

Value, Light, and Form

AP Drawing

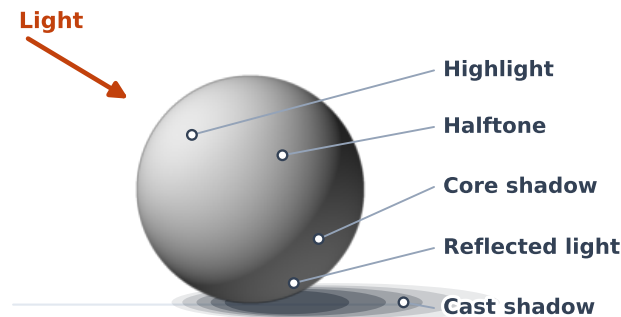
The Value Scale

Value 明度 is lightness and darkness — the backbone of drawing, because we see form as light before we see colour.

- A **value scale** 明度阶 runs from white through greys to black. Drawing a smooth 9-step scale is the classic control exercise.
- Most beginners draw too light and use too narrow a range. Push the darks so the drawing uses the full scale.
- **High-key** 高调 drawings use mostly light values and feel airy; **low-key** 低调 drawings use mostly dark values and feel heavy or dramatic.
- **Local value** 固有明度 is how light the object's own surface is; lighting is how much light falls on it. Keep the two ideas separate.
- **Squint** 眯眼 at the subject: squinting removes detail and shows the big value shapes.

Light Logic: How Light Describes Form

One light source creates a predictable pattern of light and shadow. Learn the pattern, and any form becomes drawable.



AP Drawing · Value, Light, and Form · the six zones of light on a sphere

One light source, six zones: highlight, light, halftone, core shadow, reflected light, and cast shadow

- The six zones: **highlight** 高光, light, **halftone** 中间调, **core shadow** 明暗交界线, **reflected light** 反光, and **cast shadow** 投影.
- The core shadow is the darkest band on the form, where the surface turns fully away from the light.
- 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.
- Shadow edges tell the story: hard edges mean a sharp turn or a cast shadow; soft edges mean a gradual turn.

Rendering Form

Rendering 塑造 means building smooth, believable volume — turning flat shapes into spheres, cylinders, and boxes.

- Every complex subject simplifies into **basic forms** 基本形体: sphere, cylinder, cube, cone. Render those first.
- Work dark-to-light or light-to-dark consistently; jumping around destroys the value structure.
- Blend with intention: a **blending stump** 擦笔 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 rendering test: all the value comes from light alone.

Chiaroscuro and High-Contrast Drawing

Chiaroscuro 明暗对照法 (“light-dark”) uses strong value contrast for drama — the language of Caravaggio and Rembrandt.



Seurat's conté-crayon portrait is built from soft tone alone, with almost no outline; the rough paper catches the crayon to give velvety greys

- A single strong light against deep shadow pushes the subject forward and sets the mood.
- **Tenebrism** 暗色调主义 is extreme chiaroscuro: most of the image sinks into darkness while one area blazes.
- Save the strongest contrast for the **focal point** 视觉焦点 — contrast attracts the eye first.
- Charcoal and ink wash suit chiaroscuro because they reach rich, deep darks quickly.
- Working on **toned paper** 有色纸 with black and white media makes the light logic explicit.

Tonal Composition and Notan

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

Connected values



Scattered values



one linked shape: reads clear! many separate spots: reads as noise

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

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

- Reduce the scene to 2-3 flat values. If the pattern still reads clearly, the composition is strong.
- **Thumbnail sketches** 小稿 (5-8 cm) let you test several value plans in minutes.
- Group your values: many small lights scattered everywhere feel noisy; connected value shapes feel designed.
- Place the darkest dark against the lightest light at the focal point.
- A clear value hierarchy — one dominant value, one secondary, one accent — organises the whole page.

Toned Grounds and Subtractive Drawing

Starting from a **toned ground** 有色底 lets you draw in both directions: darker with media, lighter with an eraser.

- Cover the paper with an even charcoal or graphite tone, then **lift out** 提白 the lights with an eraser.
- **Subtractive drawing** 减法素描 treats the eraser as a drawing tool — pulling light out of dark.
- A **kneaded eraser** 可塑橡皮 moulds to any shape: dab for soft lights, drag for soft strokes; a hard eraser cuts crisp lights.
- Toned or grey paper gives a ready-made middle value: you add only the darks and the white highlights.
- The mid-tone start forces value decisions early — nothing can hide behind white paper.
- This process is visible **experimentation** 实验 with materials — exactly what the CED asks you to document.

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.