

Elements of Art

AP 2-D Art and Design

Line

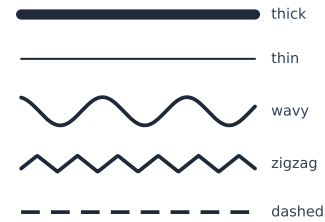
The **elements of art** 艺术元素 are the visual “building blocks” every artist uses. The first is **line** 线条 — a moving point that the eye follows.

- 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** 轮廓 lines trace the edges of a form; **gesture** 动态速写 lines capture movement quickly.
- **Implied lines** 隐含线 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

Line qualities



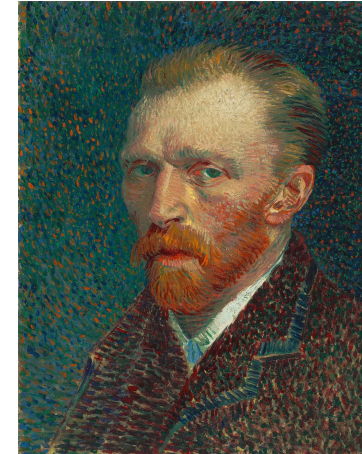
AP Art 2-D · Elements · line qualities + geometric vs organic shapes

Shapes: geometric vs organic



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

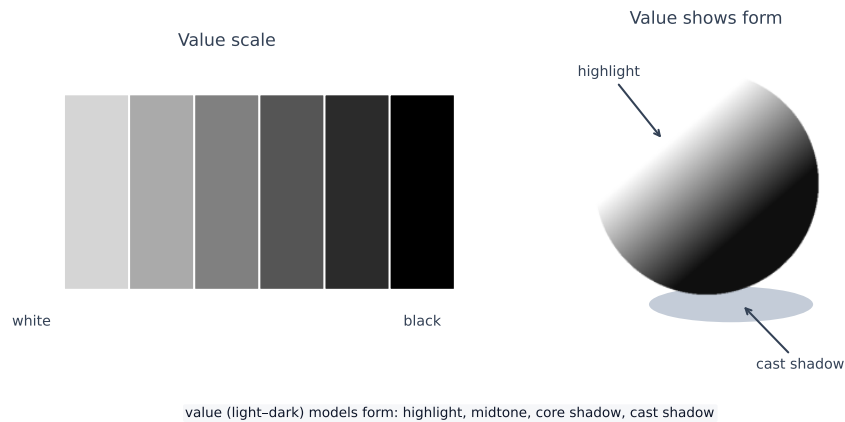
Shape and Form

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

- **Geometric** 几何 shapes (circle, square, triangle) are regular and mechanical; **organic** 有机 shapes are free and natural.
- **Positive shape** 正形 is the object; **negative shape** 负形 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 明度 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** 明度阶 runs from white through greys to black.
- Light on a form has a **highlight** 高光, **midtones** 中间调, a **core shadow** 明暗交界线, **reflected light** 反光, and a **cast shadow** 投影.
- **Chiaroscuro** 明暗对照法 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 色彩 is light reflected from a surface. It has three properties and follows the logic of the **colour wheel** 色轮.



primaries mix to secondaries · complements sit opposite (high contrast)

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

- Colour's three properties: **hue** 色相 (its name), **value** (light/dark), and **saturation** 饱和度 (dull to vivid).
- **Primary** 三原色 (red, yellow, blue) mix to make **secondary** 间色 and **tertiary** colours.
- **Complementary** 互补色 colours sit opposite on the wheel: placed side by side they intensify each other, but **mixed** together they **neutralise** 中和 into a dull grey-brown. **Analogous** 邻近色 colours sit next to each other and harmonise.
- **Warm** 暖色 colours (red, orange, yellow) advance; **cool** 冷色 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 肌理 is the surface quality of a work — how it feels, or how it appears to feel.

- **Actual (tactile) texture** 实际肌理 can be physically touched (thick paint, collage, rough paper).
- **Implied (visual) texture** 视觉肌理 is the illusion of a surface, made with marks, value, and pattern.
- Techniques include stippling, hatching, **impasto** 厚涂 (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 空间 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** 重叠, size, placement, and detail.
- A scene organises into three depth planes: **foreground** 前景 (nearest), **middle ground** 中景, and **background** 背景 (farthest). The nearest plane usually carries the most detail and contrast, the farthest the least.
- **Linear perspective** 线性透视 uses a horizon line and **vanishing point** 灭点 so parallel lines converge; **atmospheric perspective** 空气透视 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**.