



NATIONAL ART SCHOOL

MFA1 – Seminar 1 2020

Study skills & research



Academic English skills for MFA students

Dr Samantha Thompson
Academic English Coordinator
samantha.thompson@nas.edu.au

One-on-one appointments for writing support:

<https://nationalartschool.simplybook.me>



Study skills

MFA students come from a range of backgrounds

Can have different:

- Organisational and time management abilities
- Levels of experience with academic reading and writing
- Research skills – ability to identify, extract and manage information
- Understandings of the depth and quantity of reading required to fulfil the written component of the degree

This presentation:

- Provides answers to questions asked in one-on-one sessions
- Addresses some of the issues MFA students can grapple with





Study skills

Remember this is a process

- You're not expected to know everything before you begin
- You will learn skills as you go
- Your reading and writing abilities, like your studio practice, will develop through the course





Study skills

The MFA requires a higher level of study skills than undergrad, TAFE etc.

Self-reliance and self-directed learning

- Seeking out resources and solutions yourself (Google is your friend)

Research skills

- Catalogue searches, database searches, Google Scholar, etc.
- Ability to extract and manage information from a greater number of sources
- Note taking skills

Resource: Reference Librarian, Lana Ryles – Lana.Ryles@nas.edu.au





Study skills

The MFA requires a higher level of **self-management skills** than undergrad, including:

The **ability to manage the stress** that comes with uncertainty

- If you've never written academically
- If you've never written a longer academic work
- If you're uncertain where the studio practice will take you
- If you're uncertain how to connect your studio practice to theory

Self-care

- Looking after yourself – food, sleep, exercise, mental and physical health
- Learning how to pace yourself – when to push yourself, when to take breaks
- Knowing when to seek help





Study skills

Anxiety

Some anxiety is normal

- If it's interfering with your ability to work you may like to seek help
- NAS counsellor – Upasana.Papadopoulos@nas.edu.au





Study skills

Time management

- Will depend upon your lifestyle
 - Timetables, strategies (e.g. working in library instead of home, etc.)
- Understand the role of procrastination
 - Warming up or losing the battle?
 - Try using a timer to create short blocks of study time with scheduled breaks (e.g. The Pomodoro Technique)
- Avoid losing time on undirected reading





Research skills

Identify quality sources

- Academic books and journals
 - Art history, cultural studies, philosophy, psychology, literature, politics, religion, etc.
 - Include some peer review journals
- Art books and magazines
- Gallery and art organisation websites, exhibition catalogues
- Quality art documentaries and interviews

Other resources:

- 'How to write about art' books* (1st floor of library, 808 numbers)

* Including *How to Write Art History* by Anne D'Allema, *A Short Guide to Writing About Art* by Sylvan Barnet and *Visual Literacy* by Amy Tucker.





Research skills

Identify quality sources

Can also include:

- Mainstream media articles (newspaper sites etc.) but be careful to present as the journalist's opinion

Best to exclude:

- Dictionaries, encyclopaedias, beginners' guides, etc.
 - Encyclopaedias of art, philosophy etc. can be used as a starting point (1st floor of library), but don't cite them in your work

Exclude:

- Wikipedia, general websites, self help books, new age books, etc.
 - Wikipedia can be used as an overview, to look for references etc., but check the facts and don't cite it in your work





Research skills

Know the difference between **academic writing** and **general writing** (e.g. newspapers, art magazines)

Academic writing:

- The content is usually more complex
- Accuracy and critique emphasised over interest or entertainment
- Academic writing follows a set of conventions
 - The language is formal
 - There's usually a set structure – e.g. abstract, introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion
 - Opinions are founded on research
 - It seeks to question or analyse
 - Statements are supported with evidence

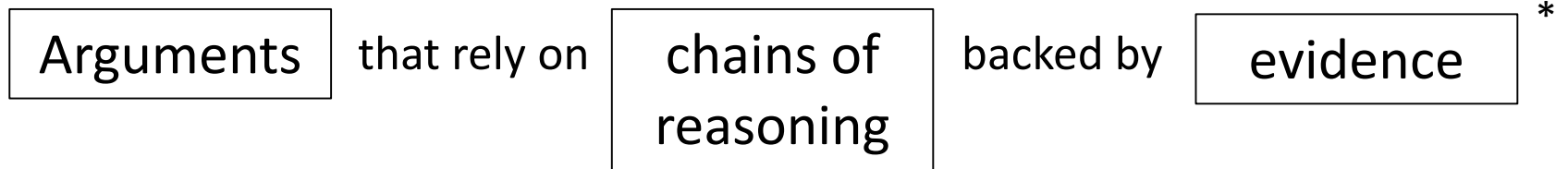




Research skills

Know the difference between academic and general writing

Academic arguments can often be recognised by their structure:



*Introduction to Academic Communication 2 700210/900108 2018 Student Workbook. Western Sydney University Enterprises Pty Ltd (p. 20).





Research skills

Practice critical reading

When reading, ask questions:

- What type of article or book am I reading?
- Who is author?
 - What are their qualifications?
 - Are they an artist, philosopher or scholar?
 - Are they considered an expert in their field?
- Is the author making assumptions?
- Is the author resorting to generalisations, or are they being specific?
- Is the author taking a position?
- Is the author presenting an argument?
 - Do they provide evidence?
 - What are their findings? Have they come to a conclusion?





Research skills

Understand the difference between fact, supposition and opinion

- Fact
 - The sculpture has been cast in bronze
 - Constable tended to paint locations near his home
- Supposition
 - It seems likely that a more significant message lies behind the painting, one personal to the artist himself
- Opinion
 - This fine example from a talented artist... (too subjective)
 - Hinkle's influence was greater than is usually reported, his techniques adopted by many prominent members of the movement (need to provide proof)



Research skills

Reading and sorting – directed reading

You may need to engage in some general reading. However, once you've a clearer idea of your topic, you should scan for relevance:

- Read the abstract (if available)
- Does the content look promising?
 - **No**: discard and move on
 - **Yes**: read the introduction and conclusion
- Does the content look promising?
 - **No**: discard and move on
 - **Yes**: retain for use
 - **Don't know**: scan a few pages
- If it still doesn't look promising, discard and move on



Research skills

Reading and sorting

How to recognise an important or relevant book or article:

- Does it contain an in-depth analysis of your concept or artist?
- Does it contain new or unusual perspectives?
- Has it been cited in a number of other articles? Is the author well-known in the field?

To find quality material:

- Chase down original citations – if you like P. Dunker’s quote in a passage you’re reading, try to find P. Dunker’s original article
- Scour bibliographies at the end of books and articles

100. Jack Levine, quoted in “Report of the Panel Discussion Sponsored by the Modern Artists Group of Boston, March 25, 1948, The Old South Meeting House, Boston, Massachusetts,” AHB Papers [AAA: 3263; 801], MoMA Archives, NY.

101. Alfred H. Barr Jr. to William A. M. Burden, March 3, 1948, AHB Papers [AAA: 2170; 20], MoMA Archives, NY.

102. Ibid.

103. Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Norman Bel Geddes, December 4, 1934, as cited in Jeffrey L. Meikle, *Twentieth-Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 181.



Research skills

Note taking

- Highlighting
- Writing notes in margins
- Summaries / commentaries
- Collecting quotes to use or paraphrase later

Information management ideas

- Citation/reference lists – for each subject / topic
- Collection of summaries – for each subject / topic
- Outlines – mapping connections between ideas (logic)
- Photocopies – use manilla folders, PostIt notes, catalogue systems
- Digital documents – use digital folders, software – Endnote, RefWorks, etc.





Examples

- Rosalind Krauss – *The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism*
- James A. Morone – *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History*
- Daphné Anglès – *Ren Hang's Provocative Photographs Show a China We Rarely See*

