The Four Steps to Critiquing Art
A Close Reading of “Text”

Describe ◇ Analyze ◇ Interpret ◇ Evaluate

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You will use the following method of critiquing to discover the meaning of a work of art. It is a step-by-step process of logical thinking.

The following are the four steps to “reading” a work of art:

1. **describing** what you see
2. **analyzing** the relationships between what you saw
3. **interpreting** the meaning of the work
4. **evaluating** or making a personal **judgment** about the quality and worth of the art.
Step 1 – **DESCRIBE**

Use complete sentences to *describe* what you see in the work of art. Pretend that you are the art detective gathering visual clues or evidence to help you with the next steps to solve the mystery!

- What is the name of the artist and the title of the work?
- What year was the work created in?
- What medium did the artist use?
- What *exactly* do you see in the work?
I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold, 1928

Charles Demuth
(American, 1883–1935)

Oil on cardboard

35 1/2 x 30 in.

Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949 (49.59.1)
Step 2 – **ANALYZE**

Use complete sentences to **analyze** the artist’s use of the **Elements of Art** and the **Principles of Design** within the work.

(You are the art detective taking your clues from **describing** and seeing how they work together using the elements and principles of art.)

- **Describe the Elements of Art:**
  - line, shape, form, color, value, texture, and space

- **Describe the Principles of Design:**
  - balance, unity, movement, pattern, emphasis, rhythm, and contrast
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Step 3 – INTERPRET

Use complete sentences to interpret what you have already discovered about the work in the first two steps. Develop a good guess about the meaning of the work. An interpretation explains what you have already observed and analyzed. You will use your knowledge of art and life to come up with your best guess as to the interpretation of the artwork.

• What is the artist trying to say in this work and what makes you think that?
• Why did the artist create the work?
• What do you think is the meaning and why?
• Do you think there are things in this work of art that represent other things – symbols? What are those things and what do they symbolize?

You will look at the emotions, content, symbols, and allegories to arrive at the best possible message or meaning of the work.
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Step 4 – JUDGE

Use complete sentences to make a judgment about the work’s worth based on the information you have gathered about the work. Judgments must be supported by what you have learned through the first 3 steps. **You must give reasons for your judgments.** Judging art is always a matter of being fair and logical.

- What do I think about this work and why?
- Do I like or dislike this work and why?
- How do I feel about whether the artist was successful in conveying an idea or feeling through the art and why?
- Do you think it is an important work of art and why or why not?
- Would you display this work in your home or is it good enough to put in a museum? Why or why not?
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