Guidelines for Analyzing an Artwork

Analyzing involves identifying relationships among elements in an artwork. It means looking at how the artist organized subject matter and elements including line, shape, form, texture, colors, and space so that they interrelate as a composition. The guidelines below can be used to analyze an artwork. You may not need all of the items. You may want to add relationships that are not listed here.

1) Similarities:
   a) Are things similar in shape, form, value, color, pattern, size, or texture?
   b) Are some lines or edges similar in direction: horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular?

2) Contrasts:
   a) Are there contrasts of dark/light, cool/warm, large/small, curved/angled, hard/soft, rough/smooth? (Contrasts can occur in line, color, value, texture, shape, or form.)

3.) Repeated Elements (Rhythm):
   a) Is anything repeated over and over?
   b) Is there a repeated alternation of elements?
   c) Are there progressions from large to small, warm to cool, light to dark and so on?

4.) Movement:
   a) Are there elements that direct your vision?
   b) Are there continuous lines, edges, arrangement of shapes and forms?
   c) Are there lines of sight?

5.) Dominance:
   a) Is there an area, element, or arrangement that dominates the rest of the work? Is it due to size, central location, complexity, isolation, contrast of some kind, or convergence?
   b) Does one element dominate the whole work? Is there one color or texture, or a pattern that covers the whole work?

6.) Balance:
   a) What arrangements or relationships of elements contribute to the balance in the composition?
   b) Is balance symmetrical, asymmetrical, approximately symmetrical, radial?

7.) Relationships Between Subject and Medium:
   a) What are relationships between the subject and the art elements?
   b) What are relationships between the subject and the medium used to produce it?