

# Visual Thinking Strategies – The Basics

Ask the following 3 VTS Questions exactly as written:

## **1. *What is going on in this picture?***

This question opens up the discussion. Note that the verb used is active and thus encourages an active response. Avoid beginning with “What do you see?” as this question tends to elicit a list of objects rather than engagement with the art.

## **2. *What do you see that makes you say that?***

This question asks students to provide evidence for their observations. Evidence in the form of visual imagery is relatively easy to give, and the skill learned is enormously useful in writing.

## **3. *What more can you find?***

This question gives students the opportunity to look further and stretch their visual and critical thinking abilities.

### **Paraphrase each student’s response**

The process of rephrasing every response serves many purposes. It shows that you are listening to each student, gives everyone in the group a chance to hear the response if they missed it the first time, helps build students’ self-esteem through positive attention, and is an opportunity to enrich students’ vocabulary. It also helps establish a connection between you and the students.

### **Link one student’s response to another when possible**

When you express connections between students’ thoughts, you encourage students to stretch their own thinking and to make their own connections. Linking students’ responses is a difficult task as it requires listening to and rephrasing details, as well as the ability to keep a grasp on the larger points of the discussion. However, linking responses is essential to nurturing students’ growth.

### **Point to all that the student mentions in the image**

As the student talks, point to each particular part of the art image mentioned. This allows everyone in the room to “see” what the respondent is seeing and encourages students to keep looking.

### **Remain neutral**

Just as it is important to recognize each student’s response by paraphrasing, it is as important not to privilege one response over another. The simplest way to do this is to nod your head after each response.

### **Take up to fifteen minutes to discuss each image**

There is no prescribed amount of time for discussion of each image, but 15 minutes is a good rule of thumb. The goal is to allow students to engage with the image and with each other.