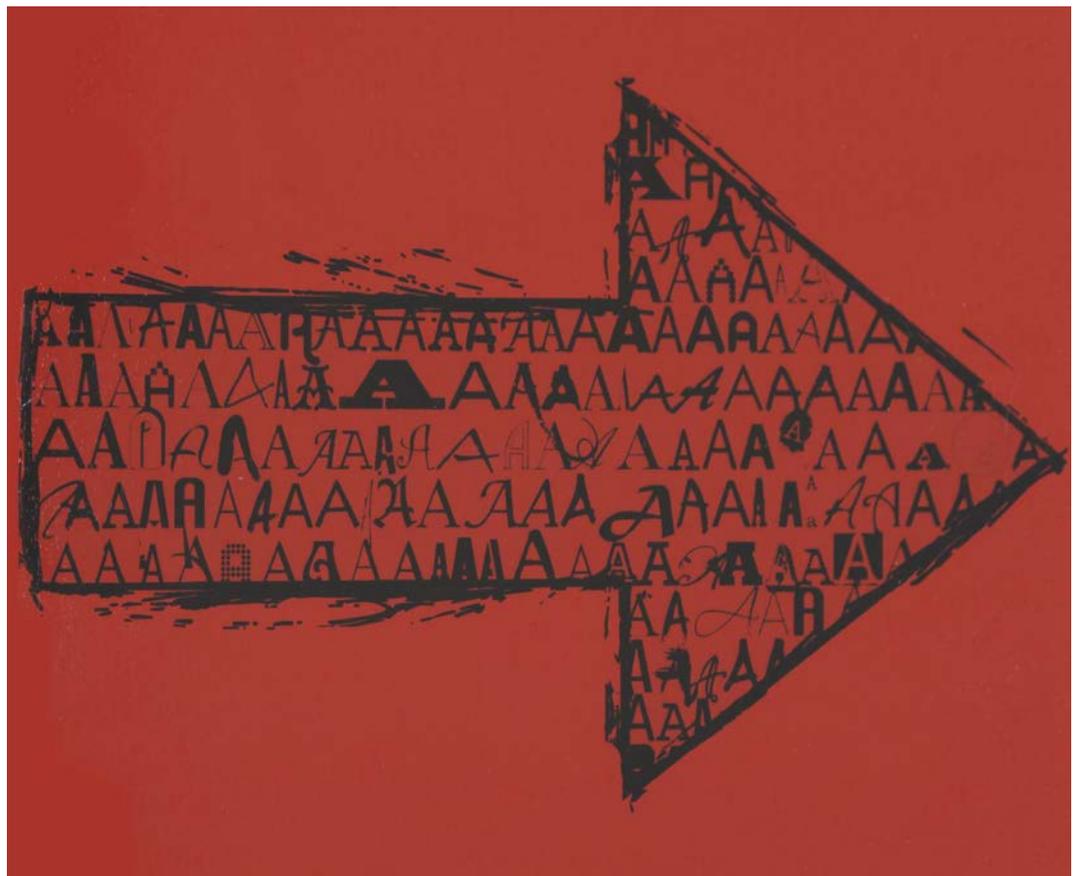


Creative Arts 1

Creative Arts Today



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Creative Arts Today

Introduction to the creative arts



OCA student, Sarah Scales

Welcome to *Creative Arts Today*. If you've enrolled on the Creative Arts degree programme, this course is compulsory; on the other hand, if you're following a different degree pathway, or just learning for pleasure, you may have chosen this course as an option.

The idea of this Level 1 course is to introduce you to some of the varied disciplines that come under the umbrella of the creative arts. At OCA we feel it's really important for you to situate your specific subject work within a broader framework. As you'll see when you work through this course guide, there are as many similarities between the various disciplines as there are differences. For example, the research skills you'll need to apply are broadly the same whatever discipline you study. You'll also find that certain theoretical issues come up again and again – the idea of reading and interpreting visual or written sign systems, for example. So this course will help you to keep an eye on the broader picture as you work through to Levels 2 and 3.

There's another important reason for taking this course if you're working towards a Creative Arts degree. To get your degree, you'll be required to study two subject areas. If you haven't yet made up your mind about what to study as a second subject, this course may help you to choose. Equally, it may suggest a different direction to the one you'd planned – perhaps a direction you hadn't previously considered.

The course has been written by five tutors from the Open College of the Arts team. The slightly different styles evident in each section reflect this. The course introduces contemporary art, creative writing, visual communications, photography and textiles, and also has two overarching themes, 'place' and 'time'. You'll explore how contemporary artists and writers have researched and explored the themes of place and time in their work and how they're integral to the work of some artists and writers and are reflected in the media and devices they use to express themselves. We hope that pursuing these two themes throughout the course will help you recognise the commonalities and crossovers between the various disciplines as well as the differences. For example in Part One you'll be introduced to the work of contemporary artist Nathan Coley who uses text in much of his work.

As you study the different elements in the course, you'll develop skills of analysis, reflection and research. These skills will be useful to you throughout your studies. You'll also develop essay writing skills and learn to follow academic conventions such as observing word counts, writing reference lists and looking up specific terms and vocabulary.



David Arsenault, *The Only Moment is Now*, 2011 (oil on canvas)

The course structure

Before you go any further, read the introduction to each part of the course to give yourself an idea of the course content.

Each part of the course represents roughly 80 hours of study. In each part you'll be asked to complete a variety of exercises and research tasks, make notes on the subject matter and also to reflect on your learning. It's important to complete all of the exercises as they often build important skills or knowledge that you'll draw on for the assignments.

You'll complete reading tasks, analyse pieces of artwork and texts, and write accounts and short essays. You'll often be asked to say what you think about a piece of work. This will be your opinion and there's no right or wrong answer, though sometimes you may be required to back up your ideas with evidence from other sources, such as quotes from art critics or references from books. In the creative arts there are often many possible answers to the same question. Being able to express your opinion is just as important as knowing where to find information and resources to develop your research and ideas.

Remember, too, that there are other students doing the course so you're not on your own. Use the online forums to reflect on your findings and discuss issues with other students. Go to www.oca-student.com/forum

At the end of each part of the course you'll complete an assignment and send it to your tutor for feedback. Reflect carefully on your tutor feedback and, if appropriate, go back to the assignment and make adjustments to it based on your tutor's comments. If you submit for assessment, making such adjustments demonstrates responsiveness and learning and will help improve your mark. Note down what you've done differently, and why, in your learning log.



Richard Clark, *Café in Clock Tower*

Exercise 1

Your tutor is your main point of contact with OCA. Before you start work, make sure that you're clear about your tuition arrangements. The OCA tuition system is explained in some detail in your Student Handbook.

If you haven't already done so, please write a paragraph or two about your experience to date (your profile). Mention any skills you already have that you think are relevant to the course. Comment on why you want to study this particular course and what you hope to achieve as a result of taking the course. Email your profile to your tutor using your new OCA email address (maximum 250 words). Your profile will help him or her understand how best to support you during the course.

Also arrange with your tutor how you'll deal with any queries that arise between assignments. This will usually be by email or phone.

Studying with OCA

Now is also a good time to work through the free introductory course 'An Introduction to Studying in HE' on the OCA student website: www.oca-student.com/study-guides/introduction-studying-he

Don't be tempted to skip this introductory course; it contains valuable advice on study skills (e.g. reading, note-taking), research methods and academic conventions which will stand you in good stead throughout your studies.

Exercise 2

The OCA website will be a key resource for you during your studies with OCA so take some time to familiarise yourself with it. Log onto the OCA student website and go to the link below. Watch the video and make notes.

www.oca-student.com/study-guides/using-website

Learning log

All OCA courses require you to have a learning log. This can be a notebook that is handwritten or word processed or an online blog.

- For useful information on what to put in a learning log, follow www.oca-student.com/content/introducing-learning-logs-1
- For information on how to set up a blog, see www.oca-student.com/content/keeping-online-learning-log-1

By following this guidance you'll make it easier for your tutor to find the relevant coursework for feedback and assessment purposes. Make sure to follow the links at the bottom of the web pages so that you read the whole of the section.

Your learning log is a vital resource. The aim with any learning log is to build up a rich resource of information, ideas and reflections. In future years, as you continue to work, you may remember an inspiring piece of work that you want to revisit and use to inform your current practice. By looking back through your learning log notes you should be able to track it down, as well as remember what you thought when you first saw or read the piece.

Creative writing courses ask you to keep a writing diary rather than a learning log. The writing diary does broadly the same thing as a learning log; the main difference is that you don't have to submit it to your tutor at any stage, so it's completely private. There's more on this in Part Two.

Exercise 3

Make a start on your learning log. Decide if you're going to use a paper-based or online approach. Make a note on what you need to include in the log and, if working online, set up your blog page. Make the profile you sent to your tutor your first entry.

Course learning outcomes

You'll probably have an idea of what you hope to get from the course already. Have a look through the following learning outcomes for the course and check if they match up with your aspirations. On successful completion of the course you should be able to:

- demonstrate awareness of a broad range of contemporary practice in the creative arts
- demonstrate an understanding of the scope and interrelationship of a range of creative disciplines
- demonstrate a knowledge of basic research tools and research skills and an awareness of the theoretical background to the creative arts
- demonstrate an ability to think critically and to reflect upon your own learning experience.

Your tutor will be looking for evidence that you're moving towards these outcomes in your work. It's a good idea to apply these to your progress at the end of each part of the course and reflect in your learning log or writing diary on whether or not you feel you're beginning to develop these skills.

Formal assessment

Read the section on assessment in your Student Handbook at an early stage in the course. You'll also find the *Assessment and How to Get Qualified* study guide on the student website: www.oca-student.com/content/assessment-and-how-get-qualified-1

For assessment you'll need to submit a cross-section of the work you've done on the course:

- your four best redrafted course assignments together with the original tutor-annotated versions
- your learning log or blog url (except for Assignment Two)
- your tutor report forms.

Only work done during the course should be submitted to your tutor or for formal assessment.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria are central to the assessment process for this course, so if you're going to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, please make sure you take note of these criteria and consider how each of the assignments you complete demonstrates evidence of each criterion. The criteria are evenly weighted, i.e. each represents 25% of your total mark. On completion of each assignment, and before you send your assignment to your tutor, test yourself against the criteria – in other words, do a self-assessment, and see how you think you would do. Note down your findings for each assignment you've completed in your learning log, noting all your perceived strengths and weaknesses, taking into account the criteria every step of the way. This will be helpful for your tutor to see, as well as helping you prepare for assessment.

Assessment criteria points

- **Demonstration of subject based knowledge and understanding** – Broad and comparative understanding of subject content, knowledge of the appropriate historical, intellectual, cultural or institutional contexts.
- **Demonstration of research skills** – Information retrieval and organisation, use of IT to assist research, ability to evaluate IT sources, the ability to design and carry out a research project, locate and evaluate evidence from a wide range of primary and secondary sources (visual, oral, aural or textual).
- **Demonstration of critical and evaluation skills** – Engagement with concepts, values and debates, evidence of analysis, reflection, critical thinking, synthesis, interpretation in relation to relevant issues and enquiries.
- **Communication** – The ability to communicate ideas and knowledge in written and spoken form, including presentation skills.



Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, *The House of Books Has No Windows*, 2008

Basic research tools and skills

In your studies you'll be expected to do research on the topics you cover. As this is a Level 1 course, many of the materials you'll use will be identified for you in the form of extracts from texts or links to online sources. Unfortunately, links do go out of date from time to time. OCA check and update these regularly but if you do find that a link no longer works, please let your tutor know immediately so that they can feed this back to OCA. In the meantime you can try a general search online in the subject area and see what else you can find relevant to the topic you're studying. Often the same information may be available with a slightly different address as websites are updated.

As you progress through the course you may wish to do further research and some starting points are listed below. (Research tools and skills, and study skills in general, are covered in some detail in the introductory course 'An Introduction to Studying in HE!')

First, though, you need to be clear about the difference between primary and secondary research sources.

- A primary source is where you experience a piece of artwork or engage in some way with an artist directly. So, for example, this might mean looking at a painting or a sculpture in a gallery or exchanging emails with an artist or curator. (But the postcard you take home from the gallery is a secondary source because it may not accurately reflect the colours of the original or may show only a partial view.) In terms of written sources, a primary source might be a letter from an artist (e.g. van Gogh's letters to his brother) or the transcript of a speech (e.g. Grayson Perry's Reith Lecture series, see Part One).
- A secondary source is where your experience of the artwork or artist is mediated by someone else, for example an account of van Gogh's relationship with his brother written by a biographer or a TV documentary about Grayson Perry. The point about secondary resources is that you have to interrogate them. We know that Grayson Perry's Reith Lectures reflect his views because we can listen to him read them, but if we watch a documentary we need to question, for example, whether the maker of the programme is putting forward a particular view, how thoroughly they've researched their subject, etc. That's not to say that a secondary source is necessarily inferior – and often it's all we've got – but you must ask questions of it and cross-reference against other sources.

Ideally, your research sources will be a combination of primary and secondary sources. At Level 1 a lot of your research sources will be secondary ones – this course guide, articles we ask you to read, videos we recommend, etc. – but you should make every effort to do some primary research too by getting out and about, visiting galleries, looking at artists' websites, etc. In Part Five, for example, you're asked to find some textile work in situ (e.g. in a public space) and write about that. In other words, don't just rely on what other people tell you – the creative arts are everywhere, so look around for yourself.

Possible research sources

Libraries (public, university)

- handouts on how to use library facilities
- use of the internet and help in developing internet search skills
- academic journals
- specialist collections
- specialist magazines/newspapers/back editions
- photocopy services
- videos, CDs, microfiche and slides.

Using booklists

Booklists can be daunting even if you recognise some of the titles on the list. There's a further reading list at the end of each part of the course and your tutor may recommend other titles. You'll need to assess the importance of some books over and above other books – you can't read everything! Your tutors (and in some cases the course guide) will let you know which books are 'essential' for you to read and which are of a more general nature. All book publications are in print at the time of the course guide being published but of course this can change from year to year – OCA will republish booklists when possible.

The internet

The internet has a huge range of information and allows you to browse across an enormous range of sources. The internet should be your key research tool. If you don't have a computer with internet access at home, make sure you set up time to use the internet at the library or at a friend's house. Via the internet you can have access to:

- newspapers and magazines
- gallery and museum collections
- OCA website
- library catalogues and information
- relevant TV and radio programmes
- government papers
- access to specialist providers
- videos (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo)
- artists' and writers' websites.

It's important to be aware that not all internet sources are reliable. You'll need to exercise judgement and at times cross-reference the information you find. Ask yourself the following questions:

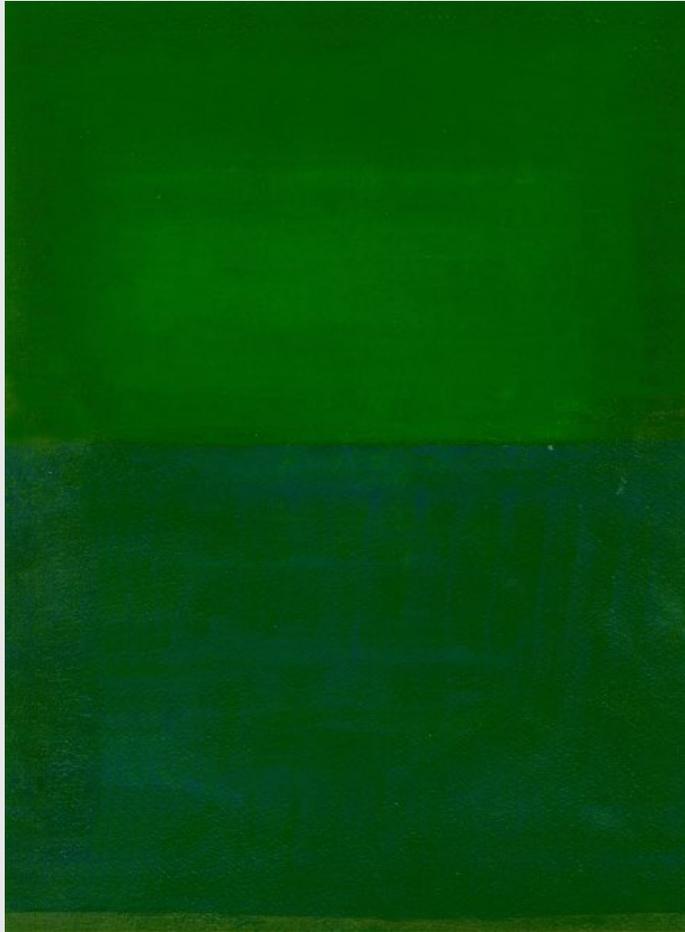
- Who is the author of the article/information?
- Do they mention their qualifications or experience in the topic?
- Is there an obvious sponsor for the site who may have a reason to promote a particular viewpoint?
- How old is the page and is the information updated regularly?

Have a look at any bibliography links given at the end to double-check that the information can be verified through another avenue.

Additional sources of research:

- gallery visits
- exhibition notes
- postcards
- poetry readings.

There is also a great deal of information available through the OCA website and you can begin to explore this in the following exercise.



Exercise 4

Explore the online libraries through the research section on the OCA student site. Make sure you research at least one of the libraries listed.

See if you can find the image above on the Bridgeman Education Library by doing a search on 'time contemporary'. Make a note of the artist and the title in your learning log and say what you think of this piece using four or five words.

Exercise 5

This exercise is about planning your studies. The course amounts to 400 hours of study. This works out at around eight hours a week over a year.

- Draw up a study schedule.
- When are you going to work?
- Where are you going to work?
- Get in touch with your tutor and arrange a date for the submission of your first assignment – and subsequent assignments if appropriate. You can also plan your study online at: www.oca-student.com/studies

Check regularly to see if you're keeping to your timetabled study sessions; if you need to, revise your plans. If you go on holiday you'll need to reschedule that study time unless you're working while you're away. Keep your tutor up to date with your progress. If you're falling behind and need to reschedule your assignment submission date, make sure you email in time to organise this.

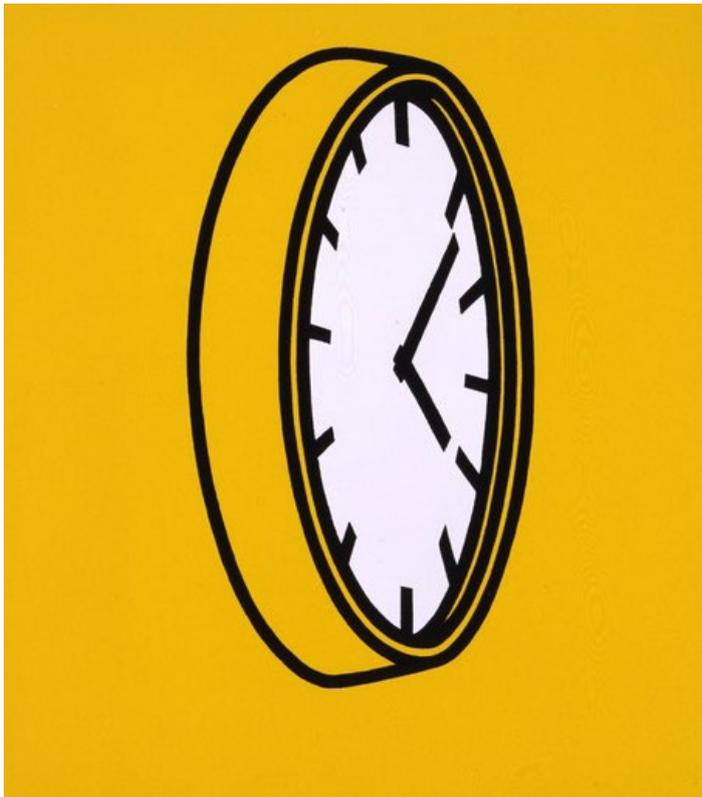
Summary

You've now completed the introduction to the course. You should have:

- familiarised yourself with some of the online support that is available through the OCA website
- written your student profile and emailed it to your tutor
- set up a learning log or blog
- drawn up a study timetable
- arranged at least your first assignment deadline with your tutor
- accessed an online library
- briefly expressed your opinion on a piece of contemporary art.

There's one more thing to do before you get cracking on the course. Many new students feel a bit apprehensive about having to write essays, especially if they haven't done any writing of this sort since school. There's a guide to academic essay writing on the OCA website at www.oca-student.com/content/academic-essay-writing-1 but we've also produced an Easy Essay Writing guide for the purposes of this course. It follows this introduction, so have a quick read now to reassure yourself and come back to it later when you produce your first piece of written work.

Now you're ready to make a start on Part One of *Creative Arts Today*. We hope you enjoy it!



Patrick Caulfield, *Crying to the Walls; My God, Will She Relent*, 1973
(screenprint)

Easy essay writing

At the end of each part of the course you'll write an essay so you can put your learning into practice. The instructions for each assignment will guide you through the essay and give you a clear idea of the content required but, if you're worried about how to structure that content, the following pointers will help you.

There's no right or wrong way to approach a piece of written work; we all work differently, so take from this guidance the methods that suit you.

1. Plan

1. Write down, in a sentence, the absolute essence of what you have to do, for example: I am going to write my personal interpretation of a piece of art/discuss an example of image re-appropriation/do a close reading of a poem.
2. Work through the assignment guidance and jot down notes and ideas.
3. If you find it easier to plan with pictures or diagrams, try mind-mapping your notes and ideas; perhaps even look online for free mind-mapping software, e.g. WiseMapping.
4. You'll need to refer back to the course guide, your completed exercises, learning log or writing diary (Part Two) and notebooks to collect additional material for your essays. This will also give you a chance to refresh your memory of terminology, theories, methods and ideas.
5. If you use other sources, e.g. websites, books or journals, write down the source straightaway with a note to remind yourself of the content you intend to use. This is really important because you'll have to list your sources at the end of your essay and it can be hard to find them again later.
6. Gather all the materials and tools from the planning stage together in one place.

2. Structure

The trick is to break down the greater task into smaller easier tasks.

Introduction: Say what you're going to say
Body of essay: Say it
Conclusion: Say what you've said



An essay

For most of the essays on this course you'll write 1,000 words. Break this down into manageable chunks or paragraphs. Let's say each chunk (or paragraph) is around 100 words. So take off 100 words each for your introduction and conclusion. This leaves you with 800 words, roughly eight paragraphs. (This is a guideline only – you might have five or six longer paragraphs.)

Start with your introduction paragraph. Write a few sentences about what your essay is going to be about. Don't worry about getting it word perfect or predicting exactly what you'll write about; for now this is simply your springboard and focus. You can amend it later.

Once you have your introduction, write down headings for the chunks that will make up the body of your essay. For example, if your assignment task was to make a close reading of a short piece (100–200 words) of creative writing, you might start like this:

Introduction:

*In this essay I'm going to study an extract (the opening two paragraphs) from my favourite book, John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, and do a close reading, paying special attention to the themes of time and place. I'll consider elements such as character, plot, setting, tone, dialogue, use of language and point of view in order to discuss how they evoke time and/or place and what impact this has on the text and, in turn, on the reader. I will be looking for clues in these opening paragraphs towards an understanding of the novel as a whole, including its genre and style.*

The part underlined is the essential core of the essay.

Body of the essay:

1. *my initial impressions of the novel*
2. *what I can glean about the main character*
3. *clues to plot*
4. *clues to setting – time and place*
5. *the possible importance of time and place in the novel – from clues*
6. *use of language to set the scene and create a sense of place and time*
7. *any poetic devices and the effect they have*
8. *the narrator and the effect of this point of view (POV)*
9. *points of intrigue and why they make me want to read on*
10. *the tone of the writing – how it makes me feel*

Next draft a rough paragraph for each point. Once you've come this far, your essay is practically written.

Conclusion:

Finish off your draft with a conclusion. Your conclusion should have one main point, for example:

Buchan's introduction to the protagonist, Richard Hannay, effectively shows the character's dissatisfaction with place in returning to 'the wrong ditch,' i.e. London, after a period of time in 'the old country' and a long time away from his birthplace, Scotland.

Use another few sentences to draw together the points you've detailed in the body of the essay to illustrate the main point and there we have it – an essay draft.

We've given an example of a creative writing assignment here, but the advice applies equally to any other creative arts discipline.

Tip

Remember, if you're giving your personal responses and interpretations it's okay to use the first person, e.g. I think... Write in a way that feels comfortable and natural; you don't need to put on a 'formal' voice at this stage, but make sure that you write clearly and check for spelling and grammar.

3. Polish

- Leave a gap between writing your draft and returning to polish your final copy so you can return to it with an outsider's view. This will also give your subconscious time to mull it over and come up with solutions to any bits you were struggling with in the draft.
- Work through the main body of your essay first and get these paragraphs how you want them. Put them in the order that makes most sense to you.
- Make sure your introduction summarises what your essay is going to be about and your conclusion summarises what it was about.
- Read through the completed essay from start to finish; check that it flows well and watch out for pointless sentences or repetitions or omissions.
- Keep it simple; avoid convoluted sentences and complex words.
- Check spellings carefully. Remember that computer spell checks don't check for context so watch out for easily confused words such as their/there/they're. If in doubt, use a dictionary.
- Invest in a good guide such as Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* to brush up on your writing skills and avoid common mistakes: Strunk, W. and White, E.B. (1999) *The Elements of Style* (4th edition). New York: Longman

4. Bibliography

If you quote another person's words in your essay, you must indicate the source of the quote, even if it's from the internet. Similarly, at the end of your essay, you must provide a reference list or bibliography listing any texts or websites you've used. You'll find much more about this in the guide to the Harvard referencing system on the student website:

www.oca-student.com/content/harvard-referencing-system-1

Print out a copy and keep it to hand. Referencing can seem a bit daunting if you've not done it before, but if you take the time to learn how to reference properly now, it'll save you a lot of time and trouble – and lost marks – later on in your studies.

5. Illustrations

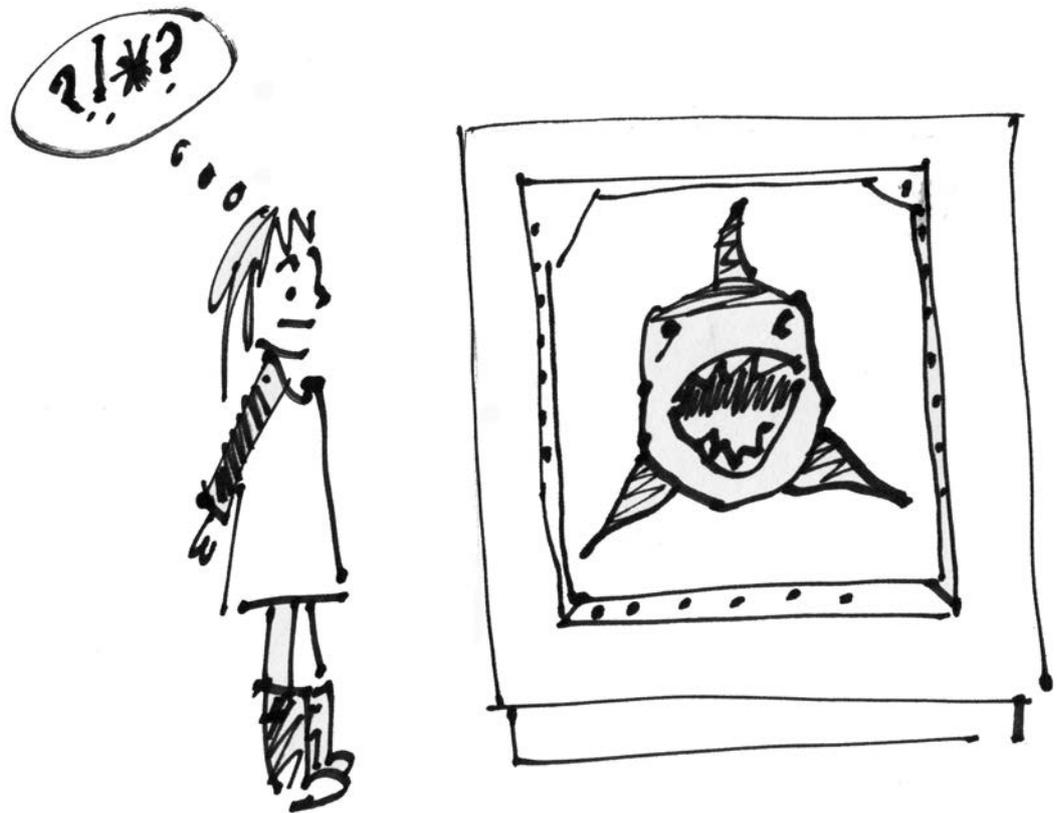
The creative writing assignment example above probably wouldn't be illustrated, but you may wish to include images for the other assignments on this course. There are two golden rules here:

1. Only include images that are relevant – don't put in images just because you like them or because you think it makes your work look better.
2. Always provide a caption indicating the source of the image.

Refer to the OCA Harvard referencing guide for more information on referencing illustrations.

Part one

Contemporary art



Tutor drawing

Introduction What is art?

We're surrounded by images in a variety of formats on a daily basis. Advertising, TV, magazines, art galleries, photographs, computers, public sculptures and instructions are just a few examples. Many of these images have an obvious purpose. It might be to persuade us to eat something, buy something or visit somewhere. You'll look at this type of image in further detail in Part Three. However, some of the imagery we come across may not be easy to interpret and it's often difficult to draw a line between visual culture and contemporary art.

There are so many different ideas about what art is. Some art isn't visual at all. Another area that can be problematic is whether or not art should need lots of written and contextual information to explain its purpose. Some people think art should stand alone; others think you need to work at art a little bit to get the most out of it, like you might need to with a poem or concerto.



Andy Warhol, *Campbell Soup I*, 1968
(screenprint, 89.5 x 58.7cm)

"For somebody just to walk into an art gallery and expect to understand it straightaway, it would be like me walking into, I don't know, a classical music concert you know, knowing nothing about classical music and saying oh it's all just noise. It is quite tricky sometimes to get into the position where you can start to understand because you can intellectually engage with something quite quickly but to emotionally and sort of spiritually engage with something takes quite a long time. You have to live with it."

Grayson Perry, Reith Lecture 1, BBC, 2013

You can download and listen to podcasts of all four of Grayson Perry's Reith Lectures 2013 here: www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/reith [accessed 14/01/14]

Try and listen to at least one of them in its entirety and make notes in your learning log as you listen.

Today, in contemporary art, a very common question is 'What is art?' and you'll regularly here people say 'That's not art!' People, including artists themselves, are questioning what art is or is not in a fundamental way and this is partly a reaction to the variety of media used, the breadth of subject matter explored, and the wide array of places you can now find art.

The term 'media' is used to describe the materials an artwork is made from. The variety of media used in the artworks you'll study is very wide and includes sound, video, sculpture and light. This variety of media and the idea that anything can be art is, at times, overwhelming and confusing. It sometimes leaves people thinking they don't know where to start even when they're looking at artwork in a gallery. In Part One you'll have a chance to explore diverse artworks that you'll hopefully find at least thought-provoking and, at best, inspirational. You'll be introduced to a few basic tools to help you start to interpret contemporary art works and get the opportunity to express your thoughts and feelings on contemporary art.

There are no right and wrong answers. You may well decide that you just don't like some of the pieces you look at. Hopefully, though, at least some of the work will make you think more deeply about certain topics than you might have done before. Throughout the course there are also two overarching themes – 'time' and 'place' – and Part One considers how artists respond to these fundamental aspects of our daily life.

Project 1 Art and ideas

Much contemporary art is about ideas and it can be also be philosophical in nature.

Marcel Duchamp is often referred to as the forefather of much of the contemporary and conceptual art that is being made today. One of his most famous pieces of work, which you may well recognise, is *Fountain*.

Exercise 1

In a few words write down your first response to Duchamp's *Fountain*.

You might write 'ugly', 'clever', 'it makes me angry' or 'what is that about?' All of these are valid responses.

Remember to record your thoughts and ideas about your own work and the work of other artists in your learning log.

Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1950 (replica of 1917 original) (porcelain urinal)



Exercise 2 What is art?

Duchamp raised a lot of questions with *Fountain* that are still very relevant and frequently asked today, such as:

- What is art?
- How do we know it is art?
- Who decides what is art?

Record your thoughts on these questions, and the questions below, in your learning log. Just spend 15 minutes or so on this activity.

- Is it enough just to display a found object and say 'this is art' because it's in an art gallery?
- Duchamp said he wanted "to put art back in the service of the mind". What do you think he meant by this?

Duchamp was interested in the idea(s) behind a piece of art. *Fountain* was a so-called 'readymade'. With 'readymades' technical skill wasn't important but the idea was and an object could become a piece of art because the artist decided it was.

In response to the question 'What is art?' you might have written 'It is found in a gallery', or 'It is beautiful'. Just write down what you think. Not what you think the right answer is. As we've said, there are no right answers. Here are some more questions for you:

- Is technical skill an important quality in an artwork?
- Do you think art needs to move you emotionally?
- Does art have to be unique?

It's important to keep in mind that most of the work featured in Part One is from the western world and isn't representative of contemporary art around the globe. Widespread access to the internet and the rise in popularity of art biennials means that our awareness of art on a global scale is increasing, but of necessity this short introduction to contemporary art will focus mainly on European-based artists.

Exercise 3 Reading about art

You'll be required to read theoretical texts as part of an Arts degree. This can be a bit daunting at first as you'll come across words that you'll have to look up in the dictionary and it can take time to get into the flow of this. It does become easier with practice and you'll find many of the same words come up time and time again. It's a good idea to get to grips with these words, make yourself a glossary and use the terms yourself in your written pieces. You might find it useful to buy a paperback guide to art terms. *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms* (see 'Further reading' at the end of Part One) is an excellent example.

- To begin with have a look at an excerpt from *Art History: The Basics* by Grant Pooke and Diana Newall (2008, Abingdon: Routledge). The first few pages (pp.1–8) outline the authors' understanding of what art is. You'll find this extract on the student website.
- Make notes on any parts that require further research or that jump out at you as particularly meaningful.
- Look up any words new to you and list them.

You might want to do further reading from this book. Duchamp's work is regarded by some people as the starting point of postmodernism. This is another area of research that you may wish to follow up independently at this stage. There is a section in *Art History: The Basics* (pp.164–91) that introduces postmodernism. There are some complex concepts to grasp here so don't worry if it doesn't make much sense to you at the moment; it's something you can revisit at a later stage in your studies.

As you're probably aware, some contemporary art work causes outrage amongst the public and there is often debate that this is intentional to draw attention to the artist. Two notorious headline grabbers are Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin. They were part of the YBAs (Young British Artists), a movement that unfolded in the late 1980s. A key exhibition in this period was 'Freeze' which took place in 1988. After finding little joy with galleries and collectors in the established art world, a group of students decided to organise and hold their own exhibition in a warehouse in London. One of the main organisers and best-known artists to come out of the period was Damien Hirst and his piece *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. People are quite often divided on what they think about the art from this period. However, whatever you might think about it, it has had an impact on the national and international art world.

Exercise 4 Looking at context

Keeping in mind the fact that contemporary art can provoke a wide range of positive and negative reactions, let's look in more detail at one of the more notorious works from the 1990s, Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, often referred to as 'the shark in formaldehyde'. Whatever your personal view of some of the works of this period, you'll almost certainly find others who have a similar response. It's OK not to like something, however well-known it is, and you certainly shouldn't worry if you simply don't understand it.

For example, here's a comment from a member of the public in response to an online article about Hirst and Emin.

"I don't get either of them. Nothing they've produced seems to me startling or original, it's almost like painting by numbers."

Thesensiblechoice, 2/4/12 (comment on an article in the Guardian newspaper)

Given its infamy let's have a look at the 'shark' in more detail.

- Write down a few words giving your first reaction to the piece.
- Do you have an emotional response to it?
- What do you think it's about?
- What do you think about the title?

Now have a look at this painting by seventeenth-century Dutch artist Edwaert Collier and answer the same questions again.

This painting is known as a vanitas painting. Many critics make reference to Dutch vanitas paintings when they talk about Hirst's shark. Did you spot the skull in the top left-hand corner? Another term associated with vanitas painting is the 'memento mori'. In vanitas paintings the 'memento mori' is usually an object or symbol that refers to the inevitability of death and in this painting the skull is one example of this.



Edwaert Collier, *Still Life with a Volume of Wither's 'Emblemes'*, 1696 © Tate, London 2014

You now have some additional contextual information about *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. To add to this, work through the next exercise.

Here's a description of Collier's piece from the Tate's website.

"The skull and hour-glass symbolise the inevitability of death, while the musical instruments, wine and jewels represent the fleeting pleasures of life. The open book shows a brief poem emphasising the theme of mortality. The Latin inscription in the top left corner comes from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'. This is why such pictures are known as vanitas paintings."

www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/collier-still-life-with-a-volume-of-withers-emblemes-n05916
[accessed 14/01/14]

Exercise 5 Finding out more

Still life paintings over the centuries would often include decaying food, such as fish, grapes, pheasants and fruit. Another term used for still life is 'nature morte', which literally means 'dead nature'. Find two examples of still life work which includes fish and in each case note the title, artist and date. Make a quick sketch of the pieces in your learning log. This can just be a line drawing with notes on the image or down the side. This is a useful skill to develop even if you're not very confident about drawing as it acts as a quick reminder of the piece's content and composition.

The best way to experience contemporary art is to go and see it first hand. Obviously this isn't always possible and the internet is a vital tool in the initial research stages today. Through the OCA you can access online libraries and online galleries and independently you can trawl through a wealth of material.

Watch this video discussion from the Khan Academy. Make notes as you listen to the discussion. The video gives you contextual information about Hirst's piece. List the different areas of context that are covered and also any references to 'time'.

http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/hirsts-the-physical-impossibility-of-death-in-the-mind-of-someone-living.html?searched=hirst&highlight=ajaxSearch_highlight+ajaxSearch_highlight1 [accessed 14/01/14]

This is a freely available video but it is also provided through a link on the OCA student website via the research section. Make sure you have a look at the resources available on the OCA site during this course.

Whilst making your notes listen for information about:

- Hirst
- the piece
- Hirst's other work
- information on other artists whose work is concerned with mortality
- references to 'time'.

In this project you've looked briefly at Duchamp, readymades and how Duchamp's work has influenced the work of more recent artists. You've also looked at two of the basic tools for starting to analyse work:

- your first response to a piece
- contextual information.

Has the contextual information about *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* altered your view or response to it in any way?

Now that you've made your own mind up, you might want to read the Adrian Searle review that the 'sensible' member of the public quoted above was responding to:

www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/apr/02/damien-hirst-tate-review

[accessed 14/01/14]

In the Khan Academy video you'll hear the contributors talk about 'impermanence'. This is a reference to our concept of time and our existence in time on the earth. The next project looks in more detail at the exploration of 'time' by artists working in a variety of media.