

ART & DESIGN

Paper 9479/01 Coursework

You should refer to the *Guidance on the Administration and Online Submission of Art & Design for 2026* which will be updated and published in September 2025.

Key messages

- This was the first time that centres submitted their work via Submit for Assessment. The work was generally well presented and in chronological order. Some responses presented work out of order, which made the journey less clear.
- Stronger responses carefully organised work throughout the submission, which enabled the clear communication of intentions. Candidates' own ideas were more focused and developed around a theme. Other responses would have benefitted from being more selective about the work included in the submission, which would have helped communicate intentions more effectively.
- Candidates must clearly identify via labelling which work is their own and which is the work of others.
- In future, it would be helpful if candidates word-process rather than handwrite any included annotation, to improve legibility.

General comments

Most candidates considered the presentation of their work through thoughtful editing, and images of studies or surface texture were photographed or scanned to show close-up detail, which effectively communicated achievement.

Most of the work was manipulated using Fine Art materials, including mixed media and the candidates' supporting photography. Other examples contained photography, digital drawing and painting, design-based work and work produced using various types of three-dimensional processes, and clay.

Many topics encouraged recording from first-hand study which enabled a more personal response. Candidates often referenced friends and family, and local traditions, as a starting point for ideas. There was frequent exploration of pattern, colour, mark-making, during the interpretation of the themes. The locality presented a rich source of subject matter for investigation and media exploration. However, while there were many opportunities for first-hand recording, some candidates chose to rely on secondary-sourced material as a starting point for investigation which prevented a personal response. Contextual referencing informed original and in-depth ideas.

Most submissions presented a portfolio of supporting work with a connected final outcome, to show the creative process. Idea progression in other submissions was unclear, especially where the starting point was vague. Consequently, it was difficult to see where the candidates' imagery following the starting point came from. Some work contained a lot of written annotation which did not always add to the development of ideas or inform the direction of the work.

Higher Level

The strongest responses were thoughtful, reflecting serious interpretations of the candidates' chosen theme. The work was focused and candidates demonstrated full engagement with their subject matter. Intentions were clear and purposeful, encouraging in-depth observation and development. These candidates reflected upon ideas during different stages of the work, to enable submissions that were personal and committed. A good balance of primary, secondary and contextual sources was consistently relevant and selected with intention.

The exploration of media was accomplished and purposeful, often informed by contextual study. Materials were applied with energy and sensitivity, whilst representing the qualities within their chosen subject matter. Photography was used effectively to express intention and creatively develop ideas, whilst also demonstrating clear understanding of the visual elements. Candidates were able to recognise their strengths through self-reflection. This enabled effective decision-making while exploring and expressing individual ideas.

Contextual referencing influenced ambition in the direction of study, enabling new ideas to evolve. Visual imagery was independent and strong, with supporting annotation that indicated critical understanding and self-reflection. The combination of the candidates' own recording along with cultural and contextual referencing were creatively manipulated, which led to imaginative final responses. Most of the development was meaningful which enhanced the visual journey, from research to final outcome.

Middle Level

Many candidates identified an area of focus to enable a personal response, and most explored first-hand sources. A range of recording methods were explored, but the depth of enquiry was less strong than at the higher level. Appropriate sources were selected for investigation and the stronger candidates included detailed observational recording in a range of materials, including photography. Some candidates looked at objects or people in their local environment and included a range of observational work but seemed unsure of how to develop their ideas from these studies. The range and quality of the recording influenced the development of ideas. Other candidates sometimes selected to work with subject matter they were unable to research from direct observation. Consequently, this stifled a personal response and the development of original ideas.

Contextual referencing helped to inform ideas based on the observational work, but efforts mostly concentrated on the artist's style rather than establishing an in-depth connection or concept for exploration. There was sometimes less evidence of the ability to analyse, or make critical connections, to move ideas forward. Candidates either explored some promising ideas but lacked the ability to analyse or reflect on their work to present a coherent outcome, or conversely produce a strong final piece. In many cases very promising ideas had been tentatively explored and then abandoned in favour of more conventional ideas and approaches. Often, the appropriate media was selected, but some candidates at this level lacked the confidence to fully explore which limited the scope for creative experimentation. The reflection required to build on the candidates' technical skills, was sometimes lacking.

Lower Level

Responses at this level were inconsistent, with insufficient research and recording from the candidates' own first-hand sources. Frequently, candidates relied heavily on secondary sources, such as imagery from Pinterest and other 'found images', as the starting point for their work. The initial research tended to be limited in range, purpose and depth of investigation. These candidates often appeared to be less able to reflect on their ideas to discern which recording was relevant for the exploration of their theme.

The insufficient depth of meaningful recording prevented idea development, with candidates presenting images that were often disconnected. There was a lack of confidence to explore a range of possibilities and candidates tended to concentrate on one initial idea. Frequently, ideas did not connect to earlier work, resulting in a submission that did not build and lacked a coherent flow. Materials were sometimes explored, but often without purpose or skilful technical ability. Where artist or cultural referencing was included, the content was either unrelated, biographical, or copied which did not inform development.

Some submissions at this level contained potential, showing understanding of the visual elements, such as tone, colour and form, but candidates were often unable to recognise this, in order to refine their ideas and build on their strengths. Greater engagement in the themes would have benefitted the work of these candidates, to encourage purposeful and in-depth research. This could have enabled them to build on the development of coherent ideas into a more informed, resolved, and imaginative final outcome.

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Paper 9479/02 Externally Set Assignment
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Key messages

- This was the first time that centres submitted their work via Submit for Assessment. The work was generally well presented and in chronological order.
- In future, it would be helpful if the coversheet indicated which question the candidate has selected.
- Links to artists were included in most responses, although their relevance to the candidates' work and intentions differed.
- Many candidates recorded subject matter from first-hand and were able to develop their own meaningful ideas but there was also a reliance on secondary sources across the levels. There was an overreliance on secondary sources in weaker submissions as this often limited a more personal response.
- Candidates must clearly identify via labelling which work is their own and which is the work of others.
- In future, it would be helpful if candidates word-process rather than handwrite any included annotation, to improve legibility.

General comments

All questions received responses, and most candidates took the opportunity to select a theme which interested them, resulting in engaged, personal responses.

All the stimuli allowed for first-hand observations from the candidates' environment and the more successful candidates made effective use of this in their starting points and development.

Painting and related media was the most common area of study with some design submissions also in evidence.

Higher level

The strongest responses included clear evidence for each Assessment Objective. Scripts were thoroughly planned by candidates and coherent.

Appropriate sources were selected with confidence and intentions were intelligent and mature. Candidates made effective use of objects, places, or people around them to record directly from. These initial studies were relevant to intentions and thoroughly explored with a high level of skill and exploration of texture and form.

Candidates also frequently provided many examples of photographs they had taken which carefully considered lighting and different viewpoints. These were used very effectively to observe from, develop their ideas and consider different possibilities. Similarly, digital manipulation was used effectively to explore, develop and present ideas.

There were many examples of a good range of media and purposeful exploration. Candidates were prepared to experiment with media and take risks, often resulting in creative results which fed into the development of their ideas.

Artist referencing informed the direction of the work through considered decision making. Where written explanations were provided, they were apt, insightful, and clear.

Ideas were fully explored and different viewpoints and compositions for final pieces for the timed test were carefully considered. Candidates were not afraid to abandon ideas which were not progressing and experiment with new or unexpected ideas.

Final outcomes were informed by the preparatory studies and were relevant and resolved.

Middle level

Submissions in the middle range were characterised by inconsistency across the different Assessment Objectives.

Many candidates had provided evidence of skill in media and a good range of ideas but not sufficient observational studies, especially from first-hand.

Where sufficient studies had been made it was primarily from secondary sources. Even when a starting point had been chosen that provided many opportunities to record from direct observation, candidates often still chose to copy from photographs or other flat imagery.

Design-based responses at this level tended to include a large amount of secondary-sourced material with little, if any, observational studies related to the theme. Initial first-hand studies are still required in design-based submissions, as they help to develop understanding, context and consequently idea development.

Other submissions at this level contained evidence of sufficient observational studies but the preparatory work lacked development of ideas. Some submissions virtually skipped development altogether and candidates went straight on to final outcomes with insufficient planning and exploration.

There were also a significant number of candidates who provided a 'pre-final' painting which is a copy of the planned exam piece. Often this is the only evidence submitted for the development of ideas which does not demonstrate a good understanding of the need to develop imagery as per Assessment Objective 3. Candidates needed to show evidence of reflection and refinement in the development of their ideas.

The journey through the submissions was less coherent and consistent than in the higher mark range.

Lower level

Submissions at this level did not include sufficient primary studies or reference material. Where observations were made, secondary images were too frequently used. Often these were also small and difficult to refer to.

Whenever possible, it is preferable to gain first-hand experience of looking and recording (e.g., materials and objects, as well as faces, hands, figures) from life. Primary studies are always beneficial for candidates to make as they lead to a better understanding of form, tone, texture, and colour and allow for more interesting outcomes.

There were some good references to artists but including photographs of the artist or a biography is not relevant. It is better for candidates to focus on what the artist has made that is of interest and why.

Some candidates tended to limit their exploration of media to predominantly one medium, e.g., graphite pencil or pen. Using a wider range of media can be beneficial, helping candidates to explore and experiment more fully.

There was a lack of clear development where the focus on a theme was not apparent. Consequently, ideas appeared disconnected and did not build into a coherent body of work.

Most submissions at this lower level also did not include enough development. In some submissions, an initial idea was chosen too soon, other ideas were not considered and the final outcome lacked sufficient refinement.

Less successful outcomes in the timed test also tended to be a copy of an earlier study rather than a culmination of the whole project.

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Paper 9479/03 Personal Investigation

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Key messages

- This was the first time that centres submitted their work via Submit for Assessment. The work was generally well presented and in chronological order.
- Though there was generally good signposting of primary and secondary sources, candidates must clearly identify via labelling which work is their own and which is the work of others, and other reference material used.
- In future, it would be helpful if candidates word-process rather than handwrite their written analysis and annotation throughout their response to improve legibility. Alternatively, candidates can include a word-processed copy of the written analysis as part of the submission.

General comments

Good integration of written analysis and the development and evaluation of personal, creative responses.

Individual responses were supported by relevant research and understanding of reference material. The written elements were articulately written and appropriately illustrated by works referred to.

Many candidates referred to first-hand visits to galleries and studios and where possible many had participated in workshops with an artist relevant to their investigation. Where a first-hand visit was not possible, candidates carried out online interviews.

Comments on specific questions

Higher levels

Submissions at this level demonstrated the ability to refer to a wide range of source material relevant to their chosen theme and make clear and individual connections between the work of others and their own ideas. They were able to apply in-depth analysis of specific works to support the development of the personal, creative work.

Personal responses were developed through a combination of observational studies to generate primary visual stimulus alongside thorough research into their chosen topics and relevant artists.

Written discussion supported the development of visual and creative work, annotation was articulate and demonstrated clear and pertinent observations relevant to intentions.

Research into the work of others and gathering of visual reference material was thorough, showing a broad approach to their theme and thinking widely around the subject. The breadth of research and understanding of the theme led to a wider range of creative responses.

Candidates were able to develop their ideas, refining as they progressed. Many building on their initial thoughts through in-depth, purposeful exploration of media, work of others and understanding of visual elements. Some explored a range of possible ideas, quite diverse, through a full range of two-dimensional and three-dimensional media, culminating in a refined outcome that includes all aspects of the investigation.

Both approaches showed a mature ability to review and refine as ideas progressed. This was clear both in the written discourse and the visual work produced.

Middle levels

Most working at this level demonstrated a competent understanding of the investigation. Submissions viewed showed a clear ability to use research, analysis and exploration to inform ideas and develop a body of personal responses.

Whilst the scripts demonstrated competent skills in handling media this was not always informed by their chosen artists or led by the qualities of materials. Those that were able to make connections between the inherent qualities or explore the full potential of a range of media relevant to their underlying concepts achieved slightly higher in this band of marks.

Candidates showed the ability to use the work of others to support their ideas. Some of the connections made were explored in a superficial manner based purely on aesthetic values.

Those gaining slightly higher were able to make more conceptual links to inform the development of their work. Sometimes the written element explored the more conceptual aspects, but this was not reflected in the practical responses.

At this level the creative journey and the various connections made to contextual references were incoherent, in some cases the reference to the work of others was carried out retrospectively after the candidate had created the work.

Some working within the lower end of this band made good use of the work of others. They made convincing copies of specific works and gathered first-hand visual stimulus to create their own versions. In these cases, the development of ideas was hindered as the candidate was unable to move beyond the initial response and copies.

Low levels

Submissions seen at this level were limited by their lack of visual references or a heavy reliance on secondary sources. Often the investigation was satisfactory in its ability to make observations from first-hand sources or satisfactory due to the range of references used to support the development of personal creative work. In some cases, this was true of both elements.

Candidates made attempts to understand media application in relation to their chosen artists but often they were limited in the ability to control materials. This was evident when carrying out first-hand observations. Although some candidates made successful copies of artists' work, they were unable to translate this within their own work.

Contextual references were sometimes irrelevant and did not support the development of ideas or help the candidate to progress in their explorations.

At this level the creative journey was less apparent, too brief or incoherent.