

Composition & space

For centuries, artists have developed ingenious techniques to create the illusion of depth, or 3-D space. To find out how artists are tricking your eyes, look at a range of paintings and answer these questions.

Focus point

- What is the main focus point of the painting? Generally, the focus point is where your eye goes first when you look at the painting. Where does your eye travel to next?

Composition

- Can you see an underlying structure to the painting? To find it, note the route your eye takes to journey over the surface of the painting. Is the structure simple or complex?
- What effect does the composition have on your interpretation of the art work? Has composition been used symbolically or to create narrative? If the elements were rearranged, how might this affect your interpretation?

Depth

- Does the composition include a sense of depth (3-D space), or is the image more or less flat? If there is depth, can you identify what is in the background, foreground, and middle distance?

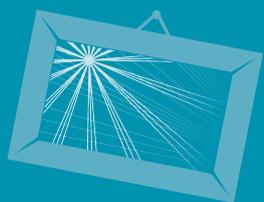
Vanishing point

- Does the composition include a vanishing point (the most distant point in the painting)? If so, identify where it is and discuss why it is there.

Perspective

- Is perspective (the illusion of depth) a feature of the composition? If so, describe the type of perspective and how it has been constructed. Eg, has linear perspective (an underlying structure of diagonal lines converging at a vanishing point) been used? Or has the artist created an illusion of depth through colour, the definition or blurring of detail, or changes in scale?

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Viewpoint

- Describe the viewpoint of the painting. The viewpoint is where the artist has positioned the viewer in relation to the painted scene. To find it, first find the focus point of the painting. Are you looking up at it, down on it (aerial), from a side angle to it, or directly at it? How does this viewpoint affect your interpretation of the art work?

Balance

- Is the composition balanced (symmetrical) or unbalanced (asymmetrical)? Imagine dividing the painting in half horizontally, vertically, or diagonally. Then look at each half to see if there are more elements on one side than the other. Which elements are being used to balance or unbalance the composition? Does this draw your eye to one part of the painting more than to others?

Cropping

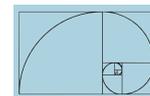
- Have objects or figures been cropped? If so, what effect does this have?

Rule of thirds

- Has the rule of thirds been used to structure the composition? Imagine dividing the picture into a grid of nine equal sections. Look along these imaginary grid lines and within the nine sections to see if the artist has placed key parts of the painting along or in them.

Golden section

- Has the artist used the golden section to structure the composition? The golden section is a mathematical ratio that produces shapes of constant proportions. In nature, it often appears as an expanding spiral – eg, a koru or shell.



Scale

- Has the artist exaggerated the scale or proportion of any elements in the composition? How does this affect the way you view the image?