

Your research paper should be at least 10 pages in length, and not more than 25; it should be cleanly typed with proper, *humanities-style* footnotes to all source material, plus a bibliography of all sources consulted. ANY USE OF SOURCES WITHOUT PROPER CITATIONS WILL BE CONSIDERED PLAGIARISM. You should provide good labeled photocopies of whatever images or objects you discuss in detail; if reproductions aren't available, a sketch, line drawing, or your own photograph is acceptable. Your thesis argument should be clearly stated in your first paragraph and reflected in your choice of a title for your essay; it should motivate your writing throughout and reach some resolution in your conclusion. I strongly suggest that you work from an outline to keep your essay on track. Read it over when you are done with your first draft -- did you reach the conclusion you thought you would? If not, go back and change the beginning to fit your conclusion! Make your paper a coherent essay, not a collection of observations glued together with others' ideas. I will be happy to meet with you during office hours to discuss your choice of a topic, to go over outlines or drafts, or talk about alternative approaches (see suggested topics, below).

Papers are due **Lec #25**, preferably *in class*. Unless they are given to my assistant before the offices close, or you have gotten prior authorization from me (or a signed medical excuse), your paper will be considered late. Late papers will be given a numerical grade lowered by 20%, and you may receive an Incomplete.

It should go without saying that essays should have artists' names correctly spelled, with all titles and dates of works accurate and complete. Successful papers will have a clear *thesis argument*. Helpful guidebooks on writing essays include those by Sylvan Barnett, Kate Turabian, or the classic Elements of Style by Strunk and White. Extra credit will be given for using the peer review system developed by Sylvan Barnett.

Suggested Topics and Approaches

1. **Monographic:** Go to the Museum of Fine Arts (your MIT ID gets you in for free), the Harvard Art Museums, the MIT List Visual Arts Center, the Rose Art Museum, or any other arts institution in the area and find a work on view at that dates from 1940 to the present. Pick an artist you feel strongly about (positively or negatively), and find out everything you can about them before you write your paper. Use library books, journal articles, the internet, newspaper reviews, radio talkshows — but cite your sources!

- . Analyze the work in detail
- . Situate this particular work in the artist's overall *oeuvre*

then pursue one or several of the following additional points, as a motivated argument:

- . Argue for the work's importance in the history of postwar art, or its meaning in its original context, and its changed meaning today

Continued...

- . Demonstrate the work's links to earlier art (this should be more than speculative, and should be anchored by research into the artist's sources)
- . Compare to earlier art of the same or similar genre, medium, style, subject, or approach, and analyze what has changed between the two periods
- . Explore the work's affinities (or lack thereof) with a movement with which it is usually associated (i.e., postmodernism, Color Field, l'art brut, Tachisme, neo-Dada, assemblage, Minimalism, Pop, Gutai, Abstract Expressionism, etcetera). Here you can argue with the “experts,” and present your own arguments for the work’s significance.

2. **Thematic:** Pick a theme that interests you, such as “primitivism,” “politics and public art,” “graffiti,” “undergrounds,” “contemporary art and popular music,” “word and image,” “advertising and art marketing,” “engineering and art,” race, masculinity, gender ... the possibilities are endless. Then, within this chosen theme:

- . Find an artist or an art movement that brings the theme into closer focus
- . Analyze the specifics of the historical period in which this artwork, artist, or art movement operated to engage with your theme

then pursue one or both of the following additional points, as a motivated argument:

- . Argue why the artist’s (or artists’) chosen approach was successful – or unsuccessful – as an artistic strategy. Support your argument in either case with data about the particular reception the art received, or the specific context in which it was produced.
- . Argue for the works' relevance for today’s culture.

3. **DIY:** Define your own research project that combines thoughtful analysis of a work (or works) of art with insights drawn from background reading on: the artist's intentions (insofar as these can ever be known), influences, personal biography, etc., and the work's social, critical, artistic, political or other pertinent contexts. You may make your final presentation in any medium (with my prior approval), but it must have some verbal component that we agree upon in advance.

NOTE: OPTION #3 REQUIRES PRIOR APPROVAL FROM THE PROFESSOR.
(this means *well before* the due date!!)

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