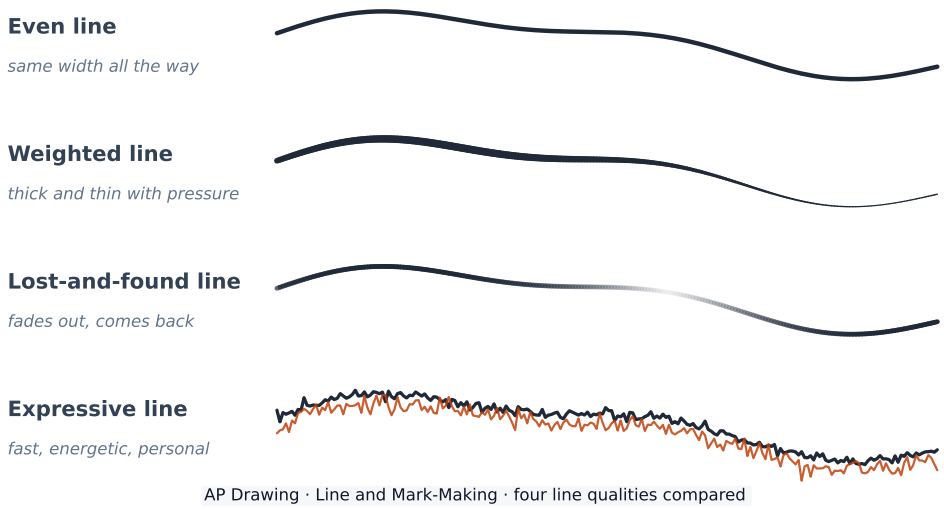
# Line and Mark-Making

AP Drawing

## Line Quality

**Line quality** is how a line looks and feels. The AP Drawing rubric names **mark-making** first in its list of drawing skills, and line is the most basic mark.

- A line can be thick or thin, dark or light, smooth or rough, fast or slow.
- A **weighted line** changes thickness along its length. Press harder where a form turns away from the light or carries weight.
- **Lost-and-found lines** fade out and come back. The viewer's eye completes the missing edge.
- Confident lines come from the shoulder and elbow, not only the fingers.




*The same edge drawn four ways: an even line, a weighted line, a lost-and-found line, and a fast expressive line*

Line direction carries feeling: horizontal lines feel calm, vertical lines feel firm, and diagonal lines feel active. Examiners read line quality instantly, so practise until your lines look decided, not timid.

## Contour Drawing

A **contour line** traces the edges of a form – the outer edge and the inner edges made by folds, creases, and overlaps. Contour drawing is slow, careful looking.

- Match the speed of your eye moving along the edge with the speed of your pencil.
- In **blind contour** you draw without looking at the paper. It feels strange, but it trains pure observation.
- **Cross-contour lines** travel across the surface of a form, like latitude lines on a globe. They describe volume, not edges.
- Overlapping contours create instant depth: one edge passing in front of another says "this is closer".

Contour studies make strong process pages for the Sustained Investigation because they show real observation skill.

*Gesture and contour from a master study: line records form in one continuous look*

## Gesture Drawing

**Gesture drawing** captures the energy, movement, and weight of a subject in seconds – before any detail.

- A gesture drawing takes 30 seconds to 3 minutes. Draw the whole subject at once with big, loose lines.
- Look for the **line of action** first: one curve that summarises the movement of the pose.
- Gesture asks *what the subject is doing*, not what it looks like.
- Long drawings usually start as a gesture: energy first, structure second, detail last.

Daily gesture pages build speed and confidence, and they photograph well as evidence

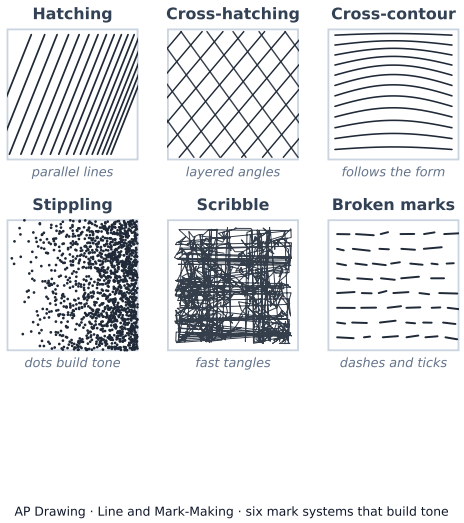
of practice.

*Gesture captures action in a few lines before detail begins*

## Hatching and Cross-Hatching

**Hatching** builds tone with parallel lines. **Cross-hatching** layers a second set of lines at a new angle on top.

*Dürer built these hands from fine parallel hatching and cross-hatching; where the lines sit closer and cross, the tone darkens and the flat marks turn into rounded form*




*Six ways to build tone with marks; closer and denser marks read as darker value*

- Closer, darker lines read as darker **value**; wider spacing reads as lighter value.
- Each cross-hatched layer deepens the tone step by step – build darkness gradually.
- Curve the lines around the form (cross-contour hatching) so the shading also describes volume.
- Keep one angle inside one plane; change the angle when the plane changes, and edges stay crisp.
- Pen-and-ink drawing depends on hatching, because ink has no grey: value comes only from line density.

## Stippling, Scribbling, and Alternative Marks

Beyond hatching there is a whole vocabulary of marks – dots, tangles, dashes, smears – each with its own texture and speed.

- **Stippling** builds tone from dots: dense dots read dark, sparse dots read light. Slow, but very controllable.
- **Scribble** marks are fast tangles of line – lively and good for fur, foliage, and energy.
- Dashes, ticks, and broken marks suggest texture without outlining every detail.
- Marks can be **additive** (putting material on) or **subtractive** (lifting material off with an eraser).
- A classic experimentation page: one subject rendered in four different mark systems.

## Texture and Surface

**Surface** is a named AP drawing skill: the physical texture of the drawing and the drawn illusion of texture work together.

- **Actual texture** is the real surface of the work – rough paper, layered charcoal, collage. **Implied texture** is drawn illusion.
- **Frottage** (rubbing over a textured surface) transfers real texture into a drawing.
- Paper **tooth** changes every mark: the same pencil reads differently on smooth and rough paper.
- Contrast of textures – smooth skin against rough cloth – makes both read more strongly.
- Build texture with the logic of the material: short strokes for fur, long strokes for hair, broken marks for stone.

## Expressive Mark-Making

Marks carry emotion. The same subject drawn with angry, calm, or nervous marks tells three different stories.

- **Expressive lines** exaggerate speed, pressure, and direction to communicate feeling, not just to describe form.
- Käthe Kollwitz's heavy charcoal and Egon Schiele's tense contours show how the marks themselves carry the meaning.
- Choose the mark to match the idea: soft graphite for quiet subjects, aggressive ink for conflict.
- **Distortion** and exaggeration are legitimate drawing decisions when they serve your intent – "accurate" is not the only goal.
- A personal mark vocabulary is part of your artistic **voice**. Examiners look for it across the whole portfolio.

## Exam tips

- **Line quality is judged at a glance** – one page of confident, varied strokes tells a scorer more than an hour of timid rendering. Warm up before every serious drawing.
- **Show the systems, not just the results**: a portfolio image of hatching, stippling, and cross-contour studies is direct visual evidence of the *mark-making* skill the rubric names.
- **Photograph marks close up.** A detail shot of your best passage of marks proves a skill that a full view only suggests.
- **Blind contour and gesture pages belong in your process images** – they show observation and practice, exactly what the Sustained Investigation rubric asks to see.
- **Match marks to meaning in your written evidence**: one sentence like "scratchy graphite lines echo the anxiety of exam season" links technique to idea, which is what scorers reward.

Vocabulary card meanings

line quality: How a stroke varies in weight, speed, and pressure. implied texture: A surface that looks rough or smooth but is only drawn, not built up.