

# 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.

## 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	
<b>Theme/Concept</b>	Landscape	Religious
	Traditional	Avant Garde
	Political	Seascape
	Seasons	Illustration
	Everyday Life	Figure
	Historical	Social Statement
	Psychological	Love
	Art for Art's Sake	Universal
<b>Subject</b>	People	Portrait
	Natural Forms	Still Life
	Imagination	Event
	Animal	Man-made Forms
	Color	Reflections
<b>Interpretation</b>	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.