1.0 Introduction

Q: How can I answer the question in a way that shows
   (i) that I understand the question, and
   (ii) I recall and understand the theoretical material
   (that the question is asking about?)

A: Your answers should contain three components:

1. MAIN CLAIM/ASSERTION
2. REASONING
3. EVIDENCE

You can present these in any order, but all three components should be present. If all three of these components are there, and connected in a logical way, your answer will at least be clear.

Q: But what are these three components, and what should they contain?

1.1 Basic Overview

1. MAIN CLAIM/ASSERTION
   → This is the basic answer to the question.
   If the question is a Y/N question, then the answer is either
   “yes, ...” or
   “no, ...”
   (where the ... will be a rephrasing of the question)
   eg.,
   Question: Does the pope have a belly-button?
   Main Claim: Yes, the pope has a belly-button
   (or “No, the pope does not have a belly-button)

2. REASONING
   → Your 'reasoning' is a set of things you believe; these are the things that make you
   think that your main claim is true
   - i.e., your 'reasons' to believe your main claim.
   The technical term for these “things” is PREMISES
   Eg.  Main Claim: The pope has a belly-button
   Reasoning/Premises:
   1. All humans have belly-buttons
   2. The pope is a human.
   → In this part of your answer, you are relying on your knowledge of theory/the world;
   this base of knowledge is what you draw your premises from

3. EVIDENCE
These are the things that you observe, which support your reasoning/premises

Reasoning/Premises:
1. All humans have belly-buttons
2. The pope is a human.

Evidence for Premise 1:
Every single human that I’ve seen with their belly bared, has a belly-button. I’ve never seen a belly without a belly-button.¹

Evidence for Premise 2:
The pope has all the characteristics of a human – eg., he has two eyes, a nose, a mouth, no feathers, opposable thumbs, etc.

2.0 Examples using Aesthetics Questions

Here are some examples of answers to the previous pop quiz questions. I have annotated the “main claim,” “reasoning” and “evidence” portion for some of the answers, so you can better understand what should be contained in these components.

2.1 Quiz No 2

Q: The following image is “Composition II in Red, Blue and Yellow” (1930) by Piet Mondrian. Is this painting compatible with the MIMETIC/REPRESENTATIONAL approach to art?

Answer Version 1a:

No, this painting is not compatible with a Representational approach to art. The Representational Approach to art states that purpose of art is to depict outward reality, such as people, society or nature. This image does not depict people, society or nature, since it only consists of abstract squares and rectangles of colour. These abstract squares do not form a recognizable image of a person, natural object or part of society.

Analysis of Answer 1a:

1. The part in blue is the main claim. It answers the question, by starting with either a “yes” or “no,” and rephrases the question accordingly. Make sure that you don't change the question you are answering.

2. The part in orange is the reasoning. It is made of two premises

¹ Except for babies who are still attached to their umbilical cord, I guess.
1. The representational approach to art states that the purpose of art is to represent outward reality, such as people, society or nature.

2. This image does not depict people, society or nature.

The first premise is basically a definition of the theoretical concept that the question is based on. By presenting a first premise like this, you show me that you recall the definition of the "Representational Approach to Art." ²

The second premise states that Mondrian's painting does not depict people, society or nature – and if we assume the first premise, this means that Mondrian's painting does not fit the definition for the Representational approach to art. By presenting this statement, you show me that you understand the definition of the Representational Approach to Art enough to define what would count as an example or counter-example.

3. The part in purple is the evidence for premise 2. It describes what you observe when you look at the painting, and these observations support the claim that the image "does not depict people, society or nature. The evidence is important to connect your observations to theory; it shows me that you can assess your observations well enough to determine whether they fit, or do not fit, your definition of an example/counter-example.

Note that since the first premise is just a theoretical definition, it does not need evidence to support it.

Answer Version 1b:

The Representational Approach to art states that the purpose of art is to faithfully depict outward reality, such as people, society and nature. Mondrian's painting consists only of abstract squares and lines that do not look like a person, part of society, or part of nature. Therefore, Mondrian's painting is incompatible with the Representational Approach to art.

Answer Version 1c:

Mondrian's painting consists only of abstract squares and lines, which do not look like a person, part of society, or part of nature. It is thus incompatible with the Representational approach to art, which requires that art faithfully depicts outward reality, such as people, society and anture.

Answer Version 2a:

The Representational Approach to art states that the purpose of art is to faithfully depict outward reality, such as people, society and nature. Mondrian's painting consists of abstract squares and lines which look like a window, where a window is a part of human life and society. Therefore, Mondrian’s painting is compatible with the Representational Approach to art.

Answer Version 2b:

Mondrian's painting consists of abstract squares and lines which look like a window, where a window is a part of human life and society. Therefore, Mondrian’s painting is compatible with the Representational Approach to art, as the Representational Approach to art states that the purpose of art is to faithfully depict outward reality, such as people, society and nature.

Answer Version 2c:

² Some people manage to phrase their answers in a way that makes it clear they understand the concept, without having to explicitly provide the definition. Unless you are confident that you can do that, I would suggest providing the definition.
Mondrian’s painting is compatible with the Representational Approach to art. The Representational Approach to art states that the purpose of art is to faithfully depict outward reality, such as people, society and nature. Mondrian’s painting consists of abstract squares and lines which look like a window, where a window is a part of human life and society.

2.2 Pop Quiz no. 3

1. The image on the right is “Woman with a Hat/Femme au chapeau” (1905) by Henri Matisse. The image is recognizably a ¼ portrait of a woman wearing a hat, horizontally centred in the middle of the composition. It is painted with bright, non-naturalistic hues of blue, lavender and turquoise, along with bright red accents. The brush strokes are loose and clearly visible, giving the painting an “unfinished” appearance.

Is the above information relevant for a contextualist analysis of Matisse’s painting? Why or why not?

Answer Version 1a:

Yes, the information above is relevant for a contextualist analysis of Matisse’s painting. The Contextualist Approach of Matisse’s painting assigns artistic value according to two factors: (i) how visually/aesthetically-pleasing the object is, and (ii) the relationships between the object and the object’s historical context of creation. The information provided describes the visual/aesthetic aspects of Matisse’s painting, such as colour, and brush-strokes; the visual aspects of the painting directly relate to factor (i).

Analysis of Answer 1a

1. Again, main claim is in blue. It answers the question, by starting with either a “yes” or “no,” and rephrases the question accordingly.

2. The reasoning consists of two premises

   (i) a definition/explanation of how the Contextualist Approach assigns value to art(which, again, will show me that you recall its definition), and

   (ii) a claim that the information provided can be used to assess part (i) of the Contextualist Approach’s value-system.

3. This question doesn’t ask you to analyze the aspects of the painting. Instead it asks you to assess the information provided about the painting. Therefore, your evidence should be your observations about the information, not the painting. In this case, the evidence provides justification for Premise 2. The observation is that the information is all about the visual aspects of the painting – such as colour, composition and brush-strokes, which directly inform part (i) of the Contextualist Approach’s value-system.
Answer Version 1b:

The information provided describes the visual/aesthetic aspects of Matisse's painting, such as colour, and brush-strokes. The Contextualist Approach of Matisse's painting assigns artistic value according to two factors: (i) the relationships between the object and the object's historical context of creation, but also (ii) how visually/aesthetically-pleasing the object is. The visual information provided directly relates to how visually/aesthetically pleasing the object is. Therefore, the information above is relevant for a contextualist analysis of Matisse's painting.

Answer Version 2a:

Yes, the information above is relevant for a contextualist analysis of Matisse's painting. The Contextualist Approach of Matisse's painting assigns artistic value according to two factors: (i) how visually/aesthetically-pleasing the object is, and (ii) the relationships between the object and the object's historical context of creation. The information provided includes (1) when the painting was created (1905), and (2) who the artist was (Henri Matisse), which provide information about what the object's historical context of creation was.

**Analysis of Answer 2a**

1. Again, **main claim is in blue.** It answers the question, by starting with either a “yes” or “no,” and rephrases the question accordingly.

2. The **reasoning** consists of two premises

   (i) a **definition/explanation** of how the Contextualist Approach assigns value to art
   
   (which, again, will show me that you recall its definition), and

   (ii) a claim that the information provided can be used to assess part (ii) of the Contextualist Approach's value-system.

3. In this case, the **evidence** provides justification for Premise 2. The **observation** is that the information is includes the “when” (1905) and “who” (Henri Matisse), associated with the paintings context of creation.