

Handout # 2 - 13  
**How To Look At Art: Part B**  
The Tools of the Artists

Artists combine the Elements and Principles of Design in many creative and imaginative ways. Studying composition and style will help you learn even more about artists, the way that they use their materials and what they want to communicate.

- I. Composition – The manner in which the artist presents the subject or subjects in an artwork.
  - A. Focus – the position of the viewer
    1. Point of view – the subject is shown whole or parts are shown;
    2. The viewer is looking up, down or straight at the subject, from the front or side.
  - B. Pose – the position of the subject
    1. Standing, sitting
    2. Quietly or in motion.
    3. The facial expression
  - C. Placement
    1. Grouping – if there is more than one person or object, how are they arranged – in a line, within a triangle, circular, etc.
    2. Proximity – how close or far away are persons or objects to each other
    3. Sight lines – primary orientation of lines and shapes in the artwork
      - a) Horizontal lines – calming
      - b) Vertical lines – formal
      - c) Diagonal lines – movement
  - D. Background or setting
    1. General setting – could be anywhere
    2. Specific or historical – shows a very definite place and/or time
    3. No background or setting is shown
  - E. Lighting
    1. Flat light – the colors are soft and blended; there are no highlights and shadows
    2. Contrasting light – there are many highlights and shadows throughout the artwork.
    3. Dramatic focus – the main subject appears to be in a spotlight

- II. Style – the distinctive way that an artist or group of artists uses the elements and principles of design in their artworks.
  - A. Use of Color
    - 1. Monochromatic – the artist uses only one color with different tints and shades.
    - 2. Multi-color – the artist uses many colors
    - 3. High Key – the artist uses primarily light colors, often with many tints
    - 4. Low Key – the artist uses primarily dark colors, often with many shades
  - B. Use of shapes
    - 1. Distortion – the size of a person or object is larger or smaller, compared to others in the artwork
    - 2. Angular – shapes are primarily angular or outlined in straight lines.
    - 3. Rounded – shapes are primarily rounded and full or outlines are curved lines.
  - C. Use of Surface
    - 1. Brushstrokes in paintings
      - a) Colors: smooth and blended; cannot distinguish how paint applied.
      - b) Colors: almost separated; individual brushstrokes easy to see.
    - 2. Textures in sculpture
      - a) Surface: very smooth and rounded; cannot see the marks of the tools.
      - b) Surface: rough; can see the marks made in carved wood, stone or clay.
  - D. Use of Details
    - 1. Simple, geometric shapes – there are no folds or complex shapes in clothing; few details in grass, trees, fur, etc.
    - 2. Some details – in clothing and objects have an idea of how things are made or help distinguish the type of tree or object.
    - 3. Highly detailed – it is nearly like a photograph, showing every small fold of clothing, edge of leaf, change in color in a person or object.
    - 4. Decorative – detailed patterns often multi-colored are shown in clothing or other surfaces
  - E. Use of Perspective
    - 1. Linear – lines of buildings, roads, and other objects appear to come together (converge) at a single point on the horizon.
    - 2. Atmospheric – the artist uses color changes to show what is near to the viewer (darker colors) and what is far away (lighter colors).
    - 3. Visual – the artist uses the size of the object to show what is near (large) and what is far away (small) or overlaps people or objects, showing what is in front and what is behind.
    - 4. No perspective – there is no sense of depth; everything looks flat

### III. A Selection of Styles and Schools of Artists

- A. Abstract Expressionism
- B. Art Nouveau
- C. Byzantine
- D. Classicism
- E. Cubism
- F. Expressionism
- G. Futurism
- H. Gothic or Medieval
- I. The Harlem Renaissance
- J. Hudson River School
- K. Impressionism
- L. Pop Art
- M. Realism
- N. Regionalism
- O. Romanticism
- P. Surrealism
- Q. Western Art

For assignments #18 – 20 you will research an artist from a specific style or school of art. The list above is a partial list taken from the [Arteyclopedia](#) website. Click on the links in the PPT presentation. Start there with your search for a general description of the style and links to artworks by the many artists who practiced that style.