

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/01
Portfolio

Key messages

Higher achieving candidates explored other artists' work and showed critical understanding. Candidates are required to clearly indicate which are supporting studies and which work is the proposal. Some work of a very high standard was seen.

Introduction

This was the first examination for AS Level 9481 Digital Media & Design and some work of a very high standard was seen demonstrating that the candidates had clearly understood what was required of them and had embraced the tasks fully. Lower scoring scripts typically contained limited evidence or evidence that was not sufficiently focused on the theme or the assessment objectives. For example, higher achieving candidates explored the unique aspects of other artists' work and then demonstrated how it influenced the development of their own work. Lower achieving candidates typically focused more on biographies of the artists they had researched. Experiments with digital media manipulation that are subsequently discarded are good evidence of concept development and critical review. Other candidates referred to rejected experimentation but did not include such evidence.

Higher achieving candidates created a journey within their portfolio that led the examiner through research, experimentation, review and refinement, feedback and selection, and proposal. This approach securely attached the candidate's work to the assessment objective of the qualification.

Some examples of research and recording contained significant amounts of technical information about the practice of chosen artists, without explaining why it was relevant to their own work. Centres are reminded that this is not purely a technical qualification. Page 7 of the syllabus states, 'Across the syllabus, the emphasis is on a personal response and the creative journey the candidate takes...'. Creative work is required which addresses the research, development, selection and digital response assessment objectives. Candidates are also encouraged to avoid unnecessary decorative elements or embellishments. For example, font lists, style guides and colour pallets have been included in some scripts. While this has its place, these additions more often contributed to the appearance of the page, rather than evidence which addresses the Assessment Objectives. Some scripts contained video proposals without story boards. Typically, lower scoring scripts contained an insufficient amount of visual material. The pages often contained text, sometimes in large font size, which occupied most of the available space. While some text or notes can be helpful, they are not a substitute for communicating ideas and meaning visually.

Approaches to the themes

Most of the candidates submitted work responding to the themes Emotions, Boundaries and Travel. Most submissions were in response to Emotions and few responses were seen for Boundaries. Candidates and their teachers are encouraged to consider the creative potential of all the themes for Component 1 before making a choice. There were several scripts which did not indicate the theme, but referred to war, dance, exercise, or portraiture. Centres are reminded that candidates are required to choose a theme from the Component 1 Portfolio themes. This choice should be indicated in the script. Whilst many candidates conscientiously included a contents page, some did not reference a proposal. Candidates are required to clearly indicate which are supporting studies and which work is the proposal. It is entirely permissible to host both the supporting studies and the proposal in the same file i.e. PowerPoint or PDF.

Where centres choose to follow a prescribed format this approach risks compromising personal responses, and can limit opportunities across each AO. In such cases, where candidates sought to differentiate their work from others, there was seen to be a tendency to emphasise product over process. Candidates are

provided with a list of optional proposals for development and an invitation to develop an idea of their own. Where candidates had chosen to develop their own idea, it was frequently not clear what that idea was. This has the potential to limit development if an intention or initial idea is not established.

For example, several photography responses in the lower ability range contained examples of well-known European fine artists from the 19th and early 20th century. Photographs of un-connected objects from the classroom were seen to be arbitrarily linked to the formal elements such as line, tone or shape. The responses contained some basic exploration of depth of field and focus. Where basic exploration of studio lighting was included, this could have included more evidence of intention or review. In some cases, it was not clear what the candidate was seeking to achieve; some annotation or visuals demonstrating critical understanding of how the technical and artists research related to their ideas, would have benefited the responses. Where the candidates provided a written description of the importance of testing and learning from mistakes, there was little evidence of the development of ideas or concepts.

In the mid-ability range some candidates interpreted the theme Emotions with a proposal for an exhibition of photographs. Candidates showed a clear intention to work with a range of emotional expressions for the intended purpose of a photography exhibition. Candidates explored a variety of compositions and setups digitally. This work was clearly seen to be based on the candidates' artist research. Development work included visuals of the isolation of areas using selection tool, and the controlled use of filters which were appropriate to the candidates' intentions. This approach was rewarded for annotations which showed critical understanding. The candidates also clearly developed a competent aesthetic judgement, demonstrated by the selection and development of their best images. These were selected for their emotional impact, and purposeful use of formal elements such as composition, tone, colour, shape, and texture. A greater quantity of developed work supported by the learner's own feedback would have secured higher marks in AO3. Greater integration of feedback and testing during the development of ideas should be included instead of saving it as a summary task at the end of a project as this compromise the candidates' ability to demonstrate creative development based on testing by an audience.

Responses to the theme Emotions which attracted the highest marks contained detailed visual analysis of the word Emotions through cultural, architectural and linguistic references. Work at this level also contained detailed storyboards, photographic research, visual analysis, worked up proposal illustrations, location and scene setting photography and moving image work. Such submissions demonstrated a highly accomplished and mature command of personal intentions and beautiful expression of visual language. Care and consideration was given to the layout and context in which the work would be viewed.

In some submissions where candidates used the theme Travel, there was seen to be a potential misinterpretation of the term 'target audience'. Those responses which focused on an advertisement for a location described a wide and unspecified target audience. Typically, this audience was described as those who like to travel. This can indicate poor design practice as it does not sufficiently focus creative and conceptual activity. Many images were collected along with a range of motifs associated with the theme. These included company logos and photographs from brochures. This work was not seen to be sufficiently insightful to attract higher marks. Whilst some other ideas were explored such as scale, perspective, or times of day, it was not always clear about the development of ideas or work. There was often little sense of focus on an idea to explore in depth. Candidates often referred to their own travels or a local destination in general terms. Some scripts demonstrated insight but missed opportunities to refine their ideas and development appeared to lose focus due to too broad a theme.

Approaches to the assessment objectives

AO1. Where this assessment objective is seen to be approached on a superficial level, responses typically provided a concise biography of the artists chosen. Investigative or analytical activity was often absent. Higher marks could be achieved by a demonstration of convincing and clear links between the candidate's intentions and the artist studied. Candidates should also reflect critically on the work they have chosen to research as well as their own ideas and progress. Candidate's submissions generally demonstrated a good ability to research and record ideas and then reflect on individual progress.

AO2. This assessment objective was approached well by those candidates who explored a range of media available and undertook a variety of experimental work. In some cases evidence which could be rewarded in this assessment objective was very limited. Lower scoring responses contained little or no evidence of exploration or experimentation. In some cases, candidates provided limited evidence for this assessment outcome and for AO3 and appeared to move from research straight to their proposal. It would be useful if candidates were made aware of the importance of providing adequate evidence so that they can access

each of the assessment objectives. Higher marks were awarded where candidates were able to explore different media and showcase all their experimental work.

AO3. Candidates awarded in the higher mark bands often provided detailed screenshots illustrating their progress and processes. This often included the editing of photographs or the production of collage or digital montage. For those awarded lower marks, such processes were poorly evidenced and did not demonstrate how an outcome or idea was developed. The production process or video work was often poorly evidenced. This could be improved by providing offline and online edits, scripts or storyboards, in order to demonstrate development. Screenshots showing a timeline could also be included. A number of candidates included the feedback they had received.

AO4. A wide range of areas of study were seen for this assessment outcome. Photography was the most popular. It is important that this outcome links convincingly to the body of supporting studies and research, in order to attract marks. In some cases, it was not clear how the proposal related to the remainder of a candidate's work. This is important to show how digital elements and design elements link. There were some attractive examples of mixed media work, which demonstrated how physical activity can combine with digital activity. The texture, tone and surfaces which were scanned from physical materials were used typically as backgrounds or fields in digital designs. Many candidates working solely in a digital environment were able to show the qualities of colour, shape, line and form convincingly.

Technical comments

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Centres should avoid sending 2 versions of the same material. One version as a word-processed file and another version as a PDF preferable.

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Some centres were contacted with a request for supporting studies files which had not been sent.

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Centres should check for corrupted files and replace them before submission to Cambridge.

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Avoid providing a link to a cloud-saved resource that is either missing or that denies access.

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/02
Externally Set Assignment

Key messages

Higher achieving candidates exploited the discoveries made during research. Candidates should clearly indicate which are supporting studies and which work is the exam work. The best candidates were able to critically reflect on their work as it progressed.

Introduction

This was the first examination for AS Level 9481 Digital Media & Design. Responses were seen across the ability range for this component. Where a centre led approach or a degree of scaffolding is provided by a centre, this has the potential to constrain individual creative work and frustrate marks in individual assessment objectives. This component is aimed at putting the skills learned from component 1 into place, by producing a response to a brief in a given time frame.

Many submissions would have benefited from including more evidence of analysis of the work of others. In responses that attracted higher marks, candidates had shown critical and contextual understanding by articulating common elements found in their research. This included typical camera angles, model poses or lighting for example. Such candidates described the effect these elements had on their ideas and went on to experiment with recreations of similar elements in their own work. Responses which attracted the lowest marks often included simplistic artist biographies and descriptive remarks based on personal taste or opinion which were not exposed to critical examination.

Higher scoring candidates explored ideas by trying several experimental approaches and described how effective they were. These candidates made appropriate selections from these experiments for the continuation of their work. The stronger scripts showed how ideas developed from experiments and how intentions were refined by ideas. The best candidates were able to critique the development of their work. They described how it influenced their progress, with both preferred and rejected avenues of investigation. These candidates also clearly identified a final work and were able to reflect on its effectiveness.

Approaches to the assignments

Candidates submitted work responding to each of the questions Style Guide, Family Cook and CCTV. Marks were awarded for the layout and graphic design where this supported the visual impact of the candidate's response to the questions. There were many references to the cinema, with the inclusion of screen grabs, or movie-clips as reference materials. Many candidates integrated a film sensibility into their use of visual language. The resulting work was often a synthesis of fine art and cinematic practice. Some candidates were demonstrably confident in this area of study. Marks were awarded for pre-planning, colour selection, location selection, camera setup, casting, and direction. Where short moving image sequences were submitted, additional marks were awarded for storyboarding, and creating a sense of time and pace using various editing techniques. (The inclusion of sound however is not a requirement, and additional marks are not awarded, nor subtracted for the inclusion of sound.)

The Style Guide question was very popular with some examples of ambitious animation seen as a style guide in the form of a video game. Some well-designed publications were also seen. Research images must be consistently attributed to a source and any research material should be clearly distinguished from the candidates' work. This will avoid potential confusion and possible frustration of marks. Artists or photographers work was sometimes accompanied by a cursory description. This was seen to frustrate marks in AO1 as it revealed little or no insight relevant to the candidates' intentions. Occasionally candidates made refreshing connections between motifs from the art of the past and their own work. Sometimes physical or digital distortions were used to communicate an emotion or intensify the message of an image. Responses to

this question included photo diaries, images of designers, and often disconnected or disjointed photos of landscapes and animals. Some candidates made exciting and inspiring references that could have been, satisfactorily developed into a final outcome. In some cases, the candidates did not appear to have understood the work they had looked at. Other scripts focused on extensive descriptions of styles, style icons, and the fashion trends of celebrities. This approach largely neglected communication in visual form. The assignment was concerned with photo portraits, digital displays, publication layout or animation. Candidates would have been better advised to research practitioners in these fields. Some examples of the magazine layout concept demonstrated a visually literate and contemporary approach. Such scripts combined lens-based images with typography and with other dynamic graphic design elements. Some style guides contained competent levels of research. This brought a discernible degree of insight to the scripts. Where research was further explored to inform ideas, marks were improved in AO2 and AO3.

In higher ability responses to the question Style Guide, the candidates produced excellent professional quality presentations inspired by their research of artists they had chosen, rather than a centre led approach. The candidates included mature and personal insights into style, while retaining a consistent reflection on their progress. Ideas generation was supported by a highly developed ability to create powerful images with digital photography. In some cases where geometric or architectural imagery had been the source of inspiration, the presentations were supported by appropriately sparse fonts that related successfully to the theme. Candidates demonstrated critical understanding of their experiments with texture and surfaces using black and white photography. A comprehensive body of work included a range of images from a location shoot, several smaller style guides, and a draft of the final style guide feature. Candidates at this level were able to demonstrate a fluid ability in handling colour and black and white photography, a clear and coherent progression of ideas, planning ability, and very good selection of location, models and clothing. Such high marks reflected the candidates' ability to bring together a broad range of visual elements into a joy of pattern making, repeats, reflection and symmetry.

Other candidates at the high ability level range included excellent initial research which explored 1930's style, fashion, movies, dance, actors, film directors, and photographers, in detail. Candidates also reflected on traditional and contemporary views about gender and ensured that research was broad but relevant and covered fashion photography, literature and film references. There were clear and sophisticated links to the illustrated pages from 1930's fashion magazines which the candidates had also reworked to reflect a contemporary style. Submissions at this level were supported by a comprehensive evaluation from the candidates of their work and included mature analysis on the effectiveness of each visual thread.

For the Family Cook assignment, lower scoring responses included examples of cooking magazines, and repetitive images from recipe books. Initial photoshoots provided limited recording and insight into the subject. However, further photoshoots began to explore broader ideas, during the preparation of a meal, for example. This provided an opportunity to show awareness of composition and colour. Candidates will need to take account of any constraints imposed by the assignment. Sometimes the control of focus was seen to be compromised by steam on the lens. Marks were awarded for stronger final outcomes which demonstrated skills in composition, balance, design and the control of colour. Many scripts seen in response to this assignment were often not sufficiently visual. Where candidates use text, this should be used to support visual work or research.

Some candidates did not appear to have read the Family Cook assignment thoroughly or interpreted it according to the guidance provided. Some scripts appeared to be directionless or confused between a focus on food photography, dieting, or still life photography with cutlery and kitchen objects. Some candidates presented cookery books. This was not required by the assignment. Other scripts indiscriminately reflected aspects of local food or food culture, rather than developing personal ideas and a design response. Some very good work was seen. This included insightful research using imagery from kitchenware advertising, analysis of non-food advertising, research into food apps, stills from short videos, research into potential outcomes such as photo diaries, original photography, digital manipulation, and well-designed desk top publishing.

Responses to the CCTV question prompted some interesting reflections on privacy and observation. Attempts at a photo essay often did not convincingly recognise the characteristics of CCTV or candid surveillance. However, some photo essays did recognise how lens-based images are intriguingly recreated by other lens-based apparatus. Some photographs of CCTV images were beautiful and reflective of contemporary practice. Where game designs were submitted, they were not seen to be consistent with the description of the assignment. Some attractive final outcomes were not seen to be consistently supported by research and the development of ideas. Some moving image submissions demonstrated good examples of editing, framing, scene setting and management of participants.

Approaches to the assessment objectives

AO1. Some submissions did not interpret this assessment objective appropriately, where evidence tended to be limited or superficial. In some instances, evidence for this assessment objective could not be found. Where candidates provide a description of the working life of an artist or designer, marks are frustrated without an indication of influence this research may have on the candidate's work. Candidates are encouraged to look at a range of research sources such as photographers, artists, filmmakers, in order to help develop their ideas.

AO2. Some submissions did not interpret this assessment objective appropriately, where evidence tended to be limited or superficial. In some instances, evidence for this assessment objective could not be found. In such cases marks were also frustrated in AO4. In other cases, candidates who were working towards a video outcome sought locations and collaborators. This shows appropriate evidence of exploration.

AO3. Candidates awarded in the higher mark bands provided sets of detailed screenshots describing how they achieved particular outcomes. This often included how photographs were edited or images digitally manipulated. For those awarded in the lower mark bands, the process was poorly evidenced with limited indications of how the outcome was achieved. Candidates should not neglect to include evidence of the testing of ideas in their submissions. This can be done in a number of ways including questionnaires, one to one feedback and group discussions.

AO4. A wide range of outcomes were produced for this assessment outcome including photography, documentary and animation. This assessment objective requires candidates to show how the digital and design elements link. It is important that candidates consider formal elements such as colour, line, shape and form alongside the technical constraints of software or cameras. It is also important that candidates understand that the final outcome should link to the supporting evidence. In some cases, video outcomes showed a limited command of camera control and of editing skills. For example, in material which was sequenced but not well edited, marks were frustrated. Final work should also make an appropriate connection to the assignment.

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