Swarthmore College ARTH 072 Fall 2013

**Critical Assessment Paper[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Due: 26 November 2013 (at the beginning of class)

Assignment:

Based upon your expertise in the field of architectural history, you have been asked to write a critical assessment of three comparable texts for a leading scholarly journal, the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. First, please choose an architectural project (which is addressed in this course) and then write an 8-10 page paper (double-spaced) in which you critically assess three related texts to the building. It is important to note that this is not merely a descriptive paper; you must write persuasively. Two examples for paper topics and related articles are listed below. The intent of this paper is for you to have the opportunity to investigate an architectural project that interests you greatly and at the same time, allow you to assess some of the recent scholarship on the project.

Goals:

-To read scholarly texts in the field of architectural history critically

-To be able to identify and comment upon the different methodologies (and types of writing) used by scholars

-To write intelligently and critically within the field of architectural history

OBJECTIVES:

-To comprehend and analyze an argument posited by one author and compare it to the arguments of the other two authors.

-To assess the three authors’ arguments: is there a multiplicity of depth and critical inquiry; does each author successfully synthesize the material, is the thesis clearly articulated and supported; etc.

-To formulate your own thesis regarding the scholarly interpretations of an architectural project and be able to support your thesis successfully

Paper Topics – two examples:

1. The Great Mosque at Córdoba:

• Dodds, Jerrilynn. “The Great Mosque at Córdoba.” In *Al-Andalus, the Art of Islamic Spain*, edited by Jerrilynn Dodds, 10-25. New York: 1992.

• Ecker, Heather. “The Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries.” *Muqarnas* 20 (2003): 113-141.

• Khoury, Nuha. “The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Córdoba in the Tenth Century.” *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 80-98.

2. The design of the Pantheon

• Haselberger, Lothar. “The Pantheon: Nagging Questions to No End.” In *The Pantheon in Rome, Contributions to the Conference: Bern, November 9-12 2006*, edited by G. Graßhoff, M. Heinzelmann, and M. Wäfler, 171-186. Bern: 2009.

• Stamper, John. “Hadrian’s Pantheon” In *The Architecture of Roman Temples*, 184-205. Cambridge: 2005.

• Wilson Jones, Mark. “The Enigma of the Pantheon: the interior and exterior.” In *Principles of Roman Architecture*, 177-213. New Haven: 2000 (second printing with corrections 2003).

Paper Details:

-This is not a traditional research paper; however, I expect you to investigate the topics you have chosen. Your class notes and textbook are good starting points for understanding the topics. However, to flesh out initially the material for each topic, consult the many books on the Reserve-Reading list for this course. Of course, you may use other books and articles in your papers.

-On the library’s website, one can access a selection of relevant architectural, art historical, and archaeological databases (JSTOR, Art Index, Avery Index, etc.) in which one can search for relevant articles. In addition, please feel free to peruse ARTstor for relevant material.

-Your paper must have a bibliography of at least six sources (four of which cannot be websites). Yes, the three articles that you will be comparing count as three of them (and must be listed). Note: Wikipedia does NOT count as a source; nor does your textbook or class notes. Any information derived from research must be properly documented. Please place footnotes at the bottom of the page.

- For this course, Lipson’s book, particularly chapter six, provides the proper citation method for footnotes and the bibliography. Parenthetical referencing is UNACCEPTABLE. FAILURE TO FOLLOW THE CHICAGO METHOD (as detailed in chapter six of Lipson’s text) WILL RESULT IN AN AUTOMATIC HALF GRADE REDUCTION FOR YOUR PAPER’S FINAL GRADE.

- If grammar and punctuation are not your strong points, please consult any writing manual, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, or Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*. Both are available in the library.

-Paper length: **8-10 pages of text: double spaced, one-inch margins, 12 point, Times New Roman font**.

-**The paper is due at the beginning of class on November 26th.** Papers submitted later on the 26th will receive a half letter grade reduction. Unexcused late papers will be reduced one letter grade for each day late (thus an A paper that is one day late becomes a B paper). No papers will be accepted after 9:55 am, Tuesday, December 3, 2013.

*Please note:*

• Students MUST submit TWO copies of their papers: a print out of their papers in class and an electronic version on the course’s Moodle site. Papers are due by the beginning of the class period, i.e., 9:55 am. When a student submits his/her paper on Moodle, the exact time and date is recorded. This is the official submission time for your paper.

*Ways to Improve your Writing*

1. Make an outline BEFORE you write your paper. This will help you organize your thoughts and ensure that your paper logically flows from one section to another.

2. Make sure the thesis of your paper is clearly stated near the beginning of your paper.

3. Make sure each of your paragraphs has a topic sentence and that each paragraph relates to your thesis.

4. Have a strong and focused opening sentence. Refrain from vague and generic opening sentences.

5. Do not use the first person. Thus, do not state, “I believe…”

6. Try to avoid using ‘there is’ or ‘there are’.

7. Avoid the passive voice.

(State: Heather excavated the trench. Not: The trench was excavated by Heather.)

8. Vary your verbs.

(Do not use the verb ‘analyze’ in consecutive sentences.)

9. Limit the use of ‘is,’ ‘are,’ ‘have,’ and ‘had’. Use stronger verbs.

(State: The author writes convincingly. Not: The author is convincing.)

10. Avoid colloquialisms.

(Do not state, “Trachtenberg’s writing makes me feel as happy as a worm in dirt.)

11. Cut down on ‘wordiness’ and fluff.

12. While complex and compound sentences tend to enhance one’s writing, beware of run-on sentences. You should not be striving for sentences that are five or six lines long. AIM FOR CLARITY NOT COMPLEXITY.

13. Read your paper out loud. This will enable you to hear the sentences that need to be refined.

14. Have a friend read your paper.

15. Good writing comes from re-writing. Do numerous drafts of your paper.

16. Visit the Writing Center on campus.

**Grading of Papers in Architectural History and Theory Courses[[2]](#footnote-2)**

**A.** Generally we look at four categories:

1. Did the student follow the instructions for the assignment?

-did he/she assess the paired readings?

-was there a thesis for the paper?

-did the student analyze numerous ideas throughout his/her text?

-is the paper persuasive, or has the student simply written a descriptive paper?

2. Level of ideas

-Did the student simply write: there is water in the center of the courtyard? Or, did the student write, the sound of the running water in the fountain adds greatly to the tranquility of the courtyard?

3. Composition and structure of the paper

4. Grammar, spelling, etc.

**B. Grades:**

A+/-: An excellent or distinguished response to the assignment or exam. The work is: well written, thoughtful, shows rigorous and independent thinking, critical inquiry and reconsideration, illustrates a wholeness and multiplicity of depth, synthesizes the material into a precise investigation, imaginative, and develops a personal language. This student is a great communicator. Very motivated.

B+/-: A good response to the assignment. The work is: well written, thoughtful, shows clear and independent thinking, and begins to illustrate critical inquiry. The language is somewhat creative, but a bit derivative, a bit fragmented, good communicator, but not great. Motivated.

C+/-: An somewhat acceptable response to the assignment: basically getting work done, but without a clarity of thought or any critical inquiry, no personal voice, unfocused and fragmented work, material not really synthesized, normative. Somewhat motivated.

D-F: An unacceptable response to the assignment: barely meets the requirements, without any clarity of thought or any critical inquiry. No personal voice, unfocused and fragmented work, material not synthesized, cynicism, lack of taking responsibility for the work. No motivation.

1. This assignment was partially inspired by Dr. Holly Pittman’s ARTH 422 course at the University of Pennsylvania. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Architectural History and Theory Faculty at Arizona State University developed this grading rubric, and it has been used in the grading of thousands of papers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)