

Image Checklist

A List of Possible Considerations for Artists :: Robert J. Tiess © 2014

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Please note: The online edition of this document includes additional links to definitions for certain concepts and terms.

About this list: This list merely exists to **provoke constructive questions** in the mind of an artist and is neither posited to be correct and exhaustive nor absolute and the “final word” on any artistic matter!

Plentiful exceptions exist to any artistic choice, practice, style, school, or “rule,” and it is ultimately up to the artists themselves to decide what to consider, when to revise, and how to complete their works.

The word “**image**,” wherever it appears below, is meant to embody the **entire visual work** in question (e.g. an illustration, a 3D render, photograph, flyer, poster, advertisement, promotional or informational graphic).

The word “**element**” is meant to represent any **individually identifiable thing** within the image (e.g. a character, a piece of text, a photo, a symbol).

This checklist is permanently **unfinished** and certainly subject to **future revisions**.

The most updated version of this free document can be found at www.artofinterpretation.com

Abstract or Concrete

- Is the image intended to be somewhat or entirely abstract (conceptual / nonfigurative / nonrepresentational) or concrete (specific / mimetic / natural / realistic)?
- Can the image benefit from increased abstraction or a more realistic treatment?
- Is the image meant to be artistic / stylistic? functional / instructional? a mixture of these things?
- Is the image intended to convey a specific meaning or statement, or is it meant to be left entirely open to interpretation?

Action

- Does the image contain any kind of action / movement?
- Is the image intended to provoke an action or reaction among viewers? If so, does it clearly and effectively convey the ideas / message(s) / etc. to inspire such responses?
- Is the image seemingly inert, inactive, relatively lifeless?
- Is the wording, if any, passive instead of active? If so, can the wording be improved?

Aesthetics

- Is the overall image pleasing to the eye, or is it harsh in some major or minor way?
- What elements or properties of the image can be adjusted to make the image more attractive and/or effective?
- Does the image employ stylistic elements? If so, are these elements stylistically consonant and synergistic, or do they tend to counter the desired end result?
- Are there certain aesthetic tendencies in this work that also appear in your other visual works? If so, is there some significance to that, or can you consider other approaches and stylistic treatments?

Allusions

- Are there any visual allusions (references) in the image? If not, have you considered incorporating one or more visual allusions into the image?
- Are there historical or literary references present?
- If so, are these references appropriate? Effective? How do they add or detract from the meaning/interpretive potential and/or quality of the image?

Aspect Ratio and Orientation

- What is the aspect ratio of the image?
- Is the image “portrait” (tall) or “landscape” (wide) oriented?
- Have you considered re-orienting the image (e.g. landscape instead of portrait, or vice versa)?
- What stands to be lost or gained, spatially or in terms of perspective and contents, if you change the orientation?

Attention

- Is the image intended to grab someone’s attention? If so, does it? If not, why?
- Through what style, technique, statement, and/or image does it attempt to get someone’s attention?
- What can be done with the image to make it more attention-getting, if it’s necessary?
- Might the image contain unintentionally attention-getting elements?
- Does the primary focal element / area of the piece garner the most attention, or do side/background elements potentially compete with, or steal, the viewer’s initial focus?

Audience

- What is the intended audience of the image, if any?
- If the image is intended for a certain age group, is the image, along with all elements within it, age-appropriate?
- Is the image intended to engage a certain type of person / demographic / group?
- Can the image be improved to be more inclusive or universal in its appeal / meaning?
- Have you educated yourself on the intended audience and taken steps to ensure your image is received positively?
- Might anything in the image be construed as disrespectful or negative to a particular group, culture, or demographic?
- Can the image be adjusted in any way to improve its public reception?
- Can the image benefit from a more inclusive appeal through more diverse imagery?

Awareness

- How aware are you about the topic(s) you wish to portray in the image?
- Can research and/or reference imagery help you be better prepared to produce the image?
- How aware do you expect your audience to be about what you hope to convey?
- Are you aware of the many different ways your image might be perceived?
- How much attention have you paid to each element within the image?
- Are you aware of any deficiencies or shortcomings in the image? Can you fix those?

Background

- What is going on, if anything, in the background?
- Is the background too vacant, or does the emptiness suit the style / tone / focus?
- Is the background too busy?
- Are background elements sufficiently contrasted / separated from the primary focal point of the image?
- Can the background / background elements benefit from desaturation, blurring, or colorization?

Balance

- Do all the elements in the image help the image achieve a sense of balance or imbalance?
- Is the image top/left/bottom/right- heavy?
- Can the balance benefit from a rearrangement of the composition or from the removal of one or more elements in the image?

Clarity

- Is the intended primary focal element clear?
- Is the intended tone / message / meaning / style clear?
- Are certain elements too clear or too unclear?
- Is there any visible pixelation?
- Could the image be sharpened?
- Should certain elements be blurred? Is the primary focal text clear and concise?

Cohesion / Flow and Synergy / Harmony

- Does everything in the image belong, congeal, work together, achieve cohesion, feel right and flow together? If not, what is out of place or working against the flow?
- Does the image have a true sense of harmony about it? Is there any imbalance?
- Are there any elements or aspects of the image preventing it from achieving a greater sense of harmony? If so, is this intentional?
- Can something be removed, introduced, or repositioned to improve the overall synergy and harmony?
- Is there any sense of flow / continuity present throughout the image, with one element flowing into the next?
- If there is a flow, is it directional? Left to right? Top to bottom? Center / outward?

Colors

- Is the piece monochromatic or multi-colored?
- Can the image work better if colorized or completely desaturated (i.e. black-and-white/gray scale)?
- Do the colors complement or clash?
- Can color be added into the image to make it more attractive and effective?
- Are color gradients present? If not, might they help ease the transition between elements and/or enhance the primary focal piece of the image?
- Have you considered how your image might appear to viewers with visual difficulties such as color blindness? If a person could not perceive some or all colors, can your image still impart its information and/or be enjoyed? Can you eliminate any color-dependent approaches if your image is informational and intended to be accessible to all viewers?

Complexity / Simplicity

- Have you generally made things too complex or too simple in the image?
- Does the image have too much happening at once? Is it too demanding on the eyes?
- Could a simpler or more complex treatment be more suitable?
- Is the wording and meaning simple or complex?
- Are there any extraneous / unnecessary elements in the image, and can they be removed to help improve the overall image? Are there too many details? Not enough?
- How many elements and/or words can you remove before you begin to lose the intended meaning / message (if any) in the overall image?

Contrasting Elements

- Are there contrasting elements in the image?
- If so, are they intentional and effective?
- Does the contrast support the theme or feel you wish to produce in the image?

Contrasting Values

- Does the image contain sufficient contrast between foreground and background elements?
- Is the contrast weak or strong? Can the image benefit from gamma correction?
- Can the contrast of certain elements in the image be improved (by lowered or increased contrast)? Can levels / RGBV curves be adjusted to improve the image?

Cropping and Framing

- Are elements in the image cropped? If so, are they effectively cropped (i.e. is there too much or too little space around those elements)?
- How is the overall image cropped and presented?
- Is there any empty space that can be removed or added to improve the overall image?
- Are elements around the primary focal point of the image arranged in such a way as to help frame the focal point?
- Can the primary focal point or overall image benefit from a border/matte?

Cultural Elements and Imagery

- Does the image contain any culture-specific elements or themes? If so, are they incorporated appropriately and respectfully in the image?
- Can you, or should you, incorporate or remove cultural references to increase the appropriateness of the image?
- Are you aware of - or have you done any research about - the culture(s) represented in the image? If not, could you please consider learning more about these culture(s)?

Depth

- Does the image have a sense of depth? If not, could a sense of depth help strengthen the intended primary focal point of the image?
- Can elements be blurred or de-emphasized in some way (e.g. reduced contrast) to improve the image?
- Are elements arranged in front of or behind other elements?
- If so, do they contribute a sense of depth?
- Is the image flat (near or completely 2D in appearance in terms of lighting / shading / positioning of elements in the image)? If so, is this effective, or could depth be introduced (e.g. through shadows, placement of elements) to improve the image?
- Can the depth of focus be improved? Simulated or enhanced in post-production? Increased or decreased to improve things?

Direction and Motion

- Is there, in the image, a sense of direction or motion? Is it intentional?
- Is the image stronger because of that sense of motion?
- Are there any angularities, and, if so, are they effective?
- Does the image suffer from a lack of direction or motion?
- Are elements within the image generally trending or mostly pointing in a certain direction?
- Can changing the direction of some or all elements in the image improve the image?

Distinction

- Are elements distinct or indistinct in the image?
- What sets this image apart from others like it?
- If this image must co-exist among other images, is the image distinct enough to visually set itself apart from other images?

Effects

- Are there any "special effects" in the image (e.g. glow/soft focus, blurring/motion blur, lens flares, noise, color/geometry decimation, colorization, sharpening)?
- If so, are they effective - or, if not, can the image benefit from one or more of these effects?
- Might there be too many effects at play within the image?

Emotion and Tone

- Is the image happy, sad, playful, meditative?
- Is the tone / treatment appropriate for the overall topic and message the image is meant to convey?
- Should the image be more or less serious? More or less tense?
- Do the elements, colors, and other aspects of the image all help establish the desired emotion and intended tone of the image?

Emphasis

- Where is the intended emphasis in the image?
- What do you wish to emphasize the most to a viewer of this image?
- Have you reduced the emphasis of secondary and lesser elements in the image? If not, why not?

Feedback

- Is (or was) your image open to public feedback? If not, why not?
- Has your image received any comments or criticism?
- Has anyone told you what they like or dislike about the image? If so, is there anything you can gain from that information? Is such feedback generally positive or negative?
- How well do you usually take constructive criticism? Do you get emotional and defensive? Are you thankful for any feedback, be it good or bad?
- Do you ever stop to think how different people's perspectives on your work can be, considering their distinct experiences, knowledge, cultural backgrounds, aesthetic preferences, etc.?
- If people comment on your image, do you try to remain open-minded and committed to improving your artistic abilities? Or do you generally ignore what people say? If so, why?
- Are you afraid of public feedback or criticism? If so, why?
- How do you feel about your project? Are you satisfied, frustrated, exhausted, proud of it, or aware that it could be improved? Would you be willing to revise it later?
- What does your image say, if anything, to you? What about your other works?
- Do you tend to learn things with every new project and apply that experience to future projects? If not, why not?
- Have you ever provided feedback to other artists? If not, why not?

File Format

- What file format(s) have you saved your image in?
- Have you learned about the pros and cons of different image file formats?
- Does the image file format you chose make use of "lossy" or "lossless" compression?
- Does the image you have created contain any transparency? If so, does the file format you want to use support transparency?
- Have you learned how to convert file formats?
- If you intend to post the image online or send it through e-mail, have you considered creating and sending a lower-resolution file so it can transmit more quickly, consume less space/bandwidth, and be viewable on the receiver's screen?

Focal Point(s) and Viewpoints

- Where does the eye naturally gravitate in the actual image?
- Is it the same where you wish it to go?
- Is there more than one focal point?
- If so, is that intentional?
- Which is the primary focal point?
- Do secondary, tertiary, etc. focal points steal too much of the viewer's focus from the primary focal point?
- Could they be better proportioned or eliminated to improve the general focus of the overall image?
- Can the viewpoint angle of the overall image be changed to improve the focus / scale / direction of the composition?
- If the image is the product of a 3D graphics project, can the 3D camera be relocated, rotated, set to higher / lower / wider / narrower lens settings, and/or altered in terms of depth-of-focus to help the image reach its most effective and interesting focal point?

Geometry – General

- Do elements in the image establish some kind of geometry (e.g. square, rectangle, triangle, circle, oval)?
- How are the shapes of elements throughout the image? Smooth? Sharp? Varied?
- Are the shapes consistent or varied?
- Would greater or lesser consistency in the shapes increase the image's effectiveness and/or appeal?
- Can elements be repositioned to improve the geometry or to make the piece less geometrical?

Geometry – 3D

- Are there enough vertices? Are subdivided elements sufficiently subdivided and/or smooth (wherever appropriate), or are jagged edges visible? If so, is this intended?
- Do meshes contain non-manifold geometry?
- Are all normals properly oriented in the same direction?

Hardware

- Does your computer optimally run the image-editing/creating software you use, or is the computer's specifications lacking in any way?
- Does your current graphics card support GPU acceleration? If so, have you determined if the software you are using can take advantage of the GPU?
- If you are looking into updating your graphics card, have you determined your computer's specifications will support it? Will your computer need a new power supply? Are drivers available for your current operating system version? And have you determined (e.g. through forums, support websites, etc.) whether or not the software you might experience with the graphics card and/or video drivers you intend to use?
- Does your computer have sufficient RAM and/or hard drive space? Can RAM be expanded? Have you looked into getting a secondary drive or flash drive?
- Has your computer reached its limits in terms of expansion? If not, is getting a newer computer possible, and, if so, are you sure it will be compatible with (i.e. be able to "run") the image editing/creation software you use? Also: is the software license transferable or will you have to purchase a new license of the software for your new computer?
- Does your mouse track accurately, or does it skip? Have you considered getting a better mouse with higher DPI, faster tracking, and possibly better ergonomics (for improved long-term usage)?
- Do you have a drawing tablet (e.g. a Wacom tablet) and/or a touch-enabled screen? If not, would either of those enhance your ability to edit/create images?

History and Anachronisms

- Are there any historical elements or themes within the image?
- Are all elements in keeping with the time period, or might they be anachronistic?
- How historically accurate are the elements in question?

Impact

- What is the intended impact and/or statement of the image?
- Does the image contain any intentional emotional impact?
- Is the statement strong or weak? Is the impact subtle or powerful?
- Should the impact of the image be stronger? Is the statement too hidden or obvious?

Inspiration and Motivation

- What inspired this image? What were your motives in creating the image, if any?
- Is the image meant to be inspirational or motivational in any way?
- What thoughts do you hope the image inspires in viewers, if anything?
- What artists or works of art inspire you?
- Do you actively seek out new sources of inspiration? If not, why not?
- What motivates you as an artist?
- Do you believe your artwork can inspire others? If not, why not?

Intellectual Property

- Do you intend to license your image and/or make it available under certain terms (e.g. Creative Commons models)?
- Does your image incorporate any elements which might be subject to copyright and/or patents? If so, have you secured the appropriate permission(s) for the use of such things in your project? Are there any image / other credits / statements you should include along with your image?
- If you wish to assert your image is copyrighted, have you clearly indicated this on the image and/or the page/location/service wherever it is provided?
- If the image was produced for a publisher, website, organization, business, employer, etc., do you have permission to disclose the fact you produced the image and the rights to republish the image elsewhere in the future?
- If you are considering submitting the image to a publisher, contest, person, or place, what are the terms of the submission? Do you retain any or all rights to the work? Have you read through the “fine print” before agreeing to have your image published?

Interpretation

- How well does the image interpret and present the ideas behind it?
- Are there other ways you can interpret and present the subject matter?
- Is the image straightforward or open to interpretation?
- What is the interpretive potential of the image? Can the image, or elements within it, have multiple meanings?
- Can elements in the image, or the image itself, possibly be misinterpreted?
- If symbols have been used, are you aware of what they might mean or represent, not only in your culture but others as well?

Lighting and Shadows - General

- Is the image lit effectively?
- What direction does the light flow? Can the light source(s)' direction be improved?
- Is the lighting harsh or soft?
- Are details washed-out / too bright or too murky / invisible?
- Have you examined the histogram of the image? If so, what does it tell you?
- Have you checked your image on more than one screen? Are you aware of possible lighting issues and color matching issues across various displays and/or printing devices?
- Is the primary focal point lit effectively and interestingly?
- Are elements too dark or too light?
- Are all shadows going in the same direction?
- Are the shadows too strong, too weak, or non-existent?
- Are shadows too sharp or too blurred / diffused?
- Have you tried lighting the image in another way (either in 3D or in post-processing)?
- Have you tried “dodging” and/or “burning” areas of the image in post-production?

Lighting and Shadows - 3D

- Are all materials (shaders) properly lit and suited to the look you are going for?
- Are there any particularly specular (shiny) areas, and, if so, are they realistic or appropriate for the style?
- Have you used / compared ray traced or buffered shadows?
- Have you increased shadow samples to an effective value?
- For reflective materials, have you sufficiently increased the mirror (reflection) depth (number of ray bounces)?
- Are there multiple light sources? If not, have you considered adding on or more lights to improve illumination (and the visibility of details) throughout the scene?
- Is ambient occlusion / global illumination available, and would it help?
- Is indirect lighting available, and would it help?
- Is HDRI (High-Dynamic-Range Image-based lighting) available, and would it help?
- Is SSS (Sub-Surface Scattering) available, and would it help?
- Is volumetric lighting possible and would it be beneficial?
- If render layers or passes are possible in the software you use, have you explored such possibilities and the greater control over the final image they might afford you?
- Can any elements benefit from shadows or drop-shadows (real or simulated)?

Lines

- Are there strong or weak lines present in the image?
- If there are lines, are they open, closed, straight, curved / wavy?
- In what direction(s) do the lines run / turn?
- Do the lines cross and/or run parallel to each other and/or create larger patterns in the image? If so, are these patterns effective and interesting, or are they too distracting?
- Does the presence of lines help maintain the intended general flow of the image?
- Can the image benefit from heavier or lighter lines – or no lines at all?

Literality and Metaphors

- Is the image intended to be literally presented and interpreted?
- Does the image include metaphoric elements or symbols?
- Are you aware of possible metaphors in the image?
- Would you like the image to mean one thing, and clearly so, or to present the image in such a way that viewers might interpret it differently and creatively?

Logic and Irrationality

- Is the image intended to be orderly and logical?
- Is the image or any element in it counter-intuitive in any way?
- Could the image stand to be more disorderly and unpredictable?
- If the image is informational, is it as logical and intuitive as possible, or can elements and/or wording in the image be rearranged and/or refined?

Mathematical Aspects

- Are there any numerical and/or mathematical aspects within the image or its elements? (e.g. numeration, geometry, Fibonacci Numbers, Phi, Golden Ratio, fractals / recursion (Droste Effect / mise en abyme) / Escheresque repetitions / symmetries)?
- Is there anything sequential / orderly about the image?
- Does any particular element or aspect add or subtract too much from the image?
- How can you multiply, literally or qualitatively, the overall visual impact of the image?

Memorable

- What, in the image, would you want someone to remember?
- Are there any elements within the image which might be open to one or more interpretations?
- Are there any opportunities, in the image, to make it more meaningful?
- Does the overall image lend itself to multiple viewings? If not, why not?
- Would you consider the overall image memorable or forgettable?
- Are there appreciable details or other interesting elements, qualities, or aspects within the image which might inspire viewers to return to it in the future?
- What could be changed, added, or removed in the image to render it more interesting, more open to interpretation, more welcoming of repeat viewings, perhaps even to make it unforgettable among some viewers?

Message

- What is the image trying to communicate?
- Is the meaning clear or open to potential misinterpretation?
- Do elements in the image speak with a unified voice?
- Does anything in the image speak against, or fail to communicate, what you want to say?

Order and Hierarchy

- What is the natural visible order of the image?
- Where does the eye naturally begin and then settle after moving through the image?
- Are the most important elements of the image seen first, or do other secondary elements attract the eye first?

Patterns and Repetition

- Are there any patterns in the image?
- Are they spatial or texture-based?
- Is there too much repetition? If textures were used, are they too repetitive?
- Does any visible repetition support the overall message / theme / feel of the image?
- Is there any symmetry in the image, and is it intentional?
- Can the image benefit more from asymmetry or symmetry?

Perfection and Imperfection

- Is the image too perfect or imperfect, and therefore unnatural?
- Is the image too balanced and/or symmetrical?
- Can the image benefit from a more or less idealized treatment?
- If the image is meant to be realistic, is it sufficiently imperfect so as to seem real?
- Is the image meant to be unreal or surreal? If so, do elements in the image support this?

Positions and Groupings

- How are elements positioned and/or grouped throughout the image? Evenly? Randomly?
- Can the position of the elements, including any text, be revised to be more effective and interesting?
- Are things grouped together in logical units or according to some other criteria?
- Can anything be better spaced / spread out anywhere in the image?
- What about the margins? Could the image benefit from increased/decreased margins?
- Can text, if any, in the image, be better spaced / paragraphed / positioned?
- Can any elements, particularly those meant to be grouped, be better aligned (on their respective top / side / left / right sides) to make the presentation more attractive and/or effective?
- Do elements in the image seem too aligned and therefore artificial / forced? Can those elements benefit from a touch of chaos / disorderliness?
- Do elements in the image appear too close or too far away? Can those be moved?
- Can any element in the image – or the image itself – be flipped along the X (horizontal) and/or the Y (vertical) axis to produce an improved final image?

Post-production / post-processing

- After the overall image has been composed / rendered, can anything be improved in post?
- Can the image benefit from Hue / Saturation / Level / Brightness / Contrast adjustments?
- Can the image benefit from additional texturing?
- Can the image benefit from a border or matte or some other framing?

Randomness

- Is the image overly orderly? Can it benefit from some randomness?
- Does the image contain too many randomized elements? Could the image benefit from some of those elements being arranged in a more orderly fashion?

Refinement

- Has the image reached its true potential, or could it be developed further?
- If you had more time or energy to work on the image, what would you change?
- Examining the image as objectively as possible, what elements or aspects of the image could be improved?
- Does the image look and feel complete? Is something unfinished or missing?

Relationships

- How do elements in the image (objects, text, etc.) relate with each other? Consider this question from a variety of perspectives: meaning, style, hue/value, size, space, etc.
- Can certain elemental relationships be strengthened?
- What are the spatial relationships between each element and the main focal element?
- Are their intentional proximities or distances between certain elements?
- Are all elements juxtaposed or spaced effectively and interestingly?

Render and Image Quality

- Are there any artifacts (distortions) in the image?
- How was the image saved? Was a lossless (e.g. PNG) file format used?
- Is the image bitmap or vector?
- Is the image of a sufficient resolution for printing?
- Are elements in the image of a high-enough resolution, or is there any visible and unattractive pixelation?
- Can the image be enhanced or rescaled for clarity in post-processing?
- Will the image need to be resized (e.g. made smaller) at some point? If so, how legible / attractive / visible are all elements (especially essential / focal textual elements) at the smaller size?
- Do any elements suffer from poor or no anti-aliasing?
- Are there vector alternatives to bitmap elements in the image?
- If it was produced in a 3D program, can the image be re-rendered at a higher resolution / oversampling rate?
- Is there any noise in the image? If not, could some slight noise improve the image?

The “Rule of Thirds”

- Does the primary focal point of the image exist somewhere at the intersecting points when the image is divided (horizontally and vertically) into thirds?
- If there is a horizon, where does the horizontal horizon line run?
- Does the image work better without conforming to the Rule of Thirds?

Sizes and Proportion

- As with Relationships and Spacing, what are the proportional relationships between the elements in the image?
- Do the elements, as they are currently proportioned, produce a sense of scale, if that is required?
- Is there anything that is too small or too large or unnaturally scaled (i.e. stretched too tall or wide)?
- Have you sufficiently established the sense of scale in the image, or is it ambiguous as to how large or small elements are in the image? Can something be added or adjusted to improve the intended sense of scale?
- Are elements equidistant from each other and/or the margin on all sides? If not, should they be? If so, does the equidistance seem natural or forced?
- Can and should elements in the image be resized to increase variety in the image?
- When composing this image, have you made use of the Golden Ratio (AKA the “Divine Proportion,” “The Golden Mean,” the “Golden Rectangle”)?

Software

- What software did you use to create the image, and why?
- Does the current software and/or the license you are using place any limitations or restrictions on the use or any other aspect of the image you are trying to produce?
- Have you explored all other software options?
- Are any open-source alternatives (e.g. Blender, GIMP) you might consider using?
- Have you learned about the more advanced features of the software you are using to produce the image?
- Have you creatively experimented with options and/or explored workarounds and potential time-saving short-cuts in the software you are using?
- Are newer versions of the software you are using available, and is the upgrade possible for your computer / operating system?
- Are newer versions of the software you are using reverse-compatible with older files, or are their incompatibility and/or data-loss risks if you open and save an older file in a newer version of the software?
- Is your operating system optimally configured to enable your image editing/creating software to run as quickly (and with as much RAM it needs) as it can?

Spacing and White Space

- Are elements effectively and/or attractively spaced throughout the image? Is the spacing too regular or too haphazard / random?
- If text is present, is it effectively spaced, or could more or less space improve the look?
- What about “white space” (empty space) throughout the image? Is there enough space, or do some elements seem too close together? Can more space help here?

Story

- Does the image tell a story?
- If the image tells a story, how does it do it? What elements in the image represent aspects of the story?
- Is the intended story partially or fully told?
- Is the story cliché, classic, or original? Can you increase its originality in any way?
- How did you narrate the story visually? Is the image part of a larger story?
- Is the intended story original, or is it based upon or inspired by a classic or popular story, myth, legend, historical event, recognizable person/character, or something else?
- Are there any archetypal elements or characters within the image?
- If characters are present in the image, how do they help tell the story? Who or what do they represent? Are they unique or stereotypical? Can you improve or remove them?
- What is the setting? Should it be recognizable? If so, is it? If not, can you add some visual cues to enable the viewer to better understand where the story takes place?
- Is the audience expected to understand the story intended to be told? Can the image still succeed and be appreciated by general viewers if the story goes unrecognized?
- What elements or aspects of the image can be added, changed, or removed to tell the story more effectively and creatively?

Subject Matter

- What is the overall topical content of the image?
- Are there any secondary themes / subtopics present in the image?
- How is the main subject portrayed? What imagery did you use, and why?
- Is the subject portrayed mostly objectively or subjectively?
- Are there other, possibly better ways to portray the subject?
- How much do you know about the subject? Have you researched it thoroughly?
- Did you have a choice in choosing the subject? If so, why did you choose this subject?
- Do you try to expand your artistic interests into other subject areas? If not, why not?
- What subjects have you not considered yet, and why?

Text and Wording

- Is the text legible?
- Does the font style support the overall tone and theme of the image?
- Is there more than one font style at play? If so, is it necessary and effective?
- Are less-important textual elements sufficiently smaller in size than the primary focal text elements?
- What about text color(s)? Have you used too many? Can colors improve things?
- Were multiple font colors used? If not, could increased variety improve things?
- Is the text placement effective?
- Might the text look better when centered or placed by the left or right margins?
- Could full justification be used for paragraph text?
- Did you use all caps or "smart caps," and, if so, is it effective or unnecessary?
- Is there jargon? If so, can it be improved, or should it be removed?
- Were any words, phrases, or names in the image written in a different language? Was any slang used? In either case, might that cause any problems if someone might not understand what is being said? Is understanding that text essential?

Textures and Materials / Shaders

- Does the image, or elements within it, contain one or more textures? If so, do the textures enhance or detract from the overall image in any way?
- Are there sufficient details in the texture(s) you are using?
- Are the textures of a sufficiently high enough resolution if you need to print?
- Are the textures oriented / mapped properly to their corresponding elements, or could those things be improved?
- Are the textures and/or materials used in the image intended to be realistic or stylistic? Either way, are they consistent and/or presented in a way that raises the quality of the overall image?
- Are materials and textures too shiny or too flat (2D) in appearance?
- Are textures bitmap-based or procedural? Have you considered using procedurals?
- Have you created your own textures for this project? If not, could custom textures help improve the quality of the overall image?
- What does the image look like without textures?
- Can individual elements within the image benefit from better textures and/or material settings?
- Can things such as colors, values, saturation, brightness, contrast, reflection, refraction, transparency, and translucence be improved anywhere in the image to increase its quality and/or make it look more cohesive and/or realistic?

Title

- Does the image have a title? If not, why is the image untitled?
- If the image does have a title, what kind of title is it? Is it descriptive, literal, suggestive, clarifying, accurate, confusing, interesting, uninspired, nonsensical, or artistic?
- How much thought have you put into the title of the image?
- Does the title help explain the image?
- Does the title limit or direct the interpretive potential of the image in a certain way?
- Is the title too long and/or distracting? Is it deficient in any way? Can it be improved?

Uniquity

- What is the most unique thing about your image?
- Have you done all you can, creatively speaking, to make the image unique?
- Is the image so unique as to be distracting?
- Is the image so mundane as to risk going unnoticed?
- Have you treated the subject matter in the image as uniquely as possible, or was that not the goal?
- Have you approached the construction of the image in a convention or unconventional way?
- Could the image benefit from being more conventional or unconventional?
- What sets this image apart from other images you have created?
- What sets this image apart from other images which might be similar to it?

Variety and Frequency

- If there are several elements in the image, is there sufficient variety?
- Can the image benefit from more or less variety?
- Are there several styles at play in the image? If so, do they work well together or clash?
- Are there repeated elements in the image? Can such repetition be made less tiresome through creative repositioning / resizing / recoloring / rotation of those elements?

Vitality

- Is the image cold, dark, warm, bright, nearly or completely colorless, or visually vibrant?
- Does the image have a general sense of life or liveliness to it?
- Is the image meant to be exciting or emotional in some way? If so, does that come across?
- What can be added, removed, or adjusted to make the image feel more organic or lively?

Workflow

- Did you prepare in any way before attempting to create the image? For example, did you do any research on topics portrayed in the image? Did you consult any reference photos? Did you create any sketches or concept art beforehand? If not, why not?
- What was the most or least challenging aspect of creating this image, and why?
- What could or should you have done differently in this project?
- How did you create the image? Do you have a set process in place - a specific workflow - or do you create each image using different steps?
- Do you develop a variety of drafts and alternate takes / perspectives / renders, or usually work towards one final image?
- Do you ever experiment using different creative approaches when creating an image, or do you usually do things in a straightforward and orthodox way?
- Is there anything in your general workflow which can be improved qualitatively, logically, or in terms of speed? Can anything be improved in terms of software / operating system / computer hardware?
- How well are you familiar with the advanced features of the software you use to create an image? Have you explored all the different possibilities within the software? Have you considered using other software?
- How do you finalize your image? Do you engage in any post-processing? If not, why not?
- How did you decide to conclude your project? Was time a factor? Did you reach some limitation or lose interest? Did you push the image as far as you could and develop everything to the best of your abilities?
- Do you request feedback on your image? If not, why not?
- If you receive comments on your work, do you take them into consideration in your future projects the workflows associated with those projects? If not, why not?

Please feel free to reconsider or disregard *any* or *all* of the questions and statements within this document!

Only you, the artist, can truly fulfill the potential of your art *as you deem fit*.

Once again...

This list merely exists to provoke constructive questions in the mind of an artist and is neither posited to be correct and exhaustive nor absolute and the “final word” on any artistic matter!

Plentiful exceptions exist to any artistic choice, practice, style, school, or “rule,” and it is ultimately up to the artists themselves to decide what to consider, when to revise, and how to complete their works.

This checklist is permanently unfinished and certainly subject to future revisions.

The most updated version of this free document can be found at

www.artofinterpretation.com
