

# Critique



What was the artist trying to do?

Did he do it? Was it worthwhile?

# Critical Evaluation Handouts and Exercises

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# An Objective Critique Guide

This approach does not judge, but rather objectively identifies what you are doing. It may answer the questions: What am I doing? Is this what I intended? Have I overlooked other possibilities?

**Theme** (Example: Religious, landscape, conceptual)

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**Subject** (Example: Last Supper, Hana Bridge, Love)

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**Interpretation** (Example: Realism, Romanticism)

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**Medium & Materials**

(Example: Painting  
Printmkg., etc.)

**Forming Process** (Ex. Glazing, palette knife, etc.)

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**Approach:** (Ex. Deliberate, Intuitive, etc.)

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## Formal Qualities

**Line** (Ex. Its weight, action & character)

**Form** (Ex. Organic, man-made, etc.)

**Value** (Ex. High key, low key, full range)

**Color** (Ex. Saturation, temperature, etc.)

**Space** (Ex. Flat, 3D, Plane/Recession, etc.)

**Light** (Ex. Source, intensity, hue, etc.)

**Edges** (Ex. Hard, soft, disappearing, etc.)

**Surface:** (Ex. Dull, textured, transparent, etc.)

**Composition** (Ex. Formal, candid, etc.)

**Presentation:** (Matting, Framing, etc.)

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Critical Statements take on many forms. We should be aware of the difference between making a value statement and a judgement.

Judgements such as "I like it!" or "I don't like it!" tells us only about the critic's taste. I may not like onions, but my taste has nothing to do with the onion's size, texture, nutritional values, etc. I may judge the onion to be sweet without imposing my tastes.

# Visual Phenomenon Personal Inventory

In order to tailor this course to your personal needs, take a few minutes to review the following list of visual phenomena to determine your class focus.

*Artists who consider themselves visual communicators, might consider it important to not only know visual phenomena, but to also utilize this knowledge where and when it's appropriate.*

VISUAL PHENOMENON	KNOWLEDGE				USE			
	NOT A CLUE	IFFY	OK	EXPERT	NO DESIRE	NONE	OCCASIONAL	ALWAYS
<b>Space:</b>								
Linear Perspective								
Aerial Perspective								
<b>Light:</b>								
Modeling Form								
Plotting Shadows								
Direct/Indirect								
Colored								
<b>Color:</b>								
Local								
Interaction								
<b>Value:</b>								
Discrimination								
<b>Surface:</b>								
Opacity (Films & Veils Translucency)								
Reflective/Dull								

## MATCH UP THESE CRITS WITH PICS

1. Posed/Candid.\_\_\_\_\_
2. Subtractive/Additive.\_\_\_\_\_
3. Linear/Painterly.\_\_\_\_\_
4. Plane/Recession.\_\_\_\_\_
5. Reason/Passion.\_\_\_\_\_
6. Stylized.\_\_\_\_\_
7. High Contrast.\_\_\_\_\_
8. Suggested/Explicit.\_\_\_\_\_
9. Symbolism.\_\_\_\_\_
10. Synthesis.\_\_\_\_\_
11. Expressionism.\_\_\_\_\_
12. The world as it is.\_\_\_\_\_
13. Idealized.\_\_\_\_\_
14. Preliminary study.\_\_\_\_\_
15. Time in motion.\_\_\_\_\_
16. Allegorical.\_\_\_\_\_
17. Genre.\_\_\_\_\_
18. Frozen in time.\_\_\_\_\_
19. Symmetry/Assymetry.\_\_\_\_\_
20. Contrapposto.\_\_\_\_\_
21. Printmaking.\_\_\_\_\_
22. Classic.\_\_\_\_\_
23. Abstraction.\_\_\_\_\_
24. Political Commentary.\_\_\_\_\_
25. Religious.\_\_\_\_\_
26. Drawn/Painted.\_\_\_\_\_
27. Corporeal.\_\_\_\_\_
28. Distortion.\_\_\_\_\_
29. Simplification.\_\_\_\_\_
30. Assembled/Carved.\_\_\_\_\_

Now, add your own "Crits" to the list.



**TASK:** Using the categories below and tracing paper, identify and diagram the sample composition at left. Apply these evaluations to your own and others' compositions.

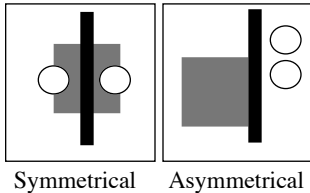


**LIGHT & SHADE: Primary & Ambient**

1. Source. 2. Intensity. 3. Color 4. Focus (Sharp/Soft)

**SPACE**

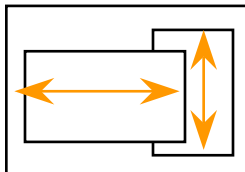
- Division. Identify the primary line or edges which separate areas of the picture.
- Shapes of space. Trace the outline of the negative or ground shapes.
- Spacial movement. Define the long axis of each form. Note how these lines lead or move the viewer through the composition.
- Balance. Arrangement of forms in space. These can be balanced symmetrically or asymmetrically.



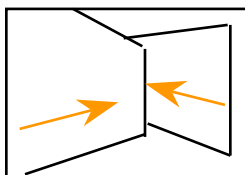
or

- Cropping. How much space is essential or non-essential to the compositional idea? In other words, could additional cropping help hinder. Do the existing frames crop too much?

- Plane. Although the picture may suggest depth, most forms are placed parallel to the picture plane. This tends to separate the viewer from the scene.



- Recession. Viewers are carried into the picture through planes which run diagonally from foreground to background. This tends to include or bring the viewer into the picture.

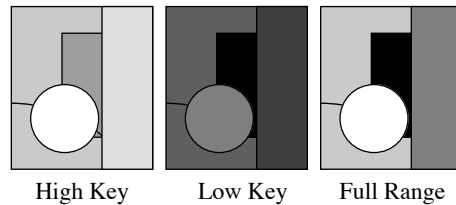


**FORMS**

- Natural (organic or inorganic).
- Man-made (geometric or freeform).
- Dimension (Flat or solid).

**VALUE Lights & darks**

- Key or range.



- Local value. A lemon, for example has an overall lighter value than an orange.
- Contrast. Locating areas of greatest, medium and minimum value contrasts.

**SURFACE**

- Textured.
- Opaque/ Translucent/ Transparent.
- Reflective/ Dull.

**COLOR**

- Hue
- Chroma
  - Tint
  - Shade
  - Tone
- Warm/ Cool.
- Interaction

**EDGES**

Lost and Found. Edges may be clearly defined or lost in shadows. Their clarity will vary according to the degree of value and color contrast with surrounding shapes.

Hard and Soft. Edges may be fuzzy or crisp and hard.



# TAKING STOCK

The objective of this inventory is to identify what we know, how well we know it and whether we need or want to know it.

## Knowledge of Medium

- |                          |                            |                          |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Paper selection.        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Paper Preparation.      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Palette Type.           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Palette Colors.         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. Brushes.                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Painting Board.         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Misc. Tools.            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Inherent Qualities.     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Traditional Approaches. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. Preservation.          | <input type="checkbox"/> |

On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rank yourself in knowledge or proficiency in each of the areas listed. Place a number in each of the boxes to the left of each item.

Check any box to the right of an item in which you wish to develop more knowledge and skill.

## Color

- |                          |                        |                          |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Permanence/Series.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Staining/non-stain. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Granular/non-gran.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Theory.             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. Tri-hue.            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Mixing/glazing.     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Luminosity.         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Harmony.            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Interaction.        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. Themes.            | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## RESEARCH

1. Find a minimum of five different watercolor styles painted by master painters.
2. Identify particular visual elements of each painter or style that attract you to the work. Be specific and objective.
3. Identify those visual elements of these paintings which you find wanting. Be specific and objective.
4. Identify any technique which makes you wonder how it was done.
5. Identify any technique you wish to adopt in your own work. Why?

## Techniques & Strategies

- |                          |                       |                          |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Wet on dry.        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Wet on wet.        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Gravity run        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Back runs.         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. Scoring.           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Resist.            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Gradation.         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Reverse Gradation. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Hard/soft edges.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. Dry brush.        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 11. Masking.          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 12. Glazing.          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 13. Absorbers.        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 14. Lifting.          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 15. Collage.          | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## DEVELOPMENT

**Select** an object which has special meaning for you.  
**Observe** it in relative isolation and under a single light source.  
**Plan** a painting strategy or strategies and techniques you might use in painting a watercolor of this subject.  
**Practice** the strategies and techniques using your current watercolor skills.  
**Evaluate** your work to identify what worked, what didn't work and what you might need to exploit the lessons learned.  
**Identify** what might be done to elevate this study to a work which goes beyond mere technical expertise.

## COLOR LUMINOSITY IN WATERCOLORS: A Painter's Survey

1. Assuming you could own an art collection from any of the following periods of art history, which one period would you choose? \_\_\_ Gothic \_\_\_ Renaissance \_\_\_ Baroque \_\_\_ Romanticism \_\_\_ Impressionism \_\_\_ Cubism \_\_\_ Abstract Expressionism \_\_\_ Pop Art \_\_\_ Photo Realism \_\_\_ Conceptual.
2. Which do you prefer, black & white television \_\_\_ or color television \_\_\_? (*By now you're probably on to my scheme, but go along with it anyway, o.k.?*)
3. Do you consider yourself a colorist? \_\_\_ What is your definition of colorist? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you consider most watercolorists to be colorists, value painters, or both? (Circle your choice.)
5. When you paint a subject, do you try to... ( You may choose more than one answer.)  
\_\_\_ a. faithfully duplicate, in your painting, the color of the shapes and forms that you observe?  
\_\_\_ b. use the actual color of the subject as merely a point of departure?  
\_\_\_ c. think of each shape as a separate color area.? \_\_\_ d. balance your colors. \_\_\_ e. develop a full range of values. \_\_\_ f. create color harmony. \_\_\_ g. create color luminosity.
6. Color luminosity results when ... ( You may choose more than one answer.)  
\_\_\_ a. you paint with full chroma, or high intensity colors.  
\_\_\_ b. you surround a set of colors with black or neutral gray.  
\_\_\_ c. optical mixture occurs between two or more colors.  
\_\_\_ d. color relationship is established, creating an interaction of color.  
\_\_\_ e. when *DAY-GLO* color is airbrushed over metallic powders.
7. Name two kinds of optical mixtures which produce color luminosity. \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_
8. Of these two optical mixtures, which was used most frequently by the Impressionists? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Explain how each of these optical mixtures is created. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Can this phenomena be created in watercolor? \_\_\_ If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## A Guide to Evaluation/Critique of Art

Nelson's students, and others interested in a meaningful critique of art are encouraged to **limit all description to visual elements**. Omit references to personal taste, such as "I like it", which are about the observer, not about the art itself. Avoid generalizations such as "this is interesting", or arbitrary statements, such as "There should be more white spaces". Each value judgment should be qualified such as "This area is weak because its color and form are inconsistent with the strong visual elements of the rest of the work". The following are suggested tangible, objective topics for evaluating artwork, whether it is your own or that produced by others. Using such a list can help you "see what you paint", and also to "see" what others artists are trying to do.

### Art Critique

#### Objective Topics

#### Examples

#### **Theme/Concept**

Landscape	Religious
Traditional	Avant Garde
Political	Seascape
Seasons	Illustration
Everyday Life	Figure
Historical	Social Statement
Psychological	Love
Art for Art's Sake	Universal

#### **Subject**

People	Portrait
Natural Forms	Still Life
Imagination	Event
Animal	Man-made Forms
Color	Reflections

#### **Interpretation**

Primitive	Abstract
Classic	Romantic
Photo Realism	Symbolic
Expressionistic	Impressionistic
Fantasy	Humorous
Conceptual	Non-Objective

<b>Art Form</b>	Watercolor Sculpture Multimedia Quilt	Oil Photograph Wood Carving Blown Glass
<b>Materials</b>	Brush Paint Paper Cloth	Pencil Knife Metal Glass
<b>Forming Process</b>	Glaze Resist Back-runs Frame	Lift Wet on wet Dry Brush Presentation
<b>Composition</b>	Plane Gesture Time of Day Viewing Angle Distance from Subject Editing	Recessional Relatedness Center of Interest Emphasis Omission
<b>Time/Tempo</b>	Climactic Time Stopped Action Static Tranquil	Anti-Climactic Time in Flux Rhythm Dynamic Turbulent
<b>Execution</b>	Deliberate Linear Bold Rough Polished Subtle Automatic Mystique Viewer Involvement Extends beyond edge of Page	Spontaneous Painterly Delicate Slick Detailed Flowing Creative Implications

## **Concept Evaluation**

Personal	Cliché
Unique	Universal
Traditional	Arbitrary
Contrived	Popular
Ambiguous	Primitive

## **Content** (Expressive content= Subject + Formal Qualities)

How do the visual elements relate to the Idea/Interpretation?

Related	Unrelated
Consistent	Inconsistent
Unique	Copied
	Contrived
	Over-Worked
Focused	Unfocused
Ordered	Chaos
Enhancing/Detracting Elements	

**Focus** There must be a focus to which all else is related. The focus must direct all the artistic decisions.

## **Relationship**

Ignorance of Relationship is a very common problem in art.

Each and every part must know about all the other parts.

Decisions should be based on what relates, belongs, integrates, & enhances the artistic statement. Relationship is established by use of all the formal qualities,. Consistent Light and Perspective especially serve to unify a work.

The Figure/Ground Relationship is an essential consideration. If the Figure/Ground is not integrated, the result is flatness, separateness, and poor or no relationship of the parts

## **Formal Qualities**

This is the meat of an objective, meaningful critique. Always evaluate art in terms of the formal qualities. Every part of a composition must be related to all the other parts by the visual elements. Each part must “know about” every other part, work with, enhance, and integrate. This is how, in art, the whole is equal to more than the sum of its parts.

Critique Suggestions: What to look for and think about concerning  
**Formal qualities of art/Essential Elements of art**

**Line:** has Weight: thin, heavy, bold, delicate, varied etc.

Action: dynamic, static, restful

Character: straight, curved, organic

It can construct, render, describe, divide, be implied,

May imply direction or movement, define figures or not  
measure, fill, shade etc.

**Shape:** 2D, round, rectangular, triangular, square

**Form:** 3D, sphere, cone, cube, cylinder

organic/geometric, man made/ from nature

Basic forms in nature: hexagon, spiral, helix,  
branching, meandering

Dimension/scale, large/small, close/distant,

Weight: heavy, light, mass/volume

Character: solid/fluid/hollow, simple/complex, delicate/bold

Composite/modular, random/programmed,  
symmetrical/asymmetrical, convex/concave

Representational/abstract/symbolic/decorative

non-objective, distorted, elaborate/efficient

Action: static, dynamic, rigid

**Edges:** hard, soft, lost, crisp, fuzzy

Defined by lines, form, value, light, surface

**Surface/texture:**

Smooth/rough, soft/hard, liquid/solid

Visual Phenomena

Transparent/Opaque/ Translucent

Film, False film, Veil

Reflective/Dull

Does a range exist? Is surface important to piece?

## Space/Perspective

Flat Space elements, 2 dimensional space

Space division, where & how is it divided? Vertical, horizontal, curved

balance, center of interest,  
figure/ground relationships, surfaces,  
unity & variety

created tension, primary point, position

one focus attracts attention

two focal areas create tension

three foci create closed form between them

3 dimensional space

includes flat space elements

Illusion of depth/distance enhanced by:

light & shade

linear perspective: 1, 2 or 3 point perspective

aerial perspective/atmosphere, volume color

overlapping: closer form hides part of distant form

size: closer objects are larger

position on page: lower appear closer

distinct edges become more diffuse in distance

weight of line heavier in foreground

foreground, mid-ground, background evident

value contrast & chroma are higher in foreground

shallow focus, deep focus

Plane versus Recessional Composition

Plane has horizontal lines, as if on a stage

Blocks or holds back the viewer

Recessional has diagonal tension

2 point perspective at least

movement into 3D space required

invites to viewer into the space

Movement in space

In & out of shapes/areas/form/color/value/lost edge/

Up/down/across/zigzag/radiate

**Color:** Primaries, secondary, tertiary, complements,  
Hue, saturation, gradation, value  
Tints, Tones, Shades, Warm/cool/temperature,  
Range, Key, Intensity, Chroma  
Visual Phenomena/Color interaction  
Halation, Vanishing Boundaries, Luminosity  
Relative hue, Color deception  
Local color, color constancy,  
Complements, vibrating boundaries  
Unity, predictability, design, balance, focus,  
Unique color combinations

**Value:** Range, Key, distribution, focus  
Visual Phenomena  
Relative Value  
Reverse gradations

**Light/shadow:**

Light & shadow must treat all things equally, that is how it creates unity in a composition.

Light & Shadow must be consistent in the following:

Source: nothing can be lighter than the light source

Position/direction must be established and held to.

Intensity must be consistent.

Color must be consistent.

Visual Phenomena and illusion

White light and shadow

Colored light and colored shadow

Functions

Aesthetics, unification, integration, relates, constancy

Illumination, focus attention, definition, modification

Form, value & color are observed only in the presence of light. Light defines form & dictates value and color.