

Critiquing Your Own Art

Learning how to critique your own art is a vital skill that can significantly enhance your artistry, creativity, and originality. By engaging in self-critique, you develop a deeper understanding of your work, allowing you to identify areas for improvement and innovation. This reflective practice encourages you to push the boundaries of your creativity, explore new perspectives, and refine your unique artistic voice.

Ultimately, self-critique fosters a continuous cycle of growth and discovery, empowering you to create more impactful and authentic art.

The prompts herein walk you through the steps of self-analysis, guiding you on how to critique a work of your own original art the way seasoned critics would. By working through these prompts, you will gain a deeper understanding of your creative choices, uncover your hidden strengths, and identify your areas for improvement.

This process of critiquing your work is invaluable for growth and development as an artist. It encourages you to view your art from a critical perspective and refine your skills. Whether you are an emerging artist or a seasoned creator, these prompts help you to elevate your craft and achieve a higher level of artistic excellence.

Key:


<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Questions or prompts for your consideration, to guide self-assessment of your Work.
	For self-reflection and perhaps journaling to help clarify your thought process.

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Is it “Art” or “Entertainment”?

“Art”	“Entertainment”
Expands the audience’s sense of the possible. Art makes you think. It pushes the boundaries of the known further, into the unknown. Inherent in the artistic experience is the capacity to expand your sense of the way the world is or might be.	What we know already, happening within the realm of what is familiar to the audience and within the range of emotions that the audience is already capable of feeling. The purpose of entertainment is to provide enjoyment within familiar boundaries.

REFLECT & ASSESS:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does the Work challenge the audience to think differently and explore a new perspective? Or does it primarily aim to provide comfort and familiarity?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	In what ways does your Work push the boundaries of the known and venture into the unknown?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	How does the Work expand the audience’s sense of the possible and evoke unexpected or unforeseen emotions?


Five Core Principles of Art Making


When critiquing your own artwork, it is essential to go beyond surface-level observations and engage in a holistic analysis of the Work. Five core principles of art making can help to guide that analysis: (1) intention and concept, (2) process and execution, (3) aesthetic and composition, (4) emotional and intellectual impact, and (5) growth and learning.

Each principle addresses a different dimension of the craft. Walking through how your Work delivers in these five areas will help with the clarity of your original idea to the quality of your technique and strengthen your visual design. When you deconstruct what makes a work of art resonate with viewers, it can be broken down into these five core principles.

Intention & Concept

Reflect on the concept behind your Work:

	What did you set out to express? State what it is you are trying to convey and explore through this Work.
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	What thoughts or emotions do you want the viewer to come away with?
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Now assess how effectively that vision carried through in the Work. This review is about your purpose and direction:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Try to impartially and objectively evaluate whether your Work has achieved your intentions.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	What emotions or thoughts do you want the viewer to experience? Did you evoke them effectively?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is this Work a reflection of your true personal voice or did you make compromises for outside approval? Reflect on artistic integrity and alignment with your true, innermost vision.

Taking Creative Risks


Taking creative risk is an essential part of developing a compelling intention and concept in your art. It means stepping beyond familiar themes, safe ideas, or comfortable techniques to explore something uncertain, vulnerable, or unfamiliar.

Creative risk often involves challenging convention, expressing personal truths, or experimenting with new forms of visual language, all in service of a deep, honest, and meaningful concept.

	Consider whether your concept pushed boundaries, asked difficult questions, or took you into new creative territory.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Did you take any creative risks? If not, why?

Process & Execution




Art making is both thinking and doing. Examine your technical decisions, your choice of tools and medium, and how well your execution supports your concept. A key principle in art making is craftsmanship, discipline, and the care taken in the process.

	What techniques, tools, or methods did you use? Explain your technical process for this Work. (Being able to explain your technical process is an essential skill for artists.)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Were you intentional in your choices of form, composition, and medium?

Form: The structure, volume, and how objects in your Work occupy space. How are you utilizing techniques to communicate depth, solidity, and perspective.

Composition: Arrangement of visual elements within the artwork. Composition is how you organize shapes, lines, colors, and space to guide the viewer's eye in the manner the artist intends. Composition is how you create focus, balance, and flow.

Medium: This is the materials and tools used to create the artwork, e.g., oil paints, charcoal, oil pastels, digital media, or collage. The choice of medium affects both the process and the final appearance of the Work.

	What part of the process was most enjoyable or satisfying?
	What felt forced or frustrating?
	Where did you demonstrate technical skill, and where do you see a need for improvement?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Did you avoid tropes and clichés?


Examples of tropes and clichés are:

- Overused symbols, such as hearts to represent love, a light bulb for ideas, etc.
- Avoid predictable compositions, like drawing the sun in the top corner of the paper, or centering the most important object dead center
- Generic emotional tropes, like crying eyes, a faceless figure, any iconography popularly used to represent certain emotions – if you do utilize a generic trope, think of how you can “make it your own” and add a unique or unexpected element

Commitment and Complexity

Rightly or wrongly, art is more valued and appreciated when it demonstrates a strong commitment from the artist and a complexity of techniques employed.

Assess your Work:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does it demonstrate your commitment to the craft as an artist, i.e., you did not take any shortcuts in the composition? You can see the artist's dedication in the Work.
	How complex are the techniques you employed for creating the Work?

Aesthetic & Composition

In the previous section we noted that Composition is arrangement of visual elements within the artwork. A strong composition is what holds your Work together visually.



Reflect on how effectively you've arranged elements like line, shape, color, space, and balance (or intentional imbalance) to create harmony or tension.

Your aesthetic choices influence how your work is seen and felt. Aesthetics is how you lead the viewer's eye across your Work, along the pathways you've intentionally paved; it's how you build rhythm and set the tone.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is the art style here “loud” (high contrast of forms, colors, with strong lines) or “quiet” (low, subtle contrast of forms, colors, with soft lines)?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does that expressed volume of the Work effectively communicate the artist's intentions and storyline?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	How well do the elements of color, balance, rhythm, texture, and layout work together?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does the Work have a strong focal point and flow?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Are there areas that feel unfinished, overcrowded, or out of harmony?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	What would happen if you removed or altered a specific element? Would it improve or weaken the Work?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is the scale or format appropriate for what you are trying to communicate?

Emotional & Intellectual Impact

Consider the emotional tone and conceptual depth of your Work.

	What feelings did you intend your Work to evoke in the viewer?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does your final Work deliver on those intentions? Does your Work stir thought or feeling in the viewer, as part of the Work's inherent power? Did you successfully infuse your Work of art with that power to stir emotion and thought.
	How might different audiences interpret this Work?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does the Work provoke thought, emotion, or curiosity? Or does it feel flat?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Describe what thoughts this Work inspires, what emotions the viewer will feel, and assess whether your Work invites further curiosity.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	What undertones does the work evoke?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	How does its essence affect the viewer's spirit and emotions?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How do you feel when you look at the Work?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is this piece honest? Does it reflect a deeper part of you, or just surface-level aesthetics?
<input type="checkbox"/>	What is the most vulnerable or brave choice you made in this Work?





Ambiance

Ambiance is the consistent expression of a particular atmospheric mood, often executed through use of lighting and shadow, color tones, and softness vs. hardness of the lines.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Are you controlling your light source and shadow play?</p> <p><i>Deliberately choose a dominant light source and maintain consistent lighting across the composition. Use shadow not just for realism, but to sculpt mood. Soft shadows create contemplation and melancholy, while harsh contrasts add drama and intensity.</i></p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Are you using a cohesive color palette to set the emotional tone?</p> <p><i>Limit your color choices to a carefully selected range that supports the feeling you want to convey. Cool tones (blues, desaturated greens) evoke quiet and isolation. Warm tones (orange, golds, rust) often feel inviting and nostalgic. Subtle shifts in saturation can dramatically affect mood.</i></p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Are you varying your line qualities to influence texture and atmosphere?</p> <p><i>Soft, broken, or fluid lines can create a dreamlike, gentle ambiance, while crisp, hard edges feel starker and more controlled. Consistent use of one or a purposeful contrast between the two reinforces the emotional environment of your Work.</i></p>

Personal Growth & Learning

Art making isn't just about having an impact on others; it is also about your own evolution, spiritually, as an artist. Growth requires curiosity, experimentation, and reflection. Each and every Work you produce should be advancing your craft forward.

	What did you learn while creating this Work, be that technically, emotionally, or philosophically?
	What do you now see more clearly about yourself as an artist, which you learned from this Work?
	What feedback would you give this Work if it were made by someone else?
	How would you approach this same piece differently now?


A Visual Analysis of the Work

The Focal Point

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Identify the focal point of you Work.
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The focal point of a work of art is the area that immediately draws the viewer's eye and intention. It's the first stop the viewer's eyes land on. This point becomes an anchor, or center of interest that holds the composition together.

When intentional, your focal point strengthens your storytelling and emotional impact. Without a strong focal point, a work will feel scattered, unfocused, and hard to engage with.

	<p>Explain what self-contained story your Work's focal point is telling the viewer.</p> <p><i>Understanding the narrative and visual weight of this focal point helps you the artist to evaluate whether your composition communicates your intended message and engages the viewer effectively.</i></p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Did you create contrast in value (light vs. dark), color, texture, and detail to make your focal point stand out from the rest of the composition?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Did you place the focal point purposefully, using compositional rules like the Rule of Thirds or the Golden Ratio to create dynamic, pleasing balance?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Did you use directional lines, utilize techniques in gaze and gestures, or leading shapes that point the viewer toward the focal point and help hold the viewer's attention there?

Disegno

Disegno is a term derived from the Italian Renaissance, meaning “drawing” or “design.” It is a foundational concept in Western art theory and philosophy, both the execution of art and the intellectual structure behind art.

Disegno esterno is “external drawing,” or the technical skill of linework, draftsmanship, and the visible rendering of forms. This is the visual, executed Work.

Disegno interno is “internal design,” or the artist’s inner vision and creative idea. This is composition, structure, and invention, the conceptual foundation of your Work.

The Florentine schools of art would focus on disegno, emphasizing the significance of line, form, and structure, whereas the Venetian schools focused on colorito, emphasizing color, atmosphere, ambiance, and sensuality.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Evidence of Hand and Eye Training. Does the Work demonstrate the precision, gesture, and observational skill of the artist?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Evidence of Mind and Heart Training. Does the Work demonstrate concept development, intentionality of symbolism, and a thoughtfully crafted narrative?

Line Work & Mark Making

Line Work: These are the marks that define shapes, guide the viewer’s eyes, and express both mood and texture. Lines can be crisp or loose, confident and assertive or contemplative, and they reveal your technical control and emotional intentions.

Mark Making: Refers to the intentional use of lines, dots, scratches, smudges, strokes, or patterns made by an artist’s tools. These marks express visual energy, texture, or emotion. Mark making conveys the artist’s hand, your energy and life force, your personality and point of view as an artist. Mark making is a hallmark of your presence, whether your style is delicate or bold, chaotic or controlled, contributing to the aesthetic, rhythm, and mood of your Work. **Mark making is the personal handwriting of an artist**, revealing not just your technical skill, but also the expressive character of your art.

Outlines & Contours

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Do your lines accurately and expressively define the shapes and volumes of your subjects? Are there areas where your outlines feel overworked or unnecessary? Are any of your lines too weak or too heavy-handed?</p> <p><i>Outlines should serve both structure and expression. Contour lines should indicate form, not just flat borders. Also, check for consistency.</i></p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Does the quality of your lines (i.e., thickness, fluidity, consistency) match the mood and intentions of your Work?</p> <p><i>Be critical of yourself and note any inconsistencies. If there is alignment, articulate how and why the lines match mood and intention.</i></p>


Active Lines vs. Passive Lines

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Do your lines feel active and dynamic? Or static and passive? How does your choice contribute to the visual rhythm of the piece?</p> <p><u>Active Lines</u> guide the viewer's eye, create movement, and add energy. <u>Passive Lines</u> are reserved, stabilizing, used for calmness, and to create rest in the composition.</p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Where in your composition are the lines energizing? Where are they calming? Where are the energizing and calming lines in relation to the focal point?</p>

Edges of Tone and Color


Edges of tone and color refer to Implied Lines, which are where one value or color transitions into another.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Are your value transitions abrupt or gradual? How do those edges affect the mood of your Work?</p> <p><u>Hard Edges</u> create clarity and definition. <u>Soft Edges</u> imply atmosphere, depth, or movement.</p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Are your implied lines reinforcing the focal point? Are they too harsh in areas where they should be receding?</p>

	Assess the quality of your edges of tone and color. The quality of these tonal edges can either heighten realism or enhance abstraction, depending on your intentions.
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Linework Fixes Relationships Between Adjacent and Remote Elements

Linework is about organizing visual space and relating one form in the composition to another. In your self-assessment, look at how lines connect or separate design elements across the composition.



<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does your linework guide the viewer to see relationships between different parts of the image?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Are forms isolated when they should be connected, or tangled when they should be distinct? Critique your own linework and how effective it is in getting across your intentions for the Work.
	How does your linework help the composition hold together as a cohesive whole?

Shape, Form, & Mass

<u>Shape:</u>	The two-dimensional aspect of your work, outline and silhouettes of figures and objects
<u>Form:</u>	The three-dimensional aspect of your work, which builds upon shape by introducing three-dimensionality and how an object occupies space, turns, and has internal volume
<u>Mass:</u>	The perceived weight, density, or solidity of those forms, giving them presence and believability.

This is how the subject matter is constructed and perceived within the pictorial space. Shape, Form, and Mass work together to communicate structure, presence, and resonance with the viewer. Whether a Work is abstract or representational, how you use shape, form, and mass impacts how convincing and compositionally powerful your Work will feel to the viewer.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Are the forms and shapes well-proportioned and harmonious within the overall composition?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	If there is imbalance or dissonance, was that intentional and does it have the intended impact on the viewer?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is there thoughtful use of scale and proportion across the forms that enhances the balance and impact of your Work?
	Reflect and assess: How well are you commanding a strong understanding of the anatomy of what you're depicting, the object's structure, and the behavior of light on volume?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Are you self-aware, conscious, and purposeful with how you are using shape, form, and mass to communicate your intentions to the viewer?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Intentional use of large, heavy forms to evoke stability or oppression ♦ Intentional use of angular, fragmented shapes to suggest tension or chaos ♦ Intentional use of lightness and translucency to portray the ethereal
	How does your linework help the composition hold together as a cohesive whole?

Volume & Space

<u>Volume:</u>	Volume is the illusion of three-dimensionality
<u>Space:</u>	Space is how you arrange areas of depth, foreground, midground, and background.

Together, volume and space create a sense of environment and spatial relationships between elements. This is how the artist creates perception and illusion of depth and spatial relationships within a flat surface.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does the spacing between elements enhance the composition or do some areas feel overcrowded or barren?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	If there is imbalance in volume and space, is that imbalance intentional?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	What purpose does the use of symmetry vs. asymmetry, proportionality or disproportionate forms communicate the artist's intention?

Linear Perspective

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Are your vanishing points correctly placed?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Where applicable, is the horizon line logically placed based on the viewer's vantage point?


<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Do all receding lines (orthogonals) align accurately with these vanishing points? <i>Orthogonals are imaginary lines in a linear perspective drawing that converge at a vanishing point on the horizon line. These lines represent edges that recede into the distance and help create the illusion of three-dimensional depth.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check your artwork for consistent alignment of architectural elements (buildings, roads, furniture) to one-point, two-point, or three-point perspective systems.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overlay perspective grids if needed to test alignment accuracy.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Look for distortions or inconsistencies that might flatten the space unintentionally.

Depth Perception

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does your composition successfully convey foreground, midground, and background?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Do you use scale, overlapping, and atmospheric perspective to suggest recession into space?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assess whether objects decrease in size as they recede.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check if nearer objects overlap and obscure parts of those behind them.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use value (lighter in background, darker in foreground) and reduced detail in distant elements to reinforce spatial depth.




Proportion and Ratios

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Are the relative sizes between design elements logical and consistent with spatial depth?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Do figures, objects, or architectural elements appear “natural” in scale to one another?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Measure using head-length units for figures.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check proportional relationships. E.g., a window compared to a wall, a tree compared to a person, etc.

	Ensure ratios remain consistent within the same spatial plane. If inconsistent, is it intentional and purposeful? What is your reasoning for breaking rules?
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Texture

Texture is describing and expressing the surface quality; the types of lines or mark-making created by the artist.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Have you varied your mark-making to suggest different surface qualities?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does the texture reinforce form and contribute to the sense of volume and space?
	Examine if textures follow the form. E.g., curved or wrapping marks for round surfaces, straight or crosshatched marks for rigid planes.
	Use finer detail in the foreground and broader strokes in the background to enhance depth.
	Consider whether the materiality (wood, metal, skin, draped fabric) is convincingly rendered through texture.

You want to be able to identify your strengths and weaknesses in rendering volume and space, so you can identify what needs adjustment or deeper study and practice.

Time & Movement

This is how the viewer experiences the Work. Time and movement involve how the viewer experiences the work across moments, whether through implied motion, rhythm, or the narrative unfolding in your Work. This can be conveyed through gesture, composition, or sequencing.

<u>Speed:</u>	Speed refers to the perceived pace of movement in your Work, how quickly or slowly the action or visual rhythm seems to unfold in the viewer's mind.
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- Rapid, energetic strokes or dynamic diagonals suggest urgency or motion
- Smoother curves and soft transitions can suggest a calm, slower unfolding
- Perceived speed is controlled through brushwork, line quality, repetition of forms, and the spacing between elements.
- Flurry of short, sharp marks evokes quick motion.
- Gentle, broad sweeps feel leisurely.



- Speed affects how long a viewer lingers on certain areas and how they emotionally respond to the Work.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does your Work evoke a feeling of fast motion, stillness, or something in between? How does the speed of your composition communicate the artist's intentions?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Where does the viewer's eye tend to linger? Where does the eye rush through?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does the pacing suit the emotional tone and subject matter of your Work?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify areas of visual density (where there is more detail, smaller shapes, higher contrast) versus openness (larger shapes, negative space). Denser areas tend to slow the eye, while simpler, bolder shapes increase the sense of speed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider the gesture of your figures or forms. Are they dynamic or static? Fast gestures suggest energy and movement. Slower, more relaxed gestures evoke calm.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Examine repetition and pattern . Quick repetition of small forms can mimic rapid beats, while broader repetitions suggest a slower rhythm.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reflect and Assess: Does your Work need adjustment in tempo? Does it feel too rushed? Or does it drag? Where can you vary the speed to heighten visual interest?

<u>Direction:</u>	Direction is the visual path the viewer's eye follows through the composition. It can be linear, circular, zigzag, or a more complex route created by the arrangement of shapes, lines, color contrasts, and implied gestures
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- Pointing hands, leading lines, or gaze direction are visual cues that move the viewer's eye.
- A clear directional flow helps to tell the story of your Work.
- Avoid confusing or chaotic visual wandering of the viewer's eye.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Where does the viewer's eye enter your composition? Where does it go next?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Are there strong visual cues leading the viewer through your artwork?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Do elements push the viewer's eye in a specific direction, or is the movement more subtle and atmospheric?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Trace the visual flow through your Work. Use a finger or pen to follow where the eye naturally goes. Does it make logical and intuitive sense? Is it engaging or confusing?

	<p>Assess whether the direction of movement matches the emotion and intent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A spiral or circular motion can feel meditative or endless ▪ Zigzags can create chaos or energy ▪ Diagonals often imply action and tension
	<p>Consider balance: Do you have strong directional pull in just one area? If so, does it make the rest of the composition feel neglected? Is that intentional? Reconsider your use of negative space and assess whether it is effective in communicating your intention.</p>

<u>Musicality:</u>	<p>Musicality refers to the rhythmic and harmonic qualities of the composition. This is the way visual elements echo, repeat, or contrast in a manner similar to beats, melodies, and harmonies in music</p>
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- This quality comes from repeated motifs, balanced intervals between elements, and variation in visual “beats” (i.e., large vs. small shapes, light vs. dark values)
- A work with strong musicality feels like it has a visual rhythm that keeps the viewer’s eye engaged, alternating moments of tension and release, quiet and crescendo, much like a well-composed piece of music.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Do the elements of your composition create a sense of rhythm or harmony?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is there a pattern, repetition, or variation that guides the experience like a melody?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does the piece feel cohesive, or are there jarring dissonances (intentional or not)?
	Identify repeated visual motifs of colors, shapes, or lines, and see how they echo throughout the Work.
	Consider contrast and flow . Just as music alternates between tension and release, does your Work have places of visual intensity balanced by visual rest?
	Look at spacing and intervals between elements: Are they evenly timed or syncopated? Do they build rhythm?
	When you scan your Work from edge to edge, does the viewer’s eye experience a sense of rhythm and harmony, moments of rest, repetition, or variation, that feels intentional and engaging? Reflect on whether your Work possesses strong musicality.
	Ask if your color palette and tonal values create harmony or disharmony. Are there “visual chords” where elements feel perfectly in tune?



Color Palette

This is the use of color hues, values, and intensity. Color palette consideration is how the artist evokes strong emotions in the viewer. The color palette sets the mood, energy, and harmony of your Work. Choices in hue, value, and saturation can unify the composition, direct attention, and evoke emotion.

Color Wheel Theory

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Are you working within a traditional color scheme (e.g., complementary, analogous, triadic, split-complementary)?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	If you are deviating from classical theory, is it a conscious and purposeful choice? What effect does breaking the rules have on your Work?
	Identify your dominant, subordinate, and accent colors and map them onto a color wheel. Are they creating harmony or tension?
	Note whether your color relationships feel intuitive or jarring.
	If you break from conventional schemes, evaluate whether that decision enhances the emotional or conceptual impact.
	Ask if your color choices serve to balance the composition or disrupt it. Does this balancing or disruption align with your artistic intention?

Color Symbolism to Convey Meaning, Emotion, and Mood

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	What emotional response do you want the viewer to feel from the color choices?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Do the colors you have used align with cultural or symbolic meanings that you intended to reference?
	Write down the emotions or themes you want your Work to convey. Then analyze whether your color choices align with those intentions (ex. red for passion or danger, blue for calm or melancholy).
	Be aware of personal vs. collective symbolism. Do your color choices require context to be understood? Is the symbolism only meaningful to you? Or is the symbolism you have employed meaningful to a community?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Check for consistency: Are there unintentional contradictions in how color is used across your Work that dilute your emotional message?
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Depicting Effects of Light (Reflections of God)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is the light source clearly defined, and does your use of color reflect that source accurately?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Have you used color temperature and intensity to convey divine presence, spiritual radiance, or other metaphysical effects, even if its implied in the subtext?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify the light source(s) in your Work and assess whether the colors shift in tone, hue, and saturation accordingly (ex. warm highlights and cool shadows).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate whether the interplay of light and color evokes something symbolic. Depictions of light are, even if subliminally, reflections of divine presence.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reflect on how your color transitions can suggest transcendence, revelation, or the divine, especially through the use of glows, halos, or color “echoes.” What aspect of spirit or spirituality is communicated, even if it’s subconsciously, in your Work?

Qualities of Color




<u>Hue</u> :	The color itself, by its name on the color spectrum.	<u>Tint</u> :	Color mixed with white
<u>Value</u> :	How light or dark the hue is.	<u>Tone</u> :	Color mixed with gray
<u>Intensity</u> :	How pure, solid, and opaque the hue is, or how desaturated and diluted it is; e.g., saturation, chroma, color purity	<u>Shade</u> :	Color mixed with black
<u>Chroma</u> :	The distinguishing between strong and weak colors		

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Did you make deliberate decisions about the hue (color family), value (light vs. dark), and saturation (intensity) of each area of your Work?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Do these color choices create a sense of volume, atmosphere, and hierarchy within your Work?

	Review each section of your Work and describe the hue, value, and saturation present. Is the range varied enough to keep visual interest?
	Check whether your use of desaturated or saturated colors contributes to mood, focus, and cohesion.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	See if your value structure helps with clarity. Can a viewer still “read” the composition clearly in grayscale?

Color Range

<u>High Key</u>	The artwork has limited light color scale or range. Ex. Claude Monet’s “Grainstacks in the Sunlight” (1890)	<u>Low Key</u>	The artwork has limited dark color scale or range. Ex. Vincent van Gogh’s “Cineraria” (1886)
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	Assess: Is your work High Key (light, airy, pastel-based) or Low Key (dark, rich, moody)?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Does your tonal choice serve the overall atmosphere and emotional register of your Work?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Scan your composition and assess the overall lightness or darkness of your color choices. Does the value range feel coherent?
	Determine whether your palette feels too flat or too chaotic. Do you need more tonal variation to help enhance contrast and depth?
	Assess if your chosen Key is consistent with your thematic goals. Ex. High Key for hope or serenity; Low Key for drama or introspection.


Use of Color Contrasts

<u>Contrast of Hues:</u>	Greater the distance between hues on color wheel, greater the contrast	<u>Simultaneous Contrast:</u>	Degree to which adjacent colors affect each other.
<u>Contrast of Saturation:</u>	Contrast formed from pairing of light and dark value, and their relative saturation.	<u>Light and Dark Contrast:</u>	Juxtaposing light and dark values
<u>Cold and Warm Contrast:</u>	Apparent temperature contrast of hues. Cool	<u>Contrast of Proportion:</u>	Color contrast between big form and small form

recedes. Warm steps forward. Cool conveys introversion. Warm conveys extroversion.

in the composition, i.e., one color takes up substantially more space than the other.

Complementary Contrast: Contrast created by juxtaposing polarities on the color wheel.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Where have you used contrast in hue, value, or temperature to create visual tension or emphasis?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Are your focal points effectively highlighted through color contrast?
	Identify the areas of higher contrast. This is often where the eye is drawn first. Ask if this location coincides with an important focal point and is where you intended the viewer's eye to go.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Look at temperature contrast (warm vs. cool), value contrast (light vs. dark), and hue contrast (opposite or adjacent colors). Are they balanced or too aggressive?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ask whether color contrasts are helping to define form, space, and narrative beats, or if they are overwhelming your composition.

What Makes Art “Great”?

Art is inherently subjective. What resonates as “great” art to one viewer may leave another unmoved. There is no single formula or checklist that guarantees artistic greatness, nor should there be.



The elements outlined in this section are not rigid requirements or definitive judgments, but rather, they are guiding points for reflection. These elements are intended to help you, the artist, critically evaluate your own work with an eye toward its potential impact, resonance, and effectiveness.

Use these criteria not as rules, but as lenses through which you might better understand how your work communicates, challenges, and connects.

Guiding Elements of Impactful Art


Tells a Story

Element #1 | **The Work tells a story.** A story has a moving narrative arc of beginning, middle, and end. The viewer can intuit all three from the Work. The story has a theme, interpersonal relations, and you can identify a style or genre.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	What is the story your Work is telling?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	How does the Work convey the narrative arc of that story?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Can a viewer intuitively grasp that story based on this composition?
	Identify the theme of this Work and evaluate how well the composition portrays that theme.
	Identify the style or genre of this Work and whether it (1) echoes the greatest values of that style or genre, and (2) adds value in some way to transcend that style or genre.

Impact Through Emotion

Element #2 | **The Work conveys emotion.** Experiencing the art causes the viewer to feel something poignant, impactful.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	What emotion did you intend for the viewer to experience when engaging with your Work, and have you successfully evoked that emotion?
	Identify the specific elements in your Work that contributes to its emotional impact.

Fresh Perspective or Challenges Convention


Element #3 | **The Work introduces a fresh perspective, challenges conventions, or evokes unexpected reactions.** Assess whether your Work bears hallmarks of originality, innovation, and provocation in art.

In what ways does your Work offer originality, innovation, or provocation in art? In what way does this Work challenge conventional norms or evoke unexpected reactions from the viewer?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Have you reframed the familiar?</p> <p><i>Take a well-known subject, symbol, or visual trope and depict it from an unexpected angle. Or subvert expectations to invite deeper engagement and offer the viewer something they haven't seen before.</i></p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Did you combine unlikely elements?</p> <p><i>Blending contrasting styles, cultural references, materials, or subject matter in surprising ways can compel a fresh perspective or challenge the viewer's norms. Juxtaposition can provoke thought and spark emotional or intellectual tension. Have you combined unlikely elements to encourage viewers to see connections they hadn't considered?</i></p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Did you create this Work from a personal truth?</p> <p><i>Draw from your lived experience, specific identity, or unique point of view. Work that is rooted in your personal authenticity will be fresh, because no one else can replicate it.</i></p>



Revelatory and Transcendent

Element #4 | **The Work is revelatory or transcendent.** It makes the reader go “wow.”

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Your Work offers a striking insight, emotional impact, or aesthetic surprise that shifts the viewer's perception or leaves a lasting impression.</p>
	<p>Ask yourself: In what way is this Work memorable?</p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Did you craft a moment of stillness or awe?</p> <p><i>Use composition, light, symbolism, or silence in your Work to create a pause in the viewer, a moment of reflection or emotional intensity.</i></p>




Commentary on Life

Element #5 | **The Work is commentary, implied or expressed, about real life and the real world.** It spotlights some facet of objective reality and gives a subjective opinion on that reality. Art that engages the world has something to say.

	In what way does your Work spotlight a facet of objective reality and provide a subjective opinion or commentary on that reality?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Did you speak the unspoken? Did you use your art to articulate feelings, insights, or experiences that are rarely voiced? Vulnerability can elevate your work into something truly resonant.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Did you embed meaning beneath the surface? <i>Let your commentary emerge through metaphor, contrast, or symbolic detail rather than overt explanation. Subtlety invites engagement.</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	For your composition and storytelling, did you choose specificity over generalization? <i>Ground your Work in concrete, observed details from lived reality, be that political, personal, or cultural, to make the message real and relatable.</i>
	Reflect, don't preach. Consider how your Work presents questions rather than provides answers. A compelling opinion within a thoughtful visual structure is more powerful than a blunt message.

Multidimensional Meaning


Element #6 | **A good composition should engage you both from far away and also up close.** Experiencing the Work from a distance gives one narrative, while experiencing the Work up close gives you an additional narrative.

	Story at a Distance: Identify and note the impression or reaction your Work should evoke in the viewer from a distance.
	Story Up Close: Identify and note the impression or reaction your Work should evoke at a close-up viewing range.
	Identify the interplay and dynamic between that distant and close-up engagement with the Work. How do these two stories work in concert with each other?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Did you design with layers to build up the complexity?</p> <p><i>Use large, simple shapes for clarity at a distance. Embed textures, linework, and detail to invite closer viewing.</i></p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Does the symbolism in your Work and subtle color shifts or line progressions create dual narratives, so the viewer discovers different stories as they engage with different parts of the composition?</p>

Compelling Use of Space


Element #7 | **The Work makes use of space, including negative space, in a dynamic, compelling, and clever way.**

	<p>Explain your intentional use of space in the Work.</p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Did you treat negative space as an active element?</p> <p><i>Don't just focus on the subject. Look at the shapes around and between your forms. Use negative space intentionally to create balance, tension, and breathing room. Well-considered negative space can enhance rhythm and clarity, and even become part of the storytelling.</i></p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Did you utilize overlap and layering techniques to create depth?</p> <p><i>Place objects at different visual planes by overlapping forms and varying scale. Foreground, middle ground, and background relationships build a sense of dimensional space, pulling the viewer into the scene and guiding their journey through it.</i></p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Did you “break the frame” strategically?</p> <p><i>Let design elements enter or exit the edges of the canvas to imply that the space extends beyond the visible boundaries. This technique creates dynamism and encourages the viewer to imagine a world beyond the canvas, making the space feel more alive and expansive.</i></p>

Demonstrates Exceptional Skill

Element #8 | **An exceptional skill is demonstrated in the execution of the Work.**




In minimalist modern art, the exceptional skill demonstrated might be the precise control of space, mastery of subtle color relationships, or the ability to evoke a strong emotion or meaning with minimal visual elements. “Exceptional skill” doesn’t always have to be technique-related.

	What is the skill or technique that this Work demonstrates exceptionalism in?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Are there areas where your technical execution could be improved or refined?

Commitment, High Effort, & Complexity

Element #9 | **The commitment of the artist demonstrated in the Work is often a key element to what makes art “great.”**

What is the level of the artist’s commitment to the craft and complexity of the composition demonstrated in this Work? How complex is the artist’s intentions? Is the creative process complex and can the viewer see how complex that creative process was?

	How challenging was the creative process?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Did you have to persist through difficulty? Did you push past frustration, blocks, or self-doubt? Did you let that struggle shape the Work? Deep commitment leaves its trace.
	Reflect and Assess: What is the depth of your intention, effort, and emotional or intellectual investment poured into this Work? How much have you risked or revealed as an artist?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Did you take risks that reveal <i>you</i> ? Were you vulnerable, sharing your fears or your obsessions? Did you ask hard questions?
	Ask Yourself: “Am I different after creating this Work?” When your work transforms you, it has a better change of transforming others.