

Principal examiner reports for teachers

Principal examiner reports for teachers summarise what candidates did well and what candidates needed to improve for this examination series only.

This report is to be used in conjunction with the question paper and mark scheme.

For guidance on teaching and learning we provide resources for many of our syllabuses.

Resource	Where to find it
Grade descriptions – Grade descriptions describe the level of performance typically demonstrated by candidates achieving the different grades awarded for a qualification.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Syllabus and specimen materials
Schemes of work – Schemes of work are designed to support you in your teaching and lesson planning.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Lesson planning – Guidance on how to plan a lesson.	Lesson planning
Resource plus – There may be additional resources such as teaching packs containing lesson plans, resources and worksheets and videos for aspects of your syllabus.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Teaching tools	Teaching Tools
Exemplar candidate responses	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Learner guide – A guide for students to help them understand what the course involves.	School support hub Select: Subject > Resource finder > Teaching and learning
Community forums – Do you have a question or something to share? Our online forums are great way to keep up to date with your subject and the global Cambridge community.	Community forum on the school support hub
Access to scripts for this series.	Access to scripts service
Results analysis is available for some syllabuses.	Results analysis
Test maker is available for some subjects.	Test maker

Other services from Cambridge International Education

- [Digital mocks service](#)
- [Insight assessments](#)
- [Professional development](#)
 - [Focus on assessment](#)
 - [Online marking workshops](#)

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/01 Portfolio
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Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates understood that they are expected to research and develop ideas and to present their proposal as a pitch or presentation.
- They understood that the themes provide a brief, and a choice of proposals with which to answer the brief.
- They produced a personal digital outcome that realised intentions and made connections between ideas and digital media and design.
- Proposals referred to something specific relating to the assignment, rather than an abstract aspiration or general recollections.

What candidates needed to improve

- Avoid providing a video explaining the supporting studies in addition to the studies themselves.
- Avoid providing an explanation of how the assessment objectives have been met.
- Avoid an overreliance on text. Candidates are required to largely communicate their ideas through visual language. Written explanations or descriptions are not seen to be equivalent to creative visual work.
- Avoid a reliance on the potential value or importance of a topic to communicate its own message. Candidates should deploy the elements of visual language within the context of an area of study to convey meaning. For example, a candidate may be concerned about the environment. The concern itself, even expressed through some poster design or photograph, for example, is not sufficient.

Comments on specific themes

Theme One: Maps

What candidates did well

- Evidence was demonstrated through mainly visual work with some annotation used to support the candidates' thinking.
- Candidates explored both the physical and conceptual aspects of the theme.
- Research and recording were relevant and artists chosen for investigation were appropriate to the candidate's intentions.

What candidates needed to improve

- Some work remained descriptive rather than reinterpreting mapping concepts.
- Opportunities to combine mapping with narrative or interaction were not fully explored.
- A clear idea from the outset is beneficial to candidates in answering across all AOs.

Theme 2: Cycles and repetition

What candidates did well

- Cycles and repetition were explored through animation, sequencing and time-based media.
- Some work showed understanding of rhythm, repetition and change over time.
- This is a wide-ranging theme and candidates responded to this using a breadth of interpretations from human routines in daily life to cycles in nature such as night and day or the lifecycles of plants.

What candidates needed to improve

- Details of camera types or camera settings are not required to be recorded. There are some exceptions which may include information such as technical logs, or when using unusual equipment such as a large format camera or a pinhole camera, for example.
- Candidates should focus less on literal repetition and more on conceptual development.
- Where using time-based progression candidates should seek to exploit the potential of this approach.

Theme 3: Narrative stories

What candidates did well

- Portfolios showed a clear creative journey from the initial concept through to the final outcome, supported by planning, experimentation and audience feedback.
- They provided well-chosen and relevant research that enabled the development of ideas.
- Research reflected an awareness of different storytelling traditions and formats.

What candidates needed to improve

- The links between planning stages, development, and the final outcome should be consistently clear.
- Moving image candidates should carefully consider the choice of location, and how the image is composed within the frame.
- Some narratives remained linear with limited experimentation in structure or viewpoint.

Theme 4: The built environment

What candidates did well

- Candidates demonstrated an understanding of abstractions that can be seen in the built environment.
- Candidates showed attention to structure, pattern and spatial arrangement.
- Candidates developed their work into proposals such as leaflets, books, promotion posters, interactive displays or immersive environments.

What candidates needed to improve

- Avoid limiting relevant sources, which may result in limited creative development.
- Avoid photographic work with repeated subject focus and with limited variation.
- Avoid including biographical details of the artists, film makers or designers studied. They may be included where they are critical to the work of the artist.

Theme 5: Museums

What candidates did well

- Some candidates took a holistic approach to the notion of the museum and considered a range of visitor-related factors such as information, promotional material, display formats and access.
- They described the creative process and demonstrated critical reflection of their own work.
- They were able to understand the constraints of the investigation.

What candidates needed to improve

- Candidates developing online museums through web design should avoid limited research and instead investigate how such institutions present information and communicate meaning.
- Candidates are encouraged to undertake research in a wide variety of forms.
- Candidates should avoid providing photographs of a museum trip as the sole evidence of researching and recording relevant insights.

Theme 6: Water

What candidates did well

- A range of approaches to water were explored using digital and mixed media.
- Some work combined traditional processes with digital editing and animation techniques.
- Several submissions explored aquatic environments, weather conditions and symbolic meanings of water such as change and movement.

What candidates needed to improve

- Avoid overediting of photos without insight or reference to the intention.
- At times, the link to the theme appeared to be tenuous.

- Avoid disconnected explorations that did not inform the development of ideas or the creative progress of the work.

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Paper 9481/02 Externally Set Assignment
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Key messages

What candidates did well

- Candidates understood that during the preparation period they should research, plan, reflect on and develop ideas for their response to the assignment they have chosen.
- Many submissions were seen to have been developed with an enthusiasm for, and an engagement with, the chosen assignment.
- Most candidates complied with the guidance for the number of slides/pages and the length of videos in the submission.
- They produced a personal digital outcome that realised intentions and made connections between ideas and digital media and design.

What candidates needed to improve

- Select visual work that clearly demonstrates creative and critical progress within the supporting studies.
- Candidates should research the concept they have chosen to develop. This will develop their understanding of the format, characteristics, constraints, and potential results of the selected concept they intend to work with.
- Candidates should have a clear idea of their intentions and refer to these throughout the assignment, revising them as necessary.
- Organise and clearly communicate their research and recording.
- Avoid explaining why a question or concept has been chosen.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 The Factory

Comprehensive responses

- Candidates included mood boards, alternative layout designs, image and photograph editing, and the application of the elements of visual language to lettering, layout and logo design.
- Evidence was demonstrated through mainly visual work with some annotation used to support the candidates' thinking.
- Candidates considered how an audience would engage with the chosen concept and used mock-ups for this purpose.
- Some candidates showed imaginative approaches through interactive or visually engaging concepts.

Limited responses

- There was an overreliance on logo templates and website layout templates found on web-based design applications.
- Candidates should engage in research and recording to provide a sufficiently reliable and stable platform for their work to progress.
- Visual identity should be consistently applied across different parts of the final outcome.
- Research and recording should be clearly linked to final design decisions or audience considerations.

Question 2 Habitation

Comprehensive responses

- Comprehensive responses showed visual awareness of environments, lived spaces and human presence.

- Candidates employed a broad range of approaches to gathering research and recording observations and insights.
- Testing and analysis of early work prior to the supervised test allowed for review, reflection, and redesign for the final outcome.
- Exemplar designers, photographers or moving image makers were used to inform and guide the development of candidate work.

Limited responses

- Photographs should clearly show a relation to the assignment, development of ideas or a specific inspiration to the referenced artists or designers. Personal photographs are expected to achieve an appropriate level of technical ability.
- Storyboards do not necessarily need to be complex and should provide sufficient information to act as a platform for the supervised test and the production of a final outcome.
- Responses should be developed beyond documentation of locations or structures.
- The externally set assignment requires a degree of preparation and planning to manage the development of ideas and the realisation of intentions.

Question 3 Cut Out

Comprehensive responses

- The development of multimedia elements was explored through a range of software and analogue approaches.
- Candidates explored the cultural and social aspects of the question through thorough investigations using alternative perspectives such as those of Fine Art or Graphic Design.
- Each slide or page was designed consistently and showed a clear progression of ideas.
- Candidates showed a clear understanding of audience and purpose within a theatrical context.

Limited responses

- A limited level of research into, and understanding of, the idea of marginalisation constrained responses to the question.
- Development work should show how concepts are reviewed and refined into final outcomes.
- Candidates should develop a clear concept for the question, which is both focused and relevant.
- Candidates should clearly distinguish between design elements and design assets.

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Paper 9481/03 Personal Investigation

Key messages

- The importance of visual evidence in this A Level component cannot be overemphasised. This should be supported by written commentary that goes beyond the descriptive to become analytical.
- Technical skills in one or more of the areas of study and an understanding of how to apply the skill to develop ideas creatively, contributes to confident and excellent evidence.

What candidates did well

- Candidates showcased their creativity.
- Candidates identified themes and areas of interest and developed the investigation through one of the three areas of study.
- Selected relevant work for submission that was well presented, clearly demonstrated the creative journey and an understanding of the assessment criteria.
- Clearly attributed evidence, aiding understanding of the overall response.
- Critically analysed their own creative visual work and the selected work of designers and artists. This supported the development of the response.

What candidates needed to improve

- Review work for selection to ensure that all evidence is purposeful.
- Reference the creative insights gained from interviews and surveys that furthers investigations rather than simply evidencing videos or showing diagrams.
- Ensure that the written commentary analyses their creative work rather than just describing the making of the investigation.

Comments on specific elements

Final practical outcome

Comprehensive responses

- Well-presented work that communicated refined and resolved ideas.
- Final outcomes that were convincingly made within one of the three areas of study.
- Videos that were engaging and well edited.

Limited responses

- Poorly presented outcomes that relied on written commentary to attempt to explain the result.
- Over concern regarding the overall slide design at the expense of the chosen developed outcome.
- Moving image outcomes that had not been refined to ensure the content conveyed the candidates' intentions and engaged an audience.

Supporting studies including written commentary

Comprehensive responses

- Responses that evidenced the candidates' research and exploration of their theme clearly through selected visual images of their own and others' work.
- Concepts that were creatively developed with critical analysis being evident through written commentary and thoughtful layout of the slides.
- Able to demonstrate that the Personal Investigation is a sustained and independent activity.

Limited responses

- Candidates submitted work that did not fully demonstrate the creative exploration and development of their chosen ideas.
- Responses showed more evidence of the story underpinning the theme rather than the creative visual solutions in design, photography and moving image.
- Candidates should consider writing a statement of intent. This could help them identify an audience, key stages, and decide on how to measure critical and creative progress.
- Candidates should provide references for source material used in their research.
- Candidates should avoid providing biographies of chosen artists. Instead, candidates should evidence the creative and practical insights gained from studying the artists' work.