

Value, Light, and Form

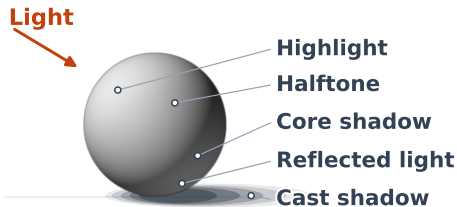
AP Drawing ■ Topic 2

AP Drawing



What we will cover

- 1 The value scale
- 2 Light logic
- 3 Rendering form
- 4 Chiaroscuro
- 5 Tonal composition & notan
- 6 Toned grounds & subtractive drawing



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The value scale – the backbone of drawing

Value is lightness and darkness. We see form as **light** before we see colour.

- a **value scale** runs white → greys → black
- **high-key** feels airy; **low-key** feels heavy and dramatic
- **local value** is the surface's own lightness – **keep it separate** from the lighting



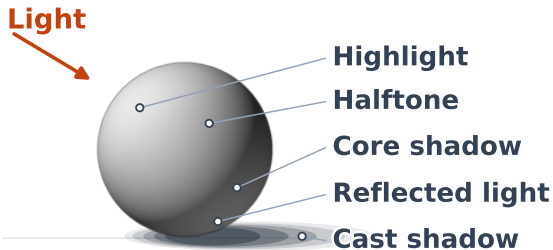
a 9-step scale – the classic control exercise

Most beginners draw **too light** and use **too narrow** a range. **Squint** at the subject – it removes detail and shows the big value shapes.

Light logic – one source, six zones

One light source creates a **predictable** pattern. Learn it, and **any** form becomes drawable.

The **core shadow** is the darkest band **on the form**, where the surface turns fully away from the light.



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*highlight, light, halftone, core shadow, reflected light,
cast shadow*

Reading the shadows

Reflected light bounces back into the shadow side
– but it is **always darker** than any lit halftone

The **cast shadow** is **darkest and sharpest** where it meets the object
– then softer and lighter further away

Hard edges mean a **sharp turn** or a cast shadow

Soft edges mean a **gradual turn**

Getting the **core shadow** and **reflected light** right is what separates students who understand light logic from students who copy photos.



Rendering form

Rendering builds smooth, believable volume.

- every subject simplifies into **basic forms** : sphere, cylinder, cube, cone – **render those first**
- work dark-to-light **consistently**; jumping around destroys the value structure
- a **blending stump** smooths values – but **preserved marks** often read stronger than over-blending

Keep the **lit side** and the **shadow side** clearly separated. Form collapses when halftones creep into the shadow.

A drawing of **white objects** (eggs, cups, cloth) is the classic test: **all** the value comes from light alone – no local colour to hide behind.

Chiaroscuro and high contrast

Chiaroscuro uses strong contrast for drama – the language of Caravaggio and Rembrandt.

- a single strong light against deep shadow **pushes the subject forward**
- **tenebrism** is extreme chiaroscuro
- charcoal and ink wash reach **rich darks** quickly

Save the strongest contrast for the **focal point** .



Tonal drawing: value models form under one light



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: reads as a form
many separate spots: reads as noise*

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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.

Check yourself, in detail

Connected values Scattered values



one linked shape many separate spots: reads as noise

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Reduce the scene to two or three values: connected value shapes read clearly;
scattered spots read as noise

Exam tips

- **Full value range is a score signal.** Scorers see weak, grey-on-grey drawings constantly; a confident black-to-white range stands out immediately.
- **Get the core shadow and reflected light right** – they are what separates students who understand light logic from students who copy photos.
- **Include one white-object study** in your practice images: value control with no local colour to hide behind is unmistakable visual evidence of the *light and shade* skill.
- **Photograph dark drawings carefully.** Charcoal darks crush to a black mush in bad light; recheck the value range on screen before submitting.
- **Keep your notan thumbnails** and submit a page of them as a process image – planning evidence directly supports the Sustained Investigation rubric.



Topic 2 – key takeaways

1

Full range

a confident black-to-white range
is a score signal

2

Light logic

six zones; reflected light is darker
than any lit halftone

3

Rendering

simplify to basic forms; keep light
and shadow separated

4

Notan

design 2-3 connected value shapes
at thumbnail size first

Check yourself

- 1 Can reflected light ever be lighter than a lit halftone?
- 2 Where is a cast shadow darkest and sharpest?
- 3 What does squinting help you see?
- 4 Why is a white-object study strong evidence?

Connected values



one linked shape many separate spots: reads as noise



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Answers 1. no – never 2. where it meets the object 3. the big value shapes 4. all its value comes from light alone