

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

Most of the essays were appropriate for the subject, although some sought to explore questions that were too broad in scope to be treated effectively. Topics were varied, covered unique areas of enquiry, and in addition to so-called "fine" art it was good to see candidates covering architecture and design.

The best essays were well researched, included an imaginative range of sources, often including visits to museums and galleries to view original works. Some candidates seem to be under the impression that an interview is mandatory. If an interview is deemed important in helping to answer the research question, it should be meaningful and the interviewee someone who can significantly contribute to answering some aspect of the research question. Too many rather meaningless interviews are conducted with family and friends. One impressive interview seen this year was with Australian artist Ben Quilty. After reading reviews and viewing his work the candidate sought an interview to better understand the underlying intentions and concepts encompassed in Quilty's work on masculinity and male youth culture. In this process the candidate examined a number of pieces under construction.

If candidates are dealing with a subject about which a great deal has been written, (e.g., street art and Banksy) it is important to select a research question that demands a focused individual response.

On the "Contents" page, it would be nice to see more candidates abandon the use of "body" and instead introduce some subheadings that would help them structure and organize their essay.

A few essays submitted were very brief. This can be self-penalising as the task and its criteria have been designed to be treated in 4000 words. Candidates are encouraged to make full use of the 4000 words.

Unless dealing primarily with visual aspects a few essays submitted as Visual Arts essays may have been more appropriately submitted to Film or Psychology. Although it has been a problem in the past, it is now encouraging to see that visual aspects are seriously considered by most candidates who choose to explore aspects of sustainable or "green" architecture.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

If a research question begins with "To what extent . . . ?" or "The extent to which . . ." then the "extent" needs to be addressed. Too often research questions resulted in biography, and descriptive narrative, rather than argument. For example, rather than write a very general essay on Salvador Dali, one student did well by arguing why the "Persistence on Memory" represents a personalized form of surrealism that is unique to Salvador Dali. It is important that the research question not be stated differently in different parts of the essay.

Criterion B: introduction

It is good to get a sense of a candidate's passion, and personal interest in undertaking research in a particular area, but the significance and worthiness of the topic was sometimes more implied than clearly stated. Very few introductions explained how the research question related to existing knowledge on the topic. It is important to have a clear understanding of what belongs in the introduction, and what belongs in the abstract.

Criterion C: investigation

Successful Visual Arts essays make use of primary sources such as museum and site visits, meetings with artists, curators, etc. The majority of candidates use secondary sources which need to be used critically. Candidates should analyse and challenge the views of artists, critics, scholars, and other commentators. Although more good scholarly sources can now be accessed, there is an ongoing need to be critical when selecting sources from the Internet.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Most candidates provide sufficient contextual, historical and/or cultural background information. However, many make factual errors and/or sweeping generalizations, indicating a hurried approach to the essay. It is important to always keep the research question in view.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Weaker essays tend to be largely descriptive, with little if any argument.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

It was not unusual to find essays doing well with this criterion, particularly in the analysis of images. An essay that exhibited some excellent visual analysis was titled: "Do we consider the work of Steve McCurry to be an art form or purely documentary?"

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject:

It is important to use accurate arts-related vocabulary when writing about art and architecture. In this respect, we were often impressed by the work of those students who found it challenging to write in English.

Criterion H: conclusion

A surprising number of essays had extremely brief, perfunctory conclusions. Conclusions must be consistent with the evidence presented.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Images need to be referenced not only with the location of the original, but candidates must also cite the URL or other location from which the image was copied: This is an area where candidates need to be aware of subject specific information. For example, on page 169 of the Guide it states: "The presentation of essays that omit . . . appropriate and acknowledged visual images . . . is deemed unacceptable" (level 0).

Too many candidates do not seem to be aware that "In Visual Arts essays, illustrations should appear in the body of the essay as close as possible to their first reference."(p169) Images need to be of good resolution, in order to show what is being analysed. Many contents pages do not accurately indicate page numbers. Bibliographies should not be "padded" - they should list only those sources that were actually used. Bibliographies that give generic URLs without the title of the article referred to are not acceptable.

Criterion J: abstract

Most candidates can explain what they have done, but not necessarily how they have done it. The one element missing from some abstracts is a description of the research methods employed - how the study was undertaken. Missing any one of the 3 requirements results in a "0" for this criterion.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

We are looking for essays that employ original strategies for research, or examine unusual questions or qualities.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Essays need to be well focused. Consider, for example, the difference between an essay titled "An investigation into artists that have mental disabilities and their works of art: To what

extent does a mental disability affect the works of artists?" and another more focused essay looking at how temporal epilepsy may have impacted two portraits, two landscapes, and two "astronomical" works by Van Gogh. There are also very successful essays that focus on only one work. It is always a good idea to choose a local topic. This enables access to primary sources, the topic can be original and creative, and the candidate will become more involved and motivated.

Candidates should be encouraged to only choose essay topics for which they can find (or conduct) primary research. It is important for candidates to experience original work first-hand. Among some of the essays that impressed us in this respect were: "How does James Turrell create an impact on the viewer by manipulating space with light?"; "To what extent has the visual appeal of the iPhone affected the design of other mobile devices?"; "Is the Theatre of Performing Arts building (in Manila) an original Filipino design or an eclecticism of international architectural designs?"; "How are power and authority expressed in the Chinese Imperial Palace - the Forbidden City?"

Supervisors need to be very familiar with both the general and Visual Art-specific requirements for the extended essay. Seeing the similar mistakes from candidates in the same school indicates that this is not always the case. It was disappointing to find that a few supervisors did not comment on their students' work. Most advisers provided supervision that was within the recommended number of hours.