

Ways of looking at any artwork

Use the questions to help you start off in your responses to what you see. There is no particular order. You might prefer one approach more than another depending on the artwork you are looking at or the focus of your area of study.

Visual

What is your first reaction to the work? What is the first word that came into your head when you saw it? What did you notice first? Do some parts draw your attention more than others?

Sensory

Does the art work appeal to other senses apart from seeing? E.g. Is there a sense of sounds or touch in the work?

Emotional

Does it make you feel a particular way? Can you describe why or how it makes you feel or think like that?

Materials and meaning

Can you see what is the work made out of? Why do you think the artist chose these materials?

Space

Is there a sense of space in the work? is it real or an illusion?

Scale

How big is the work? Is it important? What effect does scale have on an artwork and our relationship to it? How would it be different if it was bigger or smaller?

Shape and pattern

Can you find shapes or patterns in the artwork? Do they create movement or rhythm? Are they decorative, descriptive or symbolic? Can you describe them? E.g. sharp, soft, angular...

What is it?

Is it a painting, photograph etc...?

Surface and texture

What is surface of the artwork like? E.g. rough, smooth, varied
Is texture made by the material of the artwork itself or by an (painted) illusion?

Memory/ experience

Does it remind you of anything? Why? Have you seen or experienced something like this before? Can you describe where or when? (on television, at home, a place you have visited)

Personal responses- What do you bring to the artwork?

Value/ Opinion

Do you like or dislike it?
On what basis do you decide whether or not an artwork is of value to you?
E.G ideas, skill, originality, meaning, relevance, difference
When you have found out more about it, do you feel the same way?

Colour

Can you describe *how* the artist uses colour?
E.G descriptively or emotionally
What effect do they create?

Process

How has it been made?
What skills and processes do you think are involved?

Mark-making

Can you see evidence of the artist's hand- such as brushstrokes?
Do the marks affect the work e.g. are they expressive, energetic or calming?

Composition

How is the work organised?
Do you think it is random or designed?
How do the different parts of the work relate to each other?

Title

Does the work have a title?
Does this affect the way you see it?

Narrative

Has the artwork got a narrative? What do you think is happening?
Where is the action set? Where do you think the story comes from?
What point in the story does the artist choose?
Can you imagine what happened before or what might happen next?
What are the similarities and differences in telling stories in art and in writing?

Subject and meaning- What is it about?

Theme

Do you think the work has a theme?
E.g. the city, war, relationships, family
Does the room it is hung in have a theme and how does the work relate to it?

Type

What genre or kind of art would you associate this work with?
E.g. portraiture, history painting, landscape, still-life
Does it fit into more than one type or can it not be classified?

Content and ideas

Is the work about a subject? What do you think the artist might be trying to say or represent?
Could the work have a symbolic or moral meaning?

Interpretation

What information is available in the gallery to support our reading of the artwork, such as wall texts or captions?
What kind of information does it give?
Does it offer a point of view?
Does it influence what you think?

People

Are there people involved?
What are they doing?
What do they look like?
What kind of people might they be?
Who do you think is the most important?
How do you think they are feeling?

By Whom

Who made the art work?
Do you think the background of the artist can inform us about why or how it is created, or what it might be about?

Arts

How does it link to other arts of the period?
E.G literature, film, music, fashion, design, theatre

Art in Context- Influences which shape the creation and reading of the work

Where for?

Was it made for a particular location? E.g. a house, the landscape, a public monument, for a gallery?

Other fields of knowledge

How does it link to other disciplines such as science, religion, technology or psychology?

When

When do you think it was made? Are there ways you can tell when it was made? Is the date significant? E.g. war, or social/ technological change

For whom?

For whom was the artwork made?
E.g. patron/ friend/ the artist
Does it involve the viewer? In what way?

History

How does it link with the social, cultural or political history of the time?
Do you think these circumstances have influenced how it was made?
Does it reflect the ideas or values of a time?

The hang

In which room is the work displayed?
What is the room title? What works is it placed next to- are there any links?

Style

How can you tell a Hogarth from a Hockney or a Turner from a Freud? Compare examples of each and discuss similarities and differences.