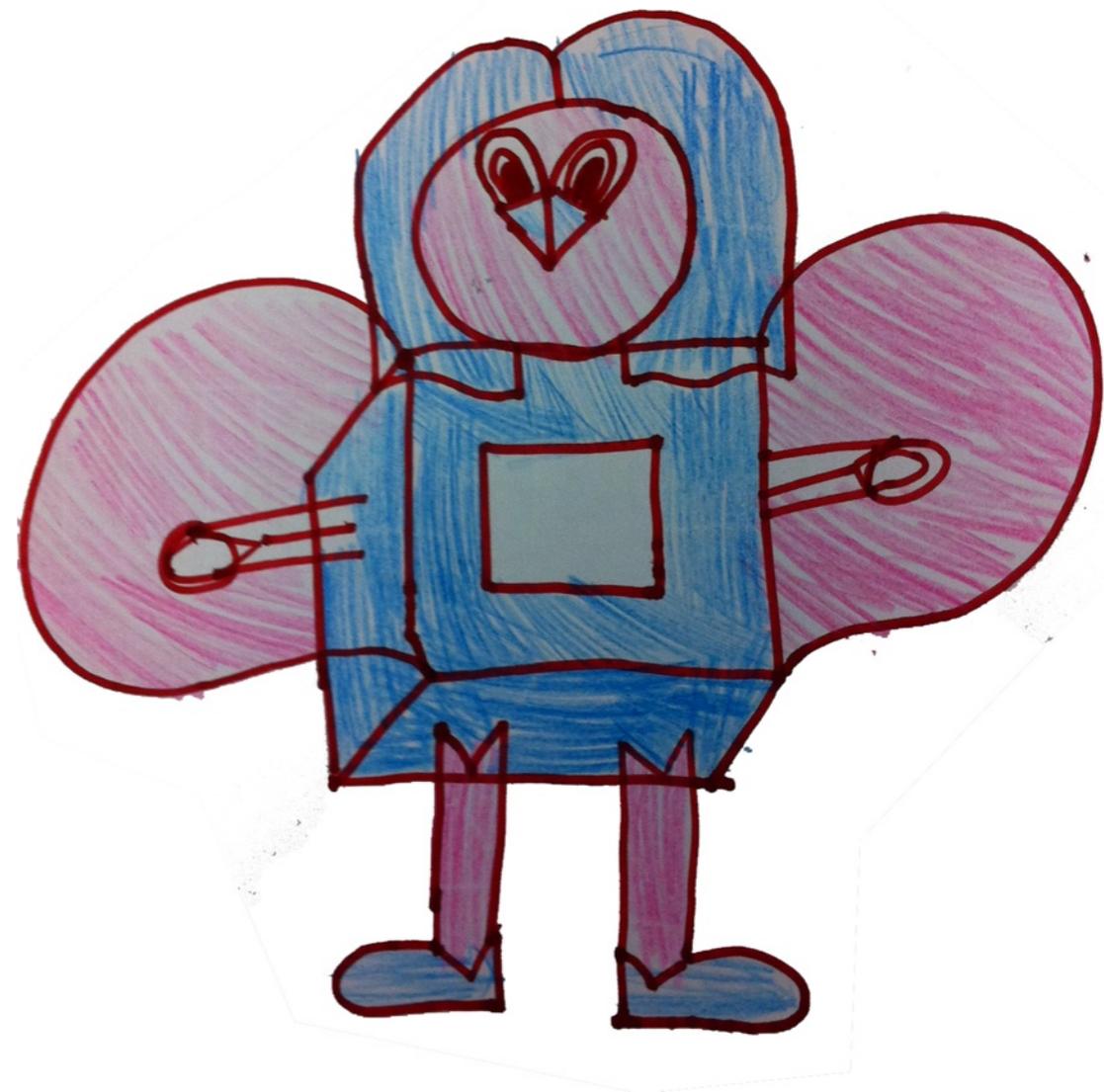


# Baseline Testing

## in Art & Design

by Paul Carney AST  
[www.paulcarneyarts.com](http://www.paulcarneyarts.com)



# Baseline Testing

by Paul Carney

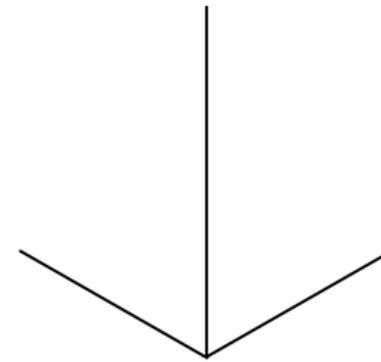
If you really want to baseline test students then there are some strategies you can use. I regularly do a baseline test for a new intake. This is often an opinion formed over the first half term from careful observation, monitoring and tracking. I will nearly always do some direct observational drawing and painting in this time and my assessment of the outcomes will usually identify those who are skillful. That's easy, but these methods do not identify my G&T's and they don't tell me how much imagination student's possess or how well they can research and find information.

The National Curriculum for Art in the UK and the GCSE examination require four areas of expertise; making skills, ability to realise original ideas, ability to synthesise knowledge of artists work into their own and to evaluate and make critical judgements, more commonly called evaluation. So when assessing art I should ideally be monitoring all my students' individual progress to these four areas. It sounds complicated but it isn't really. My baseline test therefore should try to identify where my students are in each of these four areas.

**Making** To find my students current making skills level I rely on drawing skills. Now you might just ask them to draw a still life object and mark them, which is fine but there is a quicker way! My test requires students to demonstrate that they can construct a 3D shape in 2 dimensions, which is an important function for spatial awareness, higher cognitive thinking and is an advanced drawing skill.

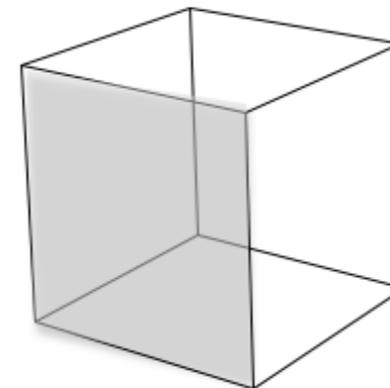
**Making skills - Drawing test (ten minutes):** Draw or show the arrow diagram below on the white board. Get the students to copy this onto A4 paper. Do not allow students to use rulers and leave space at the top of the paper for further drawing.

**Task 1:** Turn this diagram into a 3D cube (10 minutes approx.) note: It is important that you don't help the students to do this.

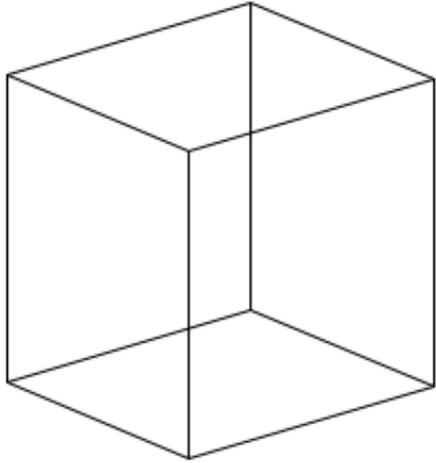


Results:

- Advanced spatial awareness - potentially has exceptional drawing skills. Draws the cube quickly and/or with skill and accuracy, using perspective different to the one suggested (might even ignore the whiteboard diagram)



- Confident spatial awareness - High/average ability. Constructs a cube in the correct perspective, connects all or most corners correctly and lines are approximately parallel. Can draw lines freely without using a ruler.



- Struggling with spatial awareness - Average/Lower ability. Numerous efforts to attempt the task fail to completely convince or there might even be an adaption of the task to suit an easier method, such as front view perspective where two 2D squares are overlapped and the corners are joined. A cube might have been completed, but the lines are not parallel and deviate considerably from the correct angles.
- Weak spatial awareness - Low ability. Unable to complete the task without assistance.

This simple test is a very revealing one. Most students in the UK learn to draw 3D shapes in Mathematics lessons at about the age of seven or eight years. Perspective isn't taught at all to my knowledge, until it is taught in technology lessons from about the age of 11 in Key Stage 3. Therefore, if a student uses perspective techniques in Key Stage 2 this would indicate very high drawing ability. If students draw using perspective techniques in year 7/Early 8 would still indicate higher ability, though it should not be unique later in year 8 or 9 as art and technology lessons

combined with physical maturity should make it easier. Usually, about 5-10% of Year 7 students draw the cube using advanced perspective, (less in KS2).

The remaining students will usually be split between typical and struggling spatial awareness, depending on the ability of the class and a tiny proportion will be unable to do it. What this reveals is that those who draw the cube correctly will be able to access most or all of your curriculum and will generally do well in art. Those with spatial awareness problems by Year 6 or 7 are usually going to struggle with realistic drawing and will need more specialist help. Interestingly, students with spatial awareness drawing problems also struggle in maths lessons at questions involving symmetry, rotations, reflections, 3D shape or visual mathematics.

Crikey, that was only the first part of the test and it should only have taken ten or fifteen minutes, yet the results are already very revealing.

**Ideas test part 1 - Imagination** (On the reverse side of the drawing) Set the pupils the task to list as many objects they can think of that the cube could be turned into. Note: It is important that you don't help the students to do this. For example: You could turn the cube into a TV, a House or Dice, (15 minutes).

Marking this section is always done as peer marking in lesson, where we swop answers and typical scores are usually similar to this:

*0-10 = below average imagination.*

*10-20 = average imagination.*

*20-30 = good imagination.*

*30 or over = very good imagination.*

*40 or over = exceptional imagination.*

Eliminate any answers that are wrong, duplicated or completely random or unclear. These results give you a good idea about a person's ability to think visually and the breadth of their visual literacy. The higher the score, the more visually literate they are. Quite astonishingly, very highly skillful artists often struggle with this task.

**Ideas test part 2 - Imaginative realisation** Draw a new cube of any size, onto a fresh sheet of paper or you can draw on top of the first cube drawing. Now, look at the list of objects you have just made. Create an imaginative picture from the most original and interesting object on your list. Create a whole scene, including background, there no rules to this except that you should be able to make out where the original cube was. For example: You might have written TV on your list, therefore you might create a picture of a TV in an interesting and unusual scene.

You begin to see patterns emerging when you look at whole samples. One idea might have 'caught on' and spread around the class or you see repetitions of X-Boxes, Playstation's, CD players, Houses and vehicles. When you get original ideas they stand out. Clearly, some people might be weak at drawing but have original ideas and vice versa. Many of the most talented artists in my classes have very weak imaginations and this test brings this to light. When a student has added rich details, backgrounds, perhaps even colour and have cleverly adapted and manipulated the cube you should score highly.

It is fairly straightforward to separate the outcomes of this task into these ability strands:

1. Highly Skillful and Imaginative. Creates a highly imaginative and skillful picture that is original and well executed. The picture makes use of space, considering background, detail and perspective.

2. Confident level of skill and imagination. A good outcome has been produced that adapts and manipulates the cube to suit the student's intentions. There is evidence of consideration given to background and detail, though some of the quality of the execution might be a little lacking.
3. Developing level of skill and imagination. The drawing is highly dependent on borrowed ideas or there might be a considerable lack of skill in outcomes or little evidence. There is evidence of a clear struggle to achieve the class standard.

In the imaginative realisation drawing you should give consideration to:

- Adapting and manipulating the cube to conform to their own idea.
- Using multiple and repeat cubes to create more complex ideas.
- Consideration given to background to make the cube part of a scenic composition.
- Creation of depth, perspective and spatial awareness.
- Consideration of the whole drawing.

I usually mark this in class with the pupils in a discussion/peer/self informal manner. Then I would record only one mark in my marks book from an average of the two test scores as exceptional, high, middle, low, SEN.

**Knowledge test** The pupils are given a question on the board which they must write down then complete at home. The question is: "Who is the mysterious stranger in the painting 'the bar at the Folies-Bergère' by Edouard Manet 1881". Present your answers in the most creative manner you feel appropriate.

What I'm asking my students to do is to find out what this painting is (a quick browser search), read about it, identify that there are many different opinions on who he is but no one really knows and then present this answer creatively in their own manner. Yes they can ask their mate in form

time but they'd still score low/no marks because their response is poor. The ability to do this is crucial to the type of work they will need for GCSE. You are testing their ability to work independently and form critical opinions about art. I mark mine as a simple exceptional, high, middle, low, SEN and no mark.

**Evaluation test** This is easy because I simply ask the English department for the pupil's reading age. This gives me vital information about the literacy level of the pupil (and the class) that tells me how able they are to access my teaching materials, how good their written and verbal responses will be and in short, how effective their evaluation skills are. I'll record them again as; exceptionally high reading age, high reading age, normal average, low and very low SEN.

So now you will have scores in four areas of making, ideas, knowledge and evaluation and it's only taken one quite interesting lesson and we've marked it in class. I'll get the homework scores the following week and add the reading ages later.

Name	Making	Ideas	Know	Eval	Comment
Bob	G&T	H	H	H	Very talented student
Sue	M	M	L	M	Homework an issue
David	L	L	x	SEN	Has learning difficulties

My marks book now shows that Bob is potentially G&T and David is more than likely an SEN student. Whilst Sue is average for her age she has problem working at home, independently so I need to do something about it! This test is very revealing and informs both your teaching and

also writes your reports for you! From a baseline test such as this you can monitor progress accurately and be able to give an inspector or SLT accurate information about how much progress your students have made in the key areas of art.

A G&T student should be confidently high scoring in all of these areas. When coupled with your own teaching observations over time, you should be able to say confidently which students are G&T, which are highly able or skilled artists and which aren't. That's it folks! My test is hopefully quick, accurate and informative. Good luck with it and let me know how you get on.

### About the author

*Paul Carney has over twenty years experience as an ex-Head of Art in a Specialist Arts Secondary school and a Middle School teacher and art consultant. He serves on the professional development board of the National Society for Education in Art & Design NSEAD and was a member of the DfE Expert Advisory Group for Art and Design. In addition to this he was a member of the NSEAD Curriculum Writing Group that wrote the curriculum competencies, more formally called the: 'Framework for Progression, Planning for Learning, Assessment, Recording and Reporting 2014.'*