



## External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	<b>Art and Design</b>
Level	<b>Standard Grade</b>

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

# Comments on candidate performance

## General comments

In **Critical Activity**, the overall response by candidates was very good. In general, scripts were very well presented and easily legible, with most demonstrating a sound command of art and design terminology. Several markers commented that the quality at Credit level was of a lower standard when compared with last year and that more General grade 4s were awarded, but the majority commented that the high standard of Critical Activity was being maintained.

In the best submissions, the writing was relevant and focused with a clear purpose. Teachers have a firm grasp of the essay requirements, and used a variety of effective structures for its delivery in carefully produced guidelines and open-ended questionnaires. In general, most candidates responded well to their chosen theme, showing sound background knowledge of the topic while offering a wide range of opinions and judgements. There were, however, a larger number of General grade 3s awarded for quite well written but highly descriptive essays that showed scant attention to a personal response. At times, the volume of historical or factual information was greater than the actual analysis of the design item or painting under investigation.

Markers noted that the most widespread and effective essay format adopted by centres consisted of a study of two designers/artists, which was structured around an introduction containing pertinent factual or historical information. This was followed by an analysis of between two or four design items/paintings, concluding in an in-depth comparison of the artists'/designers' styles and working methods. The best examples were focused around a specific theme or topic and candidates kept the biographical and historical information to a minimum. Markers reported that this type of information works best when it informs the personal response as it is the candidates' personal opinions and judgements that provide the most reliable indicator of their knowledge and understanding. Essays where candidates showed a genuine personal interest in the content were the most successful.

Overall, candidates dealt effectively with clearly contrasting Design and Expressive context. However, Expressive submissions still tend to achieve slightly higher grades; some markers commented that Expressive submissions were stronger and particularly effective when candidates were involved in a gallery visit, which meant that they could fully engage with the paintings or sculptures.

As in previous years, some Design submissions failed to achieve good grades because they were heavily composed of an analysis of a design item in terms of its visual elements. This needs to be discouraged. A good, reliable design submission need to take account of design criteria, such as fitness for purpose, materials, technologies, target group, ergonomics, cost, manufacturing processes, construction methods, style and aesthetics. It is not necessary to labour the visual elements, as this is the function of Expressive context. When design criteria are limited in favour of an analysis of the visual elements, it is difficult for markers to award grades beyond General 4.

Where the Design submission does not consist of any design issues, it is awarded a grade 7 because the candidate has failed to meet the basic criteria of this element of the course. This type of problem generally happened on a centre basis, especially when candidates were dealing with masks, posters, and wallpaper design, as there was a tendency to describe these items using Expressive criteria only.

Markers observed an ever-increasing and refreshing new range of subject matter under investigation, particularly in Design submissions, where there are innumerable choices. It is helpful to markers if those essays are illustrated, particularly when the design item is quite obscure. The subject matter was endless but graphic design, architecture, jewellery and textiles/fashion/hats, and poster design were heavily favoured. The most popular designers were Alphonse Mucha, Cassandre, Antoni Gaudi, Frank Gehry, Toulouse Lautrec, Peter Chang, Rene Lalique, Philippe Starck, Philip Treacy, Coco Chanel, Vivienne Westwood and Timorous Beasties.

The most popular themes selected for Expressive Activity were figure composition, portrait and landscape — the Colourists, the Impressionists, Pablo Picasso, Vincent Van Gogh, Peter Howson, Edward Hopper and Frida Kahlo being the key artists under discussion. It was refreshing to see a growing number of centres widening their areas of study to include contemporary Scottish artists and designers.

Most candidates conformed to the suggested 1,500-word limit, and it is generally accepted as the norm. However, some candidates continued to produce unnecessarily overlong submissions to no effect. The word limit has had the advantage of reducing the amount of irrelevant padding included in such submissions, creating responses that are more considered and purposeful.

In **Expressive Activity**, the five-hour practical examination continues to bring out the best in the candidates. It reflects the high standards and thorough preparation they are able to achieve under their own steam. Markers were impressed with the quality of work overall, and observed some very impressive pieces; they commented that the stimulus titles provided by SQA this year were addressed effectively, and that candidates appeared to have enjoyed and considered the titles thoughtfully.

It was apparent that many centres had put a great deal of thought into the preparation of resources to provide opportunities for their candidates to thoroughly develop the titles, themes and materials over time. By far the most popular choice was 'Breakfast', which elicited exclusively still life paintings of varying standards. Unfortunately, when the emphasis was placed on a cereal packet within the arrangement, it often posed difficulties for some candidates, as the colours were too garish and the graphics too flat; candidates also had problems making them appear three-dimensional. Where candidates and teachers had taken time with the composition and lighting of the objects, accounting for unusual viewpoints or cropped compositions with subtle tonal changes, excellent results were produced.

'Shopping Spree' was the second most popular choice for still life. However, the ambiguous nature of the title allowed some centres to use it as a 'catch all' title for groups of unrelated objects. These were usually difficult still lifes, and even the most able candidates were often disadvantaged by this approach.

'Shoreline', 'A Walk in the Park', and 'Painting the Seasons' lent themselves particularly well to landscape, as well as still life and portrait to a lesser extent. Markers commented favourably that there was a rise in landscape painting this year and that its standard was very good, the use of paint in particular allowed expressive qualities to be developed. 'All Dressed Up' was the obvious choice for portrait and allowed for some excellent interpretations, with fancy dress and make up involved in a creative manner. Markers reported some striking portrait work in chalk pastel and acrylic paint; dramatic lighting often assisted candidates in creating emotion and impact in their work.

Candidates performed well in the genres of still life and portrait, and it appears that most centres concentrated on these areas. The most popular selection of media included paint, oil pastel and pencil, and they were generally handled with confidence.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

In **Critical Activity**, the best submissions were centred on a specific theme, topic or Movement, which provided opportunities for considered and relevant comparisons. Some freedom of choice in selecting artists and designers produced the most individual and personal results. Where there was a clear focus or themed approach such as a study of, for example, paintings entitled '*War and Peace*', '*Images of Children*' or '*People at Work*'; candidates produced purposeful, individual and coherent submissions.

Where candidates had actually experienced paintings and sculptures at first hand during a gallery visit, their responses were stronger and more engaging. Choosing an image with a strong emotional, dramatic or symbolic content worked best for Expressive essays.

The topics that were most successful in Design, were ones where candidates were able to test or experience the design items. For example, in architecture and product design they were able to effectively demonstrate their ability to deal with three-dimensions, aesthetics and function in a knowledgeable and participative manner. Additionally, when candidates were allowed to choose their own design items or paintings to analyse, their essays were enjoyable to read, informative and showed personal enthusiasm.

On the whole, markers commented on the high standard of presentation. The vast majority of submissions were word-processed and contained coloured illustrations. These were useful in identifying lesser-known works. However, some markers were disappointed in the quality of presentation they encountered and remarked on a rising number of poor and illegible hand-written essays.

In **Expressive Activity**, candidates performed well when they had been thoroughly prepared for the examination and had been given opportunities to make personal choices with regard to the titles and media. Most of the best work was in the form of still life and portraiture, using first hand sources. In these examples, good teaching practice was evident and candidates showed a firm understanding of the visual elements. While using first hand sources is to be encouraged, it is not always possible and many candidates derive imagery from photographs. In such instances, it is desirable that candidates at least have some input in the setting up or production of the photograph.

Markers commented on the mature standard of some portraiture, where sensitivity of drawing and skill in the handling of media was apparent. In still life there was excellent use of composition, demonstrating a solid understanding of viewpoint, balance and depth. Markers were also impressed by those candidates and centres who produced work using media that could be perceived as complex in a five hour examination, such as batik, etchings, clay and lino cuts.

This year, it was widely recognised that the vast majority of centres had very successfully interpreted the stimulus titles; candidates generated an interesting mixture and variety of responses across all levels. Unfortunately, however, there are still some centres that disregard the titles.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

In **Critical Activity**, exceeding the word limit of 1,500 words is a growing problem, and some centres are guilty of encouraging this practice year after year in the mistaken belief that their candidates will achieve better grades. Often, these overlong submissions were exceptionally repetitive and failed to inform the marker any better of the candidates' knowledge or understanding of the topic.

Markers continue to register their concerns that in some submissions, the subject under investigation had no fundamental theme or link. For example, candidates had chosen to analyse a landscape painting with a portrait, or a chair with a light, making any effective comparison impossible. It is desirable for candidates to focus their essay around a theme, topic or Movement, and to avoid comparing unrelated items with one another.

Problems continue to exist in the topics of textile and wallpaper design. Markers reported that these submissions were highly descriptive with limited reference made to relevant design issues; at worst, the textiles or wallpapers were viewed as paintings. In the poorest examples, it was an analysis of the visual elements alone that comprised the main body of the essay. Candidates need to submit two clearly contrasting items, one Expressive and one Design. In each submission the content must be distinctly different, otherwise the candidate is awarded a grade 7.

Other areas of design demonstrating a poor understanding of design criteria were poster design, illustration, fashion design, public art and mask design. Frequently, when analysing fashion, candidates simply described the item and failed to consider design criteria pertinent to the topic, such as the cut and silhouette of the garment, fabrics, techniques, style, target market, cost and function.

When candidates had chosen to investigate cars or motorbikes, they regularly failed to analyse the product in a meaningful manner, as they were too focused on enthusiastically listing the detailed specification of the product.

It was obvious that some candidates had downloaded biographical information from the Internet, or had lifted paragraphs directly from books or teachers' notes, making no attempt to interpret or edit it in any way. This practice had a detrimental effect on the grades awarded and should be avoided at all costs.

While it is recognised that teachers need to direct the teaching of Critical Activity through questionnaires or work sheets, it is noted with some concern that some centres had used a very restrictive formula, providing over-directed questionnaires that limited the scope of candidates' responses. This has the effect of preventing candidates from gaining a grade beyond General 3.

Markers also highlighted the repetitive nature of several whole-centre submissions due to the limited availability of resources. Consequently, it was difficult to distinguish one candidate's work from another, with the result that the pattern of grades awarded did not go beyond general level. Markers disliked submissions where every candidate used the same artists' and designers' works. The scope was too narrow, there was no evidence of personal choice, and it stifled the true voice of the child.

In **Expressive Activity**, candidates encountered difficulties when faced with very poor and uninspiring groups of objects from which to work. Poor still life groupings were a strong factor in the production of low General and Foundation awards. There was evidence of many candidates working from one still life group or a limited number of photographs. Their work looked similar or identical in subject matter, style and composition. This approach did not sufficiently challenge candidates to achieve their true potential and hampered even the most able student. Markers found difficulties in marking similar compositions repeated by 20 or 30 candidates with little variation in approach between them.

Markers commented on the inappropriate scale of paper used by some candidates. Some clearly found difficulty in completing their work within five hours due in part to the A2 scale being too large for their ability, or in some cases A4 being too limiting.

Markers also highlighted an increasing number of centres whose candidates' work was not cropped or mounted. While the quality of the presentation is not relevant in the marking process, cropping and mounting work simply onto A2 paper can make a big difference to the impact of the submission. Candidates deserve to have their work presented in a professional format.

Several markers reported for the first time that the materials and paper used by some centres was of very poor quality.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **Critical Activity:**

- ◆ Ensure that candidates adhere to the advisory 1,500 word limit for both submissions.
- ◆ Ensure that submissions are of a sufficient length to enable candidates to demonstrate their full knowledge and understanding of a topic within the 1,500 word limit. Very brief submissions lack sufficient depth for markers to judge a candidate's true ability, especially at Credit level.
- ◆ Ensure that Critical Activity deals with contexts that are clearly and distinctly Expressive and Design.

- ◆ Avoid all candidates in a centre analysing the same artists or designers' work. Allow candidates to have some choice in their topics to ensure a personal and individual response.
- ◆ Discourage over-emphasis of historical and factual information at the expense of personal opinions and evaluative comments.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to structure their submissions on a theme, topic or a Movement.
- ◆ Be aware of the need for bibliographies that includes all sources used.
- ◆ Encourage the use of spell check in word-processed submissions.
- ◆ Ensure that information collated from Internet sites is interpreted into candidates' own words and not quoted directly as their own.
- ◆ Avoid 'text speak'.

### **Expressive Activity**

- ◆ Determine the stimulus titles early and prepare ahead of the examination.
- ◆ Use the titles provided to generate the outcome. It is clear that some centres supply the same stimulus year after year regardless of the titles, and they turn out the same images, which markers recognise. This is clearly not the fault of the candidates and should be avoided.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to work from first hand sources wherever possible.
- ◆ Avoid mechanical gridding up of drawing from photographs; this is not good practice and should be discouraged.
- ◆ Enable candidates to make some individual choice with regard to theme, titles, media and techniques from which to make a genuinely personal response.
- ◆ Plan and prepare for the examination, including how to crop and mount work simply.
- ◆ Discourage the copying of photographs of celebrities when producing portraits.
- ◆ Ensure candidates work at a scale that is appropriate to their ability.
- ◆ Check that both the candidate and invigilator initial any clay work before it is fired to confirm that it was produced on the day of the examination.
- ◆ It is advisable that all work in three dimensions is photographed from a variety of angles in case the pieces are damaged during transit.

# Statistical information: update on Courses

## Standard Grade

Number of resulted entries in 2010	12,082
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	11,293
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## Statistical information: performance of candidates

### Distribution of overall awards

Grade 1	11.9%
Grade 2	36.0%
Grade 3	35.4%
Grade 4	13.1%
Grade 5	2.0%
Grade 6	0.1%
Grade 7	0.0%
No award	1.5%

### Grade boundaries for each assessable element in the subject included in the report

Assess-able Element	Credit Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		General Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		Found-ation Max Mark	Grade Boundaries	
		1	2		3	4		5	6
	Directly Graded								