

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/01
Portfolio

Key messages

- In stronger submissions, candidates were able to reference the work of others and demonstrate the impact on their own creative journey.
- Video content must be no longer than 5 minutes in duration.
- Candidates are advised to investigate the key characteristics of the chosen coursework theme.

General comments

Candidates are required to submit supporting studies and a proposal of what their chosen idea would be. These should be related, and the supporting studies should include the research and development of ideas to support the proposal. Centres must take care with the labelling and submission as errors cannot always be resolved once the work has been submitted. Common issues that can be avoided are instances where work is uploaded for the incorrect component, or incorrect candidate; and instances where duplicate work has been uploaded rather than the supporting studies and the proposal.

For this component, many candidates used video within the supporting studies or as part of the final work. Where centres submitted video work, this was often seen to be overly long. Centres are required to submit concise video content of no more than 5 minutes in duration. Where video is submitted, candidates should carefully consider editing 'raw' footage; and the colour and size of subtitles, where used, as these design decisions can have an impact on the success of their final work.

Some submissions did not respond to any of the themes provided in the syllabus. The themes are in the syllabus to provide a framework in order to be able to access the marks in each assessment objective, candidates must work to one of the themes in the syllabus for the correct year of examination.

Candidates must also take care to clearly attribute external sources and resources. In cases where there is no reference or indication that the work is the candidate's own, it can be difficult to see what is the candidate's own original work, and what is stock imagery, templates, filters or uncredited work from other people. Where the work of others is referenced, it is important to establish how this is relevant and how it provides insight into the candidate's intentions. Some candidates took a similar approach to the themes such as Emotions, Wellbeing and Boundaries. While there may be some overlap between the themes, candidates are advised to investigate what are the key characteristics of the chosen theme.

A significant number of responses explored mental health and issues resulting from the pandemic. Many candidates submitted work in the form of a documentary, or an animation. Photoshoots claimed to be inspired by specific artists, would have been more successful where candidates demonstrated more than a superficial understanding of the artist's work. For example, the chosen artists could have determined the subject matter, angle of view, or pattern or colour choices. Less successful responses were seen to establish only a tenuous link to one of the themes. This work would have benefited from research and recording which was relevant to intentions. Such an approach could attract marks in AO1.

Stronger submissions had clear intentions for this component from the start. Candidates at the higher end made appropriate reference to the work of others and were able to demonstrate the impact of the research on their own creative journey. However, often among weaker work, it was not always clear why such artists or designers had been selected.

Approaches to the themes

Boundaries

Many candidates presented a thorough and detailed response to this theme. Typically, responses included interviews, photoshoots, videos of work in progress, records of complementary practice such as drama and fashion modelling, colour swatches, visual analysis of images, multiple versions of design work such as video editing and logo iterations. This often resulted in highly effective work based on a thorough and careful application of critical thinking. Some candidates presented videos for their proposals. Among the strongest work, the videos demonstrated the management of participants, good choices of locations, and a command of the design space. Appropriate transitions, typography, animations, and digital manipulations revealed a focused communication of visual messages. Candidates often explored the idea of Boundaries by referencing artists who work with an objective experience of the world, or who use everyday or real objects. However, candidates should avoid an over dependence on contextual studies, and focus more on developing their own ideas and visual language.

The Digital Classroom

Too few scripts were seen to discern a pattern.

Digital Poetry

At the lower range of responses, candidates were seen to identify some of their ideas for their project and demonstrated a clear idea for a photoshoot, but work would have been improved where initial ideas were visualised or developed during the planned photoshoot. There was limited evidence of some direction of models, and basic colour grading. In some cases, candidates would have improved their work with greater attention to visual elements or visual language. Higher marks could be attracted where candidates show consideration of the setting, lighting, texture, composition, symmetry, use of text, or image and text combinations. Candidates could also be rewarded for an awareness of the composition of images. This would attract marks in AO2 and AO4. Where visual elements were stronger more marks would be attracted by extending the scope of research and extending creative activities which develop ideas. Candidates are encouraged to explore a range of imagery associated with their chosen theme as a solid foundation from which to build ideas. Careful consideration should be given to the visual implications of a theme as work commences and develops.

Emotions

Emotions was a popular theme and many candidates responded to the emotional effects of isolation and lockdown. Among some lower scoring scripts, candidates referred to artists who depict or illustrate emotions. This approach would have benefited from more discerning choices and an exposure to artists who demonstrate a substantial understanding of emotions. Candidates would also benefit from seeking to develop a sophisticated understanding of the way emotions can be communicated. Candidates would be encouraged to consider research among film, animation, graphic design, mime, or fine art for example.

Lower scoring responses were seen to enthusiastically take self-portrait photographs, or photographs of friends in exaggerated poses. Often scripts contained initial research which was interesting and contained potential to help the work progress. However, more marks would be achieved where such research clearly influences the development of the candidate's work and becomes an integrated part of the creative process. As part of experimental and developmental activities candidates may wish to consider analogue techniques in their exploration of media and in the development of ideas. Such an approach can demonstrate involvement in the project and a focused investigation, with marks rewarded in AO2 and AO3. Higher scoring scripts showed a sensitivity and critical judgement in the selection of images to inspire portrait photoshoots. Such work was often developed using coloured gels, lighting arrangements, and digital manipulation. Candidates were also rewarded for their appropriate selection of the images for the final stages of their work.

Lower scoring scripts were often seen to use a point and shoot method which tended to overlook the consideration of elements such as composition, lighting, pattern, or structure. Among higher scoring scripts, candidates were seen to have carefully considered composition, and it was evident that they had thought about the mise-en-scene of the work. In many cases, candidates had missed opportunities to show evidence of post-production processes and this tended to limit marks in AO2 and AO3. This was also seen to apply to scripts containing video work. It's important that candidates are encouraged to present evidence of the development of their assignment. This can be done as screenshots, screen recordings, annotations about decisions made as ideas progressed and how things changed following feedback during development.

Travel

Candidates worked from a variety of sources for their supporting studies and their proposal. They often presented their proposal as an advertisement for a location they had visited, sometimes on vacation. candidates were seen to focus more on historical, geographical or commercial attractions of the location, rather than research into how aspects of a location can be communicated visually. Scripts often included elements of typography as the work moved towards a conclusion and a proposal. This was seen to help demonstrate design skills in the arrangement of visual elements such as text, image, and negative space. Among lower scoring scripts, candidates would be better advised to consider the weight and order of the visual elements they deploy in their work. Higher scoring scripts clearly demonstrated creative development and their progression towards a personal response.

A virtual travel experience proved a popular solution to the constraints of social distancing. Many candidates pitched their local area as a tourist destination, and appropriately researched the work of local professional photographers. Other candidates focused on modes of transport with some comparative studies featuring old and new cars or aeroplanes, for example. Lower scoring scripts used the convenience of taking photographs from the car and added visual interest to their photographs by shooting Dutch angle and/or manipulating colour saturation or contrast. Where some scripts showed potential in the use of photography, the work was limited by the very small number of photographs submitted. In some cases, responses could have gained additional marks in AO1 by more closely exploring the visual attributes and formal elements of the artworks researched, rather than solely relying on geographical relevance.

Wellbeing

In response to this theme, candidates tended to develop work inspired by a variety of sports, or the idea of mindfulness. Among lower scoring scripts, candidates were often seen to take wide angle shots of sports in action. Such scripts were not seen to exploit opportunities to explore close up photography or other approaches to creative photography. Higher marks would have been attained where candidates were seen to exercise more control over the visual environment. An appreciation of lighting, composition or leading lines could be rewarded in each of the assessment objectives. Among lower scoring scripts, candidates tended to focus on the sport itself rather than exploring visual imagery associated with wellbeing. Colour theory was often included as an aspect of research. However higher marks could be attained where candidates demonstrate the application of this theory to the development of their own ideas.

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Paper 9481/02 Externally Set Assignment
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Key messages

- Moving image work should be no longer than 5 minutes in duration.
- Candidates often presented their work in a clearly structured format.
- Candidates should submit their supporting studies, and their final outcome, based on the question paper for the correct exam series.

General comments

There was an interesting range of work presented throughout this component which included a variety of apps and animated sequences. Candidates often presented their work in a clearly structured format with episodes of activity or phases of idea development labelled throughout the submissions. Among lower scoring scripts, research was often limited to biographical details of artists and brief descriptions of art movements that had little impact on the design development. Candidates are encouraged to develop ideas and include more critical reflection on the work of their chosen artists and how this will impact on the progress of the assignment. Where film is used, candidates are encouraged to give more consideration to the characteristics of film language. This could be rewarded in AO1 and in AO3. It would be beneficial for candidates to carefully consider camera technique, mise-en-scene, lighting, sound and editing when they are planning for the final outcome. This could take the form of an annotated script, thumbnails or storyboards. This would provide candidates with opportunities to demonstrate an informed development of their work, attracting marks in AO3. There were some responses where animation had been used, in which it was unclear how the candidate's own ideas had informed the work, as some candidates used websites and apps to assist them. This may limit marks awarded for the exploration of media and techniques in AO2.

For this component, an increasing number of candidates used moving image as part of the final work or within the supporting studies. Where digital photographs have been used in the supporting studies or in the final work, centres are strongly advised not to submit duplicate sets of photographs which are labelled separately as Supporting Studies, or Final Work. Candidates are required to demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of supporting studies and of the final work as distinct and separate items. Where centres submitted film work, this was often seen to be overly long. Candidates must stick to the required maximum length of 5 minutes for moving image. Where film is submitted, candidates should carefully consider editing raw footage, and consider the colour and size of subtitles, where used.

Some centres submitted candidate work which was seen to contain the same content for both the supporting studies and the final outcome. On such occasions, candidates were seen to have missed an opportunity to demonstrate their performance in each outcome.

Most scripts were seen to follow one of the given aspects of the chosen question. Initial research into the work of photographers, filmmakers, fashion designers or branding were evident in most scripts. Much of this work was relevant to the candidate's stated intentions. Those scripts which attained higher marks were seen to narrow their research only as the project unfolded and then conduct a more in depth and focused investigation towards a conclusion. However, among lower scoring scripts research appeared to be largely confined to the late 19th century and early twentieth century European painters. In such cases, scripts were not seen to demonstrate a discernible relevance to the candidate's intentions.

Approaches to the assignments

1 *Interconnected energy*

Among the responses submitted, it was found that most candidates researched the area of energy and renewable sources. However, research and ideas generation around renewable energy and energy conservation were not required by the question. The question invited candidates to develop an animated visual identity, vox pops for video adverts, a digital video wall, or an animation showing how the solar home system and microgrid works. Candidates are reminded that they should primarily be concerned with working with digital media and with design. For example, candidates are advised, rather than researching renewable sources, to research visual means to communicate ideas. In fact, some lower scoring scripts appeared to be overwhelmed by the amount of information available about solar power. As a result, pages were filled with information with little visual reference.

Some scripts were seen to progress towards a visual outcome that communicated a message about the importance of renewable energy. Candidates produced some interesting animations in response to this question. However, among some lower scoring scripts, there was limited evidence of the developmental work that went into the production of the animation. It is important, in particular for AO3 and AO4, that candidates demonstrate their work in progress and the skills and ideas they have applied. Higher scoring scripts tended to clearly show progress and processes through devices such as timelines. Some advertisements were seen which were produced in the form of Power Point presentations. Such work appeared to be more like an information presentation and not an advertisement. These kinds of scripts would have been improved by selecting a more appropriate format that related to their design ideas.

2 *Label*

Submissions for this question included animations for an in-store display, mobile apps for the brand, and photo-essays. Many candidates focused on an in-store animation. This work was frequently supported by informative sources of research into the concept of branding and the branding of sustainable products in particular. Higher scoring scripts were seen to recognise important visual elements of branding and applied them to their own work. Also, higher scoring scripts presented extensive work on character development, colour palettes, line weight, texture, pictorial space, typography, logo design, and narrative. These scripts demonstrated a strong command of the visual environment and an understanding of how a brand message is communicated in a short space of time. The most successful responses contained an insightful exploration of the animators or illustrators studied.

Other animations describing the function of a shopping app were seen. Where photographers were researched, higher marks were attracted where candidates sought inspiration from the photographer's subjects, objects, environments, or approaches to lighting. Some scripts contained considerable amounts of writing. This was typically used to explain ideas and planning, and it was frequently accompanied by images. Candidates are discouraged from an over-reliance on writing at length and from presenting work in the form of an illustrated essay. While text has a role in the component, candidates are encouraged to think in visual terms and communicate ideas using visual language. Lower scoring scripts would have benefited from a more focused response to the question. These scripts would have been improved by avoiding distractions such as envy, or teenage bullying. Opportunities for research were missed in AO1 where candidates were seen to record solely numerical data regarding ecological production methods within the fashion industry. Candidates are strongly encouraged to research the development of their chosen visual outcome rather than any issues surrounding the question subject. Candidates working on a photo-essay combined a range of photographic shoots in various locations with competent direction of the model, lighting, pose and expression. Selected images were then incorporated with a creative use of colour filters and scale within imaginative layouts and compositions. Such work was rewarded in each of the assessment objectives.

3 *Rites of passage.*

Candidates produced work on topics such as birthday parties, college graduations, weddings, death, football games, and hunting trips. Photo-stories were seen, along with animations and moving image work. Most candidates responding to this question focused on cultural rites of passage. There were some weaker responses where candidates were seen to undertake limited research into a specific culture. This was often seen to reveal only a superficial level of understanding. Lower scoring scripts tended to avoid a focus on the visual imagery associated with their chosen rite of passage. This tended to limit marks in AO1 and AO3. Such scripts were often seen to be accompanied by a range of photographs where little consideration was given to visual investigation. In contrast, higher scoring scripts developed a sustained investigation into the visual representations of their chosen theme, such as marriage. Higher scoring scripts were demonstrably

seen to use their investigations to influence their progress towards a final piece. The development of higher scoring work often included a range of carefully considered personal photography and sets of well-designed letterforms and well deployed typography. Among lower scoring scripts, candidates would be better advised to provide evidence of experimental work and the development of ideas for their final piece. This would have attracted more marks in AO2 and AO3. Centres are encouraged to recognise the importance of a structured approach to candidate activity, in order to access each of the assessment objectives.

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/03 Personal Investigation

Key messages

- Many submissions contained eloquent, intelligent, and well written research and analysis.
- The Pandemic continued to be an ongoing theme for investigation.
- Candidates are reminded that the best campaigns have a strong command of design.

General comments

The aim of the Personal Investigation is for candidates to engage in a self-directed period of sustained and focused study. This study should bring together the skills they have developed so far and demonstrate that they are able to work independently to resolve a given idea. Many submissions were engaging, informative, visually appealing and often immensely readable. Where centres submitted film work, this was often seen to be overly long. Centres are required to submit concise film content of no more than 5 minutes in duration. Candidates must carefully consider editing to avoid blank passages and ostensibly unrelated content. Centres are reminded that the final outcome should be supported by written and visual critical analysis which clarifies working creative processes. Candidates are requested to avoid repeating written evidence in different forms within their scripts. Work must be submitted following the guidance on submitting work to *Cambridge*. Links to Google drives or websites where the final work is hosted cannot be marked and candidates will be disadvantaged as the submission guidance has not been followed.

Component 3 is a substantial piece of independent research and some candidates continued investigations that followed themes from previous components. In addition, the Pandemic continued to be an ongoing theme for investigation, where some candidates looked again at lockdown and isolation. Other themes included E-Sports, Surrealism, community fitness, dynamic sports photography, special event fashion, character design, the natural world, road trips, surfing, emotions, cultural identity, road safety, the gulf between rich and poor, action heroes, the meaning of death, light in photography, non-linear film-making, action adventure games, social media, make-up, mythical creatures, technology, commercial advertising, expressive dance in natural surroundings, the digital classroom, logos, people watching, recycling, destruction of the rainforest, escape rooms, war, transgender identity, phobias, and games design.

Approaches to the Personal Investigation

Final outcome

Among lower scoring scripts, most candidates were seen to spend time researching information or data surrounding their chosen topic or theme which may be relevant but can also be a distraction. Candidates and centres are reminded that they should primarily be concerned with an aspect of digital media and design, as a means to communicate an idea or message visually. For example, while candidates may feel strongly about a particular area of interest, they are reminded that the best campaigns have been those with a strong command of design and media. For example, where scripts focused on a reflection on coronavirus, candidates would be better advised to research creative and reflective techniques, rather than an analysis of the virus itself. In other examples, investigations focused on the environment tended to contain written analyses as a political and statistical description of the issue.

Candidates were seen to work in a variety of media and formats as their work developed. These included physical and analogue experiments, digital illustrations, pop-up-books, documentary film, animation, and websites to host photo essays. More moving image work was seen for this component than for components 1 or 2. Some candidates took a more abstract approach. This was reflected in photo joiners, videos of physical distortion experiments, animated Gifs and some beautiful collages. Some candidates developed purposeful and sustained investigations through a combination of simple and more complex visual enquiries. For example, photographs of refraction through glass leading to more demanding digital distortions of face and body, were inspired by simple experiments with lenses. Such work demonstrated a conspicuous control of light, composition, surface reflection and colour balance. Lower scoring scripts were not seen to capitalise on the earlier potential of the investigations, and this was reflected in AO3 and AO4.

There was an increased popularity in posterising and glitch effects within videos. This was seen to achieve mixed success. The most successful scripts included extensive research which aligned the medium to a clearly defined message. Additional marks were available for candidates who displayed critical awareness in their selection source material and images. Centres are strongly advised to avoid overlong submissions containing unedited material. Centres are also reminded that the syllabus describes a final practical outcome is a portfolio of practical work demonstrating a resolved creative outcome in one of the areas of study, rather than a single item of work.

Among higher scoring animations, some persuasive character design was seen. This was typically based on studies of familiar people, guided by detailed feedback forms, and informed by a consideration of appropriate colour psychology. Thought was frequently given to the grouping of characters to ensure they worked visually as a group within the game context. However, among lower scoring scripts, character design work could be improved by an exploration of facial expressions, figure movement, and rendering. Higher scoring scripts demonstrated an effective co-ordination of animation skills, combining stop frame, eased keyframing, hand-drawn and purchased texture assets, grain, blur, and colourising effects. Other higher scoring scripts were seen to combine analogue techniques such as cyanotypes, photograms and digital filters. This was rewarded in AO1 and AO2. Some live action work produced sets of photographic and video stills where character development, interiors, and exterior settings were robustly tested. Audience test screenings often provided feedback which informed changes to the editing style, pick-up shots and reshoots. This was rewarded in AO3 and AO4.

Written element

It was very encouraging to receive many submissions that contained eloquent, intelligent, and well written research and analysis. Many higher scoring scripts were supported by a keen interrogation of the process and some close integration between creative development and imaginative commentary. There were various forms of submissions of the written element. Those that attained higher marks incorporated images combined with analytical commentary as the project progressed. However, where the written element performed like a descriptive essay or purely a log of the investigation, marks were limited in each of the assessment objectives. Centres are reminded that a proposal is not mandatory for this component. Where candidates have decided to produce a client proposal or brief as part of the creative process, this should be clearly indicated.

Centres are reminded that candidates can submit their final practical outcome in any appropriate format for the area of study. The written analysis should consist of 1000–1500 words of continuous prose presented in a format that is related to the final practical outcome. Some candidates might choose to submit this as a supporting document, while others might use the word count as a thread throughout an entire project. Where candidates submit a supporting document, they must include visual content as required by the syllabus. Without visual critical analysis, marks are frustrated in each of the assessment objectives. Elsewhere, some higher scoring scripts contained sophisticated examinations of lens-based media. This work was typically supported by short video work and rich and engaging text.