

Artists' Toolbox for writing about Art works

The information below is designed to help you to describe and analyse works of art and design.

Look up and write down the definitions of any of these Art terms you are unfamiliar with. Start a page in the back of your book titled: **Art vocabulary.**

Painting

Materials, techniques and processes in painting

The materials, techniques and processes used in a painting help to determine the work's appearance and have an effect on the way we understand and interpret it.

- What materials have been used to create the work?
- How have the inherent characteristics of the materials been used by the artist (e.g. watercolour's transparency, the quick-drying property of **tempera** that does not allow colour to be blended easily, other than by **hatching**, oil paint's versatility to create translucent layers (**glazes**) to thick **impasto**)?
- What is the painting's support (the surface on which the paint is applied)?
- Is there evidence of what tools the painter has used?
- Have the **medium**, support and/or tools used helped to determine the painting's scale?

Formal features of painting

- 1 Composition
- 2 Colour
- 3 Pictorial space
- 4 Light and tone
- 5 Form
- 6 Line
- 7 Scale
- 8 Pattern/ornament/decoration

Composition

(Relates to the organisation and arrangement of elements in the work into a whole.)

- What is the format (portrait or landscape)?
- What is the dominant structure of the painting? Where is the focal point? Where are our eyes directed?
- Is it formally arranged? Is there a central axis? Is it symmetrical or asymmetrical? Is it balanced? Does it appear random?
- Does it use certain shapes (squares, rectangles, pyramids) or forms in a particular manner? What effect does this have? Are any elements repeated or echoed? What effect does this create?

- Does the composition create movement? How – using a curvilinear composition (circles) or moving from one side to the other, from top to bottom?
- Is it seemingly unstructured? Is it informally arranged? Is it dynamic and exciting? Is it harmonious, well balanced and rigid?
- Has the artist used the **Golden Section**?
- Is the image ‘open’ with elements continuing beyond the frame? Or, is the image ‘closed’ with elements confined within the frame? Has the image been cropped?
- How have the colours been organised?
- How does the composition link with the subject matter?