



Beginner's Guide to an Art Gallery

Welcome to our Beginner's Guide to an Art Gallery. To help you get the most out of the experience, we have put together a series of questions and answers about art galleries that we hope will help make your visit more enjoyable.



1. What is an art gallery?

An art gallery is a space for the exhibition of art. There are many different forms of art, but the most common includes paintings, sculpture, photographs and illustrations, but you may also find film and video, poetry readings, workshops, storytelling, dance and music in an art gallery.

Most galleries are free to visit, but there may be an entrance fee for **certain** special exhibitions.

2. I've never been to a gallery before, what do you recommend?

Each form of art means different things to different people. Depending on your taste, you might prefer a more traditional art gallery with portraits and landscapes by well-known painters from centuries ago, along with classical sculptures.

Or perhaps you may prefer a contemporary gallery, where new pictures sit alongside installation art, video and even live art - with real people!

Sometimes, you don't even have to go to a gallery to see art. Keep your eyes open as you travel around and you'll see all kinds of public art – sculptures or murals in the streets, squares and on buildings which are there to provoke, inspire, entertain or just for you to enjoy. Examples around Birmingham include the metal The Iron Man in Victoria Square, which can be found close to an older more traditional stone statue of Queen Victoria.

3. Is art suitable for children?

Many art galleries run introductory days to introduce younger visitors to their collections and the art on display, and there are usually special fun events over the holidays and at weekends, aimed at getting kids involved in art themselves. These could include drop in craft sessions or storytelling.

Most galleries also provide a children's guide to the gallery to help the young make the most out of their visit. You can usually pick one of these up at the entrance to the gallery.

4. If I'm new to art, how will I understand what it means?

Each painting, sculpture or work is typically accompanied by a panel which will tell you a bit about the piece or the artist. In addition, there may also be a more detailed free exhibition or gallery guide or even an audio guide. Staff in the gallery will also be happy to discuss the work on show. And if you wish to know more, the gallery's shop may also stock an exhibition catalogue or guidebook explaining in more detail what the artist intended, how they made the artwork and what it could mean.

Alternatively, you can just enjoy the art on show for what it is, or what it means to you.

5. Is an art gallery for me?

You probably won't know unless you try it. You can get into most areas of galleries for free, so you have nothing to lose by going along and having a look round. Try both a traditional art gallery and a contemporary one, because until you've seen both you won't really know which you like best.



6. Can I take photographs or use a video camera in a gallery?

Normally, galleries don't allow you to take photos or videos of the art works. If you'd like to take home photos of the art on display, it's worth paying a visit to the gallery shop, as these often stock postcards, posters and videos of these that you can buy.

However, some galleries will let you take photos for private use, so it's always worth asking at the reception or checking the gallery's website before you go.

7. Can I sketch?

Sketching is usually allowed in galleries using a small hand-held pad of paper and a pencil, graphite

stick or felt-tipped pen at the discretion of security staff and subject to visitor numbers.

Pastels, wax crayons, charcoal and fountain pens are usually not allowed. If you plan on sketching contact the gallery in advance for advice.

8. Why do some galleries charge for entry to some exhibitions?

In common with other museums and art galleries some do find it necessary to charge for major temporary exhibitions. Large temporary loan exhibitions cost an enormous amount to organise, including the cost of transporting paintings from abroad, research, publicity costs and producing supporting information. The small charge that applies on occasions goes some way to supporting these costs, whilst enabling exhibitions of major works to take place locally.

9. Why do galleries offer free admission to their permanent collections?

Galleries like to provide access to art works for the education and enjoyment of the widest possible audience, so offer free admission during the most convenient opening hours.

Adapted with kind permission of [The National Gallery](#).

Images kindly supplied by [Compton Verney](#) and [Ikon Gallery](#).

Image 1: J Street Project, Compton Verney

Image 2: Boy and Painting, Compton Verney

Image 3: Children Looking at Picture, Ikon Gallery

