

Drawings and Visual Imagery

Impact Evaluation Resources

For some audiences, responding in a creative way can be a meaningful way to evaluate an exhibition, experience, or event. Participants might draw, take photographs, create collages, or use other artforms to respond to stimuli from the exhibition or display they have visited or after engaging with a particular piece of research.

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Visual methods can be used as a standalone evaluation, or to measure change, such as before and after a museum visit, intervention, or experience.

The evaluation through drawing or visual imagery might be part of the activity, embedding it in the event itself. For example, you might want to get children's perspectives on an exhibition, so you ask them to respond creatively to what they see (see Figure 1 for an example).

The first child was around 6 years old. I had stuck some of the pictures on the tent. I took her over to look at them and asked if she thought the pictures seemed happy or sad. She thought they looked sad because they were 'fuzzy' and not colourful.

I asked her if she would like to make a picture that had the same feeling. She chose a picture of a child about to get a vaccination, who looked scared and sad. She enjoyed adding things to the picture to change it, the tracing paper made it look 'fuzzy' like the photos.



Figure 1: Evaluator's field notes and collage made by a workshop participant responding to an exhibition of photographs

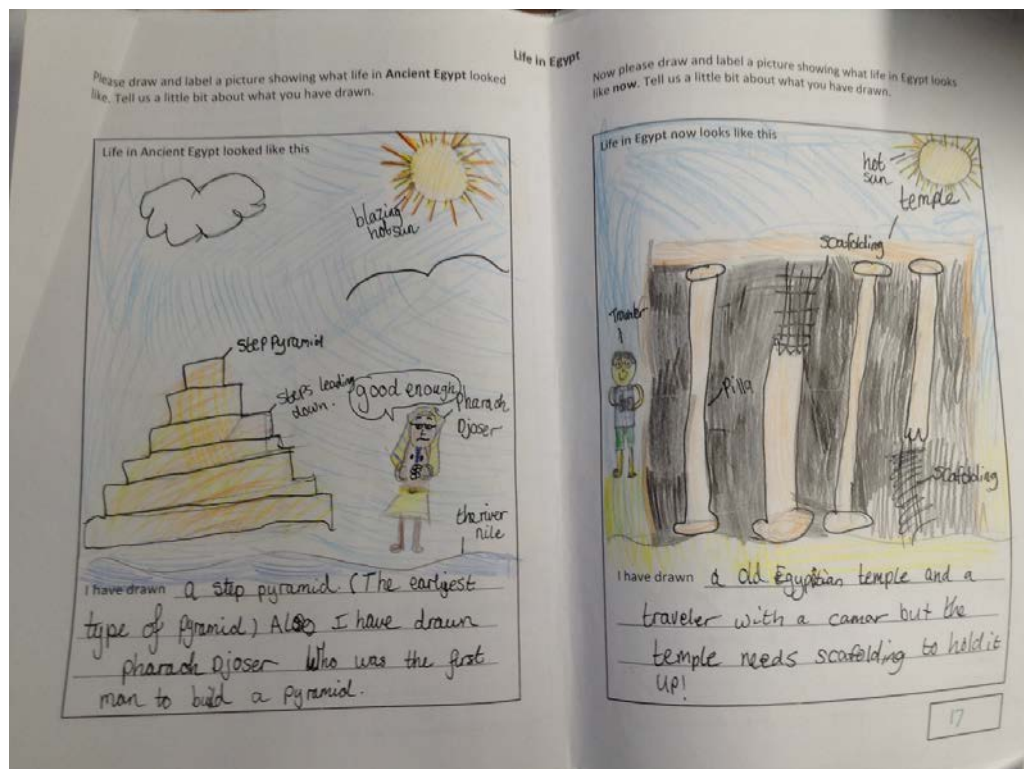
Alternatively, gaining a particular artistic skill might be an outcome in itself. You could even use it in a summative way by replacing your feedback form with a comic strip at the end of an event.

How to do it

Write clear instructions for what you would like participants to do, and carefully brief all evaluators so they are confident on their role, and how much assistance they are to give. You might want to give participants a very specific remit, with titles, hints, and a topic, or you might prefer to give broader opportunities for reflection. Ensure the task is directly related to your evaluation aims.

Your prompt should not be leading or introducing bias; if possible, pilot your prompts in advance, ideally with your intended audience. If you are repeating the same exercise before and after an intervention there should be no other influences on learning (for example, if you are measuring before and after a museum visit, there should be no taught sessions in school on the same topic). If the drawing takes place in an environment without evaluators, in a school classroom prior to a visit for example, the instructions should be followed directly so that teachers do not add comments or guide the students.

If you are asking participants to draw something, you might want to add a space for them to label it or add a sentence or two about what they have drawn. The evaluator could ask questions about the drawing as well, or the drawing might be used as the catalyst for an interview. Asking clarifying questions can be useful so that you fully understand what has been drawn; note down what you ask and the participant's responses.



Encourage participants to contribute *something*, even if they tell you they are not artistic or cannot draw. Children and young people may prefer either drawing or writing, they rarely want to do much of both. You may want to ask the facilitator or another evaluator to take field notes during and after the process to capture as much information as you can.

Figure 2: Children's drawings before they visited a museum to look at Egyptian displays. The prompts were 'Life in Ancient Egypt looked like this' and 'Life in Egypt now looks like this'.

If the evaluation is embedded in the task, the activity still needs to be engaging for the audience. It is easy to focus so much on the information or results that you want to get out of it that you lose sight of making it interesting for the participants. Get all the paperwork ready in advance of your event, make sure it is simple and quick to complete and that it is clear to the audience that you are gathering evaluation data.

Gather all the materials that you need. Creative evaluation can be resource heavy, sometimes with lots of paper printouts, materials, or equipment. Consider the environmental impact and amend things accordingly if possible. If participants will take their work away with them, work out how you will capture their creation, either through taking photos or some other way.

Ethics, safety, and security

All relevant staff should be fully briefed on the evaluation project before it begins. As this is a method which is often used with children, young people or vulnerable adults, the venue's ethics procedure should be carefully followed.

Consent forms and information sheets should include consent for retaining or taking photos of creative work, as well as pictures of people (if relevant). Formal consent should be provided by parents or guardians if young people are the evaluation participants, but children should also be asked if they are happy to take part.

No personal information should be visible in the photographs, so check artworks carefully before taking a picture.

What to do with the data

You will need to leave a lot of time for analysis. Creative evaluation methods can quickly give you a lot of data that can be hard to interpret. A significant number of responses can be created if participants are being evaluated before and after an exhibition, event, or other intervention.

Depending on the number of drawings you have, you might need to analyse a sample of them rather than all of them, in which case choose a suitable sampling strategy. It is helpful to match up the before/after responses of

individuals, so that you can analyse change for each person, rather than relying solely on group responses.

You could start by looking at specific elements, artefacts, or information that you are focusing on evaluating. You could look at how many times these appear in drawings, either individually or where they are in relation to other parts of the drawing. Simple analysis could then look at the proportion of drawings that include those items. For an example of a study using this methodology, see the Howlett and Turner paper in the further reading section below.

Another method of analysing the data is to create a simple scoring system, where you give the whole picture a score based on how accurate it is, or what learning is visible. For example, your scale might be:

- 0 = an irrelevant drawing, or if doing before/after visit drawings: evidence of negative learning
- 1 = one or two relevant items; minimal positive learning
- 2 = many relevant items; demonstrable positive learning
- 3 = a detailed drawing with relevant items; significant positive learning
- For an example of a study using this methodology, see the Jensen paper in the further reading section below.

Write your report, clearly laying out your method, the audience you worked with, the prompts you used and how you completed your analysis.

Cautions and caveats

As with all evaluation, your results will be best when you have spent plenty of time thinking carefully about what you want to find out and who the target audience is. Asking participants to respond creatively might be unsuccessful if you have not planned carefully, and (as far as is possible) piloted first.

Thinking through both what you want to know and the audience you are working with will help you to successfully adapt your evaluation for the relevant age, experience, and ability. You might need to provide alternative ways to evaluate alongside drawing and creative methods: can people use words creatively, for example.

Think through how your evaluation conclusions are going to be robust. Will you have another evaluator check a sample of your analysis so that you are both interpreting pictures in the same way or on the same scale? Include all of this in your final report.

Drawings can be excellent illustrations in your final report or in presentations about the evaluation. You do need to have the correct permissions in place to use the pictures and be careful that the individuals in the audience you evaluated cannot be identified from what you are showing. You should decide from the beginning what you will do with the physical outputs. If your study included before and after drawings, you might have a lot of pieces of paper to scan or store. Check your venue's requirements for retention.

Further reading and other resources

- Kate Howlett and Edgar C. Turner, 'What Can Drawings Tell Us about Children's Perceptions of Nature?', *PloS One*, 18.7 (2023)

This paper is based on research with primary school children from 12 schools in England. It involved the analysis of over 400 drawings that responded to the prompt: 'Please draw and label a picture of your garden or local park showing the animals you think live there. Tell us a little bit about what you have drawn below'. The drawings were analysed by listing the words and phrases used for animals and plants, then checking for items that were *not* included in each drawing. A helpful discussion draws out conclusions from the data. The drawing worksheet that was used and the information sheet that was sent out to participants are included in the appendices.

- Eric Jensen, 'Evaluating Children's Conservation Biology Learning at the Zoo', *Conservation Biology*, 28.4 (2014), 1004–11.

In this paper Jensen was seeking to measure young people's learning around the topic of conservation biology following their visit to London Zoo. School pupils were asked to complete an evaluation form before and after their visit, responding to the prompt: 'Please draw your favorite wildlife habitat and all the plants and animals that live there. (Please put names or labels on everything)'. A three-point coding scale was used for the drawings, from negative development in learning (1 point), through no development (2 points) to positive development (3 points). The online version of the paper includes the evaluation questionnaires that were used for primary and secondary students before and after the visit.

- Kerri Kearney and Adrienne Hyle, 'Drawing out Emotions: The Use of Participant-Produced Drawings in Qualitative Inquiry', *Qualitative Research*, 4 (2004), 361–82.

While this paper does not refer to museums or exhibitions, it introduces an alternative way of using drawings for evaluation, specifically with adults. In

the research project, participants were asked to make two drawings on the theme of change. These images were used as the stimulus for discussion in an unstructured interview several weeks later, with participants describing what they had drawn and what it meant. The paper includes some basic analysis of using drawing to promote discussion in interviews.

- Tamara Kisovar-Ivanda, 'Thematic Analysis of the Children's Drawings on Museum Visit: Adaptation of the Kuhn's Method', *World Journal of Education*, 4 (2014), 60–67.

A paper that specifically looks at the drawings that primary school children produce while in a museum, with a case study in Croatia. There is a good discussion of the history of using children's drawings, and a section on the methods used for the research, but it is light on analysis of the pictures themselves.