

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/01 Portfolio
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Key messages

- Centres are required to submit concise video content.
- Creatively sophisticated scripts included evidence of testing and feedback to inform and modify approaches to the theme.
- Some very productive analogue experiments were seen by the Examiners.

General comments

The Examiners were pleased to see a range of work submitted which interpreted the themes across a variety of areas of study. Some examples of excellent and highly accomplished work were seen. The Examiners also noted increased activity in 3D modelling and in video and animation. Some high scoring scripts were inspired by philosophers and psychologists, exploring the realm of meaning and its subconscious expression. Some seemingly straightforward activities such as creating a poster were rewarded for a careful creation of a main motif, the consideration of feedback, the creative use of composition, and a systematic coordination of colour. Proposals for exhibitions were seen, where candidates understood its practical implications. This often included designs for ticketing, information pamphlets, posters, and visualisations of the gallery space. Some very sophisticated work focused on the educational impact of contemporary culture was seen, simultaneously described as a dream and a nightmare.

In some cases, candidates appeared to have been provided with an index for their supporting studies. Whilst this may be thought to be helpful as guidance, it can tend to limit marks where candidates do not venture beyond the advised content. However, among higher scoring scripts, candidates tended to determine the direction of their own enquiry. Where photography was used, many candidates used a point and shoot technique. However, more marks would have been attracted by evidence of composition and lighting considerations. Among lower scoring scripts there was often limited experimental work which prevented candidates from accessing the higher mark bands. In some cases, candidates provided strong evidence of editing skills which was rewarded in AO2 and AO3.

Where candidates submitted work in the form of a documentary, or an animation, some of this work was longer in duration than the guidance provided in the syllabus. Photoshoots claimed to be inspired by specific artists, would have been more successful where candidates demonstrate more than a superficial understanding of the artist's work. Many higher scoring scripts were seen to reference the work of others and demonstrated the impact on the candidate's creative journey. However, often among lower scoring scripts, it was not always clear why such artists or designers had been selected. Stronger scripts had clear intentions from the start.

Many candidates referenced their sources, included a bibliography, and cited works within their submissions. This provides clarity, but also complies with the guidance in the syllabus. However, all candidates are reminded to clearly indicate which is their own work and which is the work of others. Where this is not stated, it may be assumed that images or text are sourced from elsewhere and cannot therefore, be rewarded. Candidates are also reminded to clearly attribute external sources and resources. 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.

Continuous PDF or PowerPoint are preferred formats. Files and websites stored on remote access servers (e.g., Google Drive), including school servers, and Keynote files are to be avoided. All material should be embedded within the submission. Additionally, the duplication of video and image files is strongly discouraged as this is unnecessary and may create potential confusion. Candidates are therefore encouraged to perform a thorough check of all work before the final submission. Where centres submitted

video work, this was often seen to be overly long which can sometimes make it difficult for candidates to access higher mark bands. Centres are required to submit concise video content.

Some submissions included a video of the candidates reading the annotations of a PowerPoint presentation. This was seen to duplicate existing work and was not seen to provide further understanding or insight.

Insufficient research and exploration in candidate work will often impact on outcomes in AO3 and AO4 resulting in lower marks across all the AO's. Such scripts would have attracted more marks where a firmer foundation was provided for the development of ideas and the realisation of intentions.

Comments on the themes

Boundaries

This theme generated a range of responses including the boundaries of science, different points of view, levels of prosperity, the impact of human activity, class, trust and betrayal, natural boundaries, and unfulfilled ambitions and longings. Among lower scoring scripts marks could be limited by a dependence on more descriptive, rather than in-depth understanding of the theme. This work would benefit from stronger links to the theme, and development which follows a coherent trajectory. Amongst higher scoring scripts, candidates were seen to adopt a more critical and analytical posture towards the work they were influenced by. Lower scoring scripts often limited the study of chosen artists and photographers to biographical information. Candidates are encouraged to critically reflect on the work they are influenced by and demonstrate how this will inform their own work.

The Digital Classroom

There were not enough responses to this theme to discern a pattern.

Digital Poetry

There was a lack of research and visual exploration in many of the submissions for this theme. Candidates are encouraged to explore relevant imagery to their chosen theme in order to develop an appreciation of visual language and can inform and develop their final outcome. They are also encouraged to carefully consider the visual and conceptual implications of the theme as they commence their work. This could assist candidates in developing a clear intention and a direction for their creative journey.

Emotions

Scripts were often based on video or photography. Higher scoring scripts clearly illustrated their creative progress and included an array of imagery and techniques that influenced the work. Lower scoring scripts would benefit from more evidence of creative progress, and reference to artists that inform the candidate's work. Candidates are encouraged to experiment with techniques they intend to use in their final work. Lower scoring scripts would benefit from an ongoing evaluation throughout the creative process. In some cases, candidates with lower scores would benefit from evidence of the postproduction process and its impact on the creative outcome.

Lower scoring scripts were more concerned with why the theme was chosen rather than its creative potential. More marks would have been attracted where candidates embarked on a digital exploration of the theme. Candidates who produced a proposal or final idea towards the start of the activity were often unable to access marks in the higher mark bands. Candidates are advised to avoid producing evidence of recording and exploring, after the event. Other lower scoring scripts would benefit from a logical progression of ideas, a convincing sense of the theme and a meaningful application of creative skill.

Higher attaining scripts frequently included analogue exploration of materials and ideas. These scripts also contained a degree of experimentation that showed an ability to be creatively dynamic, while remaining focused on the theme. Many candidates used colours to represent this theme and some scripts demonstrated a confident understanding of colour psychology.

Travel

Submissions included travel documentary videos and some photo documentaries showing a range of perspectives and cultures. Many scripts focused on the candidates' home location. Some scripts referred to

a recent natural disaster and recorded the location before and after the event. Many scripts used maps as a visual device for development and as an element of the proposal, often as part of a brochure. Candidates who made a record of their chosen location but did not fully explore the subject and develop a coherent idea, were limited in the marks they were able to access.

Many candidates took the opportunity to use their travel destinations as their main subject. This was seen to be more productive when their work was a response to a recent journey, rather than a past holiday. Lower scoring scripts would benefit from greater control of photography, and a clearer and more coherent structure to their response to the theme. Higher scoring scripts showed how learners used inspiration from established photographers or artists to develop their work.

Wellbeing

Interpretations of this theme included food, cooking, lifestyle, and sport. However, lower scoring scripts tended to focus on a sport itself, rather than exploring visual imagery associated with the theme. Other such scripts contained limited research, some written commentary with basic references to formal elements including colour, texture and composition, and responses to referenced artists which did not appear to recognise camera angle or selection of subject. Among lower scoring scripts candidates would benefit from feedback and testing, which identifies key areas for development.

Higher scoring scripts developed the theme by deconstructing the work of multiple photographers and illustrators, to recreate, and then experiment with various lighting techniques, lenses, and setups. Scripts working with a food theme included interesting investigation into vector-based graphics, the aesthetic of fine art painting, and theories of colour relationships. Such ideas were often developed into motifs, patterns, or tonal studies, attracting reward across the assessment objectives.

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/02 Externally Set Assignment
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Key messages

- Feedback was used as a valuable steer to guide the development of candidate work.
- Humour and playfulness brought an interesting dimension to the communication of ideas.
- Continuous PDF or PowerPoint are preferred formats.

General comments

An interesting range of work was presented throughout this component which included games, branding material, photo essays and animated sequences. The Examiners noted some excellent examples of research across a broad field of art and design practice. Higher scoring scripts displayed a confident and meaningful interpretation of the work of others. This was used to inform the candidate's creative outcomes. The Examiners also noticed examples of humour and playfulness which brought an interesting dimension to the communication of the candidate's ideas.

Among lower scoring scripts, research was often limited to biographical details of artists, photographers or designers. Candidates are encouraged to develop a critical approach to the work of others. Candidates would benefit from investigating the visual style, visual language, and techniques employed by the artists chosen. In this way, candidates can put themselves in a stronger position to judge the impact of their experimental and developmental work. Unfortunately, a few scripts were not seen to follow one of the four concepts given in each of the three assignments. Candidates are required to choose one of the concepts to develop. Not only is this a requirement of the question paper but this will provide support for the direction and intention of the activity. Some scripts appeared to show candidates becoming interested in a single idea, or the use of a particular technique, to the apparent detriment of the overall assignment or chosen concept. Candidates are encouraged to explore and select appropriate technology, reviewing and refining as the work develops. Where video was submitted, some scripts would have been improved by more consideration given to the language of film. Candidates choosing this medium are also encouraged to consider camera technique, mise en scene, lighting, sound and editing and how to deploy these elements when planning a shoot. This approach would tend to attract marks in AO3.

Google forms were often used to obtain feedback from peers. Higher scoring candidates asked more detailed questions about the visual elements of their own work. The feedback was used as a valuable steer to guide the development of their work. Marks were also attracted by feedback obtained on specific elements of the candidate's work. Such candidates were seen to apply the feedback as the work progressed. However, candidates are encouraged to make discriminating and effective use of feedback. Where feedback is sought from peers, and the candidate's preferred option is chosen instead of a consensus, marks are potentially limited in AO3 and AO4.

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realisation of intentions. Centres are required to avoid uploading identical material for both the final outcome and the supporting studies.

Approaches to the assignments

1. *The Journey.*

Many candidates submitted Illustrations for gameplay challenges. Some beautiful responses were seen for this question. Candidates typically provided an overview of gaming history, starting with Tetris and continuing with Gameboy, The Quarry, Limbo, Jewel Quest, Dungeons and Dragons, Darkest Dungeon, Dark and Darker, Fable 2, and The Witness. Some interesting ideas for the journey ranged from documenting the school day to quests of medieval knights. Lower scoring scripts often worked on making Pixel Art games. Research among such scripts often included screen shots and original photographs to be used as backgrounds for the game. More marks would have been attracted had candidates chosen locations for their photography which related more closely to the intended game. Sometimes candidates researched gaming stories. However, more marks would have been rewarded where the chosen stories were seen to inform the direction of the project. The use of storyboards and character development is an important element of game development. Candidates are encouraged to develop characters on a more sophisticated level than basic outline or stick figures. Candidates should also retain a consistent aspect ratio for the frames in their storyboards. Some scripts were seen to rely heavily on images sourced from the internet as the starting points for backgrounds, characters, environments, and other elements within the game. These included keys, runes, skulls etc. Some candidates attempted stop frame animation where the outcome was often good. However, this work would have been better supported by a more systematic approach to storyboarding.

Higher scoring candidates typically included ideas such as pollution, conservation, technology, or spirituality in the game concept. Outcomes included interactive installation with sound elements. Higher scoring candidates often presented a more thorough development of characters, including compelling story lines, multiple shoots with multiple models, props, costumes and make-up. Lighting was well controlled which allowed for seamless compositing of multiple elements. There was a sympathetic use of visual effects to create a mood or atmosphere. Such scripts demonstrated a command of visual language and a confident connection between digital and design elements.

2. *Sense of Place.*

The Examiners noted a broad range of responses to this question and photography was among the most common area of study. Lower scoring scripts were seen to use basic photo manipulation techniques but the work revealed limited insight and a lack of critical reflection. This work would have been improved had candidates focussed on an iterative approach to experimentation and manipulation of their photographs. This can allow candidates to draw conclusions and determine their progress towards their goals. This would enable candidates to build confidence in their ability to communicate ideas through visual and other forms.

Lower scoring scripts sometimes relied heavily on design application templates, such as canva.com. Where these have been used as starting points, such scripts would have benefited from evidence of the development of the candidate's own ideas. The qualification encourages a personal response that is based on knowledge, understanding and skill in digital media and design. Marks were limited among weaker scripts where candidates did not take the opportunity to show the development of techniques that had been applied successfully. Candidates are not at all discouraged from submitting written notes. However, some scripts placed an over reliance on text, where visual work would have been more effective. Candidates are also encouraged to avoid submitting text containing factual errors or assumptions which are not verifiable, as assessment objective 1 requires the recording of insight and the exercise of critical reflection. When titling images, candidates are encouraged to ensure they accurately describe the visual content. Some scripts contained quotations which were appropriate for the concept chosen.

Stronger scripts often explored a photographic location in detail and in doing so, found unusual and overlooked subject matter. This demonstrated a commitment to the creative enquiry and was rewarded in AO1 and AO3. Among higher scoring scripts, research was frequently relevant and explored the techniques used by their chosen artist. These were then used as part of the candidate's apparatus during exploration and experiment with media and ideas. Some candidates responded to the concept of a game based on the theme. The game environments ranged from the candidate's school to an interpretation of a popular board game adapted to the candidate's location.

3. *Synthetic Milk.*

Many candidates presented research into the benefits of synthetic milk and research into its marketing. Higher scoring scripts focused on how marketing communicated the benefits of the product through visual language. Many candidates chose the concept of a video advertisement or photographic promotion material for synthetic milk. Candidates took the opportunity to experiment with a range of media and technology. Often, candidates included their own original branding. Most candidates recognised the constraint in the question that all design work should be monochrome. However, some candidates were seen to become more interested in synthetic milk ingredients and recipes themselves. This approach tended to limit the marks awarded across assessment objectives as it often limited creative activity. Such scripts would have been improved by more focused attention to packaging, story boards or logo design, for example. Where candidates used only stock footage or images, they did not score highly in AO1 and in AO4. Candidates are required to record their own observations and produce personal digital responses. Candidates are also discouraged from distracting ancillary subjects like delivery methods, business start-ups, or synthetic milk by-products for example.

Higher scoring scripts contained strong pre-production materials which included storyboards, instructions for camera angles and camera movements. Frequently the production process was evidenced by screen shots and text. Humorous animations were used to advertise the product and candidates made appropriate references to graphic designers who have used a satirical or ironic approach. Among higher scoring scripts, candidates analysed advertisements for milk and some embedded short video clips with detailed annotation to illustrate their points. Other candidates provided hyperlinks to full length videos. This is to be discouraged as there is a potential risk that the video may no longer be available. Some candidates chose to produce a video advertisement using slow-motion photography. This emphasised the liquid character of the product and often resulted in engaging and attractive footage. Much good quality graphic design was seen among higher scoring scripts. Careful consideration was given to colour and tonal relationships, composition and layout, and to typography. Where magazine covers were used as a platform for advertising, they frequently demonstrated skills in original photography and in desk top publishing.

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/03 Personal Investigation

Key messages

- Many excellent scripts demonstrated a high level of investigation and analysis, where clear progress to the final outcome was evident throughout the work.
- Many of the higher scoring scripts were appropriately supported by the written element.
- The aim of the Personal Investigation is to engage in a self-directed period of sustained and focused study.

General comments

The Examiners noted many scripts which attained marks in the confident and excellent bands. Many scripts were seen to demonstrate a significant engagement in the candidate's chosen topic. The A level component is a substantial piece of independent research. The aim of the Personal Investigation is to engage in a self-directed period of sustained and focused study. This study should bring together the skills candidates have developed and demonstrate that they are able to work independently to resolve an idea.

Many scripts choose to record aspects of making, editing, and filming. Whilst this can be of interest, more marks could be attained by analysing the work as it develops. Some scripts reflected themes and underlying concepts from Component 1, Emotions, Wellbeing and Travel for example. Some candidates took on challenging subjects associated with mind or bodily disorders. Some scripts approached broad themes like emotions and explored them through applied methods such as colour and pattern or personal fashion. Many of the higher scoring scripts contained visual work that was appropriately supported by the written element. In many cases the quality of visual work was high, and the accompanying written analysis was unique, detailed and exciting.

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Approaches to the Personal Investigation

Final outcome

The Examiners noted an interesting variety of investigations submitted. These included video, animation, app design, photography, and character design. Some scripts were seen to use a variety of media and make interesting and creative connections between them. Candidates covered a wide range of themes including depression, street art, desolation, love and solitude, a loss of connection with nature, decreasing attention spans, non-verbal communication, appearance anxiety, greed, the seven deadly sins, AI, resonance of spaces, the stages of love, dystopian cities, rejuvenation of the natural environment, tinnitus, and cultural change within a city. In some cases, the themes chosen were closely linked to the previous components. However, candidates are reminded that the scope, focus and outcome should be different from other components. Candidates are encouraged to investigate a theme that is significant to them and allows them to explore a new perspective within digital media and design. Many candidates worked with video in this component. Among higher scoring scripts, candidates clearly analysed the relevant work of others and

based visual experiments on their discoveries. This was seen to successfully inform the development of the chosen concept and the final outcome. However, in lower scoring scripts candidates presented biographies of their reference artists rather than relevant insight about the artist's work. Some lower scoring scripts would of written and practical benefit from establishing a more convincing link between the final outcome and their research, exploration and development. In addition, candidates are encouraged to clearly show their processes, critical reflection, refinement of ideas, informed understanding, and realisation of intentions.

Where candidates focused on food the Examiners noted some very good examples of video production work. This was complimented by some good analysis of artists who produce food based videos on social media platforms. Candidates had clearly responded to this work and some of the editing styles seen, were employed to good effect. Techniques such as crash zooms to hide cuts and speed up the sense of time and space were used well. Some excellent work was presented that demonstrated a depth of study among a range of complimentary areas. Some of these provided a fascinating insight into the candidate's exploration of the theme. Higher scoring scripts were seen to undertake relevant research, use appropriate vocabulary, demonstrate sophisticated ideas, make a perceptive integration of elements, and make mature connections between digital and design elements. Excellent research enabled candidates to put ideas into practice. Such candidates also ensured that research was frequently accompanied by experimentation and reflection.

The Examiners noted a high standard of editing and filming. Candidates who did particularly well researched significant artists and directors of photography to identify a visual style that they then applied to their own work. The most successful scripts also studied examples of moving images and developed a solid understanding of editing techniques. Those that understand pace and the manipulation of space and time generated highly accomplished work. Higher scoring scripts make good use of PowerPoint as a digital sketchbook. Candidates are not seen to be constrained by traditional formats and are often seen to take the opportunity to present each page as a piece of artwork in its own right. Lower scoring scripts would have benefited from more effective application of feedback from forums such as test screenings or audience interviews, for example.

Written element

Many of the higher scoring scripts contained visual work that was appropriately supported by the written element. This was characterised by a focus on theoretical content, contextualisation and referencing and analysis of visual art and other forms of creative expression. In the stronger scripts, analysis was detailed and followed a clear structure towards the final outcome. In some cases, visual material was included to support the written commentary. Candidates are reminded that the final outcome should be accompanied by a written and visual analysis which clarifies working processes. It is important that candidates are aware of the importance of imagery when investigating design and that this should form part of their written analysis.

Among higher scoring scripts, candidates tended to analyse very specific work which utilised techniques they hoped to master for their final outcome. Such scripts attracted marks in each of the assessment objectives. Among lower scoring scripts, the written analysis often tended to focus on biographical information about their chosen artists. Higher marks would be attracted in AO1 where research into artists and designers provided relevant insight and enabled critical reflection on the candidate's own work. Where learners excelled in this part of the investigation, they appeared to be mindful of the creative character of the qualification and conducted appropriate research into key artists and design practitioners. Candidates are requested to avoid copying the text from digital sketchbooks or PowerPoint slides, into a word-processed report. This is not required by the syllabus and provides unnecessary duplication.