

Line and Mark-Making

AP Drawing

Line Quality

Line quality 线条质感 is how a line looks and feels. The AP Drawing rubric names **mark-making** 笔触 first in its list of drawing skills, and line is the most basic mark.

- A line can be thick or thin, dark or light, smooth or rough, fast or slow.
- A **weighted line** 轻重线条 changes thickness along its length. Press harder where a form turns away from the light or carries weight.
- **Lost-and-found lines** 虚实线条 fade out and come back. The viewer's eye completes the missing edge.
- Confident lines come from the shoulder and elbow, not only the fingers.

Even line

same width all the way



Weighted line

thick and thin with pressure



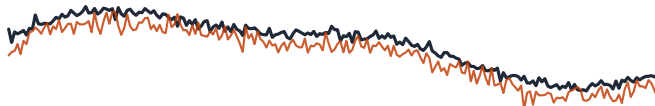
Lost-and-found line

fades out, comes back



Expressive line

fast, energetic, personal



AP Drawing · Line and Mark-Making · four line qualities compared

The same edge drawn four ways: an even line, a weighted line, a lost-and-found line, and a fast expressive line

Line direction carries feeling: horizontal lines feel calm, vertical lines feel firm, and diagonal lines feel active. Examiners read line quality instantly, so practise until your lines look decided, not timid.

Contour Drawing

A **contour line** 轮廓线 traces the edges of a form — the outer edge and the inner edges made by folds, creases, and overlaps. Contour drawing is slow, careful looking.

- Match the speed of your eye moving along the edge with the speed of your pencil.
- In **blind contour** 盲画轮廓 you draw without looking at the paper. It feels strange, but it trains pure observation.
- **Cross-contour lines** 横截轮廓线 travel across the surface of a form, like latitude lines on a globe. They describe volume, not edges.
- Overlapping contours create instant depth: one edge passing in front of another says “this is closer”.

Contour studies make strong process pages for the Sustained Investigation because they show real observation skill.



Gesture and contour from a master study: line records form in one continuous look

Gesture Drawing

Gesture drawing 动态速写 captures the energy, movement, and weight of a subject in seconds — before any detail.

- A gesture drawing takes 30 seconds to 3 minutes. Draw the whole subject at once with big, loose lines.
- Look for the **line of action** 动势线 first: one curve that summarises the movement of the pose.

- Gesture asks *what the subject is doing*, not what it looks like.
- Long drawings usually start as a gesture: energy first, structure second, detail last.

Daily gesture pages build speed and confidence, and they photograph well as evidence of practice.



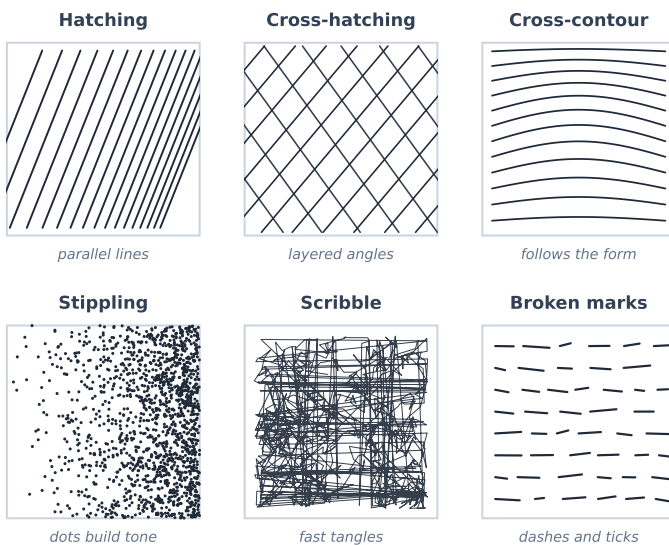
Gesture captures action in a few lines before detail begins

Hatching and Cross-Hatching

Hatching 排线 builds tone with parallel lines. **Cross-hatching** 交叉排线 layers a second set of lines at a new angle on top.



Dürer built these hands from fine parallel hatching and cross-hatching; where the lines sit closer and cross, the tone darkens and the flat marks turn into rounded form



AP Drawing · Line and Mark-Making · six mark systems that build tone

Six ways to build tone with marks; closer and denser marks read as darker value

- Closer, darker lines read as darker **value** 明度; wider spacing reads as lighter value.

- Each cross-hatched layer deepens the tone step by step — build darkness gradually.
- Curve the lines around the form (cross-contour hatching) so the shading also describes volume.
- Keep one angle inside one plane; change the angle when the plane changes, and edges stay crisp.
- Pen-and-ink drawing depends on hatching, because ink has no grey: value comes only from line density.

Stippling, Scribbling, and Alternative Marks

Beyond hatching there is a whole vocabulary of marks — dots, tangles, dashes, smears — each with its own texture and speed.

- **Stippling** 点画 builds tone from dots: dense dots read dark, sparse dots read light. Slow, but very controllable.
- **Scribble** 乱线 marks are fast tangles of line — lively and good for fur, foliage, and energy.
- Dashes, ticks, and broken marks suggest texture without outlining every detail.
- Marks can be **additive** 加法 (putting material on) or **subtractive** 减法 (lifting material off with an eraser).
- A classic experimentation page: one subject rendered in four different mark systems.

Texture and Surface

Surface 画面质感 is a named AP drawing skill: the physical texture of the drawing and the drawn illusion of texture work together.

- **Actual texture** 实际肌理 is the real surface of the work — rough paper, layered charcoal, collage. **Implied texture** 视觉肌理 is drawn illusion.
- **Frottage** 拓印法 (rubbing over a textured surface) transfers real texture into a drawing.
- Paper **tooth** 纸纹 changes every mark: the same pencil reads differently on smooth and rough paper.
- Contrast of textures — smooth skin against rough cloth — makes both read more strongly.
- Build texture with the logic of the material: short strokes for fur, long strokes for hair, broken marks for stone.

Expressive Mark-Making

Marks carry emotion. The same subject drawn with angry, calm, or nervous marks tells three different stories.

- **Expressive lines** 表现性线条 exaggerate speed, pressure, and direction to communicate feeling, not just to describe form.
- Käthe Kollwitz's heavy charcoal and Egon Schiele's tense contours show how the marks themselves carry the meaning.
- Choose the mark to match the idea: soft graphite for quiet subjects, aggressive ink for conflict.
- **Distortion** 变形 and exaggeration are legitimate drawing decisions when they serve your intent — “accurate” is not the only goal.
- A personal mark vocabulary is part of your artistic **voice** 个人风格. Examiners look for it across the whole portfolio.

Exam tips

- **Line quality is judged at a glance** — one page of confident, varied strokes tells a scorer more than an hour of timid rendering. Warm up before every serious drawing.
- **Show the systems, not just the results:** a portfolio image of hatching, stippling, and cross-contour studies is direct visual evidence of the *mark-making* skill the rubric names.
- **Photograph marks close up.** A detail shot of your best passage of marks proves a skill that a full view only suggests.
- **Blind contour and gesture pages belong in your process images** — they show observation and practice, exactly what the Sustained Investigation rubric asks to see.
- **Match marks to meaning in your written evidence:** one sentence like “scratchy graphite lines echo the anxiety of exam season” links technique to idea, which is what scorers reward.