

APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner® Application Packet

Thank you for your interest in the APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner® (CAP) program. This packet outlines everything needed to complete the CAP process. The APA is committed to working with you throughout this process and offers you our full support as you pursue certification. If you have any questions please contact craftstandards@aestheticprunersassociation.org.

The APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner® designation indicates a high level of proficiency in applying the art and science of aesthetic pruning in a variety of situations. CAPs are adept pruners who understand design and art principles.

Certification is available for Associate members of the APA in good standing who:

- are working as a professional pruner
- have knowledge of technical skills such as how, where and when to make a proper cut, leave a clean collar and of the proper ratio
- have knowledge of horticultural aspects of pruning such as typical pests and diseases, crown health, nutrition/water and environmental needs
- have knowledge of artistic aspects of pruning such as focal point vs. general pruning

The review process, overseen by our Certification Committee, evaluates a candidate's submitted work and administers the virtual CAP exam, which includes a written online test, three applicant-made videos of a pruned container shrub/tree, and a virtual verbal test with three test administrators.

The APA Certification Committee convenes twice a year to review applications for CAPs. Currently, the evaluations take place in April and October. Applications are due by the first day of the month prior to the review (March 1 and September 1).

Each submission is judged on its own merits and is not compared to the work of others.

Note that all applications and test results are treated confidentially by the APA Certification Committee and the APA Officers and Board Members. For further information and questions please contact the Chair of the Craft Standards Committee at craftstandards@aestheticprunersassociation.org.

Enclosed you will find additional information on the criteria to help you prepare a complete submission.

This Application Packet Contains

- APA CAP Three Part Test Description
- Checklist of Required Items
- APA Certification Application Form
- Referral Endorsement Form
- Professional Recommendation Form and Aesthetic Pruning Terms
- Portfolio Requirements
- FAQ
- Aesthetic Pruning Terms
- Study Guide

APA CAP Three Part Test

The three parts are:

- 1) Online Written Exam
- 2) A Virtual Oral Exam
- 3) 3 Short Applicant-made Hands-on Pruning videos

To successfully complete the CAP test, applicants must have a passing cumulative score.

The Written Exam is an online test and is objective and scored against a key. The Virtual Oral Exam and Applicant-made Hands-on Pruning videos are subjective by nature. As such, they are each graded by three Test Administrators of the APA Certification Committee. When your application and portfolio are accepted you will receive additional instructions regarding the testing process and a description of the exams. You will be notified of the date of your test at a later date. Please designate two to three hours for the online Written and Oral Exams.

Written Exam - 100 points

The written exam verifies the applicant's knowledge in six main areas: horticultural and arboricultural practices, legal and ethical issues, and art and design principles. Those who have successfully completed courses in Basic Horticulture, Plant Identification, Arboriculture and Aesthetic Pruning should find the exam challenging, but passable. Please see the attached bibliography for a list of study materials.

The 7 categories covered on the test are:

- 1) Establishing young trees
- 2) Pruning considerations and concepts
- 3) Tree biology
- 4) Art & design
- 5) Safety
- 6) Tree law
- 7) General plant considerations

Oral Exam - 60 points

The oral exam involves a virtual meeting with three Test Administrators via Zoom. While looking at photos of a garden, applicants are asked various questions about the garden's design and how it would be better served through the practice of aesthetic pruning. Additionally, specific questions regarding aesthetic pruning, plant health, and other arboriculture related topics will be asked by the Test Administrators.

Hands-on Pruning Videos Made by the Applicant - 50 points

Once the portfolio is approved applicants will receive guidelines on creating three self-made, hands-on pruning videos. Applicants will need to purchase a container plant which will meet the requirements specified in a document you will receive after your application is accepted. The pruning videos will need to show the pruning plan, the applicant pruning the plant, and a summary of the work that was done. Sample videos are available on the APA website Certification page. The Hands-On Pruning Videos are evaluated in four main areas: Tree Assessment, Quality of Plan, Pruning Skills, and Aesthetics.

CAP Test maximum possible score = 210 points

Portfolio maximum possible score = 200 points

Total possible score = 410 points

Passing score = 308 points

CAP Application Checklist of Required Items

To be considered for certification, an applicant must meet the following criteria and provide the required documentation to the Certification Committee of the Aesthetic Pruners Association.

- 1) A portfolio of your work that demonstrates your ability to aesthetically prune 15 woody perennials of your choice. The 15 examples should include a mix of different plants/species. One must be of a deciduous tree or shrub in winter silhouette, one must be of a conifer, and one must be of a vignette or grove planting. Different treatments of the same plants can also be included. Also include 3 close up photos of pruning cuts which demonstrate a removal cut, a reduction cut, and a tipping cut. (See "The three cuts most commonly used for Aesthetic Pruning" document for definitions.) Please include a close up of a saw cut that is 1" - 2" in diameter to demonstrate a proper cut outside of the branch collar.
- 2) A written description of your horticultural education and training
- 3) Document your experience as a professional pruner by providing three completed Recommendation Forms, one of which must be a Professional Recommendation.
- 4) Documentation examples and forms are available in the CAP Application Form (available online). After three Test Administrators of the Certification Committee have reviewed all of the above and verified that it meets our requirements, an applicant will be eligible to take the CAP test. If the above prerequisites are not met to our satisfaction, we will let you know what was lacking and where you stand in the application process.
- 5) Be an Associate Member in good standing of the Aesthetic Pruners Association.

APA CERTIFICATION APPLICATION

Date: _____

Name:

First _____ Last _____

Mailing Address:

Street: _____

City: _____

State: _____

Zip code: _____

Email: _____

___ Exam fee of \$95.00. Please enclose a check made out to the Aesthetic Pruners Association.

List the names of your three referrals the Certification Committee can expect to receive in the mail.

1. _____

2. _____

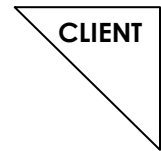
3. _____

Please provide us with your portfolio in one of the following formats:

___ Thumb drives. (Please provide three.)

___ Print. (Please provide three copies.)

Provide a written description of your horticultural education and training. Attach an additional sheet if required.



Date:

Client's Name:

Street:

City, State and Zip code:

Dear _____,

I am applying to become an APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner® (CAP). This designation, awarded by the Aesthetic Pruners Association (APA), requires demonstrating a high level of proficiency in applying the art and science of aesthetic pruning. As part of this certification process, I have been asked to provide a referral from a client.

Would you please complete the attached client recommendation form? Your honest observations will provide the Certification Committee with the client's perspective of my pruning work. Your responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared or distributed in any way.

If you have any questions or would like further information about the CAP process, please see the APA website at www.aestheticprunersassociation.org, or email the Craft Standards Committee at craftstandards@aestheticprunersassociation.org.

Kindly return the form in the enclosed addressed envelope within two weeks of the above date. No postage is necessary.

Your prompt reply is most appreciated.

Sincerely,

Aesthetic Pruners Association, APA, www.aestheticprunersassociation.org
P.O. Box 5163 • Berkeley • CA • 94705


 CLIENT

Client Recommendation Form for the CAP Process

Date:

Your Name:

Applicant's Name:

1. Over what period of time has the applicant worked for you?

From _____ to _____

2. What is the number of trees and shrubs the applicant is pruning for you?

____ 1 - 2 trees or shrubs

____ 3 - 5 trees or shrubs

____ More than 5 trees or shrubs

3. Please provide the names of the tree(s) or shrub(s) pruned.

4. Approximately how many times in a year will the applicant visit your residence for pruning?

____ Once per year

____ 2 – 3 times per year

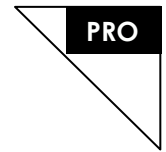
____ More than 3 times per year

5. Does the applicant conduct themselves responsibly and professionally?

6. Would you feel comfortable referring the applicant to others?

____ YES ____ NO

7. Please include any further thoughts you wish the Certification Committee to consider regarding this applicant.



Date:

Horticultural Professional's Name:

Street:

City, State and Zip Code:

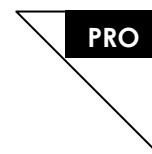
I am applying to become an APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner® (CAP). As part of the certification process, I was asked to provide a referral from a Horticultural Professional who is familiar with my work.

Would you please complete this Horticultural Professional recommendation form? Your honest observations will provide the Certification Committee with a professional's perspective of my pruning work.

Kindly return the form in the enclosed addressed envelope within two weeks of the above date. No postage is necessary.

Your prompt reply is most appreciated.

Sincerely,



As part of the APA's Certified Aesthetic Pruner® (CAP) certification process, all applicants are asked to provide a recommendation from a Horticultural Professional.

A Certified Aesthetic Pruner® is recognized for their integrity, sense of public service, and mastery of the aesthetic pruning craft from fellow pruners and the public.

To assist you with your recommendation, please see the attached "Aesthetic Pruning Terms" to help understand the usage of terms.

Draw from your experience to evaluate the applicant in the context of your knowledge of professional pruning.

Please make sure you have enough familiarity with the applicant's work.

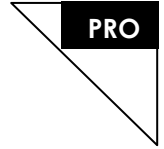
In submitting this recommendation you are endorsing that the applicant's overall pruning ability is at the CAP level.

All responses will be treated confidentially by the APA Craft Standards Committee. This information will not be shared or distributed.

Thank you for your efforts to sustain the APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner® program. If you have any questions please email the Craft Standards Committee at craftstandards@aestheticprunersassociation.org.

Sincerely,

The APA Certification Committee

Professional Recommendation Form for the CAP Process

Date:

Professional's Name:

Applicant's Name:

1. How would you describe your current relationship with the applicant?

(Check all that apply)

 Friend A fellow pruner Student Apprentice Other _____

2. What is the period of time you have known the applicant as a pruner?

_____ Years _____ months

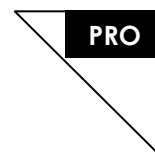
3. An applicant should incorporate the following aesthetic elements in their work. (Refer to the attached sheet for the definition of these terms.)

- Basic Art Principles
- Essence of a Tree
- Focal Point Pruning
- Winter Silhouette
- Garden Context
- Professionalism

4. Would you confidently recommend the applicant to prune for your clients?

5. Please take a moment to state the reasons you believe the applicant is qualified to be an APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner®. (You may use additional sheets of paper.)

6. Please include any further comments below:



Aesthetic Pruning Terms

Pruning with Design Intent

Having the garden's design in mind while pruning.

Basic Art Principles

Unity, balance, emphasis, contrast, proportion, scale, visual mass, space, negative space, depth, texture, light, line, movement, transition, coarse to fine, shading, perspective, framing, repetition

Essence of a Tree

Identify the "It Factor." What elements or aspects make the tree unique and of interest? All aspects of the tree must be in balance, helping to define and elevate the essence of the tree. Look for it in the following areas:

- Lasting features: trunk attributes, exposed root collar, location of branches, limbs and twigs
- Temporary features: flowers, fruit, foliage, exfoliating bark, foliar color, scent and light
- Relative strength or grace
- Motion and movement
- Lines: leading, guiding, framing
- Definition: an area, a space, a view, the entire garden
- Light: shadows and silhouettes
- Sound: leaves that catch the wind with a particular sound

Focal Point Pruning

In addition to pruning to bring out the essence of a tree, focal point pruning shows an individual specimen at its best through a high level of detail and expression. Focal point pruning includes:

- Tree should draw and hold the eye.
- Structure, coarse to fine, proportion and transition; flow and movement from the roots to the trunk through to the branch tips
- Ramification (see illustration below)
- Use of negative space
- Hide and conceal pruning cuts.
- Attention to detail; every inch of the tree is considered.
- Every aspect of the tree is in balance: essence vs. other aspects, primary vs. secondary, bold vs. subtle, wood vs. leaves, permanent vs. temporary, current look vs. future look, individual plant vs. entire garden.
- Prune for the primary viewpoint(s) and view time(s).



Ramification

Winter Silhouette

The winter silhouette is enhanced by a proper background. In areas with mild winters, the winter silhouette can help to bring a sense of seasonality.

- Essence of the tree is clearly defined.
- Emphasis is on structural aspects such as: proportion, flow, transitions, movement and ramification.
- Visible root crown and roots
- Hide and conceal pruning cuts.
- Can incorporate the art of decay and deterioration in older material.

Garden Context

Garden context refers to those elements or features which surround or influence the garden environment. It is the big picture in which the garden resides. Influencing elements may include adjacent natural areas, structures and hardscape features. Think of "garden context" as an all-encompassing aesthetic term.

- The essence, style, intent and mood of the garden – Japanese, native, formal, informal, etc.
- The role of the tree in the garden; the surroundings and the tree's relationship to them
- Establishing garden unity, harmony and interest through pruning and placement

Vignette

An intimate scene in a garden

Grove

A planted group of three or more trees pruned collectively

Portfolio Requirements

Your portfolio is an important part of the CAP Evaluation Process. It is the primary way you will present your pruning work to the Certification Committee. We will use your portfolio to confirm that your pruning work and knowledge qualifies you to take the certification exam. And if you do qualify to take the exam, then your portfolio will also be a significant part of your test score. The portfolio is worth 200 points.

Below are the principles and concepts the Certification Committee will look for in your portfolio. Note that you don't need to have every item listed below to apply for certification. Provide us with as much of the following as possible. We have attached several examples of before and after pictures with commentary that illustrate what we are looking for.

1a) Before and after pictures that demonstrate your ability to prune 15 different trees. These should include conifers, broadleaf evergreens, and deciduous trees and can have the same species in different styles. There must be a deciduous tree or shrub in winter silhouette. There must be one vignette or grove planting photo set.

1b) Also include three close-up process photos of pruning cuts:

- One photo of a removal cut on a branch with a diameter of 1" - 2", demonstrating your knowledge of a proper cut outside of the branch collar
- One photo of a heading (tipping) cut
- One close up of a reduction cut

2) Written comments for each tree:

- For each tree please include its scientific and common names, as well as the city the tree is located in and dates the photos were taken.
- For five of the trees provide a high level of note detail, describing conditions and objectives of your work, and include when and how often you've pruned the tree and your plans for future work. Expound on the artistic aspects and point out the beauty created and problems solved.
- For ten of the trees provide a moderate level of note detail, describing the art and science of your pruning for that particular tree. Focus on the key points you want us to see about the pruning and tree.

These are the Aesthetic Pruning concepts to include:

- Focal point pruning
- Pruning in the garden context
- Pruning throughout the season
- Multi-year projects (developing a plan)
- Special situations such as pruning for views, safety, drives, walkways, privacy

Examples of what to highlight in your work:

- Basic artistic principles applied to trees
- Bringing out, defining and creating the essence of the tree
- Winter silhouette work

- The tree's role, scale and look in the context of the garden and its surroundings
- Balance in all aspects of the tree: Essence vs. Other aspects, Primary vs. Secondary, Wood vs. Leaves, Aesthetics vs. Functionality, Past vs. Future look, Tree and Surroundings
- Detail work and attention to detail
- Creative problem solving
- A long-term plan for the tree and year by year improvement

(Please see the separate sheet "Aesthetic Pruning Terms" for more detail.)

Frequently Asked Questions about the CAP Process

How much does the test cost? \$95

How and when do I pay? Payment is due when you submit your portfolio to the Certification Committee. Mail everything to *APA Certification P.O. Box 5163 • Berkeley • CA • 94705*. Make checks payable to the Aesthetic Pruners Association.

What do you need to take the Virtual Oral Exam portion of the CAP Test? You need a computer with a camera and internet access to use Zoom.

What do you need to take the Online Written Test? You need a computer with a camera and internet access. Our written test is given through Classmarker.com.

What happens if my application is turned down? If after looking at all of your submitted materials the Certification Committee feels you are not ready to take the test, you will be notified and the panel will let you know what you can do to improve. All materials will be returned to you, including your test fee.

In what form can I submit my portfolio? Whatever form works best for you. A digital form on three thumb drives is easiest for the Certification Committee to pass around amongst ourselves, but a hand written or printed out form is fine too. A video portfolio with narration could also work.

What happens to my portfolio? Your portfolio, in whatever form submitted, will not be returned to you. It will be archived by the APA.

What happens if I fail the test? You will be told which of the three sections you failed, why, and what you need to work on. You can retake the failed section(s) once in the next year.

When will I know if I passed the test? You will be informed by letter or email within 30 days of your test date and will receive your CAP certificate in the mail.

Can I know what questions, if any, I got wrong on the test? No. The test is designed to determine your knowledge on various topics and is not a learning experience.

What happens if I pass the test? If you pass the test, you will receive an invitation to join the APA as a Certified Member and information outlining how to access and use your new benefits. You will be upgraded from Associate to Certified Membership and will pay your Certified Membership dues at your next renewal date. You will be formally recognized in the next APA newsletter and at the next general meeting of the APA.

What is the appeal process if I disagree with the Certification Committee's decisions? All evaluation results are final. There is no appeal of test scores. Any complaints about the process should be submitted to the Secretary of the APA within thirty days of learning your results.

How do I maintain my CAP status over the years? You must stay current with your yearly dues and continue to prune professionally.

The Aesthetic Pruning Approach

Key Concepts

Pruning with Design Intent

All pruning affects the look and design of a garden. Making intentional design choices when pruning individual plants allows the pruner to impact a garden in positive ways that enhance its overall theme and enrich harmony and interest within the garden.

Have a Plan

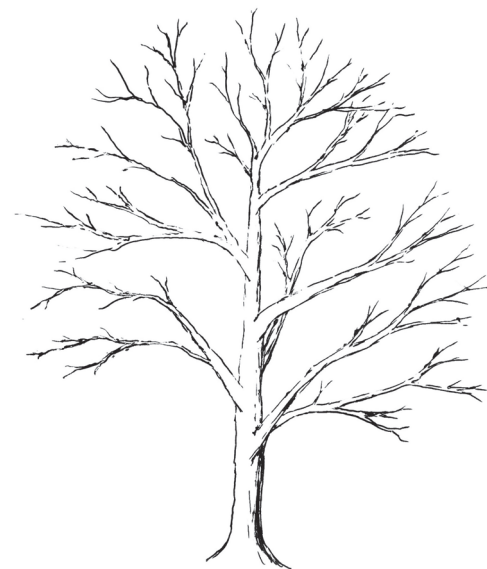
Before starting to prune, have a plan for the tree and the garden as a whole. Work in stages to accomplish the goal. Respect plants and make their health the top priority. It can be helpful to create a multi-year plan to accomplish pruning goals. Removal of large branches and trunks is often best accomplished gradually over time. The larger the cut the more important the seasonal timing of the cut to give the plant the best opportunity to callus over pruning wounds and to respond with growth that is not reactive but is in step with its growth cycle.

Find the Good

Focus on what is best about a plant and accentuate it. Identifying the essence of the tree is a good starting point. What is it about this particular species that is enjoyable, striking or beautiful? It could be its structure, shape, color, foliage, flowers, fruit, bark or any quality that distinguishes it. As well as the general species qualities, find the good within a particular specimen. It could be the trunk line, a particular branch or branches, the way it relates to another feature in the garden like a stone or water feature or any number and combination of features. The goal is not to remove the bad, but to emphasize and enhance the good.

Coarse to Fine

Describes the growth pattern of a woody plant in terms of taper. Trees and shrubs tend to be widest at the base of the trunk and gradually diminish in girth higher up the trunk. The same is true of branches. The thick branches are lower on the trunk while higher up the branches become thinner. Branches also taper from thickest at their place of attachment to thinnest at the branch tips. As pruners, the goal is to preserve or restore the coarse to fine expression of plants so that they appear resolved and natural. The same is true of our bodies. Imagine if our arms were as thick as legs and our legs as thin as arms - we would be out of balance.



coarse → medium coarse → medium → medium fine → fine

Transitions also play a major role in the coarse to fine philosophy. Plant parts transition from coarse to fine in a gradual procession. So a pruning cut resulting in a coarse branch transitioning to a fine branch will stand out as unnatural and appear forced. The goal of the pruner is to have an invisible hand. It should not be immediately apparent where cuts were made on a pruned specimen and following the rule of 1/3 in transitions insures this (Gilman, 2012, p. 83).

Up and Out

Illustrates the concept that, in most cases, trunks and branches grow from their attachment to their tips in a direction that is generally upwards and away from the center of the tree. Thus major trunks or branches that cross the center – for instance from the back to the front or from the right half to the left half of the tree – are potentially problematic as they disturb the natural flow of a tree's structure and take the eye in unwanted directions.



Tell a Story

Each garden tells a story and each feature within a garden has a voice that contributes to the message imparted by the garden. What is meant by telling a story is fairly straightforward and usually relates to the environment the garden is portraying, which provides an explanation for the overall appearance and the appearance of each feature within the garden. If the story involves a mountaintop scene, one would expect hard weathered stone and gnarled trees that have overcome harsh conditions. In a lake or stream scene, one would expect smooth stones and lush vegetation. Find what gives the garden unity and harmony and honor it.

Aesthetic Pruning Terms

Pruning with Design Intent

Having the garden's design in mind while pruning.

Basic Art Principles

Unity, balance, emphasis, contrast, proportion, scale, visual mass, space, negative space, depth, texture, light, line, movement, transition, coarse to fine, shading, perspective, framing, repetition

Essence of a Tree

Identify the "It Factor." What elements or aspects make the tree unique and of interest? All aspects of the tree must be in balance, helping to define and elevate the essence of the tree. Look for it in the following areas:

- Lasting features: trunk attributes, exposed root collar, location of branches, limbs and twigs
- Temporary features: flowers, fruit, foliage, exfoliating bark, foliar color, scent and light
- Relative strength or grace
- Motion and movement
- Lines: leading, guiding, framing
- Definition: an area, a space, a view, the entire garden
- Light: shadows and silhouettes
- Sound: leaves that catch the wind with a particular sound

Focal Point Pruning

In addition to pruning to bring out the essence of a tree, focal point pruning shows an individual specimen at its best through a high level of detail and expression. Focal point pruning includes:

- Tree should draw and hold the eye.
- Structure, coarse to fine, proportion and transition; flow and movement from the roots to the trunk through to the branch tips
- Ramification (see illustration below)
- Use of negative space
- Hide and conceal pruning cuts.
- Attention to detail; every inch of the tree is considered.
- Every aspect of the tree is in balance: essence vs. other aspects, primary vs. secondary, bold vs. subtle, wood vs. leaves, permanent vs. temporary, current look vs. future look, individual plant vs. entire garden.
- Prune for the primary viewpoint(s) and view time(s).



Ramification

Winter Silhouette

The winter silhouette is enhanced by a proper background. In areas with mild winters, the winter silhouette can help to bring a sense of seasonality.

- Essence of the tree is clearly defined.
- Emphasis is on structural aspects such as: proportion, flow, transitions, movement and ramification.
- Visible root crown and roots
- Hide and conceal pruning cuts.
- Can incorporate the art of decay and deterioration in older material.

Garden Context

Garden context refers to those elements or features which surround or influence the garden environment. It is the big picture in which the garden resides. Influencing elements may include adjacent natural areas, structures and hardscape features. Think of "garden context" as an all-encompassing aesthetic term.

- The essence, style, intent and mood of the garden – Japanese, native, formal, informal, etc.
- The role of the tree in the garden; the surroundings and the tree's relationship to them
- Establishing garden unity, harmony and interest through pruning and placement

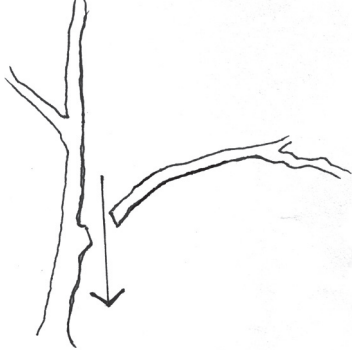
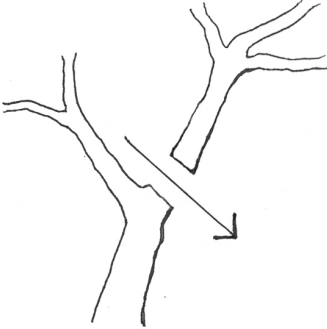
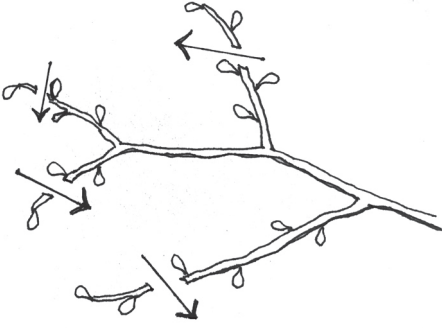
Vignette

An intimate scene in a garden

Grove

A planted group of three or more trees pruned collectively

The three cuts most commonly used for Aesthetic Pruning

REMOVAL	REDUCTION	TIPPING
<p>Removal of a branch or shoot at the point of origin</p>	<p>Removal of a leader by cutting to a side branch, establishing new apical dominance (a new leader)</p>	<p>Cutting to a node, bud or leaf, also known as heading back or heading</p>
		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used most often to reduce density, crowding or to remove dead wood • Reveals structure, direction, character and allows air and light to filter through the tree • Common on the sun side or thickest area of the plant • Appropriate for removal of coarse branches • Important for long term size control and character development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used most often to reduce height or length while allowing for a more predictable outcome of future growth • Reduces height and bulk • Important for long term size control and maintaining proportions • A quality cut over quantity of cuts; accomplish more with fewer cuts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used most often to maintain the outer contour shape of a plant • Stimulates release of the branch's inner buds • Reserve tipping cuts for the end of the pruning session to remove small diameter tips. Solve the larger problems first with removal cuts and reduction cuts. • Note: Tipping cuts will stimulate interior growth. If your goal is to thin a tree or shrub, keep your tipping cuts to a minimum.

Plant Roles

Background

Background plants provide context for the garden. They are most often placed on the edges but may be interspersed throughout the garden. There is very little, if any, woody structure visible, so their appearance is of solid foliage – a wall of green.

Transitional

Transitional plants provide some interest for the viewer without calling too much attention to themselves. They serve to keep the viewer engaged with the garden and to provide contrast and/or deepen the interest of focal points. They often show some structure and wood, but not too much. A peek-a-boo effect between foliage and structure is often employed.

Focal Point

Focal point plants catch hold of and sustain a viewer's attention. They are placed in areas with prominent sight lines and viewing positions. They are the stars of the garden or, at least, their corner of the garden. They are special because of shape and form or for some seasonal interest such as flowers, fruit or fall color. Much of the structure is often visible and the foliage is groomed to a high degree, although the tree itself may have a natural appearance.



Actors in a Play

It is helpful to think of the various plants in the garden as actors in a play or film in which there are few leading roles or stars whose personalities and lives we know much about. There are several supporting roles; we have a good sense of their personalities but their stories are less developed. They interact with the leads and play off of them. Through them we learn more about the leads and they provide depth to the story. Then there are the extras in the background that establish the setting. We know little of their personality or stories, but they give context and believability to the story.

Reading a Garden

Reading a Garden

Every garden tells a story. Although not immediately evident, the story exists and is important to the work we do as pruners since our goal is to enhance and strengthen what the garden has to communicate. The story may be obvious or subtle, somewhat superficial or deep and meaningful.

Each garden has something to say about why it exists and what it has to offer its visitors. The following questions will aid in uncovering the aspects of the garden which make up its story. Step back, see a bigger picture. Incorporate. Repeat.

Step Back – See a Bigger Picture

What is the overall mood or feeling of the garden? How do you feel at various places within it?

What gives it interest? What is its essence? Is there an identifiable style?

What is its purpose/function?

What is its age?

What is the architectural style of the house and hardscape?

How formal or informal is the garden?

What is the impact of local topography and surrounding large trees?

Is the garden compatible with its surroundings?

Where is the flow of the garden physically and visually?

Where are the primary view angles?

What unifies the garden and gives it harmony?

What makes the garden special?

Seasonal interest? How does it change over the year?

Other senses: sound, touch, smell, taste – how are they expressed?

What are the focal points? What do they say about the garden? Are they presented well?

Incorporate

What are the garden's best features? How can they be emphasized and improved?

Are there objects that take away from the story or are out of sync with the garden?

Would the garden look better with more plants or fewer plants?

Are the scale and proportion of the plant material consistent with and appropriate to the house and hardscape?

Are the lines expressed compatible or are there lines that conflict with the overall flow?

Is the palette of textures and colors appropriate?

Is there a way to incorporate outside views or features into the garden experience?

Step back, see a bigger picture. Incorporate. Repeat.

1. EXAMPLE OF TREE ID, LOCATION AND PRUNING DATE AS REQUIRED FOR ALL TREES IN YOUR PORTFOLIO



Acer Palmatum (Japanese Maple) Oakland, CA. One pruning on 6/3/09. Pruning by Bruce Thompson. Used with permission.

2. EXAMPLE OF A HIGH LEVEL OF NOTE DETAIL AS REQUIRED FOR 5 TREES IN YOUR PORTFOLIO



Juniperus chinensis 'Torulosa' (Hollywood Juniper) Berkeley, CA. One pruning on 2/22/10.

I was very excited to see this Hollywood juniper because I could immediately tell it had massive potential. It was dominating the front of their house and was only going to get bigger so I focused on establishing the tree's basic structure, reducing it in height and bulk, and getting the coarse wood out. I established proper scale, proportion and negative space and have begun to create an appropriate relationship between the house, the tree, and the client's desires for the situation. The discovery of a two trunked tree was a wonderful development, as it adds a nice bit of informality and movement to the composition. The height of this tree will now be maintained where it is. The reasons are two fold; most importantly I like how it helps to unify the house by crossing the strong horizontal line of the shingles and wood beams/stucco, while also being kept below the "eyes" of the house (the 2 windows). I feel a broad horizontal apex is appropriate for the two trunks of the tree as well as the lines of the house.

The above was done in 4 hours in mid-February and is step one in what is currently a 5 year plan. The next step is to clean up each major branch and their branch-lets and begin to develop more ramification and branch definition. There are also some smaller structural cuts that still need to happen to further refine the structure and get more coarse and duplicating wood out. Long term, the tree needs to be in scale and proportion with the home and fit into its space by the front entrance. These pictures are a bit cropped, but you can see the house has strong lines and offers up a commanding architectural presence. The tree needs to be strong as well to hold its own against this backdrop, so I have begun to develop lines in the tree that match the horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines of the house.

My final vision for the tree is one with a strong stout structure that holds up to the architecture of house and mimics its lines, while also offering a nice detailed branch structure within the branches so that they may be appreciated up close as one enters the home.

Pruning by Bruce Thompson. Used with permission.

3. EXAMPLE OF A HIGH LEVEL OF NOTE DETAIL AS REQUIRED FOR 5 TREES IN YOUR PORTFOLIO



Pinus radiata (Monterey Pine) Oakland, CA 5/10/06
- my first look

The same Monterey Pine 11/9/07

See and feel how much happier the tree is in the second picture. It has a pleasing broad crown, nice normal looking pine branches with nice movement and the tree overall feels much more in balance. The pom-poms are gone, the weak lower branches are already much more vibrant, and the strong sunny side top has been reigned in. This was a great restoration project done in 1½ years over the course of four prunings. The tree was there, it just needed to be brought back. It is 50+ years old, so I can't claim responsibility for the style and core frame work- But I will take credit for seeing what needed to be done and having the courage to do it. The growing vigor of the top was killing off the lower branches and threatening to permanently destroy the structure of the tree. This was my very first pine client with the tree being the entire front yard along a busy street, and there were some big tough cuts to make at the top, so the pressure was on. Also, since the branches had been hedged for several years, they were a real mess of sprouts that required some skill to sort out.

This tree has been a great teacher to me. To continue strengthening of the lowest tier of branches I prune them only every other year and leave the 2nd and even 3rd year needles as well. The heaviness this creates also adds a real visual weight to bottom of the tree which helps to balance out the large top and makes the tree feel strong and well rooted to the ground. (Notice that I also unpom-pommed the Irish moss as well to complete the transition to a more natural look.)

Pruning by Bruce Thompson. Used with Permission.

4. EXAMPLE OF A MODERATE LEVEL OF NOTE DETAIL AS REQUIRED FOR 10 TREES IN YOUR PORTFOLIO

Juniperus chinensis "Torulosa" (Hollywood Juniper) Berkeley, CA. One pruning 2/22/10

- This was my first pruning of the tree and was a major structural pruning.
- Large thinning cuts were used to create negative spaces in the tree and to establish branch definition among the major branches.
- Reduced the tree in both height and width, as well as in visual mass, to establish proper scale and proportion.
- This is the start of a 5 year plan to develop the tree as a focal point with good branch transitions, nice ramification and well defined branchlets with detail that can be appreciated up close as one enters the home or from inside looking out the windows.
- Ultimately the lines, angles, movement and strength of the tree will match that of the home
- With the tree up against the southern side of the home, there are wonderful opportunities to continue to develop light and shadow play on the porch, wall and even inside the home via the windows.

Pruning by Bruce Thompson. Used with Permission.

5. EXAMPLE OF A MODERATE LEVEL OF NOTE DETAIL AS REQUIRED FOR 10 TREES IN YOUR PORTFOLIO

Pinus radiata (Monterey Pine) Oakland, CA 5/10/06
- my first look

The same Monterey Pine 11/9/07

-Restoration project done in 1½ years over the course of four prunings.

-Priority one was to balance the tree's energy, growth and appearance by reducing the strength of top and the sunny side while strengthening the weakness of the lower and back branches.

-The second priority was to restore some normal branch structure to the tree by undoing the previous poor pom-pom pruning.

-This was my very first pine client in my very first year of business and I feel proud that I had the vision, courage and knowledge to make some very tough cuts at the top of the tree.

-This tree has taught me many lessons over the years. One of the first ones was why you don't de-candle a Monterey pine – I did that on my first pruning in May, and when I came back in the fall there were literally 20+ new buds growing back at the branch tips in the strongest areas. Talk about plenty of choices!

Pruning by Bruce Thompson. Used with Permission.

6. EXAMPLE OF A GROVE



December 17, 2019. Pruning by Maryann Lewis. Used with permission.

This is a grove of three *Camellia japonica* planted along a wall of a house. The grove breaks up the long solid wall of the house but has become too tall and overcrowded. For the first pruning session I thinned each of them to increase air flow as well as highlight the flowers against the dark brown wall of the house. Over time the goal is to create a natural looking wavy contour with the upper canopy while pruning each *Camellia* not as an individual but as part of the group.

7. EXAMPLE OF A VIGNETTE



February 26, 2018. Pruning by Maryann Lewis. Used with permission.

This vignette shows an example of a *Pieris japonica* and *Arbutus unedo compacta* working together with a large feature stone and a turn in the stream. Both shrubs can easily become overgrown and hide the stones as well as grow into each other. The *Pieris* is the main feature plant but the *Arbutus* could easily outgrow it. Each year after the *Pieris* blooms it is trimmed back to reveal the structure of the branches and work with the feature stone. The *Arbutus* gets trimmed back twice a year with the goal of keeping it smaller than the *Pieris*.

CAP Study Guide



Recommended reading list

Gilman, E. F. (2012). *An illustrated guide to pruning, Third edition.* Delmar.

Harris, R. W., Clark, J. R., Matheny, N. P. (2004). *Arboriculture: integrated management of landscape trees, shrubs, and vines, 4th edition.* Pearson Education.

Field, J. (2018). *An illustrated field guide to the elements and principles of art and design, First edition.* 26-29, 37-57. Hot Iron Press.

Recommended videos

Lewis, M. (2021). *Design in trees.* APA YouTube channel.

Alliger, M. (2018). *Numinous art of pruning.* APA YouTube channel.

(Links to these videos are accessible on the Members page of the APA website.)