Value, Light, and Form

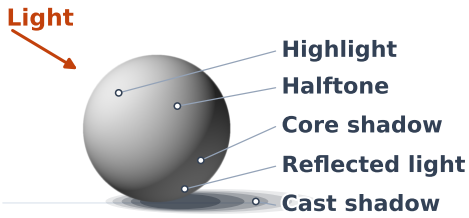
AP Drawing ▪ Topic 2

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



1

Value

The value scale – the backbone of drawing

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

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



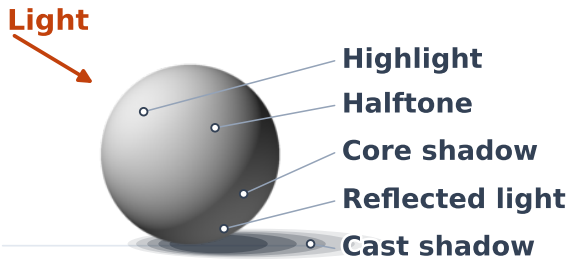
a 9-step scale – the classic control exercise

Most beginners draw too light and use too narrow a range. **Squint** 眯眼 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** 明暗交界线 is the darkest band on the form, where the surface turns fully away from the light.



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

Reading the shadows

Reflected light 反光 bounces back into the shadow side

– but it is always darker than any lit halftone

The **cast shadow** 投影 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.

2 Rendering

Rendering form

Rendering 塑造 builds smooth, believable volume.

- every subject simplifies into **basic forms** 基本形体: sphere, cylinder, cube, cone – render those first
- work dark-to-light consistently; jumping around destroys the value structure
- 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 test: all the value comes from light alone – no local colour to hide behind.

Chiaroscuro and high contrast

Chiaroscuro 明暗对照法 uses strong contrast for drama – the language of Caravaggio and Rembrandt.

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

> Save the strongest contrast for the **focal point** 视觉焦点.



Tonal drawing: value models form under one light

3 Notan & toned grounds

Planning the value design before you commit

thumbnail sketches 小稿	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 有色底	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

Connected



one linked shape: reads clearly

Scattered



separate spots: read as noise

notan: light vs dark shapes before detail

connected shapes read; scattered spots are noise

Notan 明暗构成: reduce the scene to 2–3 flat values. If the pattern still reads at thumbnail size, the composition is strong.

Toned grounds and subtractive drawing

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 tone, then **lift out** 提白 the lights
- **subtractive drawing** 减法素描 treats the eraser as a drawing tool
- a **kneaded eraser** 可塑橡皮 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** 实验 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



one linked shape: reads clearly

Scattered



separate spots: read as noise

notan: light vs dark shapes before detail

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.

4 Recap

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?



notan: light vs dark shapes before detail

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