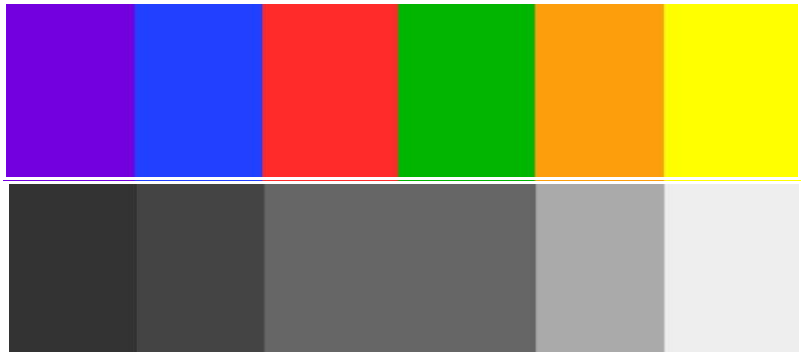
# Value / Lights and Darks

Value is defined as the relative lightness or darkness of a color. It is an important tool for the artist, in the way that it defines form and creates spatial illusions. Since we see objects and understand objects because of how dark or light they are, value is incredibly important.

Value deals directly to light. We see things because light reflects off of objects and goes into our eyes. Our mind processes the light and rationalizes what we are seeing. Without light, we cannot see anything. In order to draw or paint in a way that creates an illusion of what we normally see, we must fully understand light and how it reacts on surfaces. Value is the key to the illusion of light. All color has a relationship to black greys and white. That is how we have black and white photos from colored images.



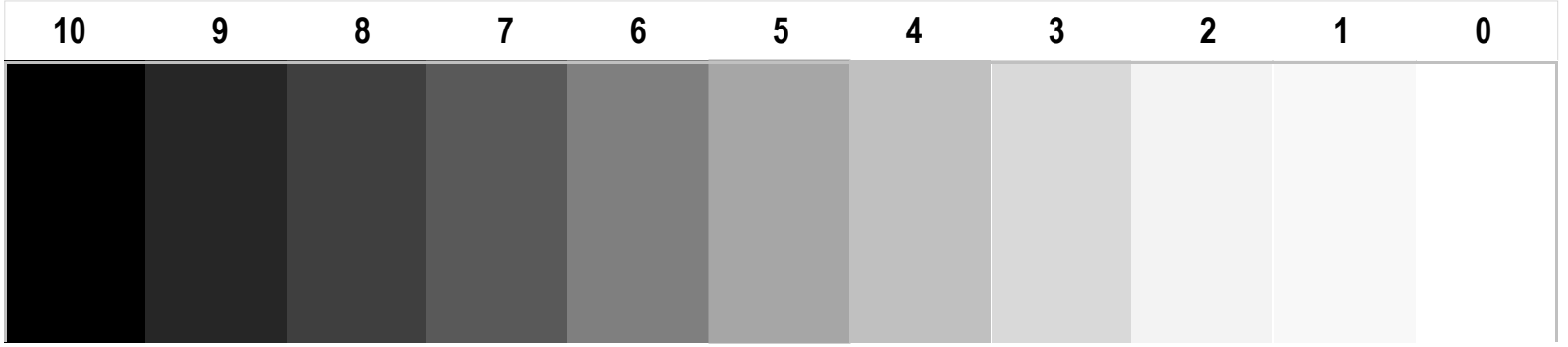
**Successful Artwork has a Full Range of Value**

Artwork that exhibit a full range of value are generally successful. It doesn't matter the type of art you are creating. As long as there are dark values in harmony with light values, your artwork will most likely be aesthetically pleasing. A full range of value means that they are ample amounts of light values- called tints, and dark values- called shades. To be sure that you have a full range of value in your artwork you may create a value scale...

**Value-Terms:**

**Value-** Element of art associated with the darkness or lightness of a color
**Light source**- area in which light is originating from
**Value scale-** a guide to creating a range of value, good art has a full range of value
**Tints**- light values (adding white)
**Shades**- dark values (adding black)
**Highlights**- areas on an object where light is hitting
**Shadows**- areas on an object where light does not hit

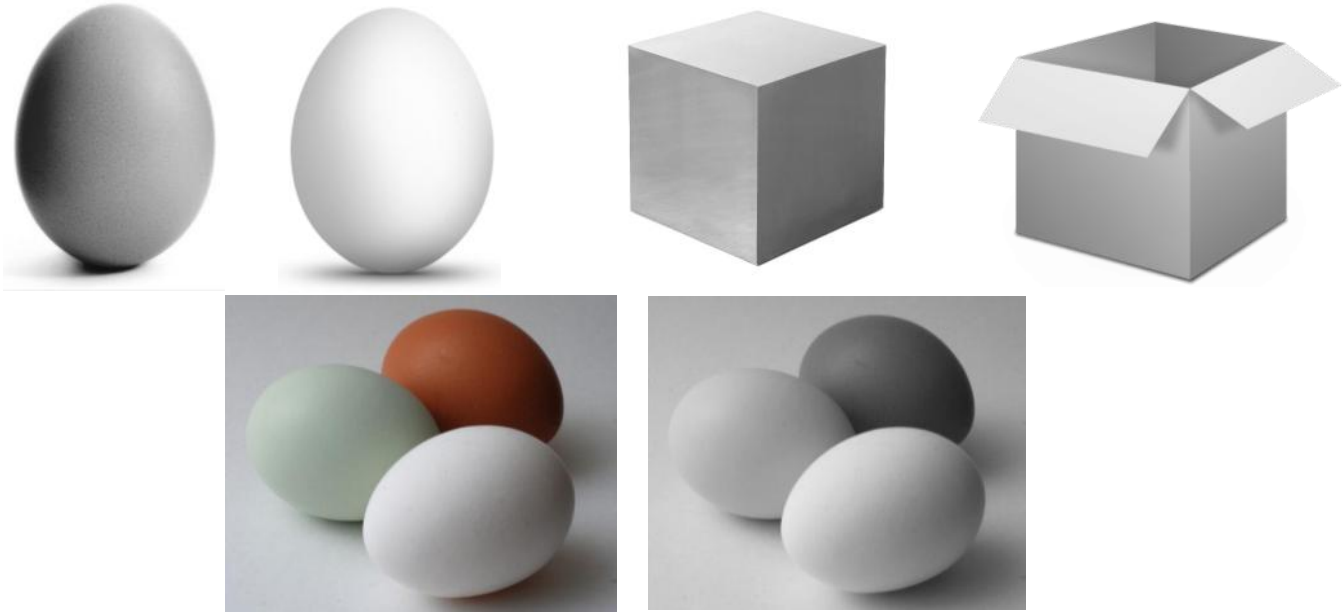
## Value Scale—#10 is black…..#0 is white



# Working with Values / Shading

You know the objects around you are three-dimensional because you can walk up to them, see them from all sides, and touch them. Take a moment to look around you at familiar objects. Try to discover why you see their actual three-dimensional forms. Look for the different values created by the light and shadows.

All shading, whether in black & white or in color can be divided into two general types—an egg or a box. If there is a smooth gradation of color and value, it is an egg. If there are sharp edges of different values, it is a box.



**QUESTIONS THAT HELP MAKE SHADING DECISIONS**

- Where is the darkest dark?
- Where is the lightest light
- How many shades do I see between?
- What is the lightest overall object or surface in the scene?
- What is the darkest part of the lightest object?
- Is the darkest part of the lightest object still lighter than anything on the next darkest object?
- Is the lightest part of the darkest object still darker than anything on the lightest object?
- Do the lights and darks change gradually or with a sharp edge? Is it and egg or a box?
- If I have an outline drawn of an object, what is creating that line, ie. is the object or the background lighter or darker?
- When I stand back from my drawing, is everything a similar gray, or is there a range of shades?

Contrast can be used to make your drawings & paintings more three-dimensional by accentuating the light and shadows. By using extremes in values (more light and dark values than middle values) you create a high-contrast drawing. For a really powerful, strong, and dynamic drawing, you can draw very dark shading right next to the light areas.

When a drawing has mostly light and middle values, it is called low contrast. Some drawing subjects need to be soft and gentle. You can create a very soft drawing and still use a full range of values. Think about a white kitten, for example. Most of the shading is very light, but the drawing becomes more powerful if you use a little dark shading in a few selective areas, such as the pupils of the eyes and the shadows.

Your paintings can appear flat rather than three-dimensional when you use too little contrast in values. Unless you are trying to achieve a specific mood or want the subject to look flat, always use a full range of values.