DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/01
Portfolio

Key messages

- Centres should avoid uploading individual jpegs which duplicate the work contained in PowerPoint presentations or PDF files.
- Candidates are encouraged to give serious consideration to the visual presentation of their work.
- Among the most successful submissions, the creative insight provided by researching the work of others is clearly seen.

General comments

A wide variety of interpretations of the themes was seen in response to this component. Candidates provided proposals in a range of formats including photography, video, graphic design, animation, and mobile applications. While the idea of testing was seen to underpin many scripts, some responses could have been improved in AO3 if candidates had made better use of focused investigation and feedback.

Many centres uploaded a single PowerPoint or continuous PDF for the supporting studies and another for the proposal, which is the expected format. However, centres are encouraged to avoid uploading individual jpegs which duplicate the work contained in PowerPoint presentations or PDF files. This additional material is not seen to extend candidate work or attract additional marks.

Among weaker responses, candidates were seen to research the work of others at a superficial level and this was not seen to be consistently reflected in the progress of the work. Candidates would benefit from more focused research into relevant photographers, designers, artists, film makers, or animators which can bring insights that inform the candidate's intentions.

Digital Media and Design is a design qualification. Candidates are encouraged to give serious consideration to the visual presentation of their work. For example, candidate work would benefit from more appropriate choices of fonts to ensure readability, and from well-considered page layout. Submissions would be improved where referenced exemplar graphic design work is used to inform the presentation of candidate work. Some candidates did not explicitly indicate their chosen theme, while in some examples, others recorded ideas for each theme. Candidates are invited to choose one theme from the list. Candidates should research the selected theme, exploring and developing ideas and concepts for their chosen proposal, responding to testing and feedback as their work develops.

Some candidates successfully used their own photography to start their enquiries into their chosen theme and then used the work of others to further their research. More successful responses typically included an analysis of their studied photographers' or designers' visual work. Candidates are encouraged to continue and develop this approach instead of providing artists' biographies. Candidates are encouraged to adopt an individual approach to the presentation of their work. The syllabus refers to key concepts of creativity and innovation. Individuality can become limited where a centre-wide approach or template is used to structure individual scripts.

The strongest responses contained a variety of ideas resulting from focused investigation, an articulate exploration of ideas, and a deconstruction and analysis of images. Referenced artists' work was thoroughly described in technical and visual terms. Where the influence of a reference artist was seen, higher scoring work avoided repetition or pastiche. The creative insight provided by researching into the work of others was clearly seen.

Approaches to the themes

Boundaries

Some candidates used the devices of pattern or variation of tone to reflect the idea of boundaries. Relevant research into artists or practitioners were selected who have worked with an interpretation of boundaries. However, more appropriate choices of artists or photographers, or a more convincing understanding of their work would have led to stronger outcomes. Some candidates made comparisons between the work of selected photographers, or between their own work and the work of a selected photographer. Among the most successful scripts, candidates avoided purely descriptive comparisons in favour of an understanding of visual language to provide a helpful insight.

Other scripts examined a more personal realm, concerned with emotional spaces, permissions, or unseen boundaries, for example. Among higher scoring scripts, candidates navigated these ideas with both digital and analogue experimentation. Stronger submissions typically illustrated a range of potential ideas. These were frequently pursued through renewed visual experimentation. Work was often continued with perceptive responses to the work of other artists. Such sustained investigations retained a sense of risk taking and frequently produced unexpected and delightful results. These candidates also demonstrated competence in the exploration of media, and a good ability to work with ideas. Other responses sought to engage with the connection between social and geographical boundaries. This was seen to have been an ambitious direction. Candidates are advised to focus their intentions on a personal response which is both manageable and attainable. However, among higher scoring scripts, candidates worked across the boundaries of creative practice within and beyond the visual arts. For example, ideas could be expressed in graphic design, image manipulation, printmaking, painting, exhibition curation, or performing arts.

The Digital Classroom

Too few scripts were seen to discern a pattern.

Digital Poetry

Some interesting references were made to Victorian literature to support a comparison between interior and exterior worlds. Some intriguing deconstructions and analyses of the work of contemporary artists resulted in development work which included colour experiments, photographic shoots, posed stylised figures, and work with text and copy. Some successful responses contained work which combined a poetic sensibility with a visual clarity expressed through digital media.

Emotions

Candidates often drew on their own experience to respond to this theme. Among the strongest work, candidates demonstrated a sophisticated approach from the outset. These scripts immediately began to translate ideas about emotions into creative work. This often included colour charts, transcriptions, personal reflections, practical ideas for investigation and plans for a proposal. Candidates often made appropriate choices of the artists they studied and aligned them to their particular interpretation of the theme. Other scripts recognised how some performing artists effectively communicate emotions. Some candidates sought to emulate the work of the artists they had looked at. This often involved working with costumes, lighting, or props. These scripts were seen to reveal a degree of creative courage on the part of the candidate. Such scripts were rewarded for the creative risks recorded.

Some remarkable results were obtained through visual experiments, often in photography. Candidates were also rewarded for recognising where experiments were successful and for using the results to progress the work. In these scripts, planning and insight exceeded the role of specialist equipment or techniques. Some work of a very high standard was seen. Such work constituted a thoroughly integrated portfolio where research, exploration, development, and production were pursued simultaneously as the work progressed. Typically, analogue and digital experimentation would accompany an analysis of the work of selected artists. These scripts contained continual refinements whilst at the same time embracing challenging and potentially destructive working methods. This approach was often seen to develop a personal and convincing visual language.

Travel

Many scripts approached the theme from the perspective of advertising. Candidates often included examples of travel advertising such as posters, destination guides, or websites. Such material from the travel industry can provide good exemplifiers of typography, copy, page layout, colourways, and choice of image. Among lower scoring scripts, more marks would be attracted where sources were analysed for their visual and written content. In these examples, candidates are reminded that the focus of the study should be on advertising as a form of communication, rather than the form of travel or the destination itself. Where candidates took their own photographs on location, this was rewarded in AO1 and AO4. Some candidates analysed their own photographs for colour palette or pictorial structure. Among lower scoring scripts, family trips were often documented, with face-on photographs and selfies. The work of such scripts would benefit from consideration of visual conventions such as rule of thirds, leading lines, or framing. This work would also have been improved by a basic command of colour management, white balance, and overlaying graphical information.

Some candidates produced exciting proposals for immersive exhibition projects. Candidates would benefit from researching artists, designers or film makers before beginning an ambitious project. While many candidates were seen to gather adequate photographs from popular destinations, lower scoring scripts demonstrated little evidence of development of ideas or creative direction for the project. Some higher scoring scripts included images from historical magazines or used older postcards to bring a different perspective to the chosen destination. Often digital photography was combined with analogue processes such as gesso, burning, and gel medium. The results were often scanned, and digital processes applied. Photographs of landscapes, sunsets, or tree silhouettes were often use as starting points. Such experimental work was seen to have a sense of purpose, control, and direction. In higher scoring scripts, experimental work was also consistent with the artists studied and the intention of the project. This was rewarded in AO2.

Wellbeing

Most scripts contained video and focused on the link between food and health. Candidates made appropriate choices of food photographers for reference. Work at the weaker end was characterised by a basic gathering of images from the internet, advertising the benefits of exercise, which were then digitally edited. Where a candidate's intention was seen to develop a response based on the benefits of spending time in nature, marks would have been greater with the use of personal photographs and an application of digital manipulation which is consistent with the theme. However, where candidates presented a body of work of location photographs alone with some annotations, only adequate levels of visual literacy and command of formal elements were seen by the examiners. Candidates should ensure that their work is developed by a continued recording of ideas and observations, and by refining ideas through a focused investigation.

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Paper 9481/02
Externally Set Assignment

Key messages

- Candidates should show a consideration of the assignment and an intended audience.
- Some candidates took the opportunity to create immersive or virtual environments.
- Many candidates expressed a heartfelt concern for the sustainability of the natural environment.

General comments

Some exciting and imaginative work was produced across the range of abilities. Some of the submissions would have benefited from a greater investigation into the concept or assignment and a clear understanding of the intended audience. Supporting studies should show research of ideas and critical reflection, exploration of media, materials and technology, development and editing of ideas, and a personal response which makes connections between digital and design elements. Some scripts were not seen to follow one of the concepts given in the chosen assignment. This component tests a candidate's ability to work to a brief in a given amount of time. As a result, some candidates were not seen to sufficiently focus on evaluation and testing. The syllabus describes the importance of working to a brief and emphasises planning, constraints, deadlines, and audiences. There appeared to be a degree of confusion over what constitutes a photo story. A photo story can be defined as a strip cartoon with photographs in place of drawings. A photo story can also be thought of as a collection of images with sequential or narrative content. Candidates are advised to research exemplar artists for clarity and inspiration in such situations.

Some candidates took the opportunity to blur the line between reality and imagination by creating immersive or virtual environments. This presented exciting and imaginative interpretations of the chosen assignment. Some dynamic and creative results were seen. However, this sometimes presented a challenge in the visual, imaginative, and technical skills required. Candidates are reminded that this is a creative, rather than a technical qualification. The focus of component two is to develop a creative solution within a set time frame. The syllabus reflects an emphasis on ideas; 'Candidates must show evidence of their research and development of ideas, while working towards a final outcome. Where software is used, screenshots should be included to show how ideas have been developed, e.g. showing the selection of tools and manipulation of imagery'. Some candidates approached the idea of 'game transfer phenomena' or the Tetris Effect. However, this work would have been improved if candidates showed greater visual acuity, and a sustained body of first-hand research.

Approaches to the assignments

The Butterfly Effect

This assignment received a broad set of interpretations. These included eradication of species, protection of wildlife, the challenge of technology faced by humans, potential ill-effects of immersion in virtual environments, overuse of virtual reality equipment, plastics in the oceans, or the overuse of antibiotics. Most candidates understood the implication of the assignment that *Nothing happens in isolation. Every action has a reaction*. Many candidates expressed a heartfelt concern for the sustainability of the natural environment. The work submitted included photographic projects, information films, documentary films and animations.

Among the weaker responses, pertinent references were made to the work of established photographers who portray a sense of humanity amidst challenging environments. However, other images appear to have been sourced from the internet and subject to some simple edits. Candidates are required to acknowledge the source of material which is not their own.
In the work at a higher ability range, candidates demonstrated a command of visual language through the use of digital manipulation. This included work with scaling, contrast, hue, and saturation. These scripts

contained some evidence of development and testing. However, this work would have benefited where the visual dexterity demonstrated in digital manipulation was exposed to critical scrutiny. Some visual work was developed into applied outcomes such as magazine covers or film title screens. Where candidates based their work on the effects of video gaming, they gained inspiration from diverse sources such as Thomas Finkler or Victor Moscoso. This was seen to provide unexpected and interesting creative directions which included the use of psychedelic art or the combination of nonsensical images to create a story. A strong sense of narrative was developed by a methodical use of storyboards. Among films exploring the overuse of antibiotics, many candidates showed their knowledge of camera positioning and camera angles.

Candidates who produced documentary films, supported their work with reflections on the definitions of the title, mood-boards, storyboards, interview strategies, and plans for the editing process. Candidates are encouraged to reflect on the work of documentary makers to gain insight into interview techniques. A lot of time appeared to have been spent on re-recording audio, applying filters and editing the audio. The time available would have been better spent testing equipment, developing animation, image processing, lighting for the interviews, testing, rough cuts, and on responding to audience feedback.

The most successful work for this assignment included the production of public information films. These included both hand-drawn animation and live action work. This work dealt with interesting issues such as technology enforcing social isolation, the tension of viewing nature through the lens of technology, and the loss of meaningful face to face friendships. Elsewhere candidates prepared pre-visualisation videos using footage in the public domain and still images of statistical graphs and charts, to test the narration and timing of image changes. Candidates often used online platforms to access a network of respondents to gain useful feedback. In turn, this was seen to inform edits, text, cutaways, animations, or interviews. This was rewarded in AO3 and AO4.

The Fans

From the four given concepts for this assignment most scripts developed 'a photography portrait of fandom'. Other submissions included documentary film and animation. Some scripts were not seen to work within the parameter of the assignment, regarding the content for a music label website. Most scripts recorded photography using friends or self-portraits to illustrate the idea of fandom. However, lower scoring scripts were not seen to use personal or original images. Images in these submissions were taken from the internet.

Among lower scoring scripts some candidates based their research on simple music apps and music fan books. The resulting work contained interesting ideas for games or quizzes, designs for avatars and site maps. These scripts also evaluated font choices and layout designs. However, more marks would be attracted by decisions informed by experiment or exposure to exemplar material. Additionally, such work could be used as a starting point for the development of ideas such as fan montages, music labels, concert images, or website mock-ups for example. Other lower scoring scripts described the popularity of particular musicians or bands and included biographical details and published images. In these examples, marks were frustrated as the candidates were seen to focus on a celebrity rather than an examination of fandom. Where candidates did not focus exclusively on the music industry, some documentary work about the popularity of devices such as smartphones was produced. It is understood that such ancillary content could be found on a broadly based music label website. However, this work would be improved by more reliable research, exploring the connection between such devices and the music industry, and by visualising the documentary in the context of the website. However, scripts were rewarded for including interviews which became a concise study of the history and future of the device. Candidates were also rewarded for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of interviews.

Other scripts contained some good and exciting ideas appropriate to this qualification. Several ideas for games were seen. However, the game development and design of the outcome frequently required more focus. Some scripts were seen to explore ideas for the setup of digital environments by photographing toy figures outdoors, using a range of focal lengths. This was rewarded in AO1 and AO2. These scripts went on to developed game icons and controls, mock-ups with simple colour graphics, and layouts for customised avatars. Designs were also seen for other screens including settings, direct messaging, and live chat. However, more marks would have been attracted by the ability to refine the work and realise the potential of the initial ideas.

Airborne

Relatively few scripts were seen in response to this assignment. Too few scripts were seen to discern a pattern.

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| **Paper 9481/03** |
| **Personal Investigation** |
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Key messages

* Most written analysis was clear, readable and personal.
* Many scripts demonstrated a high level of engagement and commitment.
* Higher scoring scripts contained sustained and detailed analysis.

General comments

Some excellent and highly effective work was seen in response to this component. This is a broad based component, with candidates free to choose their own subject area. However, a common mistake is for candidates to focus entirely on their specific object(s) of interest, and therefore find it more difficult to research more widely, or to seek inspiration from other artists. Subjects chosen for the personal investigation were as diverse as HIV support groups, virtual reality for the physically challenged, 3D modelling and desktop publishing for jewellery, documentaries on the pandemic, skincare products, a utopian dreamworld, therapeutic portrait photography, racism, and a study of cars. Some intriguing visual work was not accompanied by a written visual analysis. Candidates are reminded that component three is the A Level component. This should represent a substantial piece of research, and the written analysis clarifies the creative working process. The written analysis is integral to the work and show explain and illustrate the development process. All sources should be referenced, and the final outcome should be a standalone piece of work.

Approaches to the Personal Investigation

Final outcome

Among a range of researched topics, many were seen to have been developed from the themes previously addressed in component one, and further developed through this body of work. These included emotional and psychological themes, food, fashion, and virtual experiences. Many scripts successfully integrated the visual and written content. Most responses were realised within the digital photography and moving image areas of practice. However, some excellent examples of mobile and multimedia applications were seen featuring animations. Considerable focus was placed on the study and analysis of the works of other artists. This was rewarded where this revealed an insightful understanding through visual examination. However, candidates should indicate how the work of others has specifically influenced the development of their own work. This raises the potential for reward in AO1 and AO3.

Candidates worked on a wide range of themes from recollections of lockdown to drought and flooding, dreaming, the urban environment, sport, environmental campaigning, fears, cultural symbols, food and health, avatars, beverage advertising, illustration, game environments, publication design, street photography, dyslexia, censorship, holocaust, and depression. Other candidates researched themes as diverse as abstract expressionism and black tax. Some candidates adopted a more traditional graphic design approach. This appeared to assist in demonstrating some of the competences inherent in their chosen topic. A careful and informed selection of reference artists enabled candidates to find good examples of visual language, and to adapt alternative approaches to their theme or area of practice.

At the lower ability range, candidates showed conspicuous pride in the form, structure and design of their investigation. However, written descriptions, photography or video work was seen to be limited in the use of visual language and command of formal elements. Several examples of correspondence and feedback from professional photographers or designers provided evidence of reviewing work as it develops. However, more marks would have been attracted with evidence of an analysis of the feedback, or development of work

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based on the suggestions provided. Although some adequate titles were included within video work, there was little evidence of the development or application of typography. Where candidates conducted macro work, good levels of technical skill, and command of lighting and focus were seen. Candidates are encouraged to carefully consider the resolution required to showcase final images.

Stronger work typically introduced a theme, described a creative plan/production process, conducted audience research, provided visual references, illustrated development work, discussed options, provided examples of work in progress, presented a final work and included reflective commentary. The best investigations came to life when candidates focused on their reference artists, used deconstructive methods to understand their style, ambience and use of visual language. With excellent levels of control, higher scoring candidates repeatedly displayed a sensitivity to their chosen artist's intention, working method and use of formal elements. This was achieved through a sensitive and accurate application of visual analysis. Such candidates were then seen to deftly produce highly accomplished studies inspired by their research. Typically, this could include a coherent and rigorously researched mind map, a selection of visual research, deconstruction and analysis of images, photographic studies, research into the semiotics of images, and analogue or digital experimentation in response to the ideas revealed in the research.

Written element

Some examples of very well-produced and insightful written analyses were seen. However, some scripts included a written analysis which substantially exceeded the stated word count. Candidates are required to work with the word count and present the written analysis in a format that is related to the final practical outcome. Many scripts observed the requirement to provide a bibliography, footnotes, or a references section. Scripts across the range were seen to have researched appropriate photographers, designers, artists or filmmakers.

Many candidates provided written analyses which described the topic or theme chosen for the investigation. Candidates are reminded that their investigations should conclude in a resolved outcome in the form of a final creative work. Rather than an exploration of the topic, the written analysis should provide a commentary on the creative development of the work. For example, a personal investigation about preserving a local open space would not need to primarily focus on the history of the location, the benefits of outdoor activity or opportunities for sport or leisure. Rather, the written analysis would deal with the way in which ideas were communicated through digital design. This could include planning and reviewing a photoshoot, selecting elements of graphic design, or analysing the results of initial documentary work for future development. Statistical information, biographical details or historical records will not necessarily constitute an appropriate written analysis.