



Different art critics judge works of art according to their own personal perspectives and based on their own criteria of what makes art “successful”. These sets of criteria can be divided into three main ideas. Let’s look at the three different areas. Decide which aesthetic theory you use when judging a work of art.

### **Imitationalism (Literal Qualities)**

Imitationalism infers that only art that looks real or represents the subject matter realistically can be considered successful. The work must look like what we see in the real world.

### **Formalism (Design Qualities)**

Formalism bases the success of a work of art on the composition or the arrangement of the Elements Of Art using the Principles of Design.

### **Emotionalism (Expressive Qualities)**

Emotionalism bases its decisions about the success of an art work on the message contained within the work. The expressive quality is most important, a strong feeling for the mood and idea the artist wants the viewer to see.



Of course, the best way to look at art is with all three theories. Look at this work by Norman Rockwell. It is titled “Triple Self-Portrait”. If you were to judge it by Imitationalism theory, you would say that it looks like him and it represents the scene realistically. Formalism would judge this work based on the composition. Rockwell uses a triangle composition to organize his work. He uses diagonal lines to focus the viewer on his center of interest. Emotionalism would indicate that this work appeals to our sense of nostalgia and humor. Therefore it would be considered successful.

How you critique a work of art is a very personal thing. As you look at works, think of these three aesthetic theories and see which one(s) you will use.