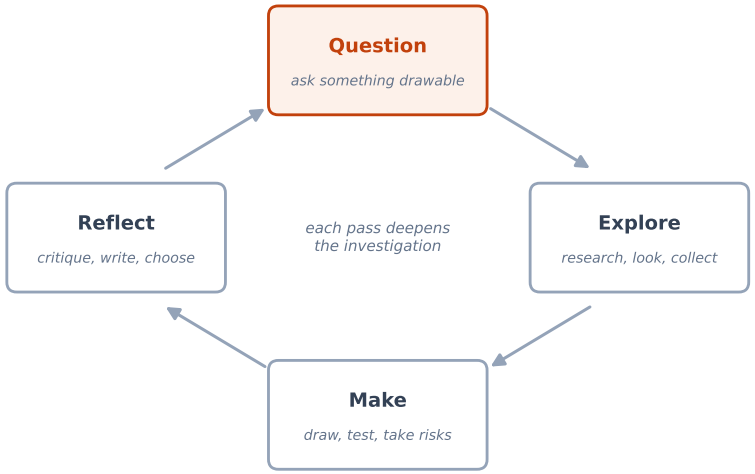
Investigate: Inquiry and the Artistic Process

AP Drawing

Inquiry and Asking Questions

Inquiry is the intentional process of questioning that guides exploration and discovery over time – the engine of CED Big Idea 1.



AP Drawing · Investigate · the inquiry cycle: question, explore, make, reflect

Investigation is a loop: each drawing answers a little and asks a little more

- A workable inquiry is open, personal, and visual – answerable *through drawing*, not through a paragraph.
- "How can line weight express my grandmother's hands aging?" beats "I will draw hands."
- Strong questions generate the next drawing: each work answers a little and asks a little more.
- Test a question by listing ten works it could produce. Fewer than five means it is too narrow.
- Questions may evolve mid-investigation – document the turn in your journal and written evidence.
- The **Sustained Investigation** is scored on how clearly the works relate to and develop the stated inquiry.

Sources of Ideas and Experiences

Artists' **experiences** – surroundings, memory, culture, research – inform why, how, and what they draw. (CED 1.A)

- Ideas come from direct **observation**, personal history, other school subjects, and other artists' work.
- Document experiences as they happen: photos, thumbnail sketches, notes, collected objects.
- Ordinary subjects carry authority: the kitchen table you know beats a fantasy castle you don't.
- Research feeds drawing – anatomy pages, historical costume, botanical structure all sharpen observation.
- Cultural sources (calligraphy, textiles, architecture) bring personal context into mark and composition choices.
- Keep a source wall or folder; when momentum dips, the collected material restarts it.

Materials, Processes, and Ideas

The CED names three working components: **materials** (physical substances), **processes** (actions), and **ideas** (concepts). Drawings happen where they meet.

- Every work is a decision triangle: *what* it is made of, *how* it is made, *why* it is made.
- Let one corner lead. An idea can demand a material (rust drawings about decay), or a material can spark an idea.
- Change one component at a time to see its effect – the fair-test habit works in the studio too.
- Name all three in your written evidence: scorers look for the connection explicitly.
- Charcoal on torn paper and fineliner on smooth film are different *statements*, not just different looks.
- This vocabulary comes straight from the CED glossary – use the exact words in your writing.

Drawing in Context

Drawings mean more when you know when, where, and why they were made. **Context** is an investigation tool. (CED 1.C)

- Study **master drawings** as working documents: Leonardo's studies, Dürer's engravings, Rembrandt's ink landscapes.

- Every tradition has a drawing language – Chinese ink line, Persian miniature, Renaissance chiaroscuro, manga screentone.
- Ask of any drawing: what was it *for* – a study, a record, a plan, or a finished statement?
- Historical technique is free training: copying a hatching system teaches decisions no video can.
- Place your own work in context: which artists share your question, and how is your answer different?
- Contextual notes in the journal strengthen written evidence and show intellectual depth.

Dürer's Melencolia I: historical engravings model mark-making and context

Evaluating Drawings

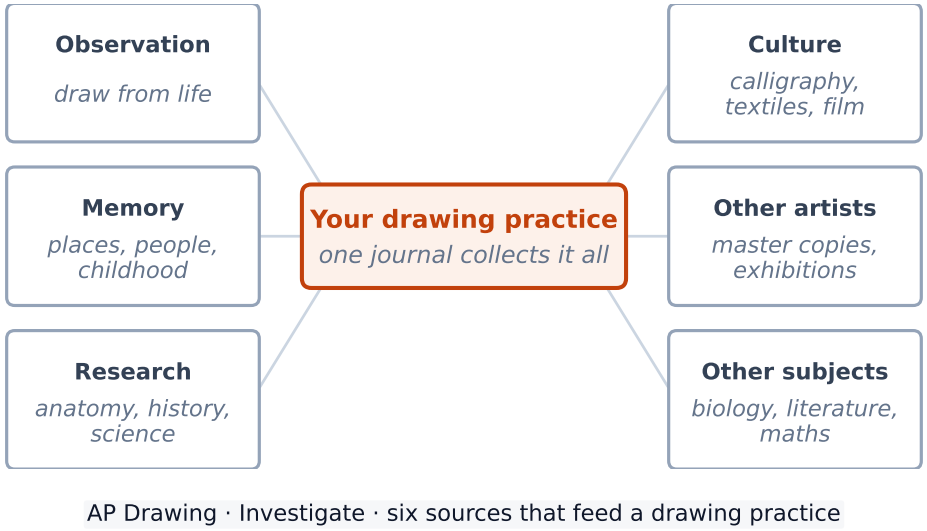
Critique – of your own and others' work – is how an investigation steers. (CED 1.D/1.E)

- Use the four-step ladder: describe, analyse, interpret, judge. It keeps opinions grounded in what is visible.
- Speak the AP language: point to **visual evidence** of skills, materials, processes, and ideas.
- Create distance for self-critique: turn the drawing upside down, view it in a mirror, or photograph it small.
- Ask one focused question per critique ("does the focal point read?") instead of "is it good?"
- Written reflections after critiques become drafts of your Sustained Investigation writing.
- **Revision** decisions born from critique are exactly the development the rubric wants to see.

Ingres portrait drawing: critique names visible visual evidence of line and tone

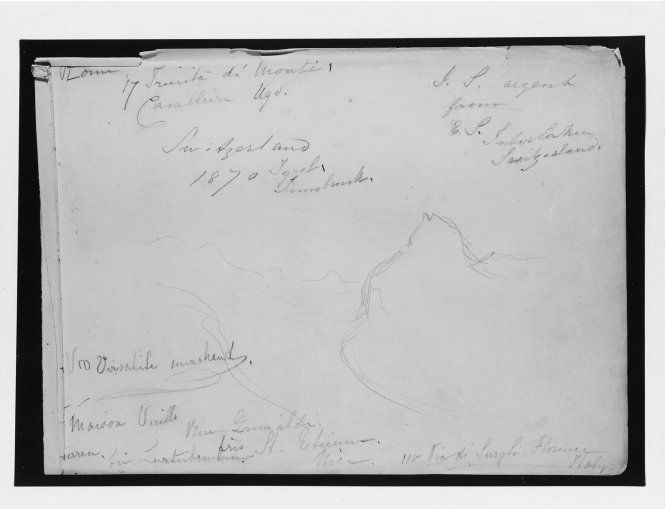
Documentation and the Process Journal

Investigation must be visible. **Documentation** captures questions, tests, failures, and turns as they happen. (CED 1.B)



Six reliable sources feed a drawing practice – collect from all of them in one journal

- Document with anything quick: phone photos, taped-in tests, dated notes, thumbnail storyboards.
- Record the *why* at decision points – two lines today saves reconstructing your thinking in April.
- Photograph work-in-progress stages; a before/after revision pair is gold for the portfolio.
- Keep material tests (paper swatches, media trials) physically in the **process journal** with outcomes noted.
- Process images may be submitted among the 15 Sustained Investigation images – label them clearly.
- A true journal (not a decorated diary) is the difference between *claiming* inquiry and *showing* it.



An artist's sketchbook page: process journals record inquiry, sources, and small experiments

Exam tips

- **Write the inquiry as one clear sentence and pin it above your desk** – every scoring row of the Sustained Investigation asks how the work relates to it.
- **Scorers must SEE the investigation**: tests, failed starts, and revision pairs are evidence; a folder of unrelated finished drawings is not.
- **Date everything.** "Over time" is a scored idea – dated journal pages prove development without a word of explanation.
- **Use CED vocabulary in written evidence** (materials, processes, ideas, experimentation, revision) – it connects your claims to the rubric instantly.
- **Photograph journal spreads as you go**, not in April: process documentation shot in a rush looks like what it is.

Vocabulary card meanings

master drawings: Studies by highly skilled artists, used as examples to learn from.