

## SUBJECT AREA: VISUAL ARTS

An extended essay in visual arts provides students with an opportunity to undertake research in an area of the visual arts of particular interest to them. Examples of **Visual Arts** include:

Paintings  
Crafts  
Etching  
Aboriginal art

Fashion design  
Architecture  
Graphic design  
Contemporary art  
Classical art

Advertising  
Landscape design  
Sculpture  
Photography

**Personal engagement relative to actual visual artwork is a focus in this subject area.** For an essay in visual arts, IBO encourages candidates to develop and explore- in an imaginative way- a research question on some topic of particular personal interest. Trips to museums, personal contact with artists, and curators, etc. is strongly encouraged, as is the use of local and/or primary sources. **The focus of your essay should also be on the artwork itself.**

The outcome of the research should be a coherent and structured piece of writing, (with appropriate illustrations-- ie photocopies of examples of artwork), that effectively addresses a research question involving a particular issue relative to the visual arts.

Absolute reliance on textbooks, and the Internet is discouraged and no extended essay in visual arts should be based exclusively on such sources. Textbooks should be consulted only insofar as they may stimulate original ideas, provide models of disciplined, structured and informed approaches, and encourage direct and personal involvement with the essay topic.

**Your essay on visual arts will be graded on your ability to show the following three things:**

**1. Developing a personal point of view based on knowledge gained in some aspect of visual art.**

**2. Selecting and using appropriate sources effectively.**

**3. Developing a critical argument by systematically analysing the art in its historical, socio-cultural context from 2 or more points of view.**

### **Choosing your topic :**

Your approach should focus directly on some aspect of the visual arts. It is usually best to center on the artwork not the artist. Avoid topics that are entirely dependent on summarizing general secondary sources such as universal art history textbooks, and encyclopedias. These topics lead to essays that are primarily narrative or descriptive, and are not likely to do well. Additionally, choosing a topic that covers many aspects of art history and/or a long period of time is also unlikely to be successful. Restricting the scope of the essay will help to ensure a clear focus and will provide opportunities for demonstrating detailed understanding and critical analysis. Biographical studies of artists, though risky, can succeed-- (for example, implied influences on an artist's work). But these kinds of essays must address a relevant visual arts issue (i.e. something regarding the artist's work itself), rather than tell the story of the artist's life discussing his works in sequential order. Most importantly an essay such as this should arrive at a particular, and preferably personal, conclusion.

**The following are examples of topics from previous essays:**

- *The artistic significance of selected totem poles.*
- *Cathedrale Marie-Reine-du-Monde, Montreal: a replica of St Peter's in Rome?*
- *Robert Ntila's East African etching techniques: a critical investigation.*
- \* *An analysis of African influences on Henry Moore.*
- \* *Picasso-- Genius or cultural thief?*
- \* *The Kimono- art form or tradition?*
- \* *Use of gold in Tutankhamen's tomb.*
- \* *Roy Lichtenstein-- serious artist or satirist*
- \* *Art for war propaganda in WWI (or WWII).*

*Note: Don't forget our local Ringling Art Museum-- It's a great resource for Baroque Art (Also Greek Mythology as interpreted by Renaissance artists.)*

**Range and Variety of sources:**

IBO suggests its wise to build a good balance of both primary and secondary sources.

**Examples of Primary Sources:**

Art exhibitions	Artifacts	Photographs
TV Videos or films	Art Magazines	Autobiographical materials
	Interviews with Artists	

**Examples of Secondary sources:**

Books	Scholarly journals	Catalogs
Art Magazines	Crafts and artifacts	TV and Film documentaries

**Regarding information found online:**

IBO warns us to use **online sources** sparingly. Though the Internet may seem more convenient, IBO stresses the importance of being careful about the quality of information found there. Frequently this information lacks accuracy, authenticity and reliability. Also occasional piracy exists in some websites. This could put your diploma at risk for malpractice penalties. Unless you are prepared to question and evaluate ideas found on the web as you present them in your essay, it is wise to stick with printed materials which respect copyrights and which have been examined for accuracy.

**Treatment of the topic:**

It is essential that the topic chosen is clearly and directly related to visual arts. If the connection is only indirect, you risk introducing material that is of only marginal relevance, and will confuse the inquiry and weaken the argument.

The research question should be of personal interest to you and should draw on a variety of sources to support your argument, such as textual analysis, study of original artworks, or designed artifacts.

Interviews with practitioners or authorities on the subjects can provide another way to show personal engagement with the topic. Remember, the use of local and/or primary sources should be incorporated wherever possible.

**Following are examples of several different approaches to treatment of the topic:**

- \* Comparing and contrasting selected works of a single artist according to various elements of art: use of line, color, composition, specific techniques, light and shade, etc. in light of the student's own views.
- \* Comparing and contrasting selected works of two or three artists vs the student's own views.
- \* An analysis of the artist's ideas about a selection of his/her works through letters, diaries, or interviews in comparison to the student's views of these works.
- \* An analysis of primary vs secondary sources' views on specific works in comparison to student's views.
- \* Exploration of selected examples of work related to a specific aspect or several aspects of the visual arts with reference to the student's views.

**No matter what approach you decide to take in your essay you should consider the following:**

List your opinions and ideas relative to the artwork you have selected. Then ask yourself which sources are vital to support these ideas?

How can you show the value and limitations of the artwork you are studying relative to its origin and purpose?

How can you show good artistic understanding of your selected artwork?

What evidence do you need to support your comments and conclusions in order to substantiate the above in your argument and conclusions?

How is this evidence well founded and relevant to your research question and not based simply on your own perceptions?

The following are some examples of titles, research questions, and approaches to a topic that have been used in the past:

**Title:** Andy Warhol: Evolution of an art

**Research question:** To what extent does Andy Warhol's artwork show evidence of changes in style between his early works and his later ones, and how does this relate to things Warhol himself has had to say about his own art during the various stages of his career?

**Approach to topic:** Selected reproduction of Andy Warhol's pieces will be gathered. Student interpretations of these works will be recorded on note cards. Books will be obtained that contain interviews with the artist and excerpts from his diaries. The outcome of the essay will contain a comparison of the artist's ideas about his art and student interpretations.

**Title:** Cultural Influences on Pablo Picasso's work

**Research question:** Picasso: Is he an individual genius, or cultural thief?

**Approach to topic:** A collection of Picasso's work will be procured. Notes will be taken on interpretations of these pieces by the student writer. Selected librarians will be consulted for recommendations of books that yield varying interpretations of the artist's work relative to the possibilities of cultural influences on Picasso. A comparison of all these views will be made in the essay.

**Title:** Influences of Ansel Adams on the art of photography

**Research question:** In what ways do the photographic images of Adams show evidence of some of the techniques he developed to better the production of quality photographs?

**Approach to topic:** Trips will be made to museums showing special exhibitions of Ansel Adams' work. Interviews will be conducted with docents and curators as well as photographic artists to derive varying views on Adams' work and the contributions of his techniques to the field of photography in general. These will be compared with the views of the student herself.

**FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA RELATIVE TO  
THE VISUAL ARTS EXTENDED ESSAY:**

**CRITERIA A: The research question**

The research question should focus clearly on some specific aspect(s) of the visual arts, and not on peripheral issues such as history, psychology, or biography. It could be broadened beyond the specifics of painting, and sculpture to include architecture, design and and contemporary forms of "visual culture". However, it should not be of a trivial naturel.

**CRITERIA B: The introduction**

The introduction should explain succinctly the significance of the topic, why it is worthy of investigation and how the research question relates to the existing knowledge on the topic. Additionally, the introduction should focus on an analysis of the research question itself, the student's reasons for choosing it and, what things the student will do to conduct the investigation of it.

**CRITERIA C: The investigation**

Students should use, as a top priority primary, sources (artwork, exhibitions, architecture, and interviews), with secondary sources (textbooks, and the comments of other artists, critics, art historians) as evidential support. It is expected that visual material (sometimes including student's own photographs) will be included and properly referenced. Proper planning of the essay should involve the student's interpretations of and responses to secondary sources in light of the research question, so that the views of art scholars and artists are used to support the student's own argument, and not to substitute for it. It is important for a student to challenge a statement made by an art scholar (historian or critic) in reference to the art being studied, instead of simply agreeing with it or going on to another point without any making any response at all. In a visual arts essay, the data gathered is principally the quoted evidence the student finds in the primary text(s) to support the argument of the essay. All material used from sources must be acknowledged in references. If students make use of internet-based sources, they should do so critically demonstrating a full awareness of the source's potential unreliability.

**CRITERIA D: Knowledge and understanding of the topic studied**

Students should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the visual arts by discussing formal artistic aspects (for example, elements and principles of design ) and considering historical, social and cultural contexts as they relate to the chosen topic. Some of this knowledge and understanding should be based at least partially on primary sources.

**CRITERIA E: The reasoned argument**

Students should use a sequence of well planned points relative to their chosen text to build the backbone for a developing argument. Embedded within this argument should be an understanding of the relevant and wider historical and sociocultural context. Personal views should not be stated without support by the reasoned argument. Straightforward descriptive or narrative accounts that lack analysis (for example a simple recounting of

the artist's life) do not usually advance an argument and should be avoided. does not usually advance an argument and should generally be avoided. Good essays are those that have something interesting to communicate, where there is evidence of original thought, and where students are able to substantiate their ideas and opinions.

**CRITERIA F: Application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject**

There should be strong evidence of a thorough knowledge of the visual arts aspects of the chosen topic, and the essay should successfully incorporate and discuss related visual images.

**CRITERIA G: Use of language appropriate to the subject**

There should be evidence of familiarity with, and the accurate and effective use of visual arts terminology. Appropriate vocabulary must be used to describe historical periods, artistic styles and so on.

**CRITERIA H: The conclusion**

"Consistent" is the key word here: the conclusion should develop out of the argument and not introduce new or extraneous material. It should not simply repeat material from the introduction either; rather, it should present a new synthesis in light of the discussion.

**CRITERIA I: The formal presentation**

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to academic standards for research papers. The presentation of essays that omit a bibliography or that do not give references for quotations is deemed unacceptable (level 0). Essays that omit one of the required elements - title page, abstract, table of contents, page numbers- are deemed no better than satisfactory, (maximum level 2), while essays that omit two of these elements are deemed poor at best (maximum level 1). Within the visual arts, the "look" as well as the "craft" of the essay is given consideration.

Precise recording of the relevant details of all quoted evidence significant to the research question is necessary so that complete references can be provided, including the author's name and page number for each in-text citation of a source. For bibliographies any particular accepted form of referencing can be used (but not more than one). References should include: Full details of the author, title of publication, publisher and date of publication must be provided in the bibliography, which should list all sources used in the essay in alphabetical order (by the author's family name). Any material that is not original must be acknowledged.

**CRITERIA J: The abstract**

The abstract must consist of three elements: the research question (or hypothesis); the scope of the essay (that is, the main points to be investigated and the sources used to research these points); and the findings or conclusion. Students should be reminded that

the abstract is not a summary or precis of the topic. The abstract is judged on the clarity with which it presents the three above mentioned required elements, not on the quality of the research question itself, nor on the quality of the argument or conclusion.

**CRITERIA K: Holistic judgement**

Qualities that are rewarded under this criterion include the following:

**Initiative:** Ways of demonstrating this in Visual Arts essays include the choice of topic and **creativity** and **insight** as shown by the student's presentation of a personal judgment on the specific examples of the selected art work. Routine essays on well worn topics using objective factual information from textbook sources will not score well under this criterion.

**Problems demonstrated by students in past essays:**

Following are problems reported by examiners relative to several important areas with respect to the Visual Arts extended essay--

**Personal point of view based on thorough knowledge of the visual arts aspects of the chosen topic:**

**Expectations:** The candidate demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the visual arts aspects of the topic, and illustrates and fully justifies a personal point of view.

**Problems of the past:**

Some candidates seemed unaware that a personal viewpoint on its own was of little value. It needs to be supported by evidence, and should be justified or explained.

**Use of appropriate sources:**

**Expectations:** There is strong evidence of the highly effective use of an original and considered selection of appropriate sources.

**Problems of the past:**

When using either primary or secondary sources, some candidates did not put informative details in a broader contextual picture, nor did they address theoretical matters. Also, there was increasing use of Internet sources. These may be convenient. Occasionally some candidates have generated research material in this way that would not be possible from other sources. However, more often online materials did not provide for a study that is truly in depth.



Examiners welcomed the use of primary sources, particularly because they helped candidates avoid tired copying of information from the Internet, videos or books, which often became a substitute for more vigorous and individual thinking and linking.

**Historical / socio-cultural context of the argument / evaluation:**

**Expectations:** The argument/ evaluation is directly and clearly placed in its historical / socio-cultural context. The context has been carefully, critically and systematically analyzed. Most relevant links have been thoroughly explored.

**Problems in the past:**

Candidates could have achieved higher marks under this criteria if they had taken more care to develop context. Linking separate details together to show how they relate to a broader picture helps them show a more thorough understanding of their topic.