

Course Companion

AP 2-D Art and Design

Every topic handout in one volume

exercises.lol

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Elements of Art

AP 2-D Art and Design

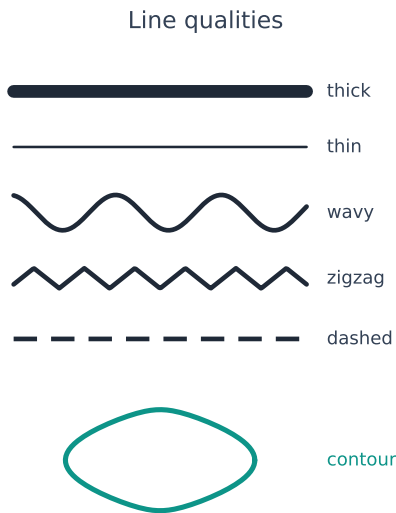
Line

The **elements of art** are the visual “building blocks” every artist uses. The first is **line** — a moving point that the eye follows.

- A line has **length and direction**; it can be straight, curved, angular, or freeform.
- Lines have **quality**: thick or thin, smooth or rough, continuous or broken, dark or light.
- **Contour** lines trace the edges of a form; **gesture** lines capture movement quickly.
- **Implied lines** are not drawn but suggested — by a row of objects or a person’s gaze.



Hokusai's The Great Wave off Kanagawa: bold curved outlines carry the eye along the wave, and the claw-like lines of foam create movement



Shapes: geometric vs organic



geometric — regular, mechanical

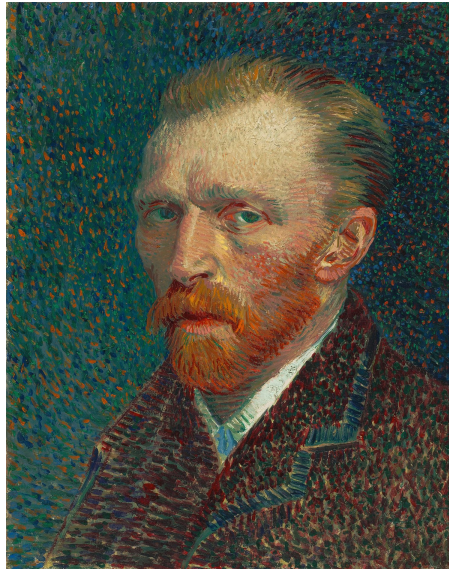


organic — free, natural

AP Art 2-D · Elements · line qualities + geometric vs organic shapes

Line varies in weight and character; shapes are either geometric (regular) or organic (natural)

Direction carries feeling: horizontal lines feel calm, vertical lines feel strong, and diagonal lines feel active. Artists use line to build shape, shade value (hatching), imply texture, and lead the viewer's eye.



Van Gogh's self-portrait: restless diagonal strokes behind calm horizontal shoulders — the same two directions doing opposite jobs in one picture

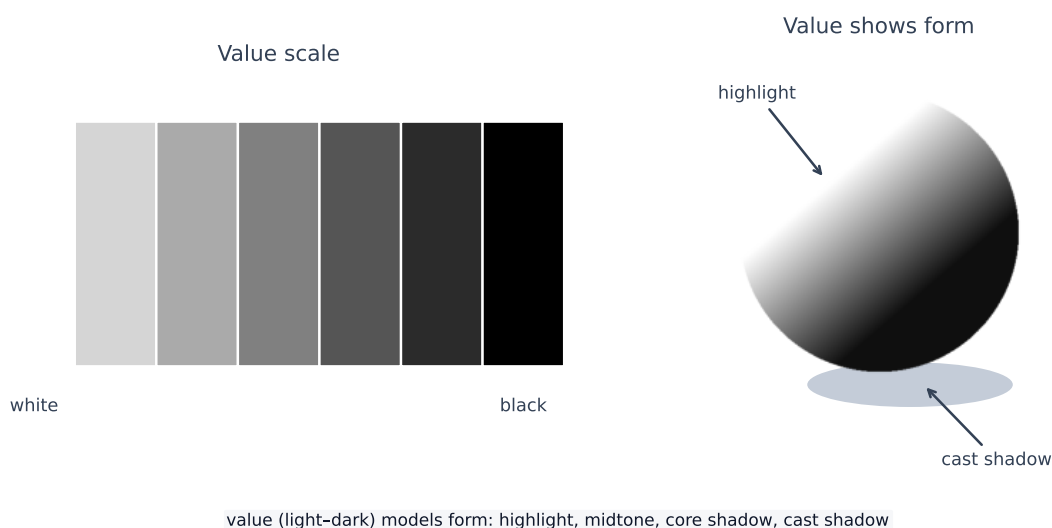
Shape and Form

A **shape** is a flat, enclosed area; a **form** has the illusion of three dimensions (height, width, and depth).

- **Geometric** shapes (circle, square, triangle) are regular and mechanical; **organic** shapes are free and natural.
- **Positive shape** is the object; **negative shape** is the empty space around and between objects — learning to see it makes drawing far more accurate.
- Form is created on a flat surface with **value** (shading), overlapping, and perspective.

Value

Value is the lightness or darkness of a tone — the single most powerful tool for showing three-dimensional form.



A value scale steps evenly from white to black; strong value contrast creates drama and a focal point

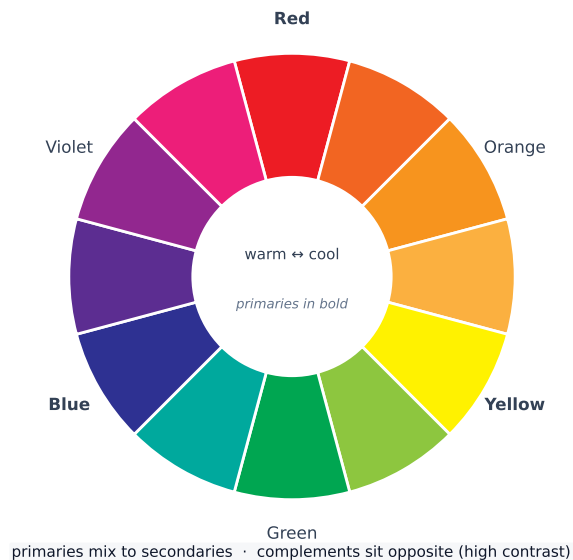
- A **value scale** runs from white through greys to black.
- Light on a form has a **highlight**, **midtone**, a **core shadow**, **reflected light**, and a **cast shadow**.
- **Chiaroscuro** is the bold use of light and dark to model form. Squinting removes colour and helps you judge value.



Joseph Wright's A Philosopher Lecturing on the Orrery: one hidden light in the centre creates strong value contrast (chiaroscuro), lifting each face out of the dark

Color

Colour is light reflected from a surface. It has three properties and follows the logic of the **colour wheel**.



Primary colours mix to secondary and tertiary hues; complementary colours sit opposite each other

- Colour's three properties: **hue** (its name), **value** (light/dark), and **saturation** (dull to vivid).
- **Primary** (red, yellow, blue) mix to make **secondary** and **tertiary** colours.
- **Complementary** colours sit opposite on the wheel: placed side by side they intensify each other, but **mixed** together they **neutralise** into a dull grey-brown. **Analogous** colours sit next to each other and harmonise.
- **Warm** colours (red, orange, yellow) advance; **cool** colours (blue, green, violet) recede. A **tint** adds white, a **shade** adds black.



Van Gogh's Sunflowers is built almost entirely from warm yellows and oranges, an analogous colour scheme that feels bright and unified

Texture

Texture is the surface quality of a work — how it feels, or how it appears to feel.

- **Actual (tactile) texture** can be physically touched (thick paint, collage, rough paper).
- **Implied (visual) texture** is the illusion of a surface, made with marks, value, and pattern.
- Techniques include stippling, hatching, **impasto** (thick paint), and dry-brush. Contrasting smooth and rough areas adds interest and can direct the eye.



Woven denim close-up: texture is the surface quality you can see or feel — actual or implied

Space

Space is the area within, around, and between the parts of a work, including the illusion of depth on a flat surface.

- **Positive space** is filled by the subject; **negative space** is the empty area around it.
- Depth is created with **overlapping**, size, placement, and detail.
- A scene organises into three depth planes: **foreground** (nearest), **middle ground**, and **background** (farthest). The nearest plane usually carries the most detail and contrast, the farthest the least.

- **Linear perspective** uses a horizon line and **vanishing point** so parallel lines converge; **atmospheric perspective** makes distant things paler, bluer, and less detailed.
- The **format** and **cropping** of the picture plane shape how the space is read.

Worked example (applying the concept). Asked to describe how **line** creates meaning in a portrait, a strong answer names the element, its quality, and its effect: *“The artist uses thick, jagged diagonal lines in the background, and their restless, active direction makes the calm horizontal lines of the sitter’s shoulders feel even more still.”* Naming the element **and** linking it to a feeling is what portfolio written evidence and analysis questions both reward.

Exam tips

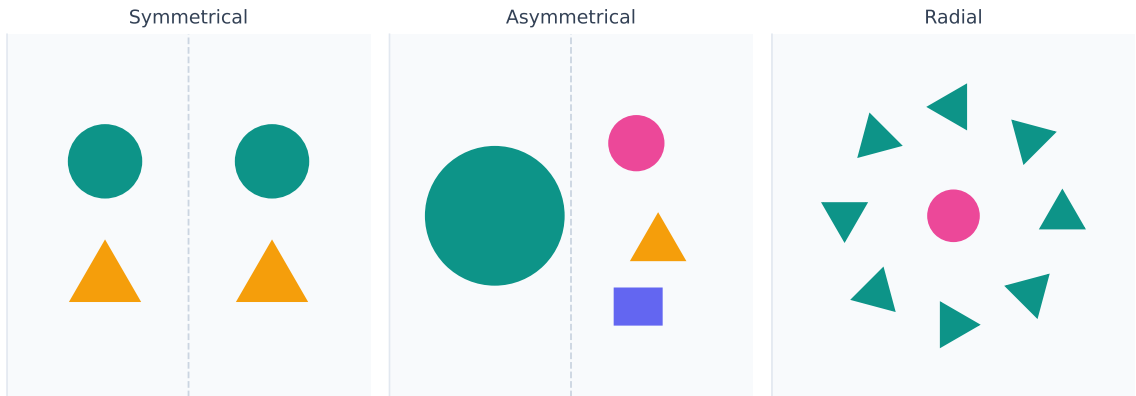
- Name the **element** precisely — line, shape or form, **value**, colour, texture, space — in any analysis.
- Justify how **form** is modelled with a **value scale** and a single light source.
- Read the **colour wheel**: identify **complementary** versus **analogous** schemes and warm or cool temperature.
- Separate **shape** (2-D) from **form** (3-D) and **actual** from **implied texture**.
- Explain depth with **overlap**, size, **linear perspective**, and **atmospheric perspective**.

Principles of Design

AP 2-D Art and Design

Balance

The **principles of design** are the “rules” for arranging the elements of art.
The first is **balance** — the visual distribution of weight so a work feels stable.

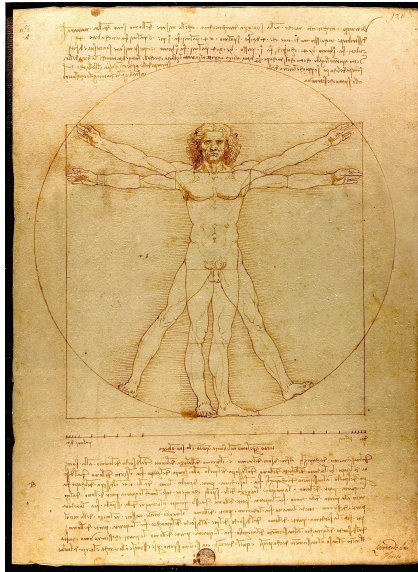


AP Art 2-D · Principles · symmetrical, asymmetrical, radial balance

Symmetrical balance mirrors a central axis; asymmetrical balance weighs different elements; radial balance radiates from a centre

- **Symmetrical (formal) balance** mirrors both sides of a central axis — calm and orderly.
- **Asymmetrical (informal) balance** uses different elements of equal visual weight — dynamic and lively.
- **Radial balance** arranges elements around a central point.

Visual weight is affected by size, colour, value, and position: a small bright shape can balance a large dull one.



Leonardo's Vitruvian Man: the figure is drawn with near-perfect symmetry about a central vertical axis, and the surrounding circle gives it radial balance too



Composition balances light, mass, and interest across the picture plane

Emphasis and Focal Point

Emphasis makes one part of a work stand out as the centre of interest — the
focal point , where the eye is drawn first.

- Emphasis is created through **contrast** — of size, colour, value, isolation, or placement.

- Leading lines and the rule of thirds help place a strong focal point.
- **Subordination** keeps other areas quieter so the focal point leads.

Contrast

Contrast is the difference between elements — it creates energy, variety, and readability.

- Contrast can be of value (light/dark), colour (complementary), shape, texture, or size.
- Strong contrast attracts attention and defines a focal point; low contrast unifies and calms.
- In design, value and size contrast create clear **visual hierarchy**.

Movement and Rhythm

Movement leads the viewer's eye through a work; **rhythm** is the repetition that creates a visual “beat”.

- Movement is the path the eye takes, guided by line, edges, colour, and placement.
- Rhythm types: **regular** (even), **flowing** (curving), **progressive** (gradual change), and random.
- Repetition with variation keeps rhythm interesting rather than monotonous.



Van Gogh's The Starry Night: swirling brushstrokes sweep the eye across the sky (movement), and the repeated curls give it a rolling rhythm

Pattern and Repetition

Repetition reuses an element; a **pattern** is the repeated element arranged in a predictable way.

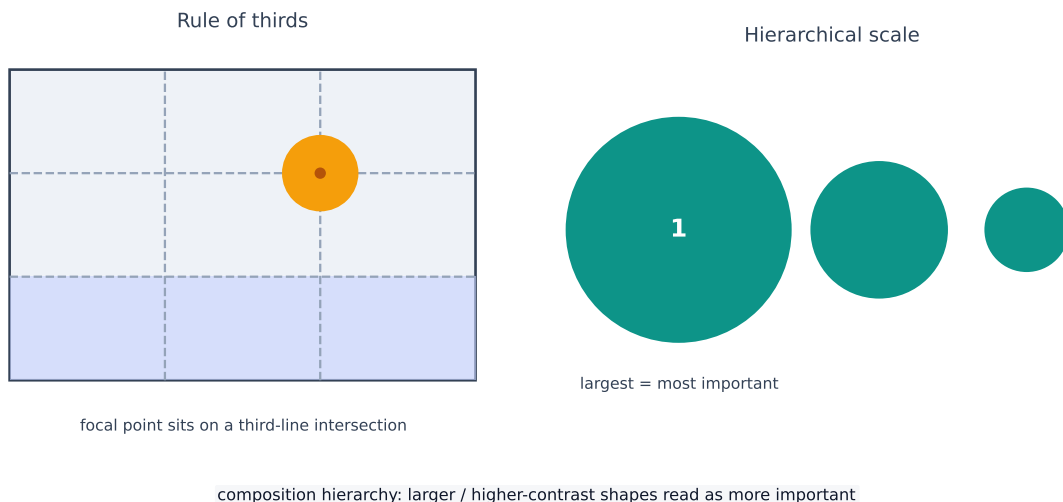
- Repetition of shape, colour, or line builds unity and rhythm.
- A pattern is a repeated **motif** — regular (a grid or tessellation) or irregular.
- Too much repetition feels monotonous; changing scale or colour adds variety.



William Morris's Strawberry Thief: one motif of birds among strawberries repeats in a regular pattern across the whole cloth

Proportion and Scale

Proportion is the size relationship between parts; **scale** is the size of an element relative to something else.



The rule of thirds places key elements on the third-lines; hierarchical scale makes the important element largest

- Proportion compares the sizes of parts within a work (head to body).
- **Hierarchical scale** makes the most important element the largest.
- Exaggerated or distorted proportion can express emotion or draw attention. The **golden ratio** is a historic guide to pleasing proportions.

Unity and Variety

Unity holds a work together as a whole; **variety** adds interest so it is not dull. Good design balances the two.

- Unity comes from repetition, **proximity** (grouping), **continuity** (aligning elements along a line or edge so they read as one group), and a limited palette.
- Variety is difference that prevents monotony. **Harmony** comes from similar elements.
- The best works achieve unity **with** variety — order that still surprises.

Composition

Composition is how all the elements and principles are arranged within the picture plane .

- The **format** (portrait, landscape, square) shapes the design.
- The **rule of thirds** places key elements along third-lines and their intersections.
- **Cropping** decides what is included and what is cut, changing emphasis and tension.
- A strong composition unifies the elements while creating a clear focal point — this is what the AP portfolio’s 2-D skills are judged on.

Worked example (applying the concept). To explain **balance** in a composition: *“The large dark shape on the left is balanced by three small bright shapes on the right — this is asymmetrical balance, which gives the piece visual weight on both sides while keeping it dynamic rather than static.”* A full answer names the principle, points to specific evidence in the work, **and** states the effect on the viewer.

Exam tips

- For every work, state which **principle** organises it — balance, emphasis, contrast, movement, or unity.
- Justify **balance** through **visual weight**, not just symmetry.
- Ensure one clear **focal point**, and name the **emphasis** technique that creates it.
- Aim for **unity with variety** — name the unifying device and the source of interest.
- Plan **composition** with the **rule of thirds** and thumbnails before committing.

2-D Media, Materials, and Techniques

AP 2-D Art and Design

Drawing Media

Media are the materials an artist works with. Drawing media make marks directly on a surface and are the foundation of most 2-D work.

- **Dry media** : graphite (pencil), charcoal, conté, chalk and oil pastel, coloured pencil.
- **Wet media** : pen and ink, brush and ink, markers.
- Mark-making techniques: **hatching** , **cross-hatching** , **stippling** , blending, and scribbling.
- The **tooth** (texture) of the paper changes the line and value possible.

Drawing is used both to **investigate** ideas (studies and sketches) and to make finished works.

Painting Media

Painting applies pigment held in a **binder** to a surface, building colour, value, and texture.

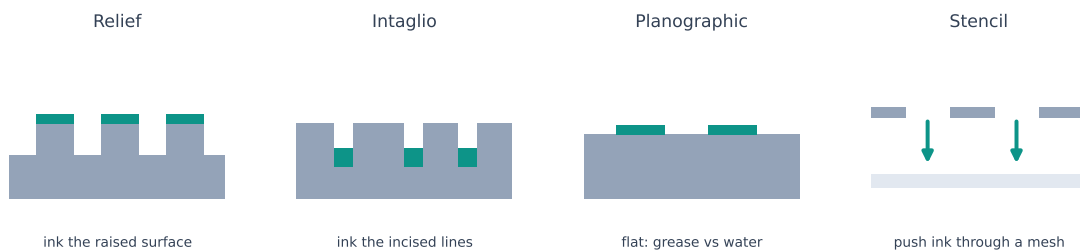
- **Watercolour** is transparent; **gouache** is opaque and water-based; **acrylic** dries fast; **oil** dries slowly and blends richly.
- The **support** and **ground** (paper, canvas, board; primer or **gesso**) affect how paint behaves.
- Techniques include washes, **glazing**, wet-on-wet, dry-brush, and impasto.



Oil painting builds colour in layers: media choices shape surface, value and space

Printmaking

Printmaking transfers an image from a prepared surface (the **matrix**) to paper, so many copies (an **edition**) can be made.



AP Art 2-D · Media · four printmaking families (side-view cross-sec...

Relief prints from the raised surface; intaglio from incised lines; planographic from a flat greasy image; stencil pushes ink through a mesh

- **Relief** (linocut, woodcut) — ink sits on the **raised** surface; cut-away areas stay blank.
- **Intaglio** (etching, engraving) — ink sits in lines **cut below** the surface.
- **Planographic** (lithography) — image and non-image areas are on the **same** level, using grease and water.
- **Stencil** (screen printing) — ink is pushed **through** open areas of a mesh.

The matrix is reversed, so the printed image is a mirror of the plate.



Dürer's engraving Melencolia I: in intaglio the lines are cut into a metal plate, and the fine, dense lines that engraving allows build deep shadow and rich detail

Collage and Mixed Media

Collage assembles found materials onto a surface; **mixed media** combines two or more materials or processes.

- Collage glues papers, photos, fabric, or found objects into a composition.
- Mixed media layers processes — for example, drawing over paint, or print with stitching.
- These add **actual texture** and unexpected meaning; a found material (a ticket, a map) can carry meaning beyond its look.

Photography and Lens-Based Media

Photography makes images with light and a lens; the elements and principles apply to the frame just as in any 2-D work.



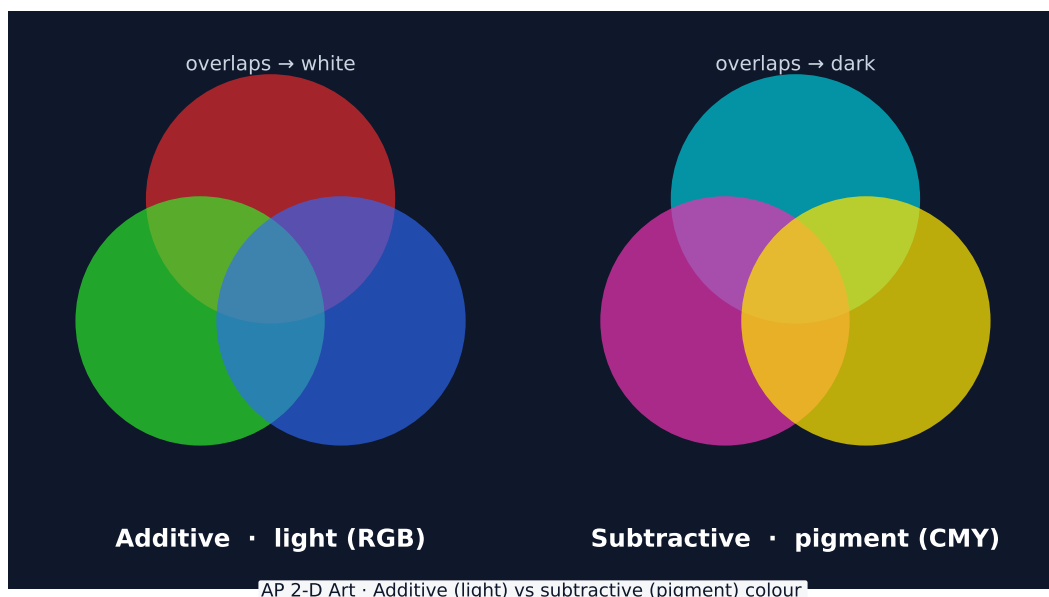
Alfred Stieglitz's The Steerage, a famous early art photograph: the gangway, funnel, and figures form a strong geometric composition, so the elements and principles apply to a photo too

- Key controls: framing, **focus** , **exposure** (light), **depth of field** , and viewpoint.
- The rule of thirds, leading lines, and negative space compose a photograph.
- **Editing** (cropping, contrast, colour) is part of the creative process, not just correction.

Digital Art and Design

Digital media create and edit images on a computer or tablet, working in layers.

- **Raster** images are made of pixels (photo editing, digital painting); **vector** images use maths paths and scale without losing quality.
- **Layers** let an artist build, mask, and revise without damaging earlier work.
- Digital colour uses **RGB** (screen, additive) or **CMYK** (print, subtractive); keep files high-**resolution** for the portfolio.



Mixing light (RGB) brightens toward white; mixing pigment (CMY) darkens toward black

Graphic Design and Illustration

Graphic design communicates a message visually; **illustration** makes images that support or tell a story.

- Design combines **type**, image, colour, and layout to reach a viewer or client.
- **Visual hierarchy** guides the eye to what matters first, through size, weight, and placement.
- **Typography** — typeface, size, spacing, alignment — is a core design tool.

- Design and illustration are **problem-solving**: the audience and message shape every choice.

Worked example (writing about process). When your written evidence must explain a **material and process**: *“I used charcoal on toned paper because its soft, smudgeable line let me build deep shadow quickly, and I lifted highlights with an eraser to suggest form.”* Notice the shape — name the medium, say *why* you chose it, and connect it to the **idea** you were exploring. Listing a material with no reason earns little.

Exam tips

- Match the **medium** to the intended effect, and justify the choice.
- For **printmaking**, state **relief** versus **intaglio**, and remember the printed image reverses.
- Explain **transparent** versus **opaque** paint, and **layers** and **vector** versus **raster** in digital work.
- Treat **collage** and **mixed media** materials as meaning, not just texture.
- In **graphic design**, show a clear visual **hierarchy** serving the message.

Investigate: Inquiry and the Artistic Process

AP 2-D Art and Design

Inquiry and Asking Questions

In AP Art and Design, making begins with **inquiry** — asking questions that guide a **sustained investigation** over time. This is Big Idea 1.



AP Art 2-D · Investigate · the artistic-process inquiry cycle

Inquiry drives a cycle: ask a question, investigate, make, reflect — and let each answer raise a new question

- Inquiry is asking questions to find information and drive investigation.
- A sustained investigation is an in-depth, question-driven study of materials, processes, and ideas.
- Good questions can be simple — who, what, when, where, why, how, what if, and why not.
- Questions **evolve**: early questions lead to new questions as the work develops.

Sources of Ideas and Experiences

Artists' and designers' **experiences** inform why, how, and what they make.

- An experience is any event — real surroundings, imagined ideas, communication, or research.
- Reflecting on experiences sparks questions and inspires investigation.
- Ideas come from **observation**, memory, other disciplines, and other artists' work.
- Experiences can be **documented** with drawings, photos, notes, or sound, becoming a resource.



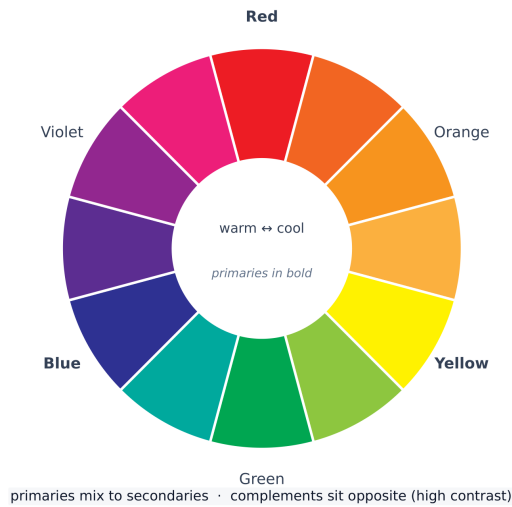
AP 2-D Art • Where sustained-investigation ideas come from (mind map)

Strong inquiry questions grow from experience, observation, other art, culture, issues, and materials

Materials, Processes, and Ideas

Every work is built from three interacting components — **materials, processes, and ideas**.

- **Materials** are what a work is made of; **processes** are how it is made; **ideas** are what it is about.
- The components interact: a material suggests a process; a process shapes an idea.
- Investigating all three expands the possibilities for making, and influences how viewers interpret the work.



Return to the color wheel when choosing harmonies for a series

Art and Design in Context

Works are made and understood within a **context** — traditions, cultures, and other disciplines.

- Context is when, where, how, why, and by whom a work was made and viewed.
- Artists work within, or challenge, art and design **traditions** from cultures around the world.
- Comparing works reveals similarities and differences in materials, processes, and ideas.
- Acknowledging references and influences shows **integrity** — never copying without credit.



Hokusai in context: historical works teach composition for the investigation

Evaluating Art and Design

Works can be **evaluated** by using visual evidence to compare them with specific **criteria** (as the AP scoring guidelines do).

- Observe carefully: identify the materials, processes, and ideas, and how they connect.
- Consider whether the components show **synthesis** — parts working together for one effect.
- Evaluation can be informal (as you work) or formal (a **critique** with peers or a teacher).
- Reflecting on evaluation improves your later thinking and making.



Critique names visual evidence: line, tone, and composition in a master drawing

Documentation and the Process Journal

Documentation records information and becomes a resource for the sustained investigation.

- It takes many forms: images, notes, diagrams, material samples, and written reflection.
- A **process journal** (sketchbook) records questions, experiments, and revisions over time.
- Documenting your **lines of inquiry** shows how the investigation developed.
- Consistent documentation makes writing the portfolio's written evidence far easier.

Worked example (framing an inquiry). A weak sustained-investigation question is really just a topic: *“My investigation is about the ocean.”* A strong one is a real **question** that can drive many artworks: *“How can I use colour and texture to show the ocean shifting from calm to dangerous?”* The question names an idea **and** points to the visual choices you will test — exactly what raises a portfolio's score.

Make: Practice, Experimentation, and Revision

AP 2-D Art and Design

The Sustained Investigation

Big Idea 2 is about **making**. Its heart is the **Sustained Investigation** — a body of work that explores one question or idea in depth over time.

- A sustained investigation is **guided by questions or inquiry** and develops as you make.
- It shows **practice, experimentation, and revision** — not a set of unrelated pieces.
- The 2-D portfolio's Sustained Investigation section is **15 images** plus written evidence.
- A clear, focused inquiry gives the whole body of work direction and **coherence**

Practice, Experimentation, and Revision

Making advances through three linked actions.



repeat



the body of work grows stronger over time →

AP Art 2-D • Make • practice / experimentation / revision drive dev...

Practice builds skill, experimentation tries new possibilities, and revision improves the work — repeated across the body of work

- **Practice** is repeated work to build skill and understanding.
- **Experimentation** tries new materials, processes, and ideas to discover possibilities.
- **Revision** changes a work based on reflection, feedback, or new questions.
- These are shown **across the body of work**, not just in one final piece. Evidence of experimentation and revision is exactly what the AP readers look for.



A master study: practice, experimentation and revision are how 2-D skill accumulates over time

Synthesis of Materials, Processes, and Ideas

Strong works show **synthesis** — materials, processes, and ideas integrated so the whole is more than its parts.

- Synthesis means the components combine to create a unified effect.
- The chosen material should support the idea; the process should serve both.
- When components are integrated, viewers read one clear message rather than separate parts.
- Synthesis develops through investigation — trying combinations and keeping what works.

Demonstrating 2-D Skills

The portfolio must show **2-D skills** — the elements and principles used to organise a flat surface.

- 2-D skills are the skilful use of line, shape, value, colour, texture, space, and the principles of design.
- Skilful work shows control of value, colour, composition, and mark-making.
- Skills are demonstrated **across many works**, in a range of materials and processes.
- The **Selected Works** section is where 2-D skills are judged most directly.



Van Gogh's Starry Night: expressive line, colour, and rhythm as 2-D skills

Composition and Craft in Making

Craft is the quality of making; **composition** is the arrangement of the work — both communicate care and intent.

- **Craftsmanship** is the skilful, controlled handling of materials and processes.
- Composition applies the principles of design to organise the picture plane.
- Craft should serve the idea — sometimes a rough or raw handling is the right choice.
- Consistent quality across the body of work signals a developed artist.

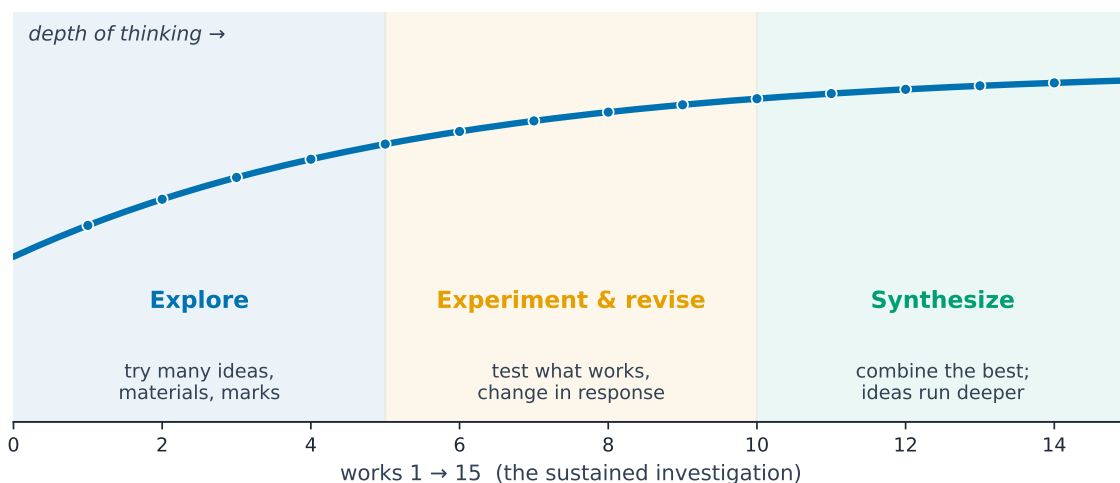


Hokusai's Great Wave: composition and craft guide the eye across the picture plane

Developing Ideas Over Time

A sustained investigation shows ideas **developing** — growing and changing across the body of work.

- Development is visible when later works build on discoveries in earlier ones.
- New questions, materials, or processes push the investigation forward.
- Not every experiment succeeds — evidence of what did **not** work is still valuable.
- A body of work with clear development scores higher than a set of finished-but-static pieces.



AP 2-D Art · How a Sustained Investigation develops across the works

Early exploration gives way to experimentation and revision, then synthesis — the thinking visibly deepens across the works

Worked example (showing development). The Sustained Investigation is scored on **evidence of thinking**, not just finished pieces: “*My first three works used flat colour; after seeing they felt lifeless, I experimented with layered glazes in works 4–6, then in works 7–9 I combined the best of both.*” Describing a change **and** the reason for it is how you demonstrate practice, experimentation, and revision.

Exam tips

- Build the **sustained investigation** as a connected body of work, not one-offs.
- Show **practice**, **experimentation**, and **revision** — a documented failure still earns credit.
- Push **synthesis** and clear **2-D skills**, and keep **craft** clean to the edges.

- Let each work **develop** from the last, raising the next question.
- Choose materials and processes that embody the guiding question.

Present: Communication and the AP Portfolio

AP 2-D Art and Design

The AP 2-D Art and Design Portfolio

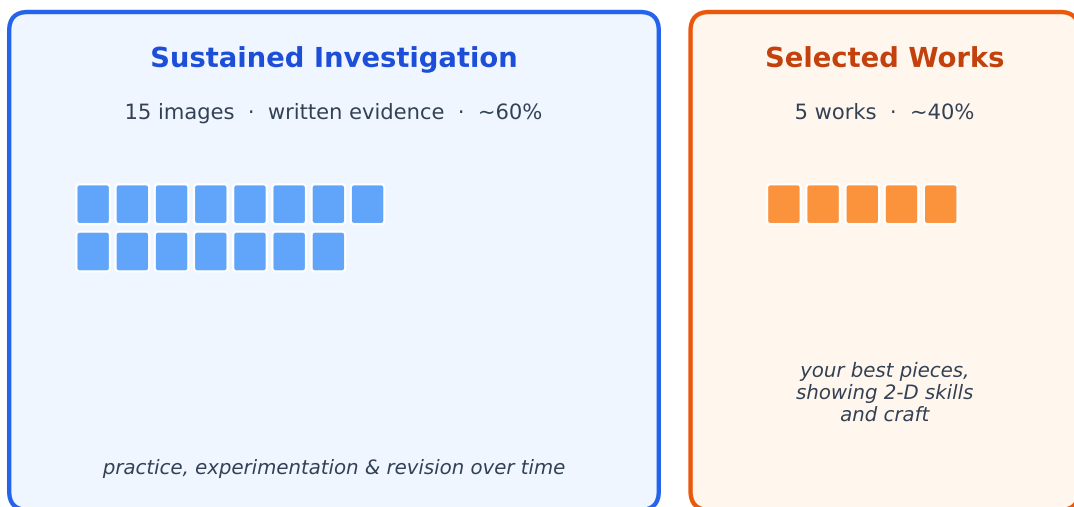
Big Idea 3 is about **presenting** your work. The AP exam is a **portfolio** not a written test. It has **two sections**, both submitted digitally.



AP Art 2-D · Present · the two-part portfolio structure

The portfolio is a 15-image Sustained Investigation plus 5 Selected Works, submitted as digital images

- The **Sustained Investigation** section: **15 images** showing inquiry, practice, experimentation, and revision, plus written evidence.
- The **Selected Works** section: **5 works** that best show your 2-D skills, with written information.
- Works may be physical or digital, but all are submitted as **digital images**. There is no timed exam — the portfolio is built across the whole course.



AP 2-D Art · The two parts of the portfolio and their weighting

The Sustained Investigation (15 images, plus written evidence) is weighted more than Selected Works (5 pieces)

Sustained Investigation: Images and Written Evidence

The Sustained Investigation is judged on the **inquiry** and the **practice, experimentation, and revision** it shows.

- Submit **15 images** — works and process documentation that show the investigation over time.
- Provide **written evidence** : identify the **guiding questions**, and describe how the work shows practice, experimentation, and revision.
- Images should tell the story of the inquiry, not just show finished pieces. Detail and in-progress shots are allowed.

Selected Works: Demonstrating Skills

The Selected Works section shows your best evidence of **2-D skills** and synthesis of materials, processes, and ideas.

- Submit **5 works** (physical or digital) as high-quality images.
- For each, give the **materials, processes, and ideas** used, plus the size.
- These works are judged mainly on the skilful use of the elements and principles; they need not belong to the sustained investigation.



A finished Selected Work: craft, composition and skill must read clearly in the submitted image



Monet water lilies: selected works need clear craft and presentation in the image

Writing About Your Work

Writing communicates your **inquiry, processes, and ideas** to viewers who cannot ask you questions.

- Written evidence must fit within the College Board **character limits** — be concise and specific.

- State the guiding question(s) of the sustained investigation clearly.
- Describe **how** the work shows practice, experimentation, and revision — use evidence, not vague claims.



Written evidence starts from inquiry notes: describe materials, process, and ideas with specific visual language

Presentation and Image Quality

How work is **presented** affects how viewers interpret it — image quality is part of the grade.

- Photograph work with **even lighting**, **sharp focus**, **true colour**, and no distracting background.
- **Crop** to the work; avoid glare, shadows, and tilted edges (**keystoning**).
- Follow the required file formats and sizes; keep **resolution** high. Poor images can hide real skill.

Understanding the Scoring Guidelines

Both sections are scored against published **scoring guidelines** — knowing them helps you build the portfolio.

- The **Sustained Investigation** is scored on inquiry and on evidence of practice, experimentation, and revision.
- **Selected Works** are scored on 2-D skills and the synthesis of materials, processes, and ideas.

- Readers use **visual evidence in the work plus your writing** to apply the criteria. Design your work with the criteria in mind — not to a formula.

Academic Integrity and Citing Sources

Portfolios must be your **own** work; using others' work without permission or citation is a serious violation.

- Work based on **published or photographic sources** you did not create must move far beyond duplication and **cite** the source.
- Never present another artist's work — or an AI-generated image — as your own.
- Citing influences shows **integrity**, not weakness. When in doubt, work from your own photos, observation, and imagination.

Worked example (portfolio written evidence). For the Sustained Investigation you write a short statement about your inquiry and how the work developed. A strong statement links idea, materials, and change: *“My inquiry asked how repetition can show the passing of time. I began with pencil grids, then moved to printmaking so I could repeat one image with small changes, revising the spacing in later prints to slow the visual rhythm.”* One or two sentences that connect **idea** → **process** → **revision** score far better than a description of the finished pictures alone.

Exam tips

- Know the two sections: the **sustained investigation** (15 images) and **selected works** (5 works).
- Use images for **process**, not only finished pieces, and name the **guiding question** in the writing.
- Write specifically and within the **character limits** — point to visible evidence.
- Photograph well: even light, true colour, avoid **keystoning**, and keep **resolution** high.
- Keep it your **own work**: transform any **sources** far beyond copying and **cite** them.