not have the skills to function as a practicing contemporary artist, to grow as an academic in the arts or to work in an arts related field. Below are some of the kinds of writing you will be exposed to both in and out of university.

WHY DO WE WRITE IN FINE ART?



Personal

Reflection as an artist (Reflection is, however, considered higher level thinking and can and may be assessed academically)
Creative writing

Academic

Essays
Artist statements
Reflective reports
Exhibition reviews
Presentations

Professional

CVs
Artist statements
Artist Biography
Exhibition/ art work proposals
Application for bursaries, funding, residences and studio programs

Academic Writing

At a university, academic writing is the most common type of writing we do. Academic writing encourages us to engage with texts written by professionals as we develop our research skills. It makes us critically analyse what academic texts say and do. It requires us to think logically, interpret, form opinions, and argue a point with ample evidence while expressing ourselves, in written form, in a coherent and concise manner. In Fine Art, this writing takes the form of essays, reflective reports, artist statements, presentations and exhibition reviews.

Critical Thinking

You will be told, both in theory and practical subjects, throughout your tertiary education to “think critically” or to “critically analyse”, but what does this actually mean? On a very basic level all it means is that your lecturer does not want you to take everything you hear or read at face value, nor to accept everything as unquestionable fact. Rather ask yourself, who wrote the text you are reading? Is there any possible bias? Is the evidence they are using to back up their argument relevant? What is the opposing view on this subject? All of this can be applied to your art making process. Most things in life are subjective. In other words question everything, within reason of course, so that you start developing the ability to make considered conclusions. It is therefore important to define the following terms:

The Oxford South African Concise Dictionary defines:

Critical as “expressing or involving an analysis of the merits and faults of a work” (Pearsall 2010:277). **Analyse** as “examine (something) methodically and in detail, typically in order to explain and interpret it” (Pearsall 2010:38). Brookfield (1987:71) defines **Critical Thinking** as “identifying and challenging assumptions and exploring alternate ways of thinking”.

How do we critically analyse a text?

- suspend judgment
- question assumptions
- evaluate the evidence
- imagine alternate answers
- enter into the spirit of an opposing view

Critical Writing must:

- be interesting
- show an engaged mind
- bring something new to the reader
- make an argument

This section is partially adapted from:

Bean, J. 2001. *Engaging Ideas*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (page 7).

Bean, J. 2011. *Engaging Ideas, 2nd ed.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (page 4).

References:

Brookfield, S. D. 1987. *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (pages 71).

The Oxford South African Concise Dictionary. 2010. 2nd ed. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa (pages 277 and 38).

Writing process

The writing process is a lot longer than you may expect. It is essential that you give yourself enough time to go through all of the steps below, for each assignment.

1. Understand your brief
2. Mind map & free write
3. Visit the Writing Centre
4. Research
5. Write your first draft
6. Visit the Writing Centre
7. Revise and read some more
8. Rest
9. Re-revise, second draft
10. Visit the Writing Centre
11. Edit
12. Go through Assignment Checklist (pages 43 - 44)
13. Hand in

