

Discovering Art as a Living Conversation



AHRC, ESRC & MRC



Project CREATE

Young People | Art | Social Science



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Contents

This guide is made up of three sections.

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PART 1

Introductions to RESPOND Framework and its guiding principles

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- 5 RESPOND Wheel



What is RESPOND?

RESPOND is a flexible, seven-stage framework for exploring art through thinking, feeling and imagination. It works across all art forms and settings, whether for personal reflection or group facilitation, inviting close looking, noticing details and sharing responses.

Rather than treating art as fixed or inaccessible, RESPOND encourages relationship building. It sparks curiosity, critical reflection and creativity, opening new ways to see, feel and think about what art means and how it can change us. It can also enrich arts-based research or practice.

Why Art Matters

Experiencing art can be transformative, moving us in extraordinary ways. But how do we truly understand and express the thoughts and feelings it evokes?

RESPOND offers a way to explore that experience, and to make use of the insights and skills discovered through it.

In education settings such as schools, museums, libraries and heritage sites, RESPOND can sharpen critical thinking, spark dialogue and develop transferable skills including observation, interpretation and communication. These skills extend beyond the immediate educational environment and into real-world contexts.

In research and wellbeing settings, artwork is often set aside once its functional role is complete. RESPOND invites a return to the artwork, asking what more it can reveal. Could it offer deeper insights into research questions, or contribute to an individual's sense of wellbeing?

Where This Guide Comes From

This guide emerges from two participatory research projects, ATTUNE and CREATE, developed in collaboration with young people. Together, we've shaped a resource that puts voice and creativity at its heart.

Inside, you'll find:

- Examples and instructions for facilitators and activity leads
- RESPOND response cards that can be adapted and used independently by young people in a variety of settings
- Flexible activity examples and prompts for different contexts where the RESPOND Framework can be applied

This resource is designed to honour agency, invite dialogue, connect art to personal meaning and shared reflection, and to flexibly support a wide range of projects and activities.

Guiding Principles

Whether you're working in education, research, wellbeing practices, or another setting, enter with curiosity, engage in critical reflection, and embrace creativity.

Let these principles open new ways to see, feel, and create.

**Step in. Look again,
RESPOND.**





RESPOND turns looking at art into a living exchange. By moving through its stages, you're invited to reflect, imagine, and create, turning each encounter with art into a conversation that can inspire learning, wellbeing, and connection across communities.



React Engage Sensing Pattern Observe Novelty Dialogue



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Validating Voices in Education

Using RESPOND

Art and Cultural Objects as Tools for Learning

Art and cultural objects spark curiosity, invite dialogue, and help young people build critical thinking skills, such as observation, interpretation, and reasoning. These skills go beyond formal education, supporting problem-solving, empathy, and communication in everyday life.

In settings like museums, galleries, theatres, concert venues, libraries, or creative events, young people learn to:

- Look closely and notice details
- Connect ideas to contexts and personal experiences
- Value multiple perspectives and express their own confidently

RESPOND offers a structured yet flexible approach to guide this process, ensuring every interpretation is valid and empowering young people to contribute meaningfully.

Learning Outcomes

- Builds critical analysis skills: observation, interpretation, reasoning
- Encourages confidence in expressing ideas and listening to others
- Connects art and objects to personal experience and wider social themes

Benefits of using RESPOND

- Promotes dialogue and empathy
- Supports transferable skills for learning beyond traditional education settings
- Inclusive of diverse art forms and adaptable for SEND learners

Applying RESPOND

Example

Theme: *How does art represent identity?*

This activity supports young people in developing critical thinking skills, validating their interpretations, and connecting art to personal and cultural experiences. It encourages young people to see their perspectives as valuable contributions, fostering confidence and empathy.

Step 1: Independent Creative Encounter

Young people explore artworks or cultural objects either:

- Independently, using the RESPOND cards and prompts, or
- With facilitator support, guided by the same prompts.

They capture their impressions in a way that feels comfortable:

- Sketching or drawing
- Creative or reflective writing
- Using tactile or digital tools to ensure SEND accessibility

Step 2: Collaborative Reflection

Facilitator-led dialogue, or creative expression (e.g., creating a group collage), guides students to share and compare responses, highlighting parallels and differences.

- In small groups: Students exchange interpretations and notice contrasts.
- As a whole group: Draw connections between individual insights and broader cultural or historical contexts.

Using RESPOND in Participatory Research:

A Methods Guide

Why Consider Creative Outputs as Data?

In participatory research, creative outputs, such as drawings, collages, or other forms of art, are often overlooked as sources of data. This happens for several reasons:

- Challenges in interpretation
- Lack of established analytical frameworks
- A tendency to prioritise verbal or written responses

Yet these creative expressions can hold rich insights into participants' perspectives, emotions, and experiences. Ignoring them risks losing depth and nuance in understanding the research question.

RESPOND for Research

RESPOND is one type of structured framework designed to help researchers engage with creative outputs meaningfully. It provides prompts and stages that:

- Support interpretation of visual and creative work
- Encourage dialogue and reflection
- Honour participants' agency and contributions
- Generate insights that complement or deepen verbal data.



Applying RESPOND

RESPOND can be used:

- **Individually:** Participants reflect independently
- **In small groups:** Collaborative interpretation and discussion
- **As a whole group:** Facilitated dialogue to explore shared and differing perspectives

Example

Research Question: *How do online platforms influence mental health and wellbeing for young people?*

Step 1: Creative Session

Facilitator/arts practitioner led session where participants respond to prompts about their experiences of social media through art-making (e.g., movement, music making, mixed media, creative writing, film making etc).

Step 2: Guided Reflection Using RESPOND

The facilitator invites participants to analyse their work using RESPOND prompts. This can happen:

- Individually
- In pairs or small groups
- As a whole group discussion

Outcome

This process creates space to explore personal perspectives through art and supports deeper understanding of the research question. It also values creative expression as a legitimate source of data.

Benefits

- Adds depth and nuance to qualitative data
- Encourages participant agency and co-analysis
- Bridges creative practice and research rigor

Using RESPOND for Wellbeing

Why Use RESPOND for wellbeing?

RESPOND offers a structured yet flexible way to explore a person's inner world through their engagement with artwork. Rather than relying on flat questions like "Why?" or "What does it mean?", RESPOND provides a pathway of prompts that invite impressions, emotions, sensory responses, patterns, perspectives and new insights. This approach opens deeper conversation and reflection, offering individuals richer material for understanding a person's state of mind while maintaining a clear, supportive structure.

Core Principles

- Expression over interpretation: The focus is not on analysing meaning but on enabling expression, agency, and connection.
- Structure with flexibility: The seven stages offer guidance while allowing adaptation to individual needs.
- Safety and support: Always work within professional boundaries, safeguarding protocols, and wellbeing goals.

Why This Matters

- Creates space for safe emotional expression across multiple modalities.
- Supports communication and agency in ways that are inclusive of different people.
- Provides meaningful material for wellbeing insight while maintaining structure.
- Bridges creative practice and wellbeing goals.

Applying RESPOND

RESPOND can be used:

- **Individually:** One-to-one sessions for personal reflection and expression.
- **In small groups:** Shared exploration and discussion in a supportive setting.
- **As a whole group:** Facilitated dialogue to build connection and shared understanding.

Example

Support emotional expression and self-awareness through engagement with art.

Step 1: Creative Session

Invite individuals to create or select and respond to an artwork that represents a feeling, experience, or theme. Offer multi-modal options so they can choose what feels most comfortable.

Examples:

- **Visual Art:** Drawing, collage, painting, photography.
- **Music:** Selecting a song that reflects their mood, creating a short playlist, or using instruments or environment for sound-making.
- **Movement/Dance:** Expressing a feeling through gesture or simple movement.
- **Creative Writing:** Write a poem, short story, or free-flow words inspired by an emotion or memory.

Step 2: Guided Reflection Using RESPOND

Use the seven stages to explore the chosen/created art form(s). Adapt prompts for different modalities:

(Optional: Invite participants to combine forms, e.g., write a short poem inspired by their movement or create a drawing while listening to music.)



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RESPOND

Prompt Cards

Using These Cards

These cards are designed as a flexible resource for facilitators leading art-based reflection sessions using the RESPOND framework. The cards can be cut out from this guide and offered to individuals for guided or independent reflection.

Each card includes prompts, adapt them to suit your session or project, while honoring participant voice and agency. There's no single right way to use them; let curiosity and dialogue lead the way.

Tips for Facilitators

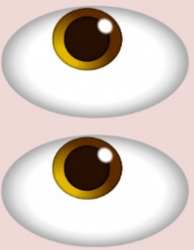
- RESPOND should be led by a qualified practitioner/facilitator or trained support professional.
- Adapt language, pace, and resources to suit the individual's/group's communication style, sensory profile, and cognitive needs.
- Validate all responses; there are no "right answers."
- Use open-ended prompts that encourage reflection and creativity.
- Safety and support: Always work within professional boundaries, maintaining safeguarding protocols.



REACT

Capture your immediate impressions through words, sketches, or feelings

What are
your first
impressions?





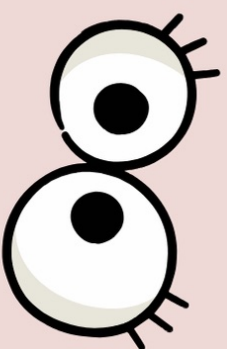
REACT

Prompts

- What's the first thing you notice?
- If you had to describe this in one word or emoji, what would it be?
- What's your gut feeling about this artwork, like or dislike? Why?



ENGAGE



Look at the
piece again.
What other
meanings or
emotions come
to mind?



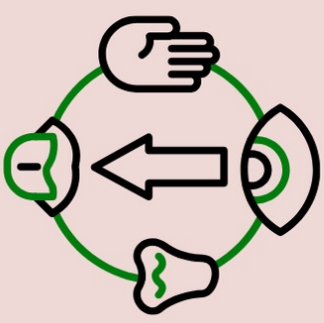


ENGAGE

Prompts

- Look or listen again. What do you see, hear or notice now, that you missed before?
- Does this piece make you think about anything in your life?
- If this art had a secret message, what might it be?

SENSING



What do you
feel in your
body? Which
senses are
activated?



SENSING

Prompts

- What sounds or smells would go with this piece?
- If you could touch something in this artwork, what would it feel like?
- If you want, close your eyes, what mood do you imagine from this piece?

PATTERN

How is it
structured?

Think rhythm,
word placement,
tone, mood
and colour.



PATTERN

Prompts

- Do you notice any movements, shapes, words, sounds, or patterns that repeat?
- What does this make you feel? Calm, sad, excited, something else?
- If this artwork could be represented as a sound, what kind of beat or rhythm would it have?

OBSERVE



Step back:

How would you
describe this
work to
someone
else?

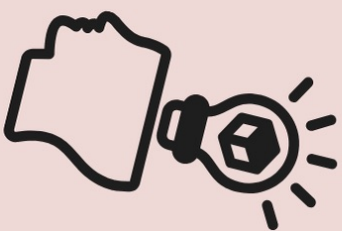


OBSERVE

Prompts

- Can you spot different textures, sounds, movements, colours or materials?
- How would you describe this to a friend who can't hear, see, or touch it?
- What's the most important detail they need to know? Why?

NOVELTY



What new
ideas or
perspectives
does this
bring?





NOVELTY

Prompts

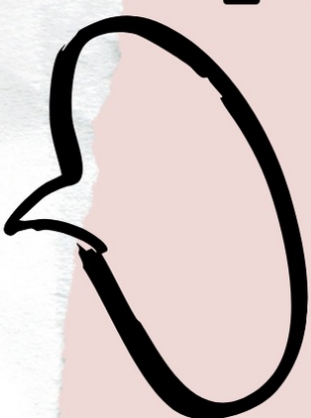
- Did you notice something new after looking or listening for a while?
- What surprised you about this artwork?
- Did it make you think differently about anything?



DIALOGUE

How might you
respond creatively?

Can you “talk”
with the piece
or talk about
the piece with
someone
else?



DIALOGUE

Prompts

- If this artwork could talk, what would it say to you?
- How would you answer back?
- Can you make something in response, a playlist, a quick sketch, a short poem, or even a TikTok idea?

Further Reading

Recommendations

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Your Notes



If you can, we'd love to hear your feedback on this guide and the RESPOND Framework.

<https://forms.office.com/e/3FmnPN9YmV>



For more information about both projects, please visit:

Project CREATE: create.leeds.ac.uk
The Attune Project: attuneproject.com