

The Lively Arts Guide to Writing a Good Lab Report

Lab reports must be neatly typed, with our normal expectations being approximately 3 pages in length, double-spaced, 12-point font, and 1-inch margins. Good lab reports consist of three basic sections:

1. A brief who/what/when/where description of the event.

The first section is an introductory paragraph that contains the pertinent information about the event that you attended (art exhibit, concert, dance performance), including the type of event and the date, time, and location. This section may also include observations about the setting, the audience, or your expectations, but only if these things seem to have some relevancy to the rest of your report.

You might also discuss the relationship among the performers (if there are any) and the audience and even the relationship among the performers themselves. If there are more than three or four performers, please do not list them all. *Please refer to all people by their last names or their full names, never by only their first names, and spell the names and titles of the artworks correctly.*

2. A more substantial part in which you combine individual creativity with specific connections amongst and between the concert or exhibition, lecture and discussion notes, and assigned readings.

The middle section is the heart and soul of the report. It is your place to show not only that you attended the event, but that you were observing with your Lively Arts eyes (and ears!). This section comprises the bulk of the paper and your chance to apply the vocabulary and concepts that you are learning in lectures, discussions, and from OWL. You may give a brief overview of the performance/exhibition, but please focus this section on one or two moments (pieces of music, dances within an entire performance, paintings/photographs, scenes in a play, etc.) in greater depth. Avoid a one or two sentence description of every performance on the program or every artwork in an exhibit. Be observant. There is no one “correct” response so trust your own reactions. Try to discern the overall mood or meaning of the artwork and then discuss how the elements of that art create that mood. Aim for a formal critique while supporting your points with the information you have learned in the class. Suspend disbelief and always remember there are reasons why art is appealing at times and why it might not be.

It is essential that you make connections between what you see/hear and what has been going on in class. The material from OWL and from the lectures will provide a foundation of information on which to base your observations. (It is a good idea to review information relevant to an event before you go. This will refresh your memory and give you things to look for). You can include your personal reactions to things in this section if they are based on, and expressly related to,

artistic aspects of the event. Essentially, we are looking not just for your opinion, but for an opinion based on knowledge.

3. A brief personal reaction to the event or to some facet of it.

The last section of the report is your opportunity to respond subjectively to the event. It is important for you to understand that lab reports are not critical reviews; therefore, keep this section down to one or two paragraphs. Please be honest in your reaction - you do not have to like every event. However, do not make offhand remarks or judgments that do not follow from the rest of your report.

Writing Tips

A central goal of this course is to help improve your ability to write about the arts. Therefore, the quality of your writing is also important. Be careful to organize your thoughts, write clearly, and use effective language. Edit and proofread your paper. The purpose of writing reports is not to give your teachers something else to read over the weekend (believe us!). The purpose is to convince a reader of something, and convincing someone of something requires writing that is clear and powerful. Here are some more tips:

- Consider buying a book to improve your overall writing skills, such as *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White, which is available at the Textbook Annex, or check the library. Books such as *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* by Lynne Truss, which is available in the library, can also help improve your punctuation. A dictionary is also a useful source since word processors may not always recognize the spelling of every word you type.
- Write up an outline first. It is a great way to organize your thoughts.
- Do a rough draft, and then put it away for a few days. When you re-read it, you will find it easy to make revisions that will improve it.
- Proofread your final version, checking grammar, spelling, punctuation, and logic. Do your thoughts relate to each other and flow nicely? Give it to a friend to read—they will be more objective.
- Read your report out loud, either to yourself or to someone else (better yet - have someone else read it to you!). Actually hearing your words will help you improve things you might not otherwise notice.
- Use your word processor's spelling and grammar check. While it does not replace the necessity of proofreading, it can catch some careless mistakes.
- Give yourself enough time to do a draft and revision. Do not wait until the last minute to find that your printer is not working. Your grade will suffer if your paper is not neatly printed.
- Use basic writing structures to make your paper clear: introduction, conclusion, paragraphs of 3-5 sentences, etc. Please do not hand in a paper that only has one paragraph.
- Say what you want to say in as few words as possible, using plain English.
- Learn the difference between *it's* and *its*, *affect* and *effect*, *their*, *there*, and *they're* and so on.

- Your report is on events that happened in the past, so keep it in the past tense.
- Never refer to performers by their first names alone.
- You must highlight titles of the pieces performed in some way: underline, *italicized*, or **boldface**, as it appears in the program.
- Do not call a piece of music a “song” if it is not sung. For example, an orchestral work is not a song. A piano concerto is not a song. A piece for a solo vocalist may be called a song.
- Avoid such terms such as *awesome*, *mellow*, and *upbeat*; used by themselves, they are meaningless.

BE SPECIFIC!

Let's take visual art as an example. It is not enough to say, "There is a diagonal line." Describe where the line is located. There might be more than one, or you might see something someone else didn't notice. Also describe why you think it's important enough to mention - how does it affect your perception of the painting? Support your claims with specific evidence from the work, and, whenever you can, make references to information from the lectures and OWL. If you make a claim, you must be able to support it.

Please do not wait until after you get the paper back to say, "Well, what I meant was..."; make your point clear from the start. If you write, "The dark green focuses attention to the center," explain HOW. If you write, "The texture is soft," explain what you mean and where you see examples. If you introduce a subject, you must develop it. For instance, if you begin by stating there's a contrast in the work, but only discuss the dark colors, then you have NOT discussed a contrast. What contrasts with the dark colors? Why is it important, anyway?

DO NOT "OVER-WRITE"

When you over-write - using big words and complicated sentences - you can only succeed in doing one of two things: using too many unnecessary words to communicate a simple idea, or using too many unnecessary words to communicate nothing. Most people, when confronted with such writing, feel that the writer doesn't know what he/she is saying and is trying to fool everyone with fancy language.

Additionally, remember that not every piece of art (music, dance, photography, etc.) has to MEAN something. Sometimes the artist just felt like writing a fun tune or taking a pretty photograph. Do not write about tales of human torment unless you really see it AND you can really support it. If all that happens when you see a painting filled with bizarre shapes is that you feel confused, then TALK ABOUT THAT. Simply write in the terms we use in class; support what you say.

Finally, read your own work very critically - you can be sure others will. Do not give yourself the benefit of the doubt; if something seems even POSSIBLY unclear to you, it will certainly be unclear to someone else. Again, writing is about conveying information and ideas in the most direct, clear, and powerful way possible.