My approach to teaching art history is to focus on the object and the context in which it was produced and existed. The human experience is anchored in the material world and objects offer one way to access an historical period. Although I ask students to focus on individual works of art, I also want students to understand them as only one part of a network of materials and ideas that constitute human culture. Because nothing exists in a vacuum, in my classes, I examine objects within spaces, in combination with other objects, as components of rituals and pageants, as part of daily life, and in conjunction with stories, ideas, and philosophies. As such, I take an interdisciplinary approach, using images and objects as sources, but in conjunction with literature, historical texts, and archaeological data.

I also incorporate various types of objects into my classes, including those that have long been part of the art historical canon, such as cathedrals, stained glass, panel paintings, and *deluxe* illuminated manuscripts, but also objects of daily life, such as textiles, personal ornament, workaday manuscripts, and vessels and utensils. While these objects are less spectacular than their more-often-studied counterparts, they help one to understand the past in a holistic way and to investigate what was valued by a society in general, and not only by the upper echelon.

In order to help students to study the materiality of objects and how they functioned within a context or as dynamic spaces, as in the case of architecture, I encourage students to engage with actual examples of art. I include field trips to medieval-style buildings, preferably those still in use as spaces for performance or religious worship. Although what students see and hear may not be an authentic medieval experience, it offers a way to understand architecture as living space, and not merely as two-dimensional representations projected onto a classroom wall. I also take students to see actual examples of medieval artworks in museums and libraries, so that they can experience a medieval manuscript, for instance, as three-dimensional tactile object that comprises networks of images and texts. Because access to collections of medieval art and medieval-style spaces depends on where one teaches, I also augment classroom work with facsimiles and Web sites that offer the virtual experience of being in a cathedral or turning the pages of a medieval book.

Beyond keeping in mind that every object has a physical and cultural context and taking an object-based and interdisciplinary approach, I do not have a single methodology that I apply to every work of art that I discuss. In my lectures and in the readings that I assign, I introduce students to various methodologies, depending on the object or question under consideration. I employ the methods of formalism, stylistic analysis, artist biography, social history, semiotics, among others, in order to demonstrate the complexity of visual objects and the many ways one can approach them. By exposing students to the various ways one can examine historical problems, I hope to teach student how to ask questions and to be open minded in their intellectual endeavors.
Approach to the student

It is my goal to teach students how to learn. Therefore, I use exams to encourage students to hone their visual skills. I do expect them to be able to recognize works of art and to know basic pieces of information, such as date and location; however, I also use exams to assess how well students apply what they have learned and practice critical thinking skills. My exams mainly comprise essay questions that combine two objects that students have not seen compared before, or unknown artworks. My concern is not to see if they can correctly determine the stylistic relationship between two works or identify the date or style of an unknown object. I am more interested in how they take what they have learned and apply it to an unfamiliar example and whether they have learned to “look.”

Because they do not have the same time constraints as exams, term papers and short writing assignments allow for more creativity and flexibility. For written assignments, I try to have students engage with objects in a way that is of interest to them. The paper topics I propose usually ask students to experience a space or an object and to describe how their contact shapes and alters their understanding. However, I also give students the opportunity to develop projects that pertain to their own interests and that excites them, whether it is researching an object or building they have seen on a trip, or using their own church or a building in their hometown as the basis for the assignment. Students in my classes have also created “medieval” works of arts and recipes. By making the assignment one in which they are invested, students will make discoveries they may not have otherwise; the quality of their writing and ideas will be better; and what they learn will be retained.

Overall, it in not what a student learns from class that is most important. What I hope to do is instill in students a love of learning that will remain with them long after they leave college. The only way to begin to do this is to show my own enthusiasm for my subject and to offer an environment that encourages respectful discussion and dialogue about art and ideas. My greatest desire is to participate in a university environment that invests in whole student and helps him or her to become a curious and thoughtful adult.