

Maryland State Department of Education
VISUAL ARTS GLOSSARY
[A Hyperlink to Voluntary State Curricula](#)

Aesthetic Qualities or experience derived from or based upon the senses and how they are affected or stimulated; from the Greek word meaning “of sense perception, artistic;” appreciative of, responsive to, or zealous about beauty.

Aesthetic Criteria Standards used for assessing the effectiveness of visual form. (These may include the quality of the physical perception, emotional makeup of the viewer, and the context in which a particular image is being experienced.)

Aesthetic Judgment Assessment and decision-making about the adequacy of visual imagery. (It is relative, never absolute, and depends upon the character of the form, needs of the viewer, and the environment.)

Aesthetic Qualities Cues within artwork, such as literal, visual, and expressive qualities, which are examined during the art criticism process.

Aesthetic Response Viewer’s reply, answer, or reaction to artwork after studying the work, describing, analyzing, and interpreting.

Aesthetics Branch of philosophy that provides a theory of the beautiful and of the fine arts; a systematic attempt to explore human feeling, form, beauty, and style expressed in disciplines involving creative effort; dealing with questions of definition, meaning, value, and evaluation in the arts.

Abstract An image or design that is not primarily perceived or understood. (It does not have fidelity to the natural, i.e., representational, world although sometimes using a simplification or exaggeration of natural form.)

Analyze/Analysis Noting how the principles of design are used to organize the elements of line, shape, form, color, texture, shape, and space.

Architecture The planning and creating of buildings.

Art Creative work or its principles, making or doing of things that display form, beauty, and unusual perception. (Visual art includes all forms of creative and expressive production in material and media resulting in architecture, painting, sculpture, photography, craft, ceramics, printing, and applied design.)

Art Concepts Theories and ideas about art and how it contributes to human growth, how it may be understood in terms of styles and techniques, and how it rests on philosophical and aesthetic assumptions about making art.

Art Criticism Skill of studying, understanding, and judging artworks. (It has four stages: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment.)

Art Element/Elements of Designs Components that comprise a work of art, such as line, color, value, shape, texture, form, and space.

Art Form The shape and structure of fine arts activity, the organization of the components comprising a work of art into a distinct order; a product or process of dance, music, theatre, or visual arts.

Artist (s) People who use imagination and skill to communicate ideas in visual form.

Artistic Behaviors Artful ways of working and habits of mind that integrate making and thinking and result in visual form.

Artistic Exemplar (s) Examples of works representative of a specific time period, group, artist, school, or style used to model the characteristics, materials, processes, or ideas of that time period, group, artist, school, or style. (Exemplars can be works done by children to model what children of a comparable age would, could, or might make.)

Artistic Style Way of expression shared by an individual artist or a group of artists.

Art Skills Abilities required to conceive, design, and produce works of art through the manipulation and control of tools, materials, and media.

Artwork/Work of Art The product of creative effort in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts.

Balance A principle of art that refers to the way the art elements are arranged to create a feeling of stability in the work, i.e., symmetrical, formal, asymmetrical, informal, or radial.

Color An element of art with properties of hue (the color name, i.e., red, blue, etc.), intensity (the purity and strength of the color, i.e., bright red, dull red, etc.), and value (the lightness or darkness of a color).

Composition Structure or basic organizing plan of all the elements within a work of art; the product of creative effort.

Content Message the artist is trying to convey in an artwork. The content may relate to the subject matter, and idea, or an emotion. (Theme refers to content.)

Contrast A principle of art closely related to emphasis that refers to a way of combining art elements to stress differences between or among them.

Craft Skill; technique; doing a job with careful attention to detail and discipline.

Creating Generation of original art. (This may include, but is not limited to, the expression of unique ideas, feelings, and responses as visual images, characterization, written or improvised dramatic works, music, or dance.)

Creative Process Those reflective thoughts and actions that move from generation to completion of an idea to solve a creative problem such as brainstorming, selecting, researching, organizing, testing, revising, and finalizing.

Creativity Experience of thinking, reacting, and working in an imaginative and idiosyncratic way that is characterized by a high degree of innovation and originality, divergent thinking, and risk taking.

Criteria Standards, lists, rules used to make judgments, i.e., the established conditions that must be met within any assignment.

Criticism A process used to describe, analyze, interpret, and judge.

Culture The shared ideas, beliefs, customs, and experiences of a given people at a given time and place.

Describe/Description In art criticism, making a careful list of all things seen in an artwork; in art history, telling who produced a particular work of art, when, and where it was done.

Design Plan or blueprint for a visual work of art as well as the outcome or product of applying.

Design Concepts Qualities applied through choice and arrangement to control and organize the elements of art and principles of design; used to purposefully produce, understand, and judge art, i.e., proximity, touching, combining, deletion, overlapping, closed and open forms, alignment, and direction. A planning process that refers to ways that components of art elements and principles, tangible or intangible, may be selected, manipulated, and synthesized to create a whole visual expression – a work of art. (Components of the element “line” may be straight or curved; “shape” may be closed or open, touching, apart, or overlapping; and elements and principles may be minimized, maximized, monumentalized, exaggerated, etc.)

Designer Professional artist whose major concern is the development of efficient, functional products that are satisfying aesthetically.

Digital Media Technology driven by computer access with emphasis on web based and print output design.

Drawing Conventions Ways of drawing and rendering form that have developed over time (e.g., conventions for showing depth include overlapping, diminution of sizes, and one- and two-point perspective).

Elaboration Something planned or carried out with great care and worked out in detail.

Elegant Problem A task or assignment that has sufficient **flexibility** to engage audiences from elementary through postsecondary education, that provides for **fluency** of responses from varied types of learners, and which provides opportunities for learners to make many choices and responses and to arrive at multiple solutions that are earmarked by a high degree of **originality** and **elaboration**.

Elements of Art/Elements of Design Components comprising a work of art, such as line, color, texture, value, shape, space, and form.

Emphasis A principle of art that refers to a way of combining elements to stress the differences between those elements and to create one or more centers of interest in an artwork.

Environment Space or context in which a person lives, works, and plays and in which the visual world, including works of art, is experienced.

Evaluation Measures and documentation of student progress.

Exemplar (s) Exemplary Model (s) Examples of works representative of a specific time period, group, artist, school, or style used to model the characteristics, materials, processes, or ideas of that time period, group, artist, school, or style. (Exemplars can be works done by children to model what children of a comparable age would, could, or might make.)

Expressive Qualities The feelings, moods, and ideas communicated to the viewer through an artwork.

Extrinsic Operating from and acting upon the outside nature of a person.

Fine Arts Dance, Music, Theatre, and the Visual Arts; painting, sculpture, architecture, drama, and literature, etc.

Flexibility Characterized by a readiness to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements.

Fluency Smooth and rapid effortlessness, flowing from one idea to another.

Form An element of art that is three-dimensional (having height, width, and depth) and which encloses volume, i.e., cubes, spheres, pyramids, and cylinders; the configuration or shape of an object in two-dimensional or three-dimensional space; and art marked by a distinctive style, form, or content.

Form (s) of Human Expression The manner in which the artist presents the subject matter or content of a work of art. (Form is the product of the organization, design, composition, and manipulation of materials.)

Function Refers to the intended use or purpose of an object.

Genre Category of art marked by a distinctive style, form, or content, i.e., still life, portrait, etc.; representation of subjects and scenes from everyday life, i.e. works by Vermeer, the 17th century Dutch painter.

Gradation A principle of art referring to a way of combining art elements by using a series of gradual changes in those elements, usually a step-by-step change.

Harmony/Unity A principle of art referring to a way of combining the elements of art to accent their similarities and bring the parts of an image or form into a whole.

Image (s) Physical likeness or representation of a person, place, event, or idea made visible through an art process.

Imagination The act of recalling natural and human-made objects, animals, people, places, and events from one's past experiences and rearranging them in a new or unusual order or format.

Interpret/Interpretation In art criticism, determining and explaining the meaning, mood, or idea of artwork; In art history, noting how the sense of time and place affect an artist's style and subject matter.

Intrinsic Operating from and acting upon internal instincts of a person.

Judge/Judgment In art criticism, making a decision about an artwork's success or lack of success and providing the reasons to support the decision. In art history, deciding whether an artwork introduces a new style or if it is an outstanding example of a particular style.

Line An element of art, which refers to, the continuous mark made on a surface by a moving point, i.e., 2-dimensional pencil marks on paper or 3-dimensional wire lines. (Line is often an outline, contour, or silhouette.)

Medium/Media The material and associated techniques used in an art form, such as watercolor, charcoal, or any other vehicle for visual expression.

Memory The act of recalling natural and human-made objects, animals, people, places, and events from past experiences.

Metaphorical Representation The use of metaphors to create visual images that can represent ideas, concepts, and feelings. Metaphors are constructs that have coherent structure, highlighting some things and hiding others, and are thus useful in making sense of experience.

Motif Subject or idea of an artwork, such as “still-life” or “portrait,” or a portion or passage of a composition that may be of special interest to the viewer.

Movement/Rhythm A principle of art which refers to a way of combining elements of art to produce the look of action or to cause the viewer’s eye to travel over the artwork in a certain way.

Narrative Art An artwork which conveys a story to the viewer.

Narrative Conventions Techniques and strategies that allow story telling to emerge in visual form with different kinds of realities including real and imagined; the conscious and the subconscious; and the past, present, and, future. (A sampling of narrative techniques includes different points of view, different times of day, different seasons of the year, settings, weather and climate, environment, emotion, action, change, characters, book formats, scroll and accordion formats, story boards, text and dialogue, beginning, middle, and end, cause and effect, what if, and what happens next.)

Narrative Drawing A way of telling stories visually; a narrative drawing can consist of a single image or a sequence of images.

Natural Shapes/Forms Shapes and forms made by the forces of nature.

Observation The act of sensing or perceiving through sight.

Observed Forms Objects that are natural or human made and perceived primarily through sight.

Organizational Structures Ways the art elements and principles of design are used to create effects in works of art.

Originality Freshness of idea, design, or style; the result of independent thought or constructive imagination.

Pattern A decorative design, usually of a repeated figure or motif; the overall composition or layout of a work art.

Perception Information obtained through the senses; observation; quick, acute, and intuitive cognition.

Phenomena An occurrence or fact directly perceptible by the senses; that which appears real to the senses, regardless of whether its underlying existence is proved or its nature understood.

Physical Qualities Composed of or relating to things that occupy space and can be perceived by the senses.

Portfolio A collection of documents and art works representative of a person's completed works and/or works in progress.

Postmodernism A complex concept that challenges formal elements of art and invites multiple approaches to art with a focus on increasing awareness of societal problems, environmental issues, and art for society's sake.

Principles of Design/Principles of Art Organizing concepts for perceiving and understanding the elements of art such as balance, rhythm, movement, repetition, harmony, gradation, proportion, emphasis, contrast, variety and unity.

Problem Solving The process of finding a solution to a stated problem. (Convergent problem solving tasks require the identification of one correct response; divergent problem solving tasks require the formation of multiple solutions to a problem, e.g., generating a list of uses for an object.)

Process The manipulative skills of a specific method of painting, sculpture, etc., such as the techniques used for watercolor painting, copper enameling, or ceramic glazing.

Proportion A principle of art referring to the relationship of various elements of art to the whole composition and to each other; also refers to size relationships.

Repetition A principle of art closely related to harmony that refers to a way of combining art elements so that the same element (s) are used over and over again.

Representational Accuracy A style of art in which the goal is to render an image or object realistically and with as much accuracy and detail as possible.

Representational Art Images or forms in which the natural world is depicted accurately.

Representational Crisis That period of time for which an intervention strategy is needed for a person that struggles to accurately render the three-dimensional form of an object or person.

Responding A combination of affective, cognitive, and physical behaviors. (Responding involves a level of perceptual or observational skill; a description, analysis, or interpretation on the part of the participant; and sometimes a judgment or evaluation based on criteria.)

Rhythm/Movement A principle of art referring to a way of combining art elements to produce a look and feel of action or to cause the viewer's eye to travel over the artwork in a certain way.

Schema A representation with no intentional experience expressed; a symbol for the thing itself.

Sculpture A three-dimensional work of art which may be carved, modeled, constructed, or cast.

Shape The element of art that has two dimensions: length and width.

Space An art element that can be described as two- or three-dimensional in reference to the distance or area between, around, above, below, or within objects. (Volume refers to the space within a form.)

Still Life A composition of inanimate objects.

Story A visual or verbal narrative related to real experiences, imagined experiences, or a combination of both. A story can be presented sequentially or as an isolated moment in time.

Storytelling The act of sharing stories, either visually or verbally.

Style Manner or process of employing tools and materials in a work of art in such a way as to communicate the personality of an artist, school, or group; artists whose thoughts, words, or style demonstrate a common influence or unifying belief.

Stylistic Elements Those characteristics that define a particular art period, group, artist, or school of artwork.

Stylistic Methods The manner in which artists manipulate and apply materials, tools, and techniques to achieve desired aesthetic intentions that are individually distinctive or recognized as part of a larger group or school.

Subject/Subject Matter That which is represented in a work of art. (In a portrait, the subject is the person depicted; in a landscape, the subject is the actual scene; in abstract art, the subject may only exist in the artist's mind.)

Symbol A form, image, or subject representing a meaning other than the one with which it is usually associated.

Symbolic Form Object or configuration used to represent or evoke associated ideas, meanings, and values through analogy, metaphor, or personification.

Symbolic Language A language that uses signs and symbols to refer to or denote meaning.

Technique Specific method or approach to art making, including the use of tools and equipment, the application of media, manipulation and control of materials, etc.; any way of working with art materials to create an art object.

Technologies/Technology Skill and knowledge connected to revolutionizing ways of doing and making; invention of new ideas or new ways of doing and making things.

Texture An element of art referring to surface qualities; the look or feel of objects.

Thematic Works A series of artworks that have a commonality, i.e., the same subject matter, style, technique, concept such as works about life and leisure, life and work.

Transformation The act of changing, altering, or converting.

Unity/Harmony A principal of design referring to ways of combining art elements to achieve wholeness or total effect in works of art that is consequent upon the successful combining of all elements and constituent parts.

Universal Theme (s) Artworks from a variety of cultures that share a commonality based in human experiences and that show the relationships of individuals to each other and within social groups. (Examples include use of the same subject matter, styles, techniques, and concepts such as containers, entranceways, rites of passage, fabrics for life, places to live, life and leisure, life and work, conflict, the human figure, couples, animals, landscapes, allegory, myth, and fantasy.)

Value An element of art that describes the lightness or darkness of a color; the gradual changes in drawings, woodcuts, photographs, etc. even when color is absent.

Variety A principle of art that refers to ways of combining art elements in involved ways to achieve intricate and complex relationships.

Visual Concepts Descriptive qualities of form and structure such as straight and curved, open and closed, spiral and concentric.

Visual Form Visual and spatial attributes (including shape, line, texture, color, value, volume, and/or space) that have relationships within a given whole.

Visual Qualities Aspects of design elements and principles used to create and critique artwork.

Visual Thinking Perception; mental representation and ordering of information using images or figures.

Volume Space within a form.

Western Works of art characterized by a dominant European influence.

Work of Art/Artwork The product of creative effort in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts.