



NATIONAL ART SCHOOL

MFA2 – Seminar 1 2020

WRITING SKILLS



The exegesis
Integrating analysis and reflection

Academic English skills for MFA students



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One-on-one appointments for writing support
Lunchtime exegesis writing workshops



The exegesis

Purpose

- An exegesis merges insight drawn from studio practice with research into contemporary theory and/or cultural criticism
- It allows an examiner to better assess your studio work by providing contextual information about its production
- It allows an examiner to evaluate the quality of your ideas and depth of understanding*
- Follows most academic writing conventions

* Kroll, Jeri, "Creative Practice and/as/is/or Research: An Overview."

The exegesis

Better exegeses:

- Critically examine a **few influences**, theories or aspects of practice and how they **relate to one another** (focus / scope)
- Tend to revolve around a **central argument, question** to be answered, aspect of studio practice to be examined, etc.
- **Retain the creative work as the main focus** throughout, including the literature review

The exegesis

Read visual arts exegeses

- In the library; also
- Trove is your friend
<http://trove.nla.gov.au>

The screenshot shows the Trove website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with categories like 'All', 'Books', 'Pictures, photos, objects', 'Journals, articles and data sets', 'Digitised newspapers and more', 'Government Gazettes', 'Music, sound and video', 'Maps', 'Diaries, letters, archives', and 'Archived websites (1996 - now)'. Below this is a search bar with the text 'visual arts exegesis' and a 'Search' button. To the left of the search bar, there's a 'Search limited to:' section with a dropdown menu set to 'Format: Thesis'. Below the search bar, there are checkboxes for 'Available online', 'Australian content', and 'In my libraries', along with an 'Advanced search' link. On the left side, there's a 'Refine your results:' section with a tree view showing 'Format' (Thesis: 365, Microform: 9, Book: 2, Illustrated: 1) and 'Availability' (Online: 305, Access conditions: 46, Freely available: 253, Unknown: 6). On the right side, there's a 'Books' section showing search results. The first result is 'Dissemblance : an exegesis from representation / by Nicholas Greenwich', with details like '[Thesis : 2013]', 'Keywords: Greenwich, Nicholas.; Arts, Modern.; Photography, Artistic.', and 'Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Visual Arts ...'. The second result is 'John 20:11-18 : an exegesis through art and text / Angela McCarthy', with details like '[Thesis : 2 versions : 2013]', 'Keywords: Bible. - Criticism, interpretation, etc.', and 'John 20:11-18 : an exegesis through art and text / Angela McCarthy. John 20:11-18: An exegesis ...'. Both results have a 'View online' button and indicate they are 'At 2 libraries'.

100s of exegeses available in full or abstract form

- Search in 'Books' and refine by 'Thesis'
- Search by topic, theory, theme etc.
- Read recently submitted exegeses (post 2005-ish)
- Keep in mind your word length when making comparisons

The writing

The exegesis requires a combination of academic and reflective writing:

- **Academic writing** consists of description and critical analysis, and
- **Reflective writing** consists of description and critical analysis

Most students who struggle to do well don't engage in enough analysis. Before you submit your work, make sure you have included description *and* analysis

The writing

Difference between academic and reflective writing

Academic writing

- Accuracy and critique are emphasised over personal opinion, interest or entertainment value (don't have to 'like' your artists)
- Opinions must be founded and conclusions based on research
- Statements are supported with quality evidence in the form of references

Reflective writing

- Analyses of your own work should connect to research
- Analyses of your work can include subjective statements, but should retain aspects of academic style (e.g. formal language, referencing)

Academic writing

Academic descriptive writing includes:

- Describing and explaining – facts, dates, summaries, sequences of events, conflicts, outcomes etc.
- art movements, artists, artworks, history, theory, techniques, methods etc. and their relationships

Academic critical analysis includes:

- Engaging in an enquiry (investigation)
- Presenting an argument
- Evaluating evidence and arguments
- Thinking about issues – likelihoods, pros/cons, limitations, usefulness
- Presenting reasons to agree with, or dispute findings
- Comparing, contrasting, coming up with conclusions

Academic writing

Purpose of academic descriptive writing

- To explain – the what, where, who, when

It **outlines** the issues and **provides context**

- To allow your reader/examiner to locate and assess your work within a field

Provides clarity

- By making explicit connections between art movements, theories, artists etc.

Provides background

- To facilitate an understanding of your arguments and methods



Academic writing



When is academic description misused?

- When a student relies upon this alone
- When a student mistakes context and background for argument and analysis



Academic analysis

The why, how, and so what

- The examination of relationships, events and their **implications**
- Used to construct an argument or central thesis



Example questions:

- What role did social conditions/politics play in these artists' decisions, and how did it influence the development of this theory, art movement, or medium? (+implications)
- Is this critic correct in their conclusions about the artist? Why? Why not? (+implications)
- How did these movements influence one another and what are the implications for contemporary painters/sculptors/contemporary artists?

Academic analysis



Purpose – to interpret:

- To demonstrate a deep knowledge and understanding of:
 - ideas, theories, history, proponents, criticisms, complexities etc.
 - relationships, conflicts and their **implications**, and
 - the issues/nuances/choices associated with working in this form
- To communicate and justify the reasoning behind decisions you make in the studio



Reflective writing

Reflective descriptive writing – the what, where, who, when

Describing and explaining your studio practice:

- Field, subject, medium, size, composition, techniques
- Artistic and theoretical influences
- What you are attempting to achieve



Reflective writing



Reflective critical analysis – the why, how, so what

Evaluating your own project, how it fits within, and contributes to the field:

- Why I work in this form
- How I intend to achieve these aims
- How my work is similar to that of my contemporaries, and how it differs
- How my approach is similar to an artist's, and how it differs
- How I have engaged with certain theories
- Why I have chosen to adopt this technique
- And later – were my experiments successful? What has been achieved?

And perhaps, what are the implications for my future direction?



Reflective writing and structure

How you combine academic and reflective writing depends upon your structure:

Reflective writing in chapters at the end

- Will you discuss movements, artists, theories, artworks first, and discuss the relationship between these and your own work in later chapters?

Reflective writing integrated

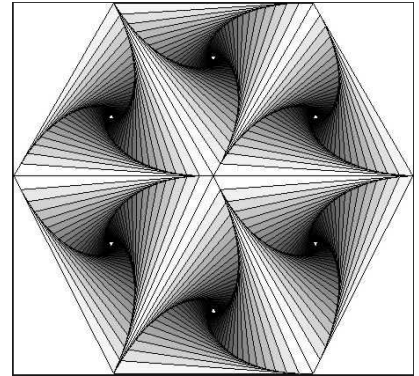
- Will you take an approach that discusses each art movement, art work, or theory followed by an analysis of how your work compares/relates?
- Or will you do both, including sections of reflective writing at the end of academic analyses, and writing a more detailed analysis of your studio practice at the end? (My favourite.)



Structure and logic

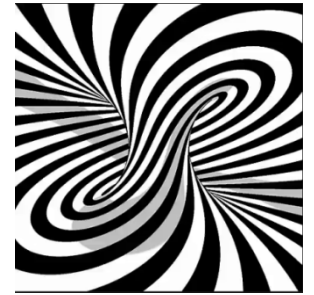
Example of a line of logic (breakdown)

- Issue 1 I'm investigating – **reflective/description**
- Issue 2 I'm investigating – **reflective/description**
- Connection between the two – **reflective/description**
- Background to issue 1 – **academic/description**
- Background to issue 2 and its relationship to 1 – **academic description and analysis**
- Artists working with issue 1 (and the relationship between them) – **academic/description and analysis**
- Artists working with issue 2 (and the relationships between them) – **academic/description and analysis**
- Implications of my findings and conclusions for my field (contemporary art/painting/ceramics etc.) – **academic/analysis**
- Connection to my studio practice – **reflective/analysis**
- Implications for my studio practice – **reflective/analysis**



Use breakdowns to create and refine your title (describes the topic and issues)

Structure and logic



Example of a line of logic – paragraph level

- Lennox (a critic) describes this artwork as one of Joseph's most important
- It is in this work that Joseph first discovered the idea of absurdity in extreme emotions
- Description of Joseph's statements about absurdity – the empty frame
- Lennox believes this 'empty frame' pictureless artwork foreshadowed Joseph's development into a sculptor

The last point starts to delve into analysis. We know because it deals with **implications**.

But this paragraph should leads to the 'so what':

- The next paragraph should explain or explore those implications. Or Joseph's development into a sculptor should link to the next important point (relevance).





References

1. Edith Cowan University, “Academic Exegesis Tip Sheet.”
<http://intranet.ecu.edu.au/student/my-studies/study-assistance/academic-tip-sheets>.
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3. Kroll, Jeri, “Creative Practice and/as/is/or Research: An Overview.” *Creativity and Uncertainty*. AAWP (2008).
4. Mullins, Gerry. “‘It’s a PhD, not a Nobel Prize’: how experienced examiners assess research theses.” *Studies in Higher Education* Vol 27, No. 4, (2002).
5. Newcastle University Writing Development Centre resources,
<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/wdc/learning/academic/>.
6. University of Birmingham Academic Skills Centre, “A short guide to critical writing for Postgraduate Taught students.” www.birmingham.ac.uk
7. Eggs - Christopher Chiappa, <http://iloboyou.com/contemporary-art-christopher-chiappa-egg-installation/>
8. Logic - Bahmann – image from the New Scientist,
<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2078286-a-new-kind-of-logic-how-to-upgrade-the-way-we-think/>
9. Spirals - <https://www.dreamstime.com/stock-illustration-black-white-abstract-spiral-background-d-rendering-image75102907>

