VCE Art 2017-2021  
VCE Studio Arts 2017-2021  
Art elements and principles

The Study Design identifies these within the cross-study specifications. Art elements and art principles are closely related. Students should be aware of these when analysing and making artworks. The art elements and art principles are considered as integral to the foundation and development of a student’s visual language and vocabulary.

Art elements

The art elements are the basic visual building blocks that can be observed or experienced in an artwork. Artists use them to compose or order the way we see an artwork. They also convey ideas through their associations.

**Line** – Has a single dimension, joining two points. It has length and direction. It may be a mark made by a painted tool, brush, pencil or pen. It may be the meeting edge between shapes or it may divide space. If repeated, it can make patterns, define a shape (outline), indicate mood or be used to create texture and tone. By varying a line’s width and direction, an artist can create movement or weight and suggest emotions. Every line has a thickness, direction and rhythm. Terms to describe line include straight, contour, curvilinear, analytical, uneven, implied, explicit, calligraphic, erratic, thick, thin, gestural, vertical, diagonal, horizontal, and autographic.

**Colour** – Colour is generated by light reflecting off a surface and describes our experience of this action. Colour hue, value and intensity are the main characteristics of colour. Colour is a visual sensation and can be represented realistically or artists can deliberately alter colour for emotional or subliminal effects. Harmonious colours are similar and are close together on the colour wheel. Complementary colour schemes, such as red-green, purple-yellow, are opposite on the colour wheel and produce vibrant, clashing effects.Terms used to describe the use of colour might include: hue, saturation, intensity, brightness, monochromatic, polychromatic, palette, local, optical, impressionistic, arbitrary, abstract, expressionistic, warm, cool, primary, secondary, tertiary, complementary, opposite, analogous, adjacent, triadic, or tint.

**Tone** - Tones are black, white and grey and can be described as a range in terms of key or value. Tone can increase the sense of reality or the three-dimensional, or can add a sense of drama if tonal contrast is used. Terms used to describe the use of tone might include: harsh, subtle, gradual, dramatic, chiaroscuro (strong light on the subject with dark background, achromatic, mid-tones, shadow, highlights, silhouette, umbra, tonal patterns and shading.

**Texture** - Texture the surface quality, from smooth to rough, that can either be felt or observed (literal or implied). Texture can be simulated or actual. Application of paint with a dry brush suggests roughness while heavy application of paint mixed with impasto can create raised ridges of actual texture. Terms used to describe the use of texture might include: invented, impasto, rough, smooth, natural, irregular, scratched, polished, gritty, uneven, wrinkled or furry.

**Shape** - Shape an area contained within an implied line, or defined by a change in colour or tone. Shapes have two dimensions: width and breadth. They can be free-form and organic (asymmetrical) or geometric in nature (symmetrical). Terms used to describe the use of shape might include: non-objective, representational amorphous, irregular.

**Form** – Form describes a three-dimensional area. It can be visual/depicted or physical. While related to shape, terminology should be specific, i.e. biomorphic, geometric volumes (cube, spherical, pyramid, ovoid).Terms include distorted, elongated, layered, anthropomorphic (human like).

**Sound** – Sound is an audible material in art that can be made electronically or naturally and might be recorded and reproduced. Sound can be heard as noise, words or music and is usually found in contemporary art, such as videos. It may be a component of installations or multimedia or interactive works. Terms used to describe the use of sound might include: loud, soft, harsh, discordant, melodic, natural, artificial, vocalised, sonorous, high or low pitched,

**Light** – Light is closely aligned to tone and describes the clarity of light rays that illuminate an object or installation. Terms used to describe the use of light might include: bright, glowing, highlight, reflection, shiny, ambient, atmospheric, sparkle, localised, illuminating, refracted, diffused, blushes,

**Time** – Time as a material relates to the physical, emotional or psychological duration of an event or experience in art. Terms used to describe the use of time might include: chronological, implied, transient, actual, set, long, short, periodical, constant, abstract, cyclical and erratic.

Art principles

Art elements are organised individually or in combination to create art principles.

**Balance** – Balance is the distribution of visual weight in a work of art. Elements like shape may be balanced along a visual axis symmetrically or asymmetrically. The comparative amounts of colours, tones, and textures can create a sense of balance within a composition. Points to consider when looking for balance: comparison of elements and objects, and a comparison of stillness/movement.

**Contrast** – differences in tone, colours, textures, shapes and other elements used to draw attention or to make dramatic parts of an artwork. For example, complementary colours or black and white tones create high contrast, and setting circular and elliptical shapes against each other creates low contrast.

**Emphasis/focal point** – The artist’s application of art elements make a part or parts of the composition stand out. Artists often use implied or psychic line to draw the eye to a location on an artwork. Some works have a single focal point, some provide a clear ordering of emphasis, and others have multiple focal points. Isolation, accents and placement can create a focal point or emphasis.

**Movement** – Can be still, anticipated, kinetic, due to kinetic empathy, suggested by motion blur. Pattern, the arrangement of recurring figures/motifs and modules (3D form), can create movement.

**Proportion** – Refers to the comparative amounts or ratios of an element. This includes concepts such as the Golden Section and distortions. Proportion includes the connection between parts and the whole.

**Repetition (Pattern)** – A regularly recurring motif/ shape/ figure creates pattern. A motif that recurs irregularly is repetition. These can create a sense of unity, rhythm or movement in a work. For example, a repetition of line can cause a pattern, or suggest movement, or a time sequence.

**Rhythm** – Where the use of an element is repeated. This can be a regular or an irregular repetition and if regular can form a pattern. Rhythmcreates a sense of movement (think of musical beats); movement in a pattern, the relationship of parts to the whole. Different types of rhythm include flowing; regular; alternating; progressive and random.

**Scale** – Refers to the comparative size of shapes or forms, use of time, volume of sound in an artwork. Examples could be human, small or large scale.Scalecan be a comparison of sizes as in a ratio, for example, one half of the original; in relation to human figures, scale can be larger than, smaller than or actual life size.

**Space** – Refers to its visual/pictorial (illusionary/ plastic) depiction or physical (sculptural/ architectural) use. Physical space includes relief and in the round work. Visual space can refer to an amount within a composition (i.e. crowded or empty) or the depiction of depth (i.e. shallow, endless). It can be decorative (flattened) through to deep plastic. Space can be created visually by simple overlapping or chiaroscuro, or through more complex techniques such as atmospheric or geometric perspective. Terms such as foreground, middle ground, background, or interpenetration are useful terms for discussing space. Techniques include foreshortening, multipoint perspective or amplified perspective.

**Unity** – Refers to the similar or uniform use of an element that unifies or ties together a composition. Unity can create a sense of balance in an artwork. Patterns, figures/motifs and modules (3D forms) can create unity.

**Variety** – The diverse use of an element creates a more assorted and visually dynamic composition. Variety can be usedto create slight differences or alter the rate of change, for example, a drawing is more expressive if variation is used in the thickness of the lines. Variation in tones when painting an object produces a greater sense of solidity.