

Exercise walk-through

2.5

Tonal Composition and Notan

AP Drawing

Notan – the design of light and dark

Notan is the design of light and dark **shapes**. A drawing works or fails at **thumbnail size**, before any detail exists.

Reduce the scene to **2–3 flat values**. If the pattern still reads, the composition is strong.

Planning the value design before you commit

thumbnail sketches

5–8 cm – they let you **test several value plans in minutes**

why so small

at that size you cannot draw detail, so you can only decide the *shapes*

group your values

many small lights scattered everywhere feel noisy; connected value shapes feel designed

the hierarchy

one dominant value, one secondary, one accent organises the whole page

notan

reduce the scene to two or three flat values and check the design still reads

a toned ground

start from a mid value and work in both directions – adding dark *and* lifting light

The composition is decided in the thumbnail, not on the final sheet. Five minutes of thumbnails saves a drawing that cannot be rescued later.

Notan – the design of light and dark, in detail

Connected values Scattered values



one linked shape many separate spots: reads as noise

notan: design with light vs dark shapes ·
abstract structure before detail

connected shapes read; scattered spots are noise

A drawing works or fails at **thumbnail size**, before any detail exists.

Toned grounds and subtractive drawing

A **toned ground** lets you draw in **both directions**: darker with media, lighter with an eraser.

- cover the paper with an even tone, then **lift out** the lights
- **subtractive drawing** treats the eraser as a **drawing tool**
- a **kneaded eraser** moulds to any shape; a hard eraser cuts **crisp** lights

The mid-tone start **forces value decisions early** – nothing can hide behind white paper.

This process is visible **experimentation** with materials – **exactly** what the CED asks you to document.

Worked example – why a white-object study scores

Include one white-object study in your practice images

Eggs, cups, folded cloth – all white. There is **no local colour to hide behind**, so every value in the drawing comes **only** from light. That makes it **unmistakable visual evidence** of the *light and shade* skill the rubric names.

Photograph dark drawings **carefully**: charcoal darks crush to a black mush in bad light. Recheck the value range **on screen** before submitting.

Exercises 2.1·2.2

2.1 Notan is the design of

[1]

☐

A colour harmonies

B light and dark shapes

C paper sizes

D frame mouldings

2.2 Why test a composition as a 2-3 value thumbnail first?

[2]

Exercises 2.1·2.2

2.1 Notan is the design of

[1]



- A** colour harmonies
- B** light and dark shapes
- C** paper sizes
- D** frame mouldings

2.1 B

- notan = the light-dark pattern

2.2 Why test a composition as a 2-3 value thumbnail first?

[2]

2.2

- if the pattern reads clearly at thumbnail size the composition is strong; it saves rendering a design that fails

Exercise 2.3

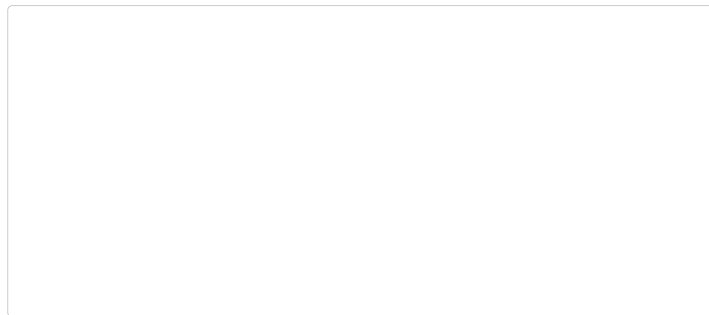
2.3 What is the difference between grouped and scattered values? [1]

3 Studio & portfolio tasks

3.1 Make a **notan study set** for one scene.

(a) Draw four 6 cm thumbnails testing different 2-3 value plans. [3]

(b) Circle the strongest and write why its pattern reads. [1]



3.2

() Enlarge the chosen thumbnail into a small finished tonal drawing. [2]

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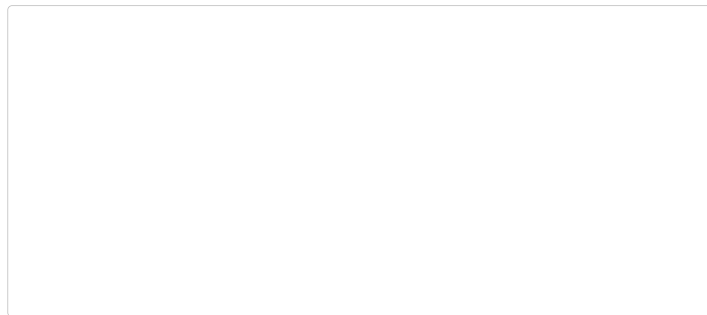
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2.3

- grouped/connected value shapes read as designed; scattered spots read as noise

3.1

- four distinct value plans; each uses only 2-3 flat values; a reasoned best choice about

Full solution 2.3

2.3

- grouped/connected value shapes read as designed; scattered spots read as noise

3.1

- four distinct value plans; each uses only 2-3 flat values; a reasoned best choice about grouping/hierarchy

3.2

- keeps the thumbnail's value pattern; darkest dark meets lightest light at the focal point