

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/01 Portfolio
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Key messages

- Sources should be referenced, and candidates should make it clear where imagery and designs are their own original work.
- Candidates are encouraged to perform a final quality check on their work before submitting it for assessment.
- For component one, candidates must choose a theme from the syllabus for the correct year of examination.

General comments

Information about reference artists should be limited to analysis of their work and visual work or evidence that shows how this research has informed the development of the candidates' own ideas. Photographs of the artist or biographies add little value unless they have informed the development of the work.

Continuous PDF or PowerPoint with layout in landscape format is the preferred format for submission. This maximizes resolution without the need for rescaling and scrolling. The Supporting Studies and Proposal should be supplied as two separate files. Files and websites stored on remote access servers (e.g. Google Drive), including school servers are not permitted as the work cannot be accessed for marking this way. All material should be embedded within the submission; this can include screen recordings where it isn't possible to access the material, e.g. for showing the user journey through a website or an app design. Duplication of video and image files is wasteful for storage and time and therefore strongly discouraged. Keynote files are not supported, candidates do not need to supply a hi res and a low res version of the same files. The coursework declaration is now included as a stage of the submission process, you do not need to send a coversheet declaration for any components.

Candidates should be encouraged to perform a thorough check of all work before final submission. Often a final quality check could include a sense check of layout and legibility of text, scale, kerning and colour, spell-check including headings.

In this series there was a clear misunderstanding of the use of feedback within the creative process. A mid-point review for candidates to obtain feedback on ideas and progress is recommended. Feedback and evaluation should be continuous throughout projects and not something which is just added at the end of a project.

Approaches to the themes

Boundaries

Candidates planned carefully using story-boarding, as well as testing of look-development. There was an understanding of formal elements such as quality of line, colour, texture, resolution, shading seen on challenging sections e.g. walk cycles, whip-pans, close-ups, utilised panoramic backgrounds for animation, and rotoscoping of live action material.

Candidates employed the use of filters, double exposure, painterly distortion, as well as use of analogue textural experimentation such as using gesso, scrunched paper, burning and scratching photographs, then rescanning and overworking. There was also the use of body paint to define skeletal areas, utilised in stills and moving image. Portraits that included gestures and body language, with compositing of multiple layers were mostly effective.

Submissions at the lower ability level included repetitive video footage with evidence of poor time planning for shoots.

Responses in the middle ability level included ideas, references and investigations that were sometimes extremely broad and included both physical and emotional boundaries. This hindered the development of a fully realised outcome as they had not always been able to select one of their ideas and take it forward within the timeframe.

In the confident and highly effective bands, candidates were seen to structure their presentation of supporting studies with an overview, which included mind-maps, visual mood-boards from secondary sources and a written summary of influences and intentions, with clear and concise technical language.

The digital classroom

Responses at the lower ability range included hasty word associations in pen, with no visual references, and random secondary references with descriptive annotations.

In the middle ability range, candidates should make decisions about the amount of research material they include as they will be rewarded for the quality of visual material, and their analysis of it, and not the amount.

Some strong responses were seen including some documentary films that were creatively supported by imaginative animations.

Emotions

This theme was generally approached as a study on a handful of emotions, or as an in-depth study on a particular emotion. Depression, despite not being an emotion, was also a popular theme.

Many candidates selected to showcase work at their nearest art gallery. Where this worked well there was a connection between the content of the candidate's work and the location selected.

Weaker responses tended to include written interviews, or as long form with basic editing and transitions. Character development to represent emotions was basic with poor visual development. Ink splatters were a popular motif. In some cases, candidates had completed testing to see which media would be the least time consuming, and give the best results, rather than testing the quality of their ideas. With minimal feedback and no revision of the testing, there was no development. Tests were combined into a proposal which was unsatisfactory and unresolved with little annotation or consideration of the context.

In the middle ability range, candidates included interviews with fellow students and teachers which were handled with visual originality and in some cases humour. Here was also seen a careful use of lighting and setup. There was a methodical deconstruction of the artist reference material with a careful development, testing and emulation of techniques. A more thorough understanding of the correct use of equipment and materials was attained through familiarity.

At the higher level, for moving image, there was a testing of match-moves to combine animated and live-action material, with selection of best matches. The cycle of analysis, reflection, referencing of intention, and feedback created mature responses. The art references strayed from mainstream and into fine art, liminal spaces were explored. Feedback was sometimes negative as candidates pushed the boundaries and evoked discomfort.

Digital poetry

For this theme, candidates demonstrated exploration through typography with investigation into different sizes and styles of font. In some cases, this was presented alongside rotoscoped imagery with some success.

Weaker submissions would have been improved by better image quality and consideration for layout of text and images.

In the middle ability range, candidates would have improved their image quality with the use of a tripod or gimbal where they were experimenting with long exposure shots.

Responses at the higher level showed thoughtful ideas and development, with critical reflection on visual work, reviewing and refining during the progression of studies. Candidates explored compositional emptiness, negative spaces, and imagery in relation to feelings of emptiness.

Several fine art responses made use of low key photographs, and harnessed controlled use of digital filters such as chalk and charcoal, posterization, smudge, swirl, and analogue media such as etching, gel medium, gesso, sandpaper; as well as the use of eraser tool to define paint and digital blending.

The most successful responses demonstrated visual interpretation of poetry and symbolism, inherent in location and cultural politics. Candidates showed sophisticated visual analysis, and appropriate use of analogue and digital processes.

Travel

In the strongest responses, candidates created designs for postcards as well as merchandise. They investigated and recorded a wide range of good quality images from the local area. Their experimentation included an in-depth exploration of Photoshop using combinations of overlay, borders, reflections, using layers and colour filters. Secondary research was focused on artists and was pertinent to the candidates' own area of focus, this research informed the progression of ideas that grew out of robust first-hand research, and experimentation with appropriate digital media. There was a consistent approach of thorough investigation, recording, explanation, and development throughout the submissions.

Wellbeing

Many candidates used Google forms to conduct surveys to gather feedback on levels of wellbeing. Feedback on ideas was rarely sought and would be beneficial to support ideas development, the surveys did provide some research and direction for initial ideas. Many candidates gathered secondary images and used these within app design. They may have benefited from using their own images although in this case candidates used their time to design and develop for the interface design with some success.

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/02 Externally Set Assignment
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Key messages

- Candidates are encouraged to focus on showcasing **visual** references, experimentation, development and final outcome pictorially, with concise and analytical text and annotations.
- Candidates successfully blended analogue or traditional art and design skills with digital techniques to produce original and creative works.
- Focused initial research that fed into confident experimentation was clear in the most successful responses.

General comments

Approaches to the assignments

Floating farm

For this assignment, candidates presented some interesting ideas that had been gathered during the sourcing of initial inspiration. First-hand research included candidates' photography with seaweed placed on lightboxes as a starting point for exploration.

Responses at the lower ability range tended to include simple vector-based graphics for posters with no supporting work. Product research and development outcomes were basic and simplistic logo designs were produced that would have benefited from greater development.

Submissions in the middle ability range generally included carefully considered layouts. Attention was paid to typography and sensitive use of colour palettes and materials that added an interesting dimension to the packaging work.

Tint, tone and shade

The development of apps for the analysis of colour were popular. Here it was the development and design of the app, as well as the user's journey through the screens, the visual appeal of the interface as well as the proposed application that were rewarded. Screen recordings of the user journey added context and validity to the submissions.

For the other concepts in this assignment, candidates successfully blended analogue or traditional art and design skills with digital techniques to produce original and creative works. Cultural references were explored through the manipulation of fabrics and clothing, with appealing presentation and a cosmetic clean-up of images in Photoshop.

Weaker responses tended to be inconsistent in their approach, in some cases research showed promise but the development of ideas was basic, and candidates missed opportunities to push ideas into the next achievement band.

At this level submissions sometimes had incomplete or missing titles for artist references. This was combined with immature visual awareness and presentations that contained basic motifs, and rudimentary visual understanding. There was basic manipulation of the colour palette using a default cycling of colours.

Several candidates produced photographs of sunsets from similar vantage points, with basic use of colour filters in Photoshop; some candidates improved their responses with thoughtful presentation and analysis to support their visual work.

In the middle range, exploration with digital media was more successful and candidates demonstrated clear investigations of themes such as architecture and interiors through the use of coloured lighting, long exposure, motion blur, the adjustment of white balance, collage and montage.

At the higher level, confidence was seen with ideas, and digital media and design techniques, achieved through the combination of digital painting over photographs. This was supported by a clear progression of techniques over a substantial body of work, that made successful connections to research into a variety of relevant artists. Ideas were pushed and explored thoroughly and with confidence to create interesting and creative outcomes.

Attachment

Some candidates found interesting artist reference material in order to start their work, but ideas were stalled and would have progressed more fluidly with greater analysis and investigation. At this level candid photographs from the school yard were uploaded into PowerPoint templates with little development or annotation which kept the work in the limited/basic band.

Candidates researched around the theme of family portraiture and candid group portraits were included. Where research related to the theme, ideas could be seen developing and candidate work progressed into experimentation. Some candidates experimented with basic level colourisation and the use of grain to make images look older.

Responses in the middle ability band were characterised by competent use of photoshop layers to combine studio portrait photography, props and graphic motifs, into a final response that used colour, lettering and emotion to powerful effect. Some responses included overly long passages of text that could have been replaced by images or more succinct writing to express ideas and analysis.

The most successful responses showed a clear intention. Thought processes were easy to follow and succinct with relevant art references and influences that were critically analysed. Candidates used experimentation through repeated tests in various lighting conditions and demonstrated their refinement of ideas by careful selection of the best images.

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/03 Personal Investigation

Key messages

- Candidates with well-researched concepts were able to sustain their interest in order to produce a successful digital media outcome.
- Candidates were confident in their own ideas and the submission covered a wide range of diverse themes.
- The supporting written element should include bibliographies and references.

General comments

Some candidates submitted excellent graphic design projects, there were a number of successful fine art responses that combined content, imagination and a high level of graphic presentation skills.

Candidates worked with themes that they felt engaged with and motivated by, including a broad range of educational categories, racial prejudice, climate change, water pollution, suicide, feminism, class structure, consumerist culture, the impact of Covid-19, courier delivery systems, interstellar transport, boredom, laziness, body image, indie fashion; the effect of time on people and the environment, cultural roots expressed in colour, sports, personal stories reflected in memorials, mental health, and investigations into propaganda. Candidates should evaluate their projects at the start to ensure there is potential longevity to the investigation as well as the candidate's interests.

Candidates embraced the opportunity to work with a variety of digital media and design disciplines including app design, digital photography, video, modelmaking, collage, exhibition mock-ups, digital displays, advertising, ticket design and information graphics.

The aim of this component 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. The A Level component of the qualification is intended to be a substantial piece of research, and work representing a broad range of ideas and independent study was seen.

Centres typically followed the administrative requirements of the component. Most work was submitted in an appropriate format and clearly presented. 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, for example a PowerPoint presentation followed by individual pages from the presentation, submitted separately.

Approaches to the Personal Investigation

Final outcome

Some lower scoring scripts contained good quality photographs in the final outcome, but evidence of recording insights, exploring materials, and developing ideas was of a lower quality or inconsistent. Among scripts marked in the middle ability range, the degree of this understanding was seen to be adequate. However, more marks would have been attracted where candidates had made analytical rather than descriptive comments.

Animation techniques included rotoscoping, claymation, stop-frame, traditional drawing, digital painting, dissolves, compositing; which, at a lower level were tested and then combined to produce a final outcome. Had these techniques been developed, the potential reward in AO3, and potentially AO4, would have been

higher. There was a preference in the lower mark band for presentation of work within website templates where more reward would be given for development of creative personal designs.

Among mid-level scripts some candidates developed an interest in advertising through photography and advertising merchandise for local business on social media. Candidates were rewarded for pre-production storyboarding and planning of 3D animations where multiple cameras were utilised within each environment. This enhanced story-telling in a time efficient way, in preference to over-long sequences from one setup.

Blocking out camera moves and timings, testing walk cycles and rigging, produced higher quality final animations and higher marks. This purposeful testing and pertinent feedback cycle can lead to higher attainment across the mark range. Higher scoring submissions provided evidence that ideas had been appropriately tested and feedback from appropriate sources had been sought and referenced.

Middle to high level app designs were based on imaginative functional ideas, and even when these ideas were technically unachievable, the concept, design and presentation of the submissions were fully rewarded. The best app designs combined investigations and testing of typography, logos, layout, with respect to usability colour, and visual impact within the application. The highest level candidates submitted design boards and well-rehearsed screen recordings of custom designed apps in use.

Among higher scoring scripts, candidates planned, tested and reworked expressive and experimental use of in-camera effects, e.g. moving subjects, camera angles and lighting conditions most frequently of self and models. This approach was complimented by the study and deconstruction of the artwork of others. Frequently, the artistic references were aligned with the direction of investigation, although they also provided insight into other creative directions. Candidates sometimes made personal responses to the work of the artists they had looked at which demonstrated an understanding and appreciation of the artists' ideas. By association this close looking developed a more sophisticated sense of visual language which was rewarded in AO1 and AO3.

Additional final outcomes included comic strips, simple game apps, documentaries, photo-stories, installation and photography for galleries and museums, photo-collage, live action films, sometimes combined with hand-drawn animation and rotoscoping.

Written element

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 of their work as it progressed. This can include screen shots of work at different stages, photographs, designs and visuals from the development of the project. The higher scoring scripts predominantly contained sophisticated analysis of digital media and design. This work was typically characterised by rich and engaging text. Where scripts were accompanied by a spoken commentary instead of written, this was a helpful indication of the candidate's own understanding of their investigation.

Ideally the written element is a summary of the supporting work that explains the way the project started and evolved and enables the final outcome to stand alone. This integrated approach produces responses within the spirit of this qualification. Where the written element is supplied separately to a supporting studies document, there is a tendency for the candidate to focus on describing their project and not being analytical or evaluative.