



Faculty Review of Open eTextbooks

The [California Open Educational Resources Council](#) has designed and implemented a faculty review process of the free and open etextbooks showcased within the California Open Online Library for Education (www.cool4ed.org). Faculty from the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California were invited to review the selected free and open etextbooks using a rubric. Faculty received a stipend for their efforts and funding was provided by the State of California, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Textbook Name:

Art History



License:



Art History by Boundless is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0](#)

Find it: [eTextbook Website](#)

Textbook Authors:

Boundless

Reviewed by:

Roland Betancourt

Institution:

University of California, Irvine

Title/Position:

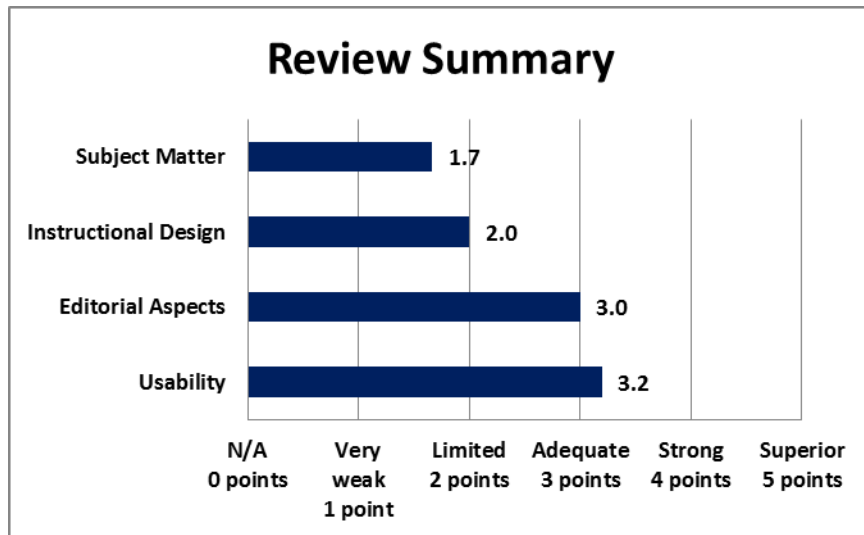
Professor

Format

Reviewed:

[Online](#)

A small fee may be associated with various formats.



Date Reviewed:

August 2015

California OER Council eTextbook Evaluation Rubric

CA Course ID: [ARTH 110](#)

Subject Matter (30 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the content accurate, error-free, and unbiased?			X			
Does the text adequately cover the designated course with a sufficient degree of depth and scope?			X			
Does the textbook use sufficient and relevant examples to present its subject matter?		X				

Does the textbook use a clear, consistent terminology to present its subject matter?			X			
Does the textbook reflect current knowledge of the subject matter?		X				
Does the textbook present its subject matter in a culturally sensitive manner? (e.g. Is the textbook free of offensive and insensitive examples? Does it include examples that are inclusive of a variety of races, ethnicities, and backgrounds?)			X			

Total Points: 10 out of 30

Please provide comments on any aspect of the subject matter of this textbook:

- On the surface, Boundless Art History seems to integrate short surveys of the material oriented around close studies of one or two works of art in a module. This follows a common online educational format as that adopted by MOOCs, for example, with short quizzes. However, when looking closely at the material it is often very superficial and does not go into any substantial depth of the historical background and context necessary to elaborate on particular monuments and events.
- The content reads as if it was produced by someone using various older surveys of history, and without a clear grasp of the art historical information. Key terms are defined improperly or inadequately for the context, such as defining hagiography as the "study of saints," rather than explicating its use in the Byzantine context to describe the writing/content of saints' lives, and odd or outdated terms often creep up along with idiosyncratic and similarly outdated sources that do not even seem to come from art history but from a popular history context. And a term like "chronology" is used to indicate the dating of a work of art.
- Capsule descriptions of works also evidence a lack of knowledge in the state of the field and current conversations about nuances regarding attributions and dating.
- There is also often a showcasing of works that while interesting and useful are idiosyncratic choices to be included in this very limited and basic survey -- often as well there are blurbs on the current state of monuments or research that are out of place, overly myopic, or insubstantial -- and there is no system of citations to back any claims whatsoever.
- The writing is at times quite awkward and evidences a lack of familiarity with the material.
- The quizzes also insist that students remember odd and simplistic judgments on style, artistic transmission, and terminology, which often just further outmoded historical stereotypes of the ancient and medieval worlds. At times the quizzes are worded in such a manner as to be nonsensical and demonstrating a misunderstanding of the material, conflating technical terms with contemporary popular uses, as for example: Byzantine representations of religious figures: "depicted icons in their human form," which demonstrates that the person who wrote this quiz assumed that icons was being used to refer to an important person rather than an object or image, which has no "human form" per se. Confusions like these are endemic in the text and quizzes.
- An important reservation: Many of the citations come from Wikipedia, which suggests that much of the content itself is being derived from there and it is not surprising by some of the language and ideas being communicated. Beyond issues of peer review, if students are going to just be directed to Wikipedia to flesh out ideas, then why not just use Wikipedia, since it would for many of these topics go much more in depth than these summaries here do.

Instructional Design (35 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Does the textbook present its subject materials at appropriate reading levels for undergrad use?				X		
Does the textbook reflect a consideration of different learning styles? (e.g. visual, textual?)		X				
Does the textbook present explicit learning outcomes aligned with the course and curriculum?					X	
Is a coherent organization of the textbook evident to the reader/student?			X			
Does the textbook reflect best practices in the instruction of the designated course?		X				
Does the textbook contain sufficient effective ancillary materials? (e.g. test banks, individual and/or group activities or exercises, pedagogical apparatus, etc.)			X			

Is the textbook searchable?		X				
-----------------------------	--	---	--	--	--	--

Total Points: 14 out of 35

Please provide comments on any aspect of the instructional design of this textbook:

- The textbook, while coherent has odd thematic organizations that seem at times haphazard while nevertheless having a loose chronological unfolding, which demonstrates an odd tension between a thematic and more traditional chronological flow.
- The modules are also not developed in any manner that could truly sustain the breadth of a thematic approach since each one would have to make efforts to connect a trajectory of materials and this is not often successfully achieved here.

Editorial Aspects (25 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the language of the textbook free of grammatical, spelling, usage, and typographical errors?				X		
Is the textbook written in a clear, engaging style?				X		
Does the textbook adhere to effective principles of design? (e.g. are pages laid out and organized to be clear and visually engaging and effective? Are colors, font, and typography consistent and unified?)					X	
Does the textbook include conventional editorial features? (e.g. a table of contents, glossary, citations and further references)				X		
How effective are multimedia elements of the textbook? (e.g. graphics, animations, audio)			X			

Total Points: 15 out of 25

Please provide comments on any editorial aspect of this textbook.

- The writing can be clumsy with odd constructions that index a lack of familiarity with the material and common uses of technical terms. There are misplaced spaces and other formatting/proof-reading issues.

Usability (25 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the textbook compatible with standard and commonly available hardware/software in college/university campus student computer labs?				X		
Is the textbook accessible in a variety of different electronic formats? (e.g. .txt, .pdf, .epub, etc.)				X		
Can the textbook be printed easily?				X		
Does the user interface implicitly inform the reader how to interact with and navigate the textbook?					X	
How easily can the textbook be annotated by students and instructors?				X		

Total Points: 16 out of 25

Please provide comments on any aspect of access concerning this textbook.

- It has a fairly attractive design, though moving through it can be a bit slow at times if you are attempting to review the material since the modules are relatively short. Though there is the ability to move linearly through them with ease and the student's interface is quite fluid and has good navigational tools.
- The powerpoints that are pre-made for instruction seemed promising, but they are poorly suited for an art history course since they treat images as small side illustrations to the text, rather than showcasing them and focusing on them as the primary focus of the lecture. They are also too text heavy for a traditional art history course, but seem to be made for a course that involves the recitation of short historical blurbs, which might be attractive to certain teaching styles, yet they often are too general and lack the more concrete information one might want to display on the screen for students. The image captions are likewise not standardized, usually lack dates and any information except an ambiguous title which for the ancient and medieval world is less than ideal since title are often descriptive and do little to adequately identify a work of art.

Overall Ratings						
	Not at all (0 pts)	Very Weak (1 pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3 pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)

What is your overall impression of the textbook?		X				
	Not at all (0 pts)	Strong reservations (1 pt)	Limited willingness (2 pts)	Willing (3 pts)	Strongly willing (4 pts)	Enthusiastically willing (5 pts)
How willing would you be to adopt this book?		X				

Total Points: 2 out of 10

Overall Comments

If you were to recommend this textbook to colleagues, what merits of the textbook would you highlight?

- The merit of this textbook is that it is in a relatively attractive format for students, and that it is marginally better than many other options available in OER textbooks.
- Most importantly, however, is the fact that it also includes pre-1500 modules for more global "ancient" and "medieval" art from around the globe, including North America. This is attractive because it could encourage the survey module to take a more global approach to thinking about the survey, working to use a temporal demarcation to break down the western-centric view of the history of art and its linear development. This is certainly worth mentioning, especially since the modules are readily accessible in the table of contents to those looking at the pre-modern period.
- Modules on Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Native American art before c. 1350 are located even before the Early Medieval Europe unit, and even one on Africa before 1800. This certainly encourages the inclusion of these often neglected areas into the ART 110 survey.

What areas of this textbook require improvement in order for it to be used in your courses?

- The writing needs to be tightened up by commissioning proper experts in respective fields so as to provide students with something more than a cursory introduction to the material and make the text more substantial and help flesh out the thematic organization of certain modules. The same must be done with the quizzes.

We invite you to add your feedback on the textbook or the review to the [textbook site in MERLOT](#) (Please [register](#) in MERLOT to post your feedback.)



For questions or more information, contact the [CA Open Educational Resources Council](#).



This [review](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).