



A level Art and Design

COURSE PLANNER

Guidance on planning your course

GCE Art and Design course planner

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The successful design of any course structure depends on a full understanding of the specification requirements and what criteria the candidates are going to have to fulfil to gain recognition of their achievements.

A unique aspect of our specification is an emphasis on personal candidate development and involvement. We do this by focusing a quarter of the course on ideas and their development. These ideas, which are all the candidates' own, fuel their creative journeys, and drive their personal ambitions and interests.

The simplest way to look at the demands of the specification is to break it down into its basic elements. For Edexcel this is easy, as the demands of the qualification are very straightforward. For each of the two components candidates normally respond to themes, or assignment/project titles, for example, a generic theme such as "Structures". Candidates will then narrow this theme down, to their personal particular area of interest. This interest could follow any path, such as the following examples human anatomy, mechanical structures, organic landscape or man-made landscape.

The course is normally run over two years, typically years 12 and 13 in UK Centres, but this is not prescriptive, and students of any age can take the qualification. Some complete it in a single year depending on the individual circumstances of each Centre.

The theme for Component 2 is set by the examination board and is available on 1 February of the second year of the course. The candidates then have until about mid-May to develop this theme and produce an outcome in response to it. Candidates sitting the course in a single year will take the February theme for that year.

Component 1's theme is set by the Centre. Many Centres use one of the old exam paper themes, as they contain many resources and starting points to inspire and focus candidates. Component 1 can be built from one or several themes, depending on each Centre's course structure and resources.

Centres must use the specification as a scaffolding for their course design. It is necessary to encourage candidates to go on journeys of creative exploration and produce responses that realise their own personal intent. Naturally, candidates will eventually be assessed to determine their levels of success and achievement. In light of this, the assessment criteria provide a useful set of targets for the candidates to strive to achieve.

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So, a good course will be designed to enable the candidates to develop the skills necessary to achieve these goals and fulfil the assessment criteria. Therefore, the assessment criteria somewhat determines the structure.

For Edexcel these targets are defined as four Assessment Objectives, each one describing attributes we feel a committed Art and Design candidate should possess.

Candidates demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and performance abilities through scoring on an Assessment Grid. This scoring is established by a set of criteria at different levels from 1 to 6. 1 represents the minimum requirements to gain an award, 6 represents candidates that have gone beyond the expectations of this award.

As can be seen the Assessment Objectives actually play a large part in determining the course structure. Here is an explanation why:

There are 4 Assessment Objectives, AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4.

Most important is that they all generate equal marks. Each one represents 25% of the qualification and the total mark.

This means that effective courses teach the candidates how to address each one equally in their submissions. So let us look at these in turn and what they are actually looking for.

Assessment Objective 1

“Develop ideas through sustained and focused investigations informed by contextual and other sources, demonstrating analytical and critical thinking.”

The key aspect of this is “developing ideas” Candidates must have an idea they want to explore and then develop that idea. The idea may or may not be complex. It is not the complexity of the idea that accrues marks, it is the informed and analytical development of the idea that does. Cezanne’s idea that he wanted to capture the very presence of a bowl of fruit. The smell, texture and luscious qualities of the fruit provided a simple starting point for a sustained and focused investigation that resulted in an astounding series of still life studies. In contrast, Ai Weiwei’s focus on corruption in the building industry resulted in some incredible installations such as “Snake Ceiling”. There is no prescribed format for the idea, it must simply be personal to the candidate and have enough potential to provide them with the opportunity to go on a sustained creative journey.

Once the idea development starts, analytical and critical understanding form an essential element of it. A good idea makes it easy for the candidates to focus their enthusiasm on exploring its potential; helping fuel their idea development, they will be encouraged to look at other artists who have explored similar themes. Their analysis of their chosen artists’ work will help them with knowing how and when to use techniques and materials to realise their own creative intent.

Assessment Objective 2

“Explore and select appropriate resources, media, materials, techniques and processes, reviewing and refining ideas as work develops.”

At the beginning of courses, Centres will want to give their candidates a broad experience, in various techniques, with a wide range of materials. These will be in the disciplines that are relevant to their chosen ‘Title’ This is especially true for candidates embarking on a new ‘Title’ they have not encountered before; someone new to Textiles or Photography for example. Acquiring a generic background knowledge of the materials and techniques available to them, would therefore be essential at the start of the course. Once the candidate has embarked on a personal theme/idea, however, the skills and materials they are exploring should be relevant and enable them to realise their aims for that particular project.

The key words in the assessment objective being: select, appropriate, review and refine.

This obviously requires candidates to analyse their experiments and comment upon their success, or not, and how they are going to move forward to achieve a more creative outcome, if this is possible. If not, what other avenues are they going to try?

Appropriate resources here, might include looking at how other artists have tackled similar problems, what materials they used and how successful they were.

Assessment Objective 3

“Record Ideas, observations and insights relevant to intentions reflecting critically on work and progress”

This assessment objective is about research and the body of reference material the candidate builds to enable them to progress with their creative journey. Drawings, paintings, prints, photographs, contextual research are just some of the ways of collecting this reference material. The key aspect of this research is its quality. Only good quality reference material will result in successful analysis and outcomes. To use a sketch or drawing successfully the observation has to be selective and considered. Likewise, a documentary painting needs to reflect accurate colours, a photograph sharp focus and definition, a contextual reference needs to be true. This is where the candidates’ skills come into play. Can they draw and paint accurately? Can they focus a camera and control exposure? Can they do comprehensive research on artists and document it accurately? It is these skills that will give them a faithful body of evidence to work from to produce their own creative outcomes. Also, part of this objective assesses their ability to analyse the information they are gathering, from whatever source. Are they able to comment personally and critically about its content? Most important is whether the information is relevant to their focus, as opposed to simply a random collection of material gathered to bulk out a portfolio and tick an irrelevant “quantity” box.

Assessment Objective 4

“Present a personal and meaningful response that realises intentions and, where appropriate, makes connections between visual and other elements.”

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This objective targets the various outcomes and conclusions to the single or several creative journeys the candidate may make during the course. For component 2, logically it would be the final piece completed under exam conditions, but it is not solely restricted to this, as even in the period of sustained focus candidates may include outcomes in their preparatory studies. For Component 1 there may be several journeys with multiple outcomes over the two-year period. In any case, there will always be two, as the written element demands a separate outcome to the practical work. It is the written element that is intended to consolidate and marry the connections to the “other elements” described in the heading. These are primarily contextual references drawn from the work of other artists/practitioners.

Many centres devote the early part of the course to focus on developing the relevant skills needed for the candidates to be able to create and realise their ideas. These exercises may or may not be linked to a theme, however, at some point all of them will orientate towards a theme. This is usually in the second term of the academic year. This is to enable the candidate to fulfil the demands of each of the Assessment Objectives. Focussing on skills alone would only partially address AO2, AO3 and AO4.

So now let us look at some suggestions for a successful course structure.

First Year (Year 12 in most Centres)

| Term | AO's | Possible Structure (not prescriptive, guide only) |
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| Autumn Term 1st Half | AO2 AO3 | <p>Introduction to course and explanation of specification requirements and assessment criteria. Find out what previous experience your cohort has (have they done GCSE Art and Design? Which exam board? etc). A full cohort of candidates that have completed GCSE art with Pearson, for example, will already be familiar with the type of demands of this specification. Those with no prior experience of art (such as photography or textile candidates new to the discipline) will require greater focus on basic skills and exercises.</p> <p>A focus on exploring skill levels of candidates, group exercises to build these skills and develop candidates' control over the formal elements of their chosen Title. Broaden candidates experience of different media and techniques specific to their chosen Title. For Fine Art candidates, these may be observational drawing and painting exercises and an introduction to new techniques, such as printing, etc. For Photography it may be dark room use, camera functions, digital or other recording methods such as photograms/video etc. Look at other practitioners especially professional ones in their chosen Titles. Start to evaluate other artists' works using critical evaluation pro-forma's, as guides to asking the right questions.</p> |
| Half term | AO3 | Non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. |
| Autumn Term 2nd Half | AO2 AO3 | Carry on experimenting and building skills within group or individual exercises. Start to explain more complex methods of analysis of the experiments and develop personal and group critical discussions. Carry on with exploring the work of others and their methods and techniques. Introduce the concept of working to a theme, perhaps look at an old exam paper and theme they have explored. Select a group theme to explore or let the candidates choose a personal one. |
| Christmas Holiday | AO3 | Non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. Also, an opportunity to visit a local gallery or exhibition. Remind them they will be developing their chosen theme next term, so this is an opportunity to find things they could not access in the Centre. These might be magazine cuttings or twisted bits of driftwood from beach outings/walks. Holiday work should be optional and fun, not really tasks. |
| Spring Term 1st Half | AO1 AO2 AO3 AO4 | Review the responses candidates have produced to their themes the previous term and start to explore Assessment Objective 1 in depth. Many candidates struggle to understand the concept of developing an idea. Many think it's experimenting with lots of different media or doing their own version of another artist's idea. Developing an idea needs to be taught in the same way as developing skills. This is an ideal time to do this, as the candidates will be in the right place to look at the theme they have been working on, and see how this can be driven forward along pathways that are personal and meaningful to them as |

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| | | individuals. Critical analysis is invaluable here, as it always raises the question of where can I go now and what can I do next? This aspect also helps feed their ongoing experimentation and skill development. Candidates start to use the Performance Calculators to evaluate their work. It is important to use the Performance Calculators, not the Assessment Grids, as the language used in the Performance Calculators is more pertinent, candidate friendly and meaningful. These start to be used regularly as teaching aids. |
| Half Term | AO3 | Another non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. |
| Spring Term 2nd Half | AO1 AO2 AO3 AO4 | Candidates will be working at different speeds, some will have finished their responses to the theme/theme's, others will want to carry on. Now is a good time to look at sketchbook /supporting studies and explore the effectiveness of good annotation that veers away from description towards analysis and evaluation. Look at examples from previous candidates or the published exemplars on Pearson's website. If the Centre wants, it can conclude the thematic assignment with a formal and controlled 'mock examination' to give the candidates an opportunity to experience this. The aim is to produce a final outcome under examination conditions and give them a solid block of uninterrupted time to work on a single piece. This block of time can be any length but is usually 8-15 hours depending on the flexibility of the Centre's timetable. Many Centres leave this mock until November or December as a conclusion to the second project. This again will depend upon the cohort's previous experience, whether they are ready or not and the timetable structure of the whole Centre. This is an opportunity to switch to a new theme, again depending on the progress of the whole cohort. If a new theme (second assignment) is introduced before the Easter break, it gives the candidates an ideal opportunity to collect fresh research and inspiration over the break in new environments, away from the Centre. This is especially true if the candidates are going away somewhere on a holiday. Many Centres, as mentioned before, carry on with the existing theme/themes for the whole year and conclude it with a mock in the second half of the Autumn term. This often varies depending upon the prior experience of the cohort. Some Titles such as Photography and Three-Dimensional Design require candidates to spend longer acquiring skills and control over the formal elements appropriate to their discipline. These Centres often run with a single theme over the entire year. |
| Easter Holiday | AO3 | Some Centres use this break to organise gallery trips/visits. Again, it is a non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. Also, an opportunity to take in local gallery or exhibition visits. Remind them they will be developing their chosen theme next term so this is an opportunity to find things they could not access in the Centre. These might be magazine cuttings or twisted bits of driftwood from beach outings/walks. Holiday work should be optional and fun, not really tasks. |
| Summer Term 1st Half | AO1 AO2 | Start the second theme, or carry on with the existing one they have been working on for the previous terms. Second themes might be inspired again by old examination papers, or some candidates will already |

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| | A03 A04 | have selected an avenue of interest they want to pursue. New contextual sources might be introduced at this point, and again, emphasis place upon the difference between mimicry and pastiche and using the sources for technical assistance or inspiration. Further experimentation and refinement with media should be encouraged and regular evaluation and analysis. Weather and day-length can be exploited in certain Titles such as Photography to expand the candidates' resources outside of the Centre. This is important for candidates working on themes relating to landscape. |
| Half term | A03 | Non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. |
| Summer Term 2nd Half | A01 A02 A03 A04 | Candidates carry on building their portfolios, experimenting, collecting resources, pushing their individual themes forward and developing their ideas in response to their chosen themes. Candidates still on their original themes from the Autumn term may want to start a new one before the summer holidays so they can acquire fresh resources. Those that have already embarked on a new theme will want to carry it on over the summer and into the Autumn Term. All candidates, at this point, should now be looking at the written element and the examples from the website; as the summer holidays provide an ideal opportunity to gather resources for this, by visiting galleries, collecting magazine articles, reading books or searching online. The nature and the purpose of the written element (The Personal Study) should be investigated in detail. Candidates should leave for the summer confident in their analytical and critical abilities, so they can collect resources for it whenever the opportunity presents itself. Those candidates starting a new theme should start to think about their personal focus and begin to explore contextual resources for their written element. Many candidates will not firm up their focus for the Personal Study until the autumn term, but they should be starting to form some sort of approach based on their interests and journeys so far. |
| Summer Holiday | A03 | Excellent opportunity to build resources from new environments and situations. Non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. |

Second Year (Year 13 in most Centres)

| Term | AO's | Possible Structure (not prescriptive, guide only) |
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| Autumn Term 1st Half | AO1 AO2 AO3 AO4 | Review of progress on existing themes, or introduction of new theme. At this point candidates should be choosing their own theme, based on their own interests. Again, this can come from old examination papers and the starting points contained within them, or it can be an original focus chosen by the candidate. The only importance at this stage is that the theme/starting point should have enough potential to allow the student to develop a full assignment that addresses all the Assessment Objectives. This is another good point for candidates to evaluate their submissions using the Performance Calculators, especially if they are part way through an assignment. It gives them a chance to identify any weaknesses and then address them. There is still time for candidates to expand their knowledge of other mediums and techniques. Part way through this term candidates who have started new themes must decide upon a personal focus for their Personal Study. Those who are continuing with existing themes will already have their personal focus for the written study. Many Centres like to have the Personal Study completed by the half term break. Candidates who have started a new theme in this academic year, often leave the written element until the end of the Autumn Term; however, this leaves little time for reviewing and refining, as the externally set assignment is released in February and is usually started immediately. |
| Half term | AO3 | Non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. |
| Autumn Term 2nd Half | AO1 AO2 AO3 AO4 | Conclusion of thematic assignments and Personal Study. Candidates will progress with their themes, there will usually be less experimentation and acquisition of new techniques; rather more focus will be placed on exploiting their existing skills, reviewing and refining work and plugging any gaps that might be evident in their coursework. These will be found by judicious review of their work using the Performance Calculators. Of course, if they are light on experimentation and exploration in AO2, this will have to be addressed, but it is not usual at this point. Here, again, is an opportunity for the candidates to try their hand at working under examination conditions, if this is a better time for the Centre to organise a mock examination, as many will be reaching a natural conclusion to their individual creative journeys. Many students at this point will appreciate the uninterrupted time to produce a final outcome to their last thematic assignment. |
| Christmas Holiday | AO3 | Non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. Also, an opportunity to take in local gallery or exhibition visits. Remind them they will be developing their chosen theme next term so this is an opportunity to find things they could not access in the Centre. These might be magazine cuttings or twisted bits of driftwood from beach outings/walks. Holiday work should optional and fun, not really onerous tasks. |

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| Spring Term 1st Half | AO1 AO2 AO3 AO4 | <p>The Externally Set Assignment (Component 2) is released on 1 February. During this time, candidates will carry on refining, evaluating and enhancing their Component 1 coursework elements including the Personal Study. Some Centres again use this natural break point to hold their mock examination using it to finally conclude Component 1. They should aim to have Component 1 fully complete before embarking on Component 2, as overlaps can get very messy and seriously impinge on the short time allocated to Component 2.</p> |
| Half Term | AO3 | <p>Another non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. This is often an important break for candidates as they are free to start collecting and reaching for the exam theme. Resources are often limited in Centres so for Titles, such as Photography, this provides an excellent opportunity for candidates to get fresh material.</p> |
| Spring Term 2nd Half | AO1 AO2 AO3 AO4 | <p>Candidates will now be fully immersed in the sustained focus, discussing and exploring ways to produce their own personal responses to the theme. Candidates who are indecisive or floundering should be directed to the starting points in the question paper and reminded they will not be penalised for using one of them to launch their investigations. They are often put off by thinking that the starting points are someone else's idea, so need reminding that it is their personal take on the starting point that is rewarded and the depth and breadth of their investigation, not the initial idea. The starting point is simply that, a starting point. It is more important at this stage that they actually get the project underway, as time is very short for this particular component. The Centre's timetable and other exams/events at this time of year condense the guided learning hours further – dithering will risk dire consequences. This is the time to explore any new mediums or fresh techniques that might help them fulfil their creative intentions for the exam theme.</p> |
| Easter Holiday | AO3 | <p>This is the best time to replenish and freshen resources for the ESA, component 2. Some Centres use this break to organise gallery trips/visits. Again, it is a non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. It is an opportunity to take in local gallery or exhibition visits. Remind them they will be developing their final exam theme next term so another opportunity to find things they could not access in the Centre. These might be photographs or actual objects, skulls, rusty metal etc, from outings/walks. Holiday work should be optional and fun, not really tasks, but at this point the exam takes on a new significance for most candidates.</p> |
| Summer Term 1st Half | AO1 AO2 AO3 AO4 | <p>Group gallery/museum visits are often conducted in this term to help feed and inform the contextual element of the exam component. Candidates will be working at lots of experimentation, exploration, refinement and analysis at this point trying to work towards a solution that will place them in a strong position to embark on their final outcome for the exam. This may involve initial attempts at outcomes, dead ends and failures but these are all a natural part of the process and candidates should be reminded of this by reference to professional artists who have had to overcome such issues. This is one of the really</p> |

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| | | <p>constructive elements of their contextual research. It is vital at this point, however, that candidates are reminded about pastiche and mimicry. The temptation is, for candidates who are struggling to push their ideas forward, to simply do their own version of another artist’s work. This is an immense mistake and the consequences of doing so are severe. In terms of assessment, mimicry falls into basic ability and level 2 on the assessment grid.</p> <p>Depending upon individual Centres timetables, some might actually run the final examination at the end of this term, others usually do it at the beginning of the second half of the summer term</p> |
| Half term | A03 | Final, non-mandatory opportunity to collect resources, especially visual ones not available in the Centre. Quite useful for candidates taking the exam after half-term. |
| Summer Term 2nd Half | A03 A04 | Final preparations for exam and conclusion of supporting studies. Depending upon the position of the exam in the term, this time can be used for final refinement, evaluation and presentation. The examination time ideally should be run sequentially to give the candidates a focused period of sustained work, although this is not always possible. |
| Summer Holiday | | Results |