

VTS Lowe Art Museum Docent Training

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a learner-centered method designed to introduce help people find meaning in visual arts. VTS techniques create a welcoming and respectful environment by creating an opportunity for children and new art viewers to use their senses and their individual backgrounds to approach art.

A facilitator who is trained in the VTS techniques poses simple, open-ended questions about a work of art, and new viewers are encouraged to look carefully and verbalize these observations.

Students can have the positive experience of an adult leader listening to opinions and ideas they express about the art. A group discussion proceeds with a courteous exchange of viewers' ideas, thus modeling speaking and listening skills, as well as the expression of ideas. Viewers can develop personal connections and understandings to artwork that would probably not have occurred in a lecture format viewing artwork.

VTS methods offer a positive way for new viewers to approach fine art and makes art more personally accessible. It increases observation skills, evidential reasoning, speculative abilities, and the ability to find multiple solutions to complex problems.

The first VTS Question is:

1. What is going on in this picture?

Students look at art piece and make observations relating what they see to their own memories and what they know of the world. The facilitator paraphrases the first response to communicate that the speaker was heard and understood. This validates the individual views, and demonstrates language use.

The facilitator may ask the speaker another question ...

2. VTS Question: What do you see that makes you say that?

This invites the speaker to elaborate and encourages deeper levels of observation and expression. They learn to support their observation with evidence. These comments will stimulate the other viewers to continue their observations and the de-coding of the artwork.

3. VTS Question: **What more can we find?**

The facilitator can call on another student to add their interpretation to the discussion, and paraphrasing this comment, too.

With each paraphrase the facilitator confirms that the comment was heard and understood, and re-states the idea for the others to hear. By clarifying the comments, language skills can be enriched by the use of synonyms or a more concise elaborate paraphrasing.

By asking viewers to look again, viewers may see details or visual relationships that stimulate new ideas. They will label what they see and offer their own interpretations and opinions. Narratives or storytelling-style discussions are encouraged, all guided by the respectful and non-judgmental methods of the facilitator. Viewers are encouraged to explain their comments, which often involve emotions and personal experiences. Differing opinions can be expressed without negative, critical commentary from the facilitator, an authority figure. Viewers have learned to make sense of something that may have at first appeared strange and unknown.

VTS VISUAL THINKING STRATEGIES

Students and teachers examine **carefully selected art** images.

Teachers ask **open-ended questions** beginning with: □

3 What's going on in this picture?

Teachers **paraphrase** student **responses**, actively listening, validating individual views, demonstrating language use, reinforcing a range of ideas.

3 What do you see that makes you say that?

Students **support opinions** with evidence, listen and share information and ideas, to **construct meanings** together

3 What more can we find?

Teachers **facilitate** student **discussions**, encouraging scaffolding of observations and interpretations

Artworks become more complex as student facility grows.

" DON'T TELL WHAT YOU CAN ASK."

VUE.org Visual Understanding in Education (VUE) conducts educational research focused on aesthetic and cognitive development that results from interaction with art. Based on its findings, VUE develops programs for schools and museums, principally Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). VUE is not-for-profit and primarily supported by grants.