

Analysing Words:

It is important that you start to use a variety of words when analysing a painting. You need to expand your vocabulary when describing the painting.

Colour

Think about your overall impression of the colours used in the painting, how they look and feel, how the colours work together (or not), how they fit with the subject of the painting, how the artist has mixed these (or not). Are there any specific colours you can identify?

- Natural, clear, compatible, distinctive, interesting, lively, stimulating, subtle, sympathetic.
- Artificial, clashing, depressing, discordant, garish, gaudy, jarring, unfriendly, violent.
- Bright, brilliant, deep, earthy, harmonious, intense, rich, saturated, strong, vibrant, vivid.
- Dull, flat, insipid, pale, mellow, muted, subdued, quiet, weak.
- Cool, cold. warm, hot. Light, dark.
- Blended, broken, mixed, muddled, muddied, pure.
- Complementary, contrasting, harmonious.

Tone

Don't forget to consider the tone or values of colors too, plus the way tone is used in the painting as a whole.

- Dark, light, mid (middle).
- Flat, uniform, unvarying, smooth, plain.
- Varied, broken.
- Constant. changes.
- Graduated. contrasting.

Composition

Look at how the elements in the painting are arranged, the underlying structure (shapes) and relationships between the different parts, how your eye moves around the composition.

- Arrangement, layout, structure, position.
- Landscape format, portrait format, square format, circular, triangular.
- Horizontal, vertical, diagonal, angled.
- Foreground, background, middle ground.
- Centered, asymmetrical, symmetrical. Balanced, unbalanced, lopsided.
- Overlapping, cluttered, chaotic.
- Separate, spacious, empty.
- Free, flowing, fragmented.

- Formal, rigid, upright, confined.
- Negative space, positive space.

Texture

It's often hard or impossible to see texture in a photo of a painting as it doesn't show unless there's light shining in from the side that catches the ridges and casts small shadows. Don't guess; if you don't see any texture, don't try to talk about it in that particular painting.

- Flat, polished, smooth.
- Raised, rough, coarse.
- Cut, incised, pitted, scratched, uneven,
- Hairy, sticky.
- Soft, hard.
- Shiny, glossy, reflective.
- Semi-gloss, satin, silk, frosted, matte.
- Marks made with a knife, brush.

Mark Making

You may not be able to see any details of the brushwork or mark making if it's a small painting, but remember that in some styles of painting all brush marks are carefully eliminated by the artist.

- Visible, impasto, blended, smooth.
- Thick, thin.
- Bold, timid.
- Heavy, light.
- Edgy, smooth.
- Glazes, washes, scumbling, dry brush, stippling, hatching, splattered.
- Layered, flat.
- Precise, refined, regular, straight, systematic.
- Quick, sketchy, uneven, irregular, vigorous.
- Regularity, patterned

Mood & Atmosphere

What is the mood or atmosphere of the subject of the painting and the way it's painted? What emotion(s) do you experience looking at it?

- Calm, content, peaceful, relaxed, tranquil.
- Cheerful, happy, joyful, romantic.
- Depressed, gloomy, miserable, sad, somber, tearful, unhappy.
- Aggressive, angry, chilling, dark, distressing, frightening, violent.
- Energetic, exciting, stimulating, thought-provoking.
- Boring, dull, lifeless, insipid.

Form & Shape

Think about the overall shapes in the artwork and the way forms (things) are depicted. What sense of depth and volume is there?

- 2D, flat, abstracted, simplified, stylized.
- 3D, realistic, natural, sense of depth and space.
- Sharp, detailed.
- Blurred, obscured, overlapping, indistinct.
- Distorted, exaggerated, geometric.
- Linear, long, narrow.
- Hard-edged, soft-edged.

Lighting Words

Look at the lighting in the painting, not only in terms of the direction it is coming from and how it creates shadows but also its color, how intense it is, the mood it creates, whether it is natural (from the sun) or artificial (from a light, fire, or candle). Don't forget the option the artist has for not including a light source at all, particularly in modern styles.

- Back lit, front lit, side lit, top lit.
- Indirect light.
- Reflected light.
- No directional light source.
- Natural.
- Artificial.
- Cool, blue, gray.
- Warm, yellow, red.
- Dim, faint, gentle, gloomy, low, minimal, muted, soft.
- Clear, brilliant, bright, glowing, fiery, harsh, intense, sharp.

Viewpoint & Pose Words

Consider the angle or position we're seeing the subject of the artwork. How has the artist decided to present it?

- Front, side, three-quarters, profile, rear (from behind).
- Close up, far away, life-size, bird's eye view.
- Upwards, downwards, sideways.
- Standing, sitting, lying down, bending.
- Gesturing, moving. Resting, static.

Subject Matter Words

This aspect of a painting is one where it can really feel like you're stating the obvious. But if you think of how you'd describe an artwork to someone who's

not seen it or who isn't looking at a photo of it, you'd probably tell them the subject of the painting quite early on.

- Abstract.
- Cityscape, buildings, man-made, urban, industrial.
- Fantasy, imaginary, invented, mythological.
- Figurative (figures), portraits.
- Interiors, domestic.
- Landscape, seascape.
- Still life.

Still Life Words

Before you get into what the individual objects in a still life painting are, whether they're themed, related, or dissimilar, look at them overall and describe this.

- Antique, battered, damaged, dusty, old, worn.
- New, clean, shiny.
- Functional, decorative, fancy.
- Domestic, humble.
- Commercial, industrial.