

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/01 Portfolio
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Key messages

- Candidates produced some complex and sophisticated work.
- In stronger scripts, the development of ideas was pursued in preference to digital manipulation skills.
- Centres should recognise the importance of safeguarding issues.

General comments

Centres submitted work representing a broad range of disciplines, ideas, styles, contexts, media, and resources. This included a range of photography practice and some strong video work was seen. There was also some complex and sophisticated work produced by the candidates.

Most centres followed the administrative requirements of the syllabus correctly. Most work was submitted in an appropriate format and was clearly presented. Centres will wish to continue this good practice and make sure that candidate work is submitted for the component for which it is intended. Centres are required to avoid submitting additional copies of video material, or video material which is not aligned to the development of candidate work or a final outcome. Centres are encouraged to avoid submitting individual items of work in different formats. Centres are also required to avoid submitting a PowerPoint presentation followed by individual pages from the presentation, submitted separately.

Centres will recognise the importance of safeguarding issues. This is described in the syllabus among skills and understanding common to all areas of study (Section 3 Subject content). It is expected that centres will avoid submitting work which may raise safeguarding concerns.

For each of the components in the syllabus, candidates are required to work towards a brief or scenario. In this component candidates are required to research a selected theme and explore and develop ideas for their chosen proposal. Some candidates interpreted the proposal as a starting point, an initial idea or a kind of statement of intent. However, the syllabus describes the proposal as a culmination of ideas developed and submitted in the supporting studies. The proposal can be thought of as a presentation, rather like a 'pitch' to a client or audience. Some candidates wrote their own brief or project structure, as they prepared to work towards a proposal. Candidates will determine the appropriate level of finish applied to their work. This will depend on the area of study the candidate is working with. Candidates are encouraged to clearly indicate the theme they have chosen for their starting point.

Among higher scoring scripts, candidate presentations avoided simply providing information about the theme. Some scripts became focused on a specific subject or topic and sometimes took a campaigning stance. To realise the creative potential of a topic candidates are encouraged to go beyond information gathering, to record insights, refine their ideas and test their creative work. In stronger scripts, the quality of idea development was pursued in preference to digital manipulation skill. Stronger submissions included material, which was clearly, reliably, and consistently referenced. This approach avoided potential concerns over attribution and authenticity. Many scripts acknowledged the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In these unusual circumstances, candidates adapted their practice and sometimes, the focus of their activity. This often resulted in successful projects and centres and candidates are to be congratulated for their efforts.

Approaches to the themes

Boundaries

A number of candidates discussed their intentions for Component 1, and good use was made of feedback from peers. However, candidates are advised to use this as an opportunity to critically reflect on their work rather than on the issues surrounding the theme. Some candidates took inspiration from Dorothea Lange and Martin Campos, producing painted group portraits from their digital photographs. Whilst this approach represents an interesting combination of traditional and digital practice, such work would be improved by visual records of activity and emerging ideas. Where candidates chose to work with difficult or sensitive subjects, the strongest outcomes used images and motifs to develop outcomes in an applied context. This included advertising material, campaign visuals or promotional video.

Among higher scoring scripts, where the theme was interpreted in terms of human rights, the supporting studies were relevant and constituted an ongoing critical reflection of the work in progress. Such work typically included literary and political references. These scripts also contained focused investigations into clothing, bodily constraints, and behaviours. Typically, such work was supported by several episodes of feedback, resulting in an applied and well tested proposal.

The Digital Classroom

In some scripts, this theme was not clearly indicated. This risked a potential to frustrate an understanding of the context in which the candidate was working. Elsewhere, some complex and sophisticated submissions were seen with activity across a range of areas of study. As is relevant to the theme, appropriate attention was given to typography and colour as educational devices. Some candidates used self-interviews as a device to critically reflect on the work. Where these were conducted systematically, they became persuasive and insightful. Some especially personal responses made use of digital manipulation software to resolve the virtual and digital aspects of the question. However, the potential of the question would have been more successfully understood with a commitment to observation and from gathering insights from a range of sources.

Digital Poetry

Among higher scoring scripts, candidates studied poets who themselves work with image and text combinations. These scripts often contained explanations of the ideas, motifs, and imagery found in an individual poem. This was often accompanied by detailed descriptions of process using thumbnail illustrations. Some particularly good paper craft work was seen, along with excellent combinations of craft skills and digital film making. Some presentations contained original poetry based on the direct experience of the candidate. This was communicated through a creative and digital environment devised by the candidate as the work progressed. Other candidates used well known poems as a vehicle for digital manipulation. Among these, the most successful used colour and typography to illustrate the content of the poem. Stronger scripts were also characterised by visually rich presentations, in depth proposals, clear intentions, attention to styling, effective direction of actors, good management of colour and lighting.

Among lower scoring scripts which studied specific poets or poems, the work would have benefited from a greater application of technical skill and visual awareness. Such scripts would also have been improved by a broader scope of personal research. Candidate commentaries on the content and value of their research would have benefited from a consistent and reliable attachment to the images presented by the candidate.

Emotions

Most scripts contained a clearly stated intention. Many candidates sought to explore emotions provoked by the Covid-19 pandemic. A range of creative devices were used including fragmenting images, joiners, tiled photographs, wire frame animations, and colour manipulations. Where candidates focused on low-mood and loneliness, higher scoring scripts employed a responsible approach to the subject and a targeted approach to research. This was most successfully combined with an exploration of both analogue and digital fine art methods.

Candidates often made good use of the artists and designers studied. However, centres are reminded to make sure that images and text acquired from the work of others, are consistently referenced. Where centres photograph physically printed work, they must ensure that candidates are not disadvantaged, due to low resolution or poor image quality.

Lower scoring scripts would be improved by presenting clearer more coherent bodies of work. This could be supported by a better understanding of image resolution, the use and content of text, and the application of video work. Candidates should also consider how lighting used to create mood and atmosphere, can effectively illuminate a scene. Lower scoring scripts would also be improved by an appropriate choice of font and typographical layout which promote readability.

Travel

Some centres may have used a common template or layout design. Typically, this was seen in spider diagrams. Centres may wish to reflect on this practice as it may have the potential to frustrate individual expression. Among higher scoring scripts, well designed layouts were seen. This kind of approach provided a clear sense of the candidate's understanding and critical reflection. Higher scoring scripts were seen to clearly use the testing of ideas to inform the development of the proposal. Image manipulation was often used creatively and purposefully, and many scripts demonstrated an effective connection between digital and design elements. Lower scoring scripts would have been improved by establishing a reliable connection between the candidate's intention and their proposal. Other scripts would have benefited from a gradual and systematic focus on developing a visual concept as a response to the theme.

Wellbeing

Some candidates used this theme as a branding opportunity. Some scripts reflected the theme using a delicate aesthetic, sensitive lighting, and subtle control of form. Among lower scoring scripts, candidate work would have been improved by more relevant personal photography and refined experimentation. Some proposals would also have been improved by a more convincing sense of a personal response to the theme. In some scripts, the candidates focused closely on the theme as an issue in itself, rather than a starting point for visual activity. Among stronger scripts, a wide range of photographers, designers, or film makers were researched. Barbara Kruger was frequently referenced. Some scripts were seen to merge some of the themes, Wellbeing/Boundaries/Emotions for example. Where scripts did not state the theme, the creative direction of the proposal became clear as the project evolved. However, candidates are strongly advised to clearly indicate the theme they have chosen.

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Paper 9481/02 Externally Set Assignment
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Key messages

- Some delightful and sophisticated work was seen.
- Stronger submissions included suitable artists reference work, which was consistently referenced.
- Some lower scoring scripts did not manage to resolve the candidates' intentions fully.

General comments

Centres submitted work representing a broad range of disciplines, ideas, styles, contexts, media, and resources. Candidates approached the questions across each of the areas of study. Centres presented a wide range of digital images and visual storytelling, including examples of stop-frame animation and video work. Some delightful and sophisticated work was seen.

Most centres followed the administrative requirements of the syllabus. Most work was submitted in an appropriate format and clearly presented. Centres will wish to continue this good practice and make sure that candidate work is submitted for the component for which it is intended. Centres are required to avoid submitting additional copies of video material, or video material which is not aligned to the development of candidate work or a final outcome. Centres are encouraged to avoid submitting individual items of work in different formats. Centres are also required to avoid submitting a PowerPoint presentation followed by individual pages from the presentation, submitted separately.

Centres will recognise the importance of safeguarding issues. This is described in the syllabus among skills and understanding common to all areas of study (Section 3 Subject content). It is expected that centres will avoid submitting work which may raise safeguarding concerns.

In this component, candidates are required to respond to one of the assignments provided on an externally set paper. The focus of the component is to develop a creative solution to a brief within a given time frame. Many candidates made good use of the time available to them. Higher scoring scripts demonstrated good management of resources, idea development and production of the final outcome. Stronger submissions included work, which was clearly, reliably, and consistently referenced. This approach avoided potential concerns over attribution and authenticity. Many scripts acknowledged the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In these unusual circumstances, candidates adapted their practice and sometimes, the focus of their activity. This often resulted in successful projects and centres and candidates are to be congratulated for their efforts.

Approaches to the assignments

Night Light

Work submitted for this question included documentary film making, app design, web design and promotional videos. Higher scoring scripts immediately recognised the applied nature of the question and worked with a product or a campaign in mind. These scripts often demonstrated thorough investigations among the elements of visual language. These investigations often included complementary, analogous, and triadic colour, scale and visual frequency, sample app layouts and content. These were then used to devise a range of colour palettes. Such scripts also contained detailed studies of typography, differentiating between tracking and kerning, identifying font families, and examining the work of specific logo designers. This frequently resulted in detailed design work on the part of the candidate. Some strong app graphic design work was seen. On some occasions, this was supported by screen recordings of the app in use.

Web site development was used to host information and marketing material. Some websites contained animated web advertising. From time to time, good use was made of bike shop mock-ups. Stronger scripts contained well controlled low light and night-time photography. Where candidates submitted detailed sheets, higher scoring work demonstrated good page layout and a good sense of visual orientation. The idea of combining light drawing with mounting fluorescent bulbs on a bike was used by several candidates. This was a particularly appropriate initial response to the question which often resulted in a luminous bike motif. However, stronger scripts used the insights gained from their research, to generate an entirely personal digital response. Such higher scoring scripts also described the contribution of professional designers by recording visits to their workplace. Promotional videos made effective use of action shots, lights and typography. Some higher scoring scripts focused on product marketing, contained evidence of eloquent and precise explorations of advertising philosophy.

Some interesting ideas about night-time and about bikes were not satisfactorily resolved. Lower scoring scripts containing research into artists who work with neon lights, would have benefited by using the insights gained to inform the candidates' design work. Other lower scoring scripts would have been improved by avoiding an over reliance on the Internet for a source of reference material. Scripts containing hand drawn boiling effect animation, could have been improved by character development during the animation pipeline process.

Some high scoring scripts contained densely populated boards, communicating a sense of urgency to present ideas and show development in the time available. Some candidates brought a tangible sense of engagement and excitement to the study of the work of others and the resulting development of their own ideas. Comparison studies of the shape and structure of bike wheels and light cones gave way to compelling app layouts designs. Work at this level was distinguished by clean lines and sharp graphics. Some scripts used designer portfolio platforms to find exemplar material and user interface and app design. Other scripts included the creation of audience personas for lifestyle marketing and then recorded repeated episodes of feedback using anonymised questionnaires. Some candidates used design platforms to test ideas, augmented reality, and user interface layouts. In the strongest scripts, excellent layout and logo design were informed by a deconstruction of published material and advertisements.

The Audition

In answering this question, each of the concepts for development were seen. Most scripts contained a sense of narrative and focused on a community. Higher scoring scripts contained good quality digital personal responses and detailed exploration of visual devices such as silhouettes and shadow play. These scripts also paid careful attention to the selection of fonts, the use of text, arrangement of graphic layouts, and the design of colour palettes. Where scripts paid close attention to shooting styles and interviewing styles, this was seen to have been systematically researched and the results were evident in candidate video work. Some responses were influenced by a broader scope of arts practice such as mime and performance.

Whilst several scripts demonstrated a good understanding on how to use light and shadow to establish style motifs and photographic effect, some scripts would have been improved by more detailed description of process and development of ideas. Lower scoring work with information apps, would have been improved by relating content more convincingly to the theme. In other scripts, graphic design work would have been improved by paying closer attention to visual clarity, a hierarchy of typography, and more appropriate choices of title and body text fonts. Where candidates had sought to reproduce their own versions of well-known television shows, this work would have been improved by more appropriate frame orientation and more considered shot planning.

Cultural Festival

This question generated some very good work and some unexpected and delightful responses. Answers to this question ranged from desktop published booklets to Cyberpunk inspired venue advertising. Higher scoring scripts indicated that candidates had been exposed to good practice in design – especially graphic design and desktop publishing. Some candidates demonstrated a very good standard of campaigning graphics. Scripts contained a refreshingly creative use of digital manipulation software. Among higher scoring scripts, it was used as if it was a set of raw ingredients. Such scripts avoided well used effects and standard filters. Other high scoring scripts included detailed study of ideas associated with the words 'Cultural' and 'Festival'.

Some confidently original design work was seen, based on research among vintage and contemporary style sources. This was then developed into practical outcomes such as app or website design. Many scripts concentrated on researching appropriate locations. Higher scoring scripts used the insights gained to inform

the design work. Other scripts recorded the process of making mock-ups of stalls within an event area. Many higher scoring scripts contained substantial bodies of research, and work across a number of fields including, page layout, art and design, photography and video. Where candidates scored highly for video work, their lighting, management of actors, scripts, storyboards, and camera work was supported by detailed records of the creative processes. Some interesting and richly detailed exploration of cultures was evident. Some dramatic photography enhanced by imaginative layout was informed by the styles found in the cults studied. Higher scoring scripts contained an integration of indigenous cultural archetypes and patterns, and images of nature. Other scripts illustrated an intersection of culture, design and technology, with scaled mock-ups of temporary structures placed in a festival context. Where candidates worked on publicity material, their designs often included posters, animations, ticketing, and animated gifs. Candidates using animation were seen to make good use of animatics to present a story board.

Some lower scoring scripts would have been improved by identifying a disused site to give their project a context. Other scripts would have benefited from conveying the sense of celebration contained in the question. Some presentations were produced on paper, mounted together on boards, and digitally photographed. This approach risked compromising the resolution of the design work and the clarity of the ideas the candidate seeks to communicate. Many scripts were seen to be disproportionately focused on the theme, rather than on developing a visual means to communicate ideas. Other lower scoring scripts would have benefited from developing basic design work through a process of iteration and review, rather than settling for the initial idea. These scripts would also have been improved by a clear indication of intentions, a broader scope of exploration using digital photography, and the application of appropriate digital manipulation. Some lower scoring scripts were not seen to realise their stated intention. Candidates are reminded that the visual quality of presentations is an important aspect of the qualification. Candidates are rewarded for connections made between digital and design elements. Some scripts would have benefited from developing effective typography and avoiding Word Art, carefully considering page layout, and refining tone and colour balancing. Some videos and animation work would have benefited from cuts and edits informed by testing and feedback. Where uneven responses were seen, the activity would have benefited from clearer time management. This approach would better prepare candidates for attention to detail for storyboarding, pre-production work, management of actors, camerawork, editing, and the quality of design work required for the component.

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/03 Personal Investigation

Key messages

- Work representing a broad range of ideas was seen.
- Stronger submissions demonstrated an effective and perceptive integration of practical and written elements.
- The written analysis should be understood as a commentary, designed to bring clarity and insight to the work.

General comments

The A Level component of the syllabus is designed to be a substantial piece of independent research. Work representing a broad range of independent and creative ideas was seen. Centres typically followed the administrative requirements of the syllabus and most work was submitted in an appropriate format and clearly presented. Centres will wish to continue this good practice and make sure that candidate work is submitted for the component for which it is intended. Centres are required to avoid submitting additional copies of video material which is not aligned to the development of candidate work or a final outcome. Centres are encouraged to avoid submitting individual items of work in different formats. Centres are also required to avoid submitting a PowerPoint presentation followed by individual pages from the presentation, submitted separately.

Centres will recognise the importance of safeguarding issues. This is described in the syllabus among skills and understanding common to all areas of study (Section 3 Subject content). It is expected that centres will avoid submitting work which may raise safeguarding concerns.

Approaches to the Personal Investigation

Final outcome

It was a pleasure to see such a rich and diverse range of responses from centres in this series. Many scripts acknowledged the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In these unusual circumstances, candidates adapted their practice and sometimes, the focus of their activity. This often resulted in successful projects and centres and candidates are to be congratulated for their efforts.

In this component candidates identify a theme or topic that is informed by an aspect of digital media and design within the areas of study described in the syllabus. The component requires candidates to engage in a sustained period of study. Higher scoring scripts typically demonstrated a focused and creative approach.

Delightful and exciting work was seen by the examiners. Work for the final outcome often contained film or animation. Among lower scoring scripts, these could have been improved by testing visual ideas through the use of rough cuts or storyboards. This approach would also help to work out timings before commencing a final animation or working on high-resolution renders. This approach would also provide an opportunity for further development of characters, environments, and visual styling.

Specific examples of practitioners were used to support the investigation. For example, studies of ergonomics looked at how the architect Zaha Hadid, used fluid design to improve children's safety. Investigation into the work of Helmut Newton and Gerhard Richter informed the design for digital fashion magazines. The use of case studies often complemented research and enabled candidates to demonstrate relevance and insight. Among some higher scoring scripts, excellent and purposeful personal photography was analysed for pictorial structure, and then used to develop design work for the personal investigation.

Among the strongest scripts, the choice of artists for research was driven directly by the creative direction of the work.

Some submissions formed public awareness campaigns. These typically focused on issues such as the effects of drugs or alcohol. Other campaigns concentrated on specific areas such as the fashion or food industries. This work typically contained an intense scrutiny of ethical issues and practices within the sector. Such scrutiny was amplified often, by an insightful use of questionnaires and feedback, accompanied by close-up photography. Candidates often demonstrated a good command of light, form, and camera macro work. Higher scoring scripts also used qualitative and quantitative research to record observations and insights. The examiners also noted some laudable examples of candidates obtaining critical feedback from professionals. Elsewhere candidates conducted interviews with those directly affected by the issues implicit in the awareness campaign. Other high scoring scripts were seen to develop a theme through a sophisticated appropriation of broad concepts such as water or air. This often resulted in beautiful work which was informed by the characteristics and associations of the concept. For example, attempts to incorporate design motifs developed from diagrams of aerodynamics. Stronger scripts contained feedback from others which was supported by good quality illustrations and high levels of presentation graphics.

Higher scoring candidates produced highly personal work containing mature responses to their chosen theme. These scripts also demonstrated a highly accomplished command of the chosen media, whether documentary video, or visual effects, for example. In other scripts, creative and dynamic work resulted from a focused investigation into the properties of the materials a candidate was working with. Systematic examinations of shape, transparency, elasticity, durability, colour, and pattern were seen. This was typically explored further through the use of collage, lighting, and digital manipulation. Some scripts used formats developed in other components, such as 3D modelling or mock-ups. Candidates frequently used video to describe their emotional life and the challenges and demands they face. This approach used animation and documentary formats to present personal and compelling work.

Written element

The final outcome should be supported by written and visual analysis which clarifies the working process. There was a variety of approaches taken by candidates in their presentation of a written analysis. Some scripts included a separate text document and others contained extended notes which accompanied images. However, higher scoring scripts often contained text in the form of a flowing narrative which amplified the relevance of research, the communication of ideas, the focus of the investigation and realisation of intentions. Higher scoring scripts demonstrated an effective and perceptive integration of practical and written elements. Among lower scoring scripts, research work was rarely correctly referenced. All sources should be clearly attributed to the originator and distinguished from the candidate's own work. However, stronger submissions included work, which was clearly, reliably, and consistently referenced. This approach avoided potential concerns over attribution and authenticity. Candidates are reminded that the written analysis goes beyond an evaluation and should be understood as a commentary designed to bring clarity and insight to the work.