

Visual Arts

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Visual Arts extended essays again ranged from specific studies with a clear structure and carefully reasoned argument, to some very brief unsubstantiated narratives. Some EE's were well-focused on the Visual Arts and carried special meaning for the candidate either in relation to a future program (e.g., the study of architecture), or for a current artistic reason, e.g. related personal studio pursuits. It was good to see some candidates steering away from well-worn topics. If one is going to write yet another essay on Frida Kahlo, Andy Warhol, Banksy, the Impressionists, etc., it is helpful to uncover something new, or to take issue with some existing scholarship and challenge conventional views. Local topics remain a good choice, especially in the area of architecture, or where one is able to visit a museum, gallery, view public art or meet with a significant artist or craftsman.

Although we define the Visual Arts broadly, some essays had only a tenuous relationship to the visual arts. For example, because they tended to focus on technology, rather than aesthetics, some essays on “green” architecture would have been better submitted in Environmental Systems. Similarly schools and supervisors need to be aware that “Film Studies” may now provide a more appropriate home for those essays that are less focused on the *visual* aspects of film.

All candidates should be encouraged by their supervisors to formulate significant research questions of personal interest and to draw on a variety of sources to support their arguments, such as textual analysis and study of original art works or designed artifacts. Appropriate interviews can sometimes be helpful, particularly when significant questions are asked of practitioners and authorities on the subject.

Titles of some higher scoring essays included:

- *How were Sir Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano influenced by the Maison de Verre designed by Pierre Chareau in their design and construction of the Centre Pompidou in Paris?*
- *To what extent is Grady Gerbracht's assertion that the role of an artist is: “to become the embodiment of a person, a citizen, a metaphor” particularly embodied in interactive artworks?*
- *A comparison of Darren Aronofsky's works “Black Swan” and “Requiem for a Dream.” How does Aronofsky successfully employ film techniques and devices to engage the audience?*

- *The painter, the model and the viewer: an investigation into the iconography and use of art elements in Velazquez's original "Las Meninas" and Pablo Picasso's first variation of the work.*
- *The London of John Nash: To what extent do the technical and aesthetic elements of John Nash's master plan continue to provide functionality within the infrastructure of central London.*
- *Painting the head: a narrative journey into Basquiat's universe. Why has Basquiat's head of 1981 become his most celebrated painting?*
- *How has Gunmar Asplund contributed to the architectural landscape of Stockholm in the 20th century?*
- *The sculptures of Dennis Oppenheim: a conceptual genius or attention-seeking examples of contemporary artwork in modern societies.*

The emphasis, in many other essays, seemed more to be upon reportage, rather than upon investigation and personal research; and upon secondary, often rather superficial sources, rather than upon personal involvement and familiarity with reliable more "academic" sources. Many topics chosen were far too broad in nature, thus not allowing candidates to focus their endeavours. For the weakest candidates, the EE seems to be a chore, to be completed as quickly and easily as possible. Such essays, often little more than 2,000 words, give the impression of being early drafts, full of factual, spelling, and grammatical errors, and having poor quality, and in some cases no illustrations.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research Question

The guide makes clear that the research question should be essentially that: a question or hypothesis. There was a growing tendency to style the question as a topic, e.g., "Feminist Portraiture," or an investigation into "James Coban's Use of Colour" and this was inclined to lead to descriptive writing or eulogies. When titles too are stated more in the form of a question, this allows more opportunity for reasoned argument and opinion throughout the essay, proof of knowledge and understanding of the topic studied and increased application of analytical and evaluative skills. It is important however to keep the question consistent and not to state it differently in the title, the abstract, and in the introduction. The more broad an area, the more difficult candidates found it to discuss the topic with sufficient depth.

Criterion B: introduction

The introduction should be seen as an opportunity to justify the significance of the topic, not a repeat of the abstract. It is particularly important to state why the topic/question (and sometimes the approach that will be taken) is worthy of study – particularly so if the topic is "well-worn."

Criterion C: investigation

Although a chosen topic or question may have been previously explored, e.g. as in the essay mentioned above on John Nash's London, the investigation can still be original by focusing on the contemporary relevance of Nash's work using a variety of existing literature and the candidate's own on-site photographs to build and defend an argument. Most candidates consulted secondary sources with some skill and planning. Others relied solely on the internet and, although scholarly references are increasingly available on-line, tended to rely on blogs and personal sites, thus raising problems of accuracy and acknowledgement.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

As this criterion clearly asks the candidate to locate their study within an academic context it is important for the student to `read around` the topic and make critical reference to that reading.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Essays varied considerably. Too often personal opinion passed as argument, there was rarely another opinion cited. As stated on page 173 of the guide, "Good essays are those that have something interesting to communicate, where there is evidence of original thought, and where students are able to substantiate their ideas and opinions." Essays such as those cited above provided well-reasoned arguments.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

Analysis and evaluation is still too often just personal opinion. Supervisors might give more help to students who appear not to understand the use of analysis. Hard questioning and challenging the candidate's points of view should stimulate a deeper investigation. It is important that students question the information they read (especially on internet sites) and that they attempt to cross-reference and examine information by providing new examples and particularly by exploring alternative views. It is surprising how many essays do not include analysis of images.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

It is certainly expected that students will use an appropriate vocabulary to describe and discuss the formal qualities of art and design. The language of cultural studies is also important, particularly as it relates to art theory and contemporary art criticism in a socio-cultural context. Too often teachers, trained mainly in the studio component of their subject, seem unfamiliar with the kind of terminology used in recent art criticism.

Criterion H: conclusion

Examiners look for a synthesis that refers to the discussion in the body of the essay. Although generally set out under a separate subheading, this is not an absolute requirement. Unresolved questions should certainly be considered, but it is acknowledged that they may not fit all topics.

Criterion I: formal presentation

More than a few candidates continue to neglect proper acknowledgement of the source material used in their essays. This is a very serious problem, verging on plagiarism. A few essays, in fact, seem to consist of little more than a series of extracts or quotations (poorly acknowledged), strung together by brief comments by the candidate. This severely limits the level of achievement to be expected in several criteria. Candidates must consistently apply the academic referencing system that they have selected.

Candidates writing essays must pay careful attention to the use and referencing of images. Well presented images provide an indicator of the candidate's understanding and commitment to the essay. Images must be a decent size and placed in the essay next to the relevant text. The absence of visual images in an essay written in Visual Arts is deemed inappropriate and unacceptable.

Candidates need to proof read, number, identify, and attach each page.

Criterion J: abstract

It is surprising how many candidates fail in this criterion. Of the three necessary components, candidates most often omit relevant information pertaining to how the investigation was undertaken. Remember that an abstract is a summary of completed work – it is *not* a proposal.

Criterion K: holistic Judgement

We are looking for clear evidence of independent thinking and innovative approaches that give more weight to an essay than merely sitting in front of a computer and searching websites.

We are looking for essays that are sharply focused on one aspect of the visual arts. The best essays are persuasively argued, clearly structured and well organized; they show evidence of independent thinking, and demonstrate good knowledge of the topic. Candidates are expected to exhibit ability to assemble evidence and information intelligently and to analyze it with insight and understanding.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Considering the general standard of submissions, the hours reported and supposedly spent in consultation with candidates often seem rather excessive. It is recommended that supervisors spend up to 4 to 5 hours with each candidate. However, a few supervisors did not spend even one hour with their student(s). These supervisors appear not to understand the importance that the fulfillment of their responsibilities has upon the ultimate success of their student(s). Some supervisors, unfortunately, appear not even to have read the guide.

A few supervisors are neglecting to write any comments on their candidates' performance – even though sometimes claiming great amounts of time “supervising”. Some supervisor's wrote lengthy reports that

included irrelevant information. Where a finding from a *viva voce* was included, this information proved useful in considering Criterion K: holistic judgement.