Art Elements and Principles

Elements are an artwork's ingredients. Principles describe how the ingredients are organised. Lists follow the VCE Art Making and Exhibiting study design.

The 9 art elements

What the artwork is made of

Colour
Hue, intensity and temperature

Line
A mark or implied path with direction and weight

Shape
A flat area defined by an edge

Form
Three-dimensional volume, real or suggested

Tone
Relative lightness or darkness

Texture
Surface quality, physical or suggested

Sound
Audible material used in the work

Time
Duration, sequence or change

Light
Illumination used, shown or emitted

The 11 art principles

How the elements are organised

Emphasis
Giving one feature visual importance (focal point)

Movement
Directing the eye or suggesting action

Rhythm
A visual beat from recurring features and intervals

Unity
Making the parts feel like one whole

Variety
Differences within the work

Space
Areas, gaps and relationships around forms

Repetition
Using an element more than once, including pattern

Balance
How visual weight is distributed

Contrast
Different qualities placed together

Proportion
Size relationships between parts

Scale
Size against the viewer or surroundings

Write it in three steps

1. Element: name a specific feature you can see or hear. **2. Principle:** say how it is organised. **3. Effect:** explain what that does for the viewer, using a detail from the work.

Example: Repeated diagonal lines (element) create rhythm (principle) that pulls the eye across the image and makes a still scene feel restless (effect).

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