**How to Develop and Support Art Historical Arguments**

Art historians use argumentation to establish claims and supporting evidence for their interpretations.

Claims can be supported by:

* What you see in the work
* Ways that people experience the work
* The context of the work

It is not enough to justify evidence; you need to articulate how a piece of evidence supports your claim.

**Step One:** Articulate a defensible claim about one or more works of art (or group of related works of art).

Key Questions:

* What do you know about the work(s) described in the prompt?
* What are your options regarding which claims to make?
* Based on the prompt and the evidence, what claim will you make?
* State in a few words, how you will prove your claim (“…because...” statement)

**Step Two:** Using specific and relevant evidence, support a claim about one or more works of art (or group of related works of art).

* Brainstorm to think of relevant evidence that relates to the work(s) established in the prompt.
* Hone your initial list of evidence by describing specific examples that support the argument.
* Determine whether the evidence supports, refute, or modifies each of the possible positions.

**Step Three:** Explain how the evidence justifies the claim.

*Key Questions:*

* *How does the evidence support the claim?*
* *How did the artistic decisions shape the work?*
* *How did the intent, purpose, or function, shape the creation or meaning of the work?*
* *How did the context influence the artistic decisions about creation or meaning?*
* *How did the artistic decision elicit a response or shape its reception?*

**Step Four:** Corroborate, qualify, or modify a claim in order to develop a complex argument. This argument might:

* Explain nuance of an issue by analyzing multiple variables.
* Explain relevant and insightful connection.
* Explain how or why an art historical claim is or is not effective.
* Qualify or modify a claim by considering diverse or alternative views or evidence.

*Key Questions:*

* *What are some other positions you could take? How can addressing those other positions help you modify or support your initial claim?*
* *What is the context of this work? How does that relate to my claim?*
* *How do/did people experience this work? How does that relate to my claim?*
* *What relevant and insightful connections can I make with this work and similar works, the context of this work and another work, or visual elements of this work and another work?*

**Expectations**

1. Write in complete sentences.

2. Be mindful of proper grammar and mechanics.

3. Use the language of the discipline or appropriate AP Art History vocabulary.