

DIGITAL MEDIA AND DESIGN

Paper 9481/01
Portfolio

Key messages

- Centres and candidates are reminded that AS and A level Digital Media and Design is a visual qualification.
- Extended bodies of text are not a satisfactory substitute for an effective use of visual language.
- Higher scoring scripts were distinguished by a critical reflection on progress, a curiosity in investigation and an authentic personal response.

General comments

The examiners noted some examples of excellent and highly accomplished work during the series. Higher scoring scripts were distinguished by a critical reflection on progress, a curiosity in investigation and an authentic personal response. However, among lower scoring scripts, candidates are encouraged to concentrate their research on creative aspects of the theme rather than a narrow concern for the theme itself. For example, where candidates select the theme Emotions, they should consider meaning, expression or exploration. The suggested areas of research include ways in which creative practitioners investigate emotions. The work towards a proposal will not focus on emotions primarily, but on the design of a creative platform such as a documentary, game or animation, for example.

The examiners noted an increase in the use of online graphic design platforms. Whilst the use of such applications can support and simplify the process, candidates' risk being satisfied with results which are not sufficiently relevant, appropriate, or authentic. Centres are reminded that the syllabus describes the realisation of design ideas, through iteration, an understanding of constraints, and critical investigation. Candidates are required to demonstrate their personal creativity, as they realise their intentions.

In some cases, candidates appeared to have been provided with an index for their supporting studies. Whilst this may be thought to be helpful as guidance, it can tend to limit marks where candidates do not venture beyond the advised content. However, among higher scoring scripts, candidates tended to determine the direction of their own enquiry avoiding a specified format. Candidates are not at all discouraged from submitting written notes. However, some scripts placed an over reliance on text, where visual work would have been more effective. Centres and candidates are reminded that AS and A level Digital Media and Design is a visual qualification. Extended bodies of text are not a satisfactory substitute for effective visual language.

Centres were often seen to have encouraged candidates to consider a range of techniques and to develop a visual language which was appropriate for the chosen theme. However, among lower scoring scripts, candidates often provided limited examples of exploratory work, frustrating marks primarily in AO2. Among higher scoring scripts, candidates provided evidence in a variety of formats including, videos, animations, timelapse videos of work in progress, photography, printmaking, 3D design, and typography. Higher scoring scripts often provided clear evidence of editing skills. Among lower scoring scripts this evidence was seen to be limited despite evidence of a personal digital response which attracted higher marks in AO4.

Continuous PDF or PowerPoint are preferred formats. Files and websites stored on remote access servers (e.g., Google Drive), including school servers, and Keynote files are to be avoided. All material should be embedded within the submission. Where candidates submitted work in the form of a documentary, or an animation, some of this work was longer in duration than the guidance provided in the syllabus. This approach may result in marks being frustrated. Centres are required to submit concise video content. This is mentioned in previous reports and centres are reminded to monitor the duration of moving image work. Additionally, the submission of duplicate video and image files is strongly discouraged as this is unnecessary.

and may create potential confusion. Candidates are therefore encouraged to perform a thorough check of all work before the final submission.

Photoshoots claimed to be inspired by specific artists, would have been more successful where candidates demonstrated more than a superficial understanding of the artist's work. Many higher scoring scripts were seen to reference the work of others and to demonstrate the impact on the candidate's creative journey. However, often among lower scoring scripts, it was not always clear why such artists or designers had been selected. Stronger scripts had clear intentions from the start. Many candidates referenced their sources, included a bibliography, and cited works within their submissions. This provides clarity, but also complies with the guidance in the syllabus. However, all candidates are reminded to clearly indicate which is their own work and which is the work of others. Where this is not stated, it may be assumed that images or text are sourced from elsewhere and cannot therefore, be rewarded. Where the work of others is referenced, it is important to establish how this is relevant and how it provides insight into the candidate's intentions.

Comments on the themes

Boundaries

This theme generated a range of responses including itinerary of journeys, the impact of technology on human life, boundaries explored through the language of images, unseen boundaries, and the boundaries of time. Candidates presented work in a variety of formats including animation, photography of weather effects, video, showreels, desk top publishing, graphic design, character design, concept art, location photography, digital illustration, portrait photography, and experiments with light and focus.

Lower scoring scripts tended to rely on images sourced from the internet, indeed images sourced from the first results of a Google search are often seen among such scripts. Such indiscriminate use of images tends to limit marks in AO1 and AO2. Lower scoring scripts often presented work that was disproportionately based on text. Explanations or ideas were exclusively presented as written work in some scripts. This tended to limit marking across the assessment objectives and centres are reminded that this is a visual qualification. Where the potential of a candidate's ideas was seen to be good, marks were often restricted due to limited visual supporting material.

Higher scoring scripts displayed a greater visual eloquence with the understanding of tone as a way to describe boundaries. This was sometimes applied to landscape or the urban environment and described territorial boundaries. Devices, such as fences, paths, bridges or buildings were photographed repeatedly to gain insight and develop the investigation. Some higher scoring scripts presented their final work as an exhibition, displayed within a gallery context. This often demonstrated a mature understanding of the constraints of a project. Some documentary films were seen where the ideas were represented visually. However, candidates are encouraged to carefully consider the duration of talking heads sequences, camera positioning, location, lighting, multiple vantage points, and cut-aways to narratives.

The Digital Classroom

There were not enough responses to this theme to discern a pattern.

Digital Poetry

Scripts were presented which included subjects such as mortality and an exploration of poetry through photography. Candidates responding to this theme typically worked with black and white video, black and white photography, and staged still life colour photography.

Some candidates selected poems or sometimes wrote their own to support this theme. The poetry was often used as a reference to influence the use of lighting, semi-translucent fabric, and silhouettes. Some scripts used a layering of analogue and digital elements to impart a mood or suggest a time of day. These atmospheric elements were used in combination with carefully selected fonts, among both photographic and moving image submissions. Where the proposal was a book or magazine cover, candidates used image patterning, repeats, fades, and mirroring to visually respond to the language and rhythms of the poem. Experiments with colour balance, saturation and hue sought to reflect the mood of the poetry. Some work, however, would be improved through a more developed visual language and understanding of balance, order and layout.

Emotions

This theme attracted responses such as the definitions of emotions, physical, social and psychological expressions of emotions, the capture of emotions through photography, and emotional responses to the built and natural environment. Candidates typically worked with documentary video, graphic design, illustration, digital manipulation, film scripting, 3D modelling, studio photography and studio lighting.

Higher scoring scripts frequently made relevant references to other practitioners and provided some critical insight. Some scripts experimented with icons, symbols or graphic design pictograms. Candidates at this level frequently visualised their work through mock-ups or visualisations in a gallery context. However, more reward would have been gained by the placement of suitably edited photographs with an appropriate application of perspective. Marks were rewarded where candidates undertook photoshoots which revealed visual insight and possibilities for further exploration.

This theme attracted some stop-frame animation, where the exploration of materials and media was rewarded in AO2. Such scripts would however have been improved where work with materials allowed for the refinement of character development. Higher scoring candidates used a variety of digital filters and layering techniques including glitch, smear, liquify, and splice across portraits to represent a range of emotions. Higher scoring scripts which presented film poster outcomes, demonstrated a controlled colour palette, coloured filters, colour inversions, and motifs that were reminiscent of other film formats.

Travel

Scripts typically focused on outdoor locations or competitive sports using action photography and digital manipulation. Candidates often worked towards photographic essays or magazine layout outcomes. Some candidates were seen to have misinterpreted the theme as Vacations, rather than Travel. The syllabus requires candidates to explore the theme creatively, rather than relying exclusively on pre-existing photographs. Lower scoring scripts often referenced travel photographers. Candidates are encouraged to examine any exemplar work more closely and produce personal responses. This will require a more creative approach to the theme, than that seen among lower scoring scripts. Candidates are reminded that there is little or no reward for including biographies of selected photographers unless this directly informs a visual understanding of their work. Candidates are encouraged, where possible, to research and plan location shoots in advance, to be able to capture effective lighting, appropriate weather, and conducive social conditions.

Higher scoring scripts made meaningful cultural references, included a thorough recording of the development of ideas, tested 3D models, selected surface textures, practiced animation or camera moves, and refined and developed storyboards. Such scripts demonstrated an excellent application of the design process as a cycle of feedback and modification. Some candidates produced layouts for navigation apps of a local area or a shopping arcade, using information gathered from basic user flows. This was supported by a good selection of fonts and colour schemes. Higher scoring scripts also included travel maps along with additional icons to denote areas of interest accompanied by video clips. Such work was rewarded for its attention to layout design and to the user experience.

Wellbeing

This theme attracted ideas such as walking as a meditative therapy, exercise and recreation, traditional and contemporary approaches to mental health, dealing with stress, visual communication of emotion, and emotional health in young people. Candidates used a variety of platforms for their proposals such as promotional videos, app designs, or video recorded interviews.

Lower scoring scripts were seen to depend on an overreliance on text, and uncredited images sourced from the internet. Such scripts were not seen to provide evidence of an understanding of the selected image(s) or their effectiveness or visual attributes. The examiners noted the use of questionnaires and some discussion of colour schemes among peers. This data was translated into the design of apps using flow diagrams and images sourced from online maps, gymnasiums, or from recipes. Other candidates were seen to use their own photographs and graphic design skills, to incorporate text and images into simple poster layouts.

Higher scoring scripts achieved their intentions with good levels of skill and visual literacy. The design of wellbeing apps, which included the development of characters and icons was rewarded in AO2 and AO3. Frequently higher scoring candidates related the theme to their own emotional wellbeing, and used devices such as bounding boxes, chalk outlines, and collage to signal fragmentation and restriction. Higher scoring candidates also experimented with text, 2D and 3D animation, as well as particle systems.

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<p>Paper 9481/02 Externally Set Assignment</p>
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Key messages

- The examiners noted some excellent examples of research from among a range of creative arts.
- Many lower scoring scripts appeared to demonstrate a concern for the topic above the study of creative design using visual media.
- Extended bodies of text are not a satisfactory substitute for an effective visual language.

General comments

A varied and creative range of work was seen throughout this component which included games design, one to one interviews, animations and photo essays. The examiners noted some excellent examples of research among a range of creative arts. Higher scoring scripts contained examples of research into specific areas of applied design practice such as web design, typography, or desk top publishing. Higher scoring scripts also displayed a confident and meaningful interpretation of the work of others. These candidates invariably went on to develop mature and accomplished creative outcomes. Higher scoring scripts also displayed a focused investigation where the communication of the candidate's ideas made excellent connections between digital and design elements.

Many lower scoring scripts appeared to demonstrate a concern for the topic above a study of creative design using visual media. Whilst candidates are required to work with their own ideas and reflections, they are reminded that the principal focus of the qualification is the study of digital photography, moving image, and/or mobile and multimedia applications. The focus of the qualification is not on geography, environmental studies, social concerns, or health for example. Therefore, candidates are advised to start with digital media and design concepts as described in the chosen question and consider which is the most appropriate for the candidate's skills and interests. Candidates are advised to concentrate their supporting studies on concepts such as video work, animation, photography, app design or game design for example. The syllabus describes a mark scheme which rewards creative activity in digital media. There is no reward for concern for a cause or specialist interest by itself, however strongly expressed.

The examiners noted an increase in the use of online graphic design platforms. Whilst the use of such applications can support and simplify the process, candidates' risk being satisfied with results which are not sufficiently relevant, appropriate, or authentic. Centres are reminded that the syllabus describes the realisation of design ideas, through iteration, an understanding of constraints and critical investigation. Candidates are required to demonstrate their personal creativity, as they realise their intentions.

Candidates are not discouraged from submitting written notes. However, some scripts placed an over reliance on text, where visual work would have been more effective. Centres and candidates are reminded that AS and A level Digital Media and Design is a visual qualification. Extended bodies of text are not a satisfactory substitute for an effective visual language. Among lower scoring scripts, candidates often provided limited examples of exploratory work, limiting marks primarily in AO2. Among higher scoring scripts, candidates provided evidence in a variety of formats as ideas developed and the work was refined.

Continuous PDF or PowerPoint are preferred formats. Files and websites stored on remote access servers (e.g., Google Drive), including school servers, and Keynote files are to be avoided. All material should be embedded within the submission. Where candidates submitted work in the form of a documentary, or an animation, some of this work was longer in duration than the guidance provided in the syllabus. This approach may result in marks being restricted. Centres are required to submit concise video content. This is mentioned in previous reports and centres are reminded to monitor the duration of moving image work. Additionally, the submission of duplicate video and image files is strongly discouraged as this is unnecessary.



and may create potential confusion. Candidates are therefore encouraged to perform a thorough check of all work before the final submission.

Creative work inspired by specific artists, would have been more successful where candidates demonstrated more than a superficial understanding of the artist's work. Many higher scoring scripts were seen to reference the work of others and demonstrate the impact on the candidate's creative journey. However, often among lower scoring scripts, it was not always clear why such artists or designers had been selected. Stronger scripts had clear intentions from the start. Many candidates referenced their sources, included a bibliography, and cited works within their submissions. This provides clarity, but also complies with the guidance in the syllabus. However, all candidates are reminded to clearly indicate which is their own work and which is the work of others. Where this is not stated, it may be assumed that images or text are sourced from elsewhere and cannot therefore, be rewarded. Where the work of others is referenced, it is important to establish how this is relevant and how it provides insight into the candidate's intentions.

Approaches to the assignments

1 How does water change your world?

Candidates responded to this question with ideas ranging from the ever changing nature of water to the visual characteristics of water, local waterways, a concern for climate change, reflections on the meanings of water, and reactions to flood damage. Candidates developed their assignment through a variety of media including photography, animation, analogue experiments, desktop publishing, digital montages, pattern development, and digital artwork. Some candidates investigated water from below the surface. Other scripts included quotes from artists who have worked with water as their subject. Some candidates reflecting on water pollution, explored this topic by creating a useful body of photographic images from first hand research. This often proved to be a sound foundation for further study. Other scripts used marine creatures as a starting point to develop ideas about pattern and colour.

Most candidates were seen to research the work of photographers, artists or designers as a reference and inspiration for their own work. Higher scoring candidates were able to continue their research and to critically reflect on their progress. However, some candidates did not give sufficient attention to research and exploration and as a result produced limited evidence. In some instances, work in these areas was seen to have been neglected altogether. Candidates are reminded to record relevant insights, develop ideas through investigation, and critically reflect on their work as it progresses. Many scripts explored a variety of media and materials when developing their ideas and concepts. However, some candidates used material from online sources, which was not appropriately attributed. This had the tendency to limit marks in AO1, AO2 and in AO3.

Among lower scoring scripts, candidates included analysis of the careers of animators, photographers, or designers. This is to be discouraged unless it is significantly and demonstrably relevant to their work. More reward would have been attracted by a critical interest in the visual aspects of the work of the selected animators, photographers, or designers. Candidates are also encouraged to develop their work beyond basic storyboards and animations with stick figures. Scripts that exclusively investigated statistical information, tended to adopt a less imaginative approach, with fewer opportunities for the development of visual ideas.

2 Nutmeg.

A number of scripts presented some delightful and unexpected ideas. Many candidates approached this question from an advertising perspective, producing a billboard campaign or a video advertisement. Some attractive app designs were also seen. The examiners noted a broad range of media, material and techniques used in response to this question. These included copy writing, digital manipulation, logo designs, typography, colour and pattern development, location research, storyboarding, photography, and desk top publishing. Candidates often made good use of natural sources for colour, such as berries, dried fruits, or nuts. Domestic environments and household implements were used to good effect especially in video advertisements. Where scripts included visualisations of billboards in place, candidates were often seen to develop an informed understanding of their progress. This was rewarded in AO3. Some animated billboards were seen.

Many scripts researched the functionality, price, current models or available systems. Whilst many scripts designed logos and gave some consideration to typography, this work would have been improved by research into the visual and physical design of existing hubs. Whilst many scripts used existing hub shapes

as starting points, others developed original designs. Where these proved to be consistently effective, this was rewarded in AO2 and AO3.

The examiners noted that lower attaining scripts often had a higher proportion of writing than visual material. Often the visual work was confined to simple logo designs and colour swatches. Among lower scoring scripts there was seen to be limited evidence of research, exploration, or critical reflection. Additionally, such scripts were not seen to establish a reliable connection between the final piece and the supporting studies. This had the tendency to limit marks across the assessment objectives. Where candidates presented material from online sources which were not appropriately attributed, this tended to limit marks in AO1, AO2 and AO3.

Among higher scoring scripts, candidates were seen to investigate a variety of appropriate media, demonstrating the range of their explorations and critical approach. Most higher scoring scripts were seen to develop an app. Such scripts frequently demonstrated the creative use of visual language and the professional styling used by the advertisers of similar products.

3 Sanctuary.

Candidates developed a range of ideas such as endangered species, raising awareness, advertising for zoos, animal care, and animal environments. A range of media was used among scripts responding to this question. This included digital illustration, games design, desk top publishing, video recorded interviews, animations, app design, poster design, and digital information boards. However, some lower scoring scripts consisted almost entirely of text. These were often accompanied by a single original image. Whilst the development and communication of ideas is a significant aspect of the qualification, candidates are reminded that AS and A level Digital Media and Design is a visual qualification. Therefore, ideas presented almost wholly as text will struggle to access the full range of marks available. Other scripts were seen to have developed a theme which was not provided in the question paper.

Lower scoring candidates often relied on source material such as videos about animal sanctuaries, or games about endangered species. Screen shots were frequently used to reference such material. However, candidates should not include screen shots of online tutorials in the use of image manipulation or animation software. Centres are reminded that marks are awarded for the development of ideas and visual material relating to the theme.

Some candidates visited animal sanctuaries and took photos and videos of the animals, the physical environment, and the perimeter area. This often provided valuable source material for developing work using image manipulation software. Candidates producing long videos, are encouraged to reflect on their work before submission to ensure clarity and precision of communication. Candidates and centres are reminded that the development of characters, environments, modelling and rendering, animation, and lighting are rewarded, rather than the duration of the recording. Indeed, overly long work may obscure content and the communication of meaning.

Generally, candidates interpreted the question as a place of refuge or retreat. However, some scripts which developed a game recognised the hunting connotations of the question. Among higher scoring scripts candidates recognised the limitations of their own animal photography through peer review, teacher feedback, or critical reflection. Such candidates were seen to have worked within these constraints creatively, for example, by using fencing, lettering, signage, or animal motifs, to produce patterns, or colour studies. Some scripts which included a disruptive approach to the physical materials used, were inspired by artists such as Francis Bacon, Nigel Henderson, James Gill, or Christophe Relander.



DIGITAL MEDIA AND DESIGN

<p>Paper 9481/03 Personal Investigation</p>

General comments

The examiners noted some excellent scripts which were highly accomplished and mature. The aim of the Personal Investigation 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 also designed to be a substantial piece of research, and work representing a broad range of ideas was seen. Candidates worked with themes including the notion of a fulfilled and healthy life, social dynamics, women's rights, pollution, racism, the unconscious, architectural design, and the unique perspective of teenagers.

Centres typically followed the administrative requirements of the examination window. Most work was submitted in an appropriate format and clearly presented. Centres will wish to continue this good practice. Centres are required to avoid submitting additional copies of video material or images which are not aligned to the development of candidate work or the final outcome. Centres are required to avoid submitting individual items of work in different formats. Centres are also required to avoid submitting a PowerPoint presentation followed by individual pages from the presentation, submitted separately. Candidates submitted scripts representing work from each of the areas of study.

Approaches to the Personal Investigation

Final outcome

In this component candidates identify a theme or topic that is informed by an aspect of digital media and design within their areas of study. The component requires candidates to engage in a sustained period of study.

Candidates were seen to use a range of approaches as they pursued their investigations. These included street photography, interviews, photomontage, documentary photography, and graphic design. Some lower scoring scripts contained good quality photographs in the final outcome. This work was rewarded in AO4. However, these scripts typically saw marks restricted in other AOs where evidence of recording insights, exploring materials, and developing ideas was seen to be limited. Where scripts were accompanied by a spoken commentary, this was a helpful indication of the candidate's own understanding of their investigation. However, more marks would have been attracted where candidates had made analytical rather than descriptive comments.

There was evidence of candidates exploring new ways to present their final outcomes when using mock-ups, in the form of original ideas for digital displays. This creativity boosted attainment in AO4. However, attainment dipped when there was reliance on similar templates used in paper 01 and 02 (for example exhibitions or bus shelters).

Some submissions in the confident band engaged in a broad range of study (e.g.: photography, videography, 2d and 3d design). These scripts were lively and demonstrated a range of interest and potential in AO2. With critical understanding, and well managed feedback, the candidate can demonstrate a broad range of ability. Time management and focus of intent is required for the candidate to develop a compact and coherent, focused investigation of the sort required to attain marks in the top band.

In this paper some lower scoring candidates produced video documentary which would have benefited from closer research and deconstruction of the techniques used in effective, emotionally engaging documentary films. Acknowledgement and utilisation of these techniques (multiple cameras, intercutting, lighting setups, movement, editing) allowed others to attain higher marks by crafting compelling stories.

Many mid to high scoring candidates demonstrated creativity and dedication to their theme throughout the design process. Where the application of art and design elements were focused on the design of apps, mid scoring candidates were seen to compare not only a range of market leader application software, but also to acknowledge the influence of designers. When developing user interface design and layouts, stronger candidates demonstrated a greater understanding and fluency through the influence of contemporary designers sourced through Instagram Industry magazines.

Where candidates posed direct questions to elicit feedback on their designs, this generated constructive criticism. Thus, the strongest ideas could be finessed and acquire consistency in terms of design and colour, before being utilised in the final design layout boards, or video roll-out of the app in use.

The highest scoring candidates' boards were neat, well organised, and professional. They showed rich visual appeal, with written analysis of the influence, process, and decisions that influenced their final outcome.

Originality and visual impact in the mock-up display of the UI in the final presentation was also rewarded in A04.

Among higher scoring scripts, some candidates effectively deployed investigative photography. Some scripts made expressive use of their exploration of media and materials. These included physical and digital disruptions such as double printing, double exposure, projected images, and burning and tearing images. Higher scoring scripts also contained dramatic video and some compelling experiments with colour. Higher scoring video work contained examples of very well considered and observed performances. This approach was complimented by the study of the work of others. Frequently, the artists who had been chosen to look at more closely were appropriate to the direction of the investigation and provided insight into other creative directions. Higher scoring scripts also provided evidence that ideas had been appropriately tested and feedback from appropriate sources had been sought.

The highest scoring scripts contained material which was both visually articulate and powerfully expressive of ideas. Higher scoring scripts typically demonstrated a focused and creative approach.

Written element

Among higher scoring scripts, candidates committed to a focused and sustained investigation. Some lower scoring scripts often contained written material which was largely attributed source material. Additionally, lower scoring scripts, were frequently seen to spend time researching information or data surrounding their chosen topic or theme. This is not required by this component. Candidates and centres are reminded that they should primarily be concerned with an aspect of digital media and design, to communicate an idea or message visually. For example, whilst candidates may feel strongly about a particular area of interest, they are reminded that the best campaigns have been those with a strong command of design and media. More marks would have been attracted where the written analysis provided a commentary on the candidate's creative process and some insight into the development of the work.

Centres are reminded that 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 as required by the syllabus. Without visual critical analysis, marks can be limited in each of the assessment objectives. However, some higher scoring scripts contained sophisticated examinations of digital media and design. This work was typically characterised by rich and engaging text.