

Four Steps of Art Criticism

One Way to Talk About Art

Step 1- Describe

What do you see?

Step 2 - Analyze

How is the work organized?

Step 3 - Interpret

What is happening?

Step 4 – Judge

What do you think of the work?



Step 1 – Describe

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- What do you see?
- Focus on the facts
- Include credit line
 - artist,
 - title,
 - year,
 - medium,
 - size,
- Use neutral words



Artist: Vincent Van Gogh

Title: Starry Night

Date: 1889

Media: Oil on canvas

Step 2 - Analyze

- How is the work organized?
- Look for and cite evidence.
- How are the elements organized using the principles ?

- ***Elements of Art:***

Line, Color, Shape, Texture, Value, Space

- ***Principles of Design:***

Balance, Emphasis, Rhythm, Movement, Unity, Contrast, Variety



Step 3 – Interpret

- What is happening?
- What is the artist trying to communicate?
- What ideas, sensations, and/or feelings



Step 4 – Judge

- What do you think of the work?
- The three Aesthetic Theories:

Imitationalism (Subject) - looks like real life.

Formalism (Composition) - uses the elements and principles effectively

Emotionalism (Content) - evokes a feeling/emotion





Winslow Homer, *Crossing the Pasture*, 1871-72, oil on canvas



- Describe:
- How many figures do you see in the picture?
- What object are they holding?
- What does the taller boy have over his shoulder?
- What animals do you see in the background?
- How would you describe the surroundings?

Winslow Homer, *Crossing the Pasture*,
1871-72, oil on canvas



Analyzing

- What forms appear at the center of the composition? Why does the artist place the boys in the center, close to the viewer?
- Can you find any intense or bright colors?
- Where is the lightest value? What purpose does it serve?
- Notice the diagonal lines formed by the stick in the taller boy's hand and by the downward slope of the hill on the right? These lines converge on, and emphasize, the face of the taller boy. Can you find a third diagonal line that does the same?
- Can you find a more gently sloping diagonal that points to the face of the smaller boy?
- What colors has the artist used? What textures has he included?
- How has the artist used emphasis to make the subjects stand out?
- What role does proportion play in this artwork?



- Interpreting
- What emotion is communicated by the look and body language of the taller boy? Would you say he stands tall and appears sure of himself?
- Contrast these observations with the facial expressions and posture of the smaller boy.
- Why has the artist placed the boys against a darker, textured background? Does this focus your attention on their faces and facial expressions? What do you think the artist has accomplished by drawing the viewer's eyes to the boys' expressions and body language?
- What visual clue can you find that might explain the boys' behavior?