

What is Research in Art?

Broad View of Research in Art

While the creation of art can be a form of research, not all art is research-based. To become a research project, the artist must extend the focus of the work beyond creating the piece to include the work's contributions to the field of art, human thought, society, or other forms of knowledge. Additionally, research must be grounded in previous work or findings. In other words, what techniques have been used previously that you are building from? What is the current political climate that you are trying to expose? Finally, research must be disseminated or shared with other professionals in your field. Dissemination in the visual arts often includes exhibition of the work. To frame your work as research, the exhibition should include an artist statement or project statement that contextualizes the piece, including the contribution of the piece to society, how previous artists informed the work, experimental aspects of the research, and more. An additional form of dissemination could be an Artist Talk.

Examples of Art Research

- Creation of visual art piece in response to Art History (including Contemporary Art)
- Focus on an experimental process, such as experimenting with a new technique, materials, or media.
- Creation of visual art piece(s) in order to expose a current political climate, societal bias, environmental degradation, or something else.

Guidelines and Recommendations

- Think about the central research goals of the project.
- What relevant scholarly or research context will your work be grounded in? For example, your influences and inspirations, other established artists, movements that are referenced or serve as inspiration, political, cultural, or social issues that the work responds to, personal growth events, or something else.
- Significance. How does your work contribute to wider conversations in the field? In what ways does your project build on or respond to existing artistic practices or ideas?
- Methods. What techniques will be used? Are you experimenting with a new technique? New materials? Or using a “tried and true” technique and materials?
- Preparation. How well prepared are you to take on the research project? What formal and informal training or mentoring have you had? Are there other types of training that you will need to complete the research? How will your previous experiences inform and ensure the success of this project?
- Dissemination plan. How will you share the work and your research? How will these pieces fit into your portfolio or future works? The research as well as the created works should be disseminated or shared.

Mentoring in Visual Art Research

A key component of undergraduate research projects is that they are not completed in isolation, but are instead mentored by a faculty member. In many cases, it is the faculty mentoring that moves a project from merely the creation of a piece of art into a true undergraduate research project. As you are beginning to discuss your research project with your faculty mentor, you should think about a plan for continued interaction with your mentor. How will your mentor's area of expertise support your research project? How often will you meet and discuss your research activities?

You want to have enough interaction with your research mentor to receive constructive feedback and guidance as you move through all phases of your research project—from the initial project proposal through the dissemination of the work. Faculty will support you as you develop your initial plans, prepare timelines, and overcome creative challenges along the way. Not only should you not have to “go it alone” through the research process, but engaging with your faculty mentor will help you think critically about your project and plan for the best possible project. As well, observing first-hand how a professional responds to obstacles or strategizes will prove to be an invaluable experience as you build your own professional identity.

How to Find a Faculty Mentor

- Read the UWF faculty bio pages for your department(s) of interest, which list faculty research interests and publications.
- Search faculty names in the [UWF Library database](#) and the [Argo Scholar Commons](#). These resources will provide their published work, including examples of their current and previous research with UWF students.
- Review the [OUR Finding a Research Mentor database](#), which lists mentors who have connected with OUR seeking undergraduate students to support their projects.
- Be engaged in your classes; faculty often invite interested students to join a research project.
- Be proactive. Set up appointments with professors to discuss research opportunities. Offer to volunteer a few hours a week to help however you can; cleaning glassware in a chemistry lab or brushes in an art studio are great ways to demonstrate your commitment, learn proper techniques, and become part of the team.
- If you have a faculty member with whom you work well, ask them if they would consider being your OUR mentor.
- Attend the UWF Student Scholars Symposium each April. This event is a great way to see what your peers are working on, talk to undergraduate researchers about how they got started, and connect with faculty who are already working with undergraduate researchers.