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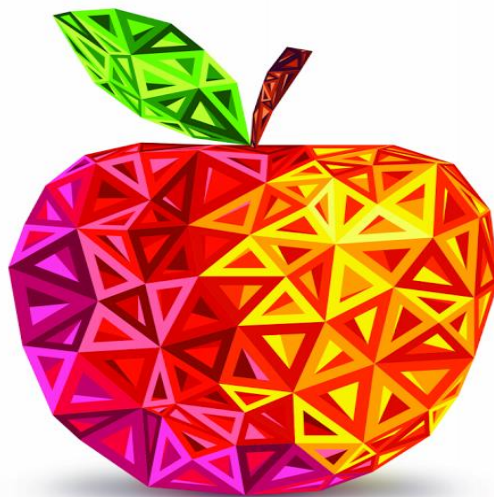


Examiners' Report/ Lead Examiner Feedback

January 2020

BTEC Level 3 Nationals in Art & Design

Unit 2: Critical and Contextual Studies in
Art & Design (31828H)



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What is a grade boundary?

A grade boundary is where we set the level of achievement required to obtain a certain grade for the externally assessed unit. We set grade boundaries for each grade (Distinction, Merit and Pass). The grade awarded for each unit contributes proportionately to the overall qualification grade and each unit should always be viewed in the context of its impact on the whole qualification.

Setting grade boundaries

When we set grade boundaries, we look at the performance of every learner who took the assessment. When we can see the full picture of performance, our experts are then able to decide where best to place the grade boundaries – this means that they decide what the lowest possible mark should be for a particular grade.

When our experts set the grade boundaries, they make sure that learners receive grades which reflect their ability. Awarding grade boundaries is conducted to ensure learners achieve the grade they deserve to achieve, irrespective of variation in the external assessment.

Variations in external assessments

Each test we set asks different questions and may assess different parts of the unit content outlined in the specification. It would be unfair to learners if we set the same grade boundaries for each test, because then it would not take into account that a test might be slightly easier or more difficult than any other.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, are on the website via this link:

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Unit 2: Critical and Contextual Studies in Art & Design (31828H)

| Grade | Unclassified | Near Pass | Pass | Merit | Distinction |
|---------------|--------------|-----------|------|-------|-------------|
| Boundary Mark | 0 | 8 | 16 | 29 | 42 |

Introduction

This lead examiner report has been written to support your understanding of how learners performed during this examination series and to help inform on-going delivery of this unit. When reading this report you should consider the points raised in conjunction with the following materials:

- Unit content – which can be found in the qualification specification
- The set task - which can be accessed on the qualification pages of the BTEC website
- The unit marking grid - which can be accessed on the qualification pages of the BTEC website

The current approach for this paper is now well established and this series was the third time this format of paper has been used to assess this unit. The paper requires learners to undertake targeted research prior to sitting a supervised assessment where they are presented with unseen material to respond to. As such the paper is presented in two parts. Part A is provided 4 weeks prior to the release of Part B.

Part A provides learners with a theme, a scenario and a list of five practitioners from which they must select one to research. It is expected that learners should spend approximately 15 hours independently researching the theme and the practitioners they have selected from the list given. The last three hours of this preparatory period is undertaken in a monitored session or sessions in which learners must collate the research undertaken and produce up to 2 sides of A4 summary notes that can be taken into the supervised assessment period.

Part B provides an image of a specific piece of work by each practitioner from Part A, along with details such as title, date, medium and size where appropriate. In addition, Part B also introduces an additional practitioner that learners must respond to. For the new practitioner, learners are provided with an image of a specific piece of work, as well as a short body of text that provides contextual information about the unseen practitioner in relation to the work provided. All information within Part B will be connected to the theme of the paper.

It is important to note that during the three hours of monitored preparation learners are permitted to have access to the Internet or other research sources in order to produce their summary notes. However, during the supervised assessment period learners will not have access to any research sources and therefore will need to rely on the summary notes they have produced in the preparatory period and the information provided in Part B of the paper. Learners then have 3.5 hours to produce a formal written response to the set task and Part B. It should be noted that learners are no longer required to provide a bibliography or list of sources as part of this task.

Centres should take specific note of centre instructions in both Part A and Part B of the paper, as well as the administrative support guide for unit 2 to ensure that they are adhering to the requirements of this assessment.

The unit mark scheme has remained unchanged since the last series and reflects the requirements of the set task. The mark breakdown is:

AO1: Be able to apply an effective investigation process to inform understanding of creative practitioners. Marks available = 12

AO2: Demonstrate the ability to visually analyse the work of creative practitioners. Marks available = 20

AO3: Demonstrate understanding of how contextual factors relate to creative practitioners' work. Marks available = 12

AO4: Communicate independent judgements demonstrating understanding of the work of creative practitioners. Marks available = 16

The total marks available for this paper are 60.

Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

For January 2020 the theme was 'Crossing Boundaries'. The majority of learners demonstrated a real engagement with the theme with a variety of interpretations evident across the work submitted. Some learners applied a very literal interpretation of the theme and talked about how the practitioners had crossed physical boundaries through travel or international acclaim. Others explored the idea of crossing boundaries in relation to practitioners doing something unexpected. Both interpretations are valid and learners are free to apply any number of interpretations to the theme as they feel are appropriate and relevant.

Part A of the paper provided learners with a diverse range of practitioners. The practitioners included in this assessment are carefully selected to ensure that learners studying on specialist pathways are not disadvantaged and so each paper will feature work from as wide a range of specialisms as are possible. However, it is important to note that there is no requirement for learners to select the practitioner that is most closely related to their own creative practice. Whilst there may be some advantage to learners in having practical knowledge of the materials, techniques and processes used by the practitioners being researched, it is completely plausible for this information to be developed through the learner's own investigation. With regards to the unseen practitioner who is introduced in Part B of the paper, it is clear that this practitioner may only produce work in relation to one area of specialist practice. Therefore, in preparing for

this assessment, it is vital that learners are exposed to a wide range of creative practitioners and have the confidence to apply their skills in visual analysis to practitioners across a broad spectrum of disciplines. All practitioners within Part A of the paper have an appropriate international profile to provide learners with ample opportunity to undertake broad research.

There was evidence of learners responding to all of practitioners listed in Part A of the paper. Of the five possible practitioners in this paper there was evidence of a range of responses relating to each of them. Frida Khalo (fine artist) was by far the most popular choice of practitioner selected by learners. Shepard Fairey (illustrator and graphic designer) and Sebastião Salgado (photographer) were also quite popular choices for learners. There was less evidence of learners selecting Philip Treacy (milliner) or Moshe Safdie (architect).

The unseen practitioner Keith Haring proved to be highly accessible for learners with some quite passionate responses to his work. Most learners made relevant observations about his work, drawing relevant conclusions from the contextual information provided.

Task

AO1: Be able to apply an effective investigation process to inform understanding of creative practitioners

The underlying principle of this unit is the importance of being able to undertake appropriate research and then be able to apply the research to a given task. Based on the response it was clear that the unit content for this unit was generally well taught and the majority of learners were able to make appropriate use of research undertaken during the preparatory period to provide relevant and thoughtfully justified responses.

The 15 hour preparatory period, which includes the 3 hours of monitored preparation, should be used to conduct extensive research into the practitioner selected from the list provided in Part A of the paper. During the monitored preparation period learners must breakdown their research into bulleted summary notes that will support them during the supervised assessment. Most learners were able to demonstrate they had read widely and developed clear understanding of the work and the context of their chosen practitioner. Whilst it was clear that the majority of research had been conducted using the internet, there was evidence that some learners had engaged with other sources of information such as exhibitions, news reports, interviews and documentaries. This was often most evident from higher achieving learners. Centres must continue to ensure that research skills are taught as part of the delivery of this unit. Learners are no longer required to provide a bibliography for this unit and the learner's summary notes are not submitted for assessment. Some centres still submitted responses which included bibliographies. Please ensure learners are clear that this is no longer a requirement, as it takes valuable time away from the supervised assessment. Examiners form a judgement on the effectiveness of a learner's investigation based on how they have used the information gleaned from their research to respond to the task, not from where it has been sourced.

For responses achieving in the higher mark bands there was evidence that learners had engaged well with the practitioners they had selected to research. This is an extract from a learner's submission that achieved a mark in band 4 for AO1. This is merely an extract example of the standard expected at this level. It must be noted that a holistic approach it taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported mark awarded for AO1.

"This Photo was taken in the Serra Pelada mining complex on a Leica R6 film camera deep in the heart of inner Brazil. The location was somewhere Salgado travelled to in 1986 to take photos for his 'Migration and Workers' projects, to capture the hardships of the poorer working class there. Described by many critics as 'hell holes', these enormous pits that ran so deep were the working stations of tens of thousands of normal Brazilian workers. By examining the collection of photographs taken at these mines it is easy to understand the message of the images. They are meant to signify the ultimate horrors of the Capitalist Ideology. By physically boring into the ground creating these huge unnatural mines, these people have destroyed the natural beauty that once resided there, replacing it with grime and greed. The apocalyptic working conditions come as

a clear result of the focus on profit and personal gain. The metaphorical machine of business that cranks on indefinitely only kills anything in its path. Within these men Salgado saw the plight of the natural world as we as human beings are key parts of. He saw it as an opportunity to showcase the war that is waged between nature and the machine”.

This learner’s selection of research is considered and clearly relevant to their enquiry. They have demonstrated a good level of knowledge about the work produced by Sebastião Salgado and have used this to suggest meaning within the work and to justify their ideas. The learner has applied an effective and consistent use of written communication in a logical and engaging structure.

For learners achieving in the lower marks for this assessment outcome relied heavily on making reference to interesting ‘facts’ about the practitioner’s life or work with limited reference to the set task. This showed a lack of application of investigation to inform understanding.

This is an extract from a learner’s submission that achieved a mark in band 2 for AO1. As before, this is merely an extract example of the standard expected at this level. It must be noted that a holistic approach is taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported mark awarded for AO1.

“Fairey is a very controversial artist within himself as he went to court on cases of fraud and destroying documents, which he was found guilty of. He had to pay a fine and was sentenced to a load of community service. Despite this he still created iconic master pieces and defied society with some of his work”.

This learner’s selection of research is quite basic and shows only partial relevance to their enquiry. They have demonstrated some knowledge about the contextual factors relating to Shepard Fairey’s work but has not applied this knowledge in a way that demonstrates understanding.

Unfortunately, at the lowest end of achievement there were learners who presented little or no evidence that they had undertaken an investigation into their selected artist and all information contained within their response could have been gleaned from that provided in the paper itself.

The work submitted for this series generally showed a consistent and logical structure in line with the expectations of Level 3. Some learners continue to use subheadings to structure their work, which for the most part was logical and helpful. However, centres should avoid directing learners to work from a writing template as this approach can have the potential to limit exploration of an independent idea or line of enquiry.

AO2: Demonstrate the ability to visually analyse the work of creative practitioners

This assessment outcome is the highest weighted outcome in this paper and is worth one third of all marks available. Learners are expected to provide a visual analysis of the selected work by their chosen practitioner as well as the work provided for the unseen practitioner. As learners are provided with images of both pieces of work to refer to during the supervised assessment it is expected that there should be equal emphasis on the visual analysis of the both pieces of work. However, when assessing the work, it is possible that a particularly strong analysis of one piece can compensate for weaker analysis of the other piece. It is important to note that learners' visual analysis must specifically relate to the pieces of work identified in the paper. An unfortunate number of learners didn't score very highly for this assessment outcome as they based their visual analysis on other work by their selected practitioner and made little or no reference to the work identified in the paper.

For many learners within this series there seemed to be quite a heavy emphasis placed on the concepts or context of the work being looked at, and at times this was at the expense of visual analysis. For example, for those learners discussing the work of Frida Khalo, many choose to focus quite heavily on the symbolism within the work rather than commenting on visual components such as composition or colour. Likewise when discussing the work of Moshe Safdie, many learners focused on the underlying concept of the design rather than commenting on the shape or form within the design. Whilst this type of analysis is very useful as part of this task and does help to establish meaning in the work, learners should be reminded to not miss key opportunities for analysis through reference to the formal elements. Despite this, there was some evidence of thoughtful visual analysis within the submission.

This is an extract from a learner's submission that achieved a mark in band 5 for AO2. This is merely an extract example of the standard expected at this level. It must be noted that a holistic approach it taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported mark awarded for AO2.

"The image summons up themes of darkness, struggle, and humanity due to the visceral nature of the way it appears. The lighting and shadows cast craft this moment into being a grand, momentous movement up and to the left. The visible shadows on the muscles, showing how strained they are signify the battle that these men are waging with their surroundings. The black and white serious tone that Salgado expertly handles. There is unmatched within documentary photography. The various tones and textures shown bring this tactile feeling to the forefront, making the viewer a part of this atmospheric and emotional world that these poor men live in. The monochrome aesthetic also gives the smallest detail the utmost importance in relativity to the photo as a whole. You can really see the dirt and mud clearly in a way that you cannot in colour with the dramatic black and white look enhancing the emotion felt. Every literal element of the image is important in defining the image as a work of photographic art".

This learner has demonstrated a sophisticated approach to analysing visual elements, demonstrating assured understanding. This learner clearly understands the connections between visual elements and subject matter and meaning. They have included a variety of

pertinent and insightful references and made appropriate use of specialist terminology throughout.

When it came to analysis of the work of Keith Haring, there was a very varied quality in the visual analysis of the given work. Less well-prepared learners appeared to struggle to apply their visual analysis skills to the unseen artist and simply regurgitated portions of the given text without showing evidence of independently analysing the visual elements of the work.

However, the strongest learners included pertinent and relevant independent observations and linked these to contextual information from the given text. For example:

“The bright colours seen in the piece serve as tools to catch the eye. By drawing people’s eyes to the image it then makes the viewing worthwhile in the form of the characters. It does all this then delivers its main message saying that ‘Ignorance = Fear’ and ‘Silence = Death’. By contradicting the playful appearance of the figures with such a powerful, graphic message written in black creates a multi-layered aspect of the piece. The yellow figures are incredibly expressive despite their simple design, you can clearly see which is which in relation to the proverb. The crosses on their chests at first seem like a strange choice on the artist’s part, however these represent crosshairs as if these figures are marked for death. This makes sense as the artwork is in service to advertise the Fight AIDS movement between the 1990s and 80s. The extra dark lines around the figures are placed there to simulate movement making these images feel alive”.

AO3: Demonstrate understanding of how contextual factors influence creative practitioners work

For this assessment outcome learners must draw on the research undertaken in the preparatory period as well as the text provided in Part B. During the preparatory investigation it is important that learners research into the wider context in relation to their selected practitioner as well as developing their understanding of the theme and how this impacts on the interpretation of the selected work.

Contextualisation in relation to the theme was generally very strong with lots of learners making wider reference to social and political issues. Contextualisation in relation to the selected practitioner was far more varied. Learners achieving in the lower mark bands for this AO limited themselves to simply extracting detail from a practitioner’s biography and made little or no reference to wider contextual factors. It was unclear if these superficial responses were the result of poor research or simply demonstrated a limited ability to apply the research effectively to the task. However, learners achieving higher marks for this AO were able use their research convincingly, demonstrating understanding of the practitioner’s creative practice and making insightful links to the theme.

This is an extract from a learner's submission that achieved a mark in band 4 for this assessment outcome. This is merely an extract example of the standard expected at this level. It must be noted that a holistic approach it taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported mark awarded for AO3:

"We can view Kahlo in a similar way to this as she crossed boundaries of what was socially 'acceptable' and instead was honest to her own expressions and experiences, particularly those of suffering, romance, sexuality and gender. A piece that beautifully embodies this rebellion of tradition and what's socially 'acceptable' is "Self Portrait with Cropped Hair" which she produced in 1940, following her divorce from Diego Rivera after a turbulent marriage. The portrait embodies her masculinity and embraces her power and strength, we can view this as a rejection of the need for a husband as she sees herself as capable of undertaking the masculine role; this presents both the piece and Kahlo's attitudes as being transcendent of the 40s and the patriarchal oppression enforced by society".

This learner has provided an effective analysis of some key contextual factors that are relevant to Kahlo's work and these have been thoughtfully linked to the themes and ideas that have impacted on the production of the work.

Contextual understanding in relation to Keith Haring was understandably less developed as learners were reliant on the short body of text provided in Part B of the paper. It is important that learners develop their skills in analysing the information provided to be able to extract the pertinent points; using the information to develop their understanding of the work they are discussing in the task. Unfortunately, lower achieving learners provided a direct transcription of the given text without demonstrating any understanding of the information provided. However, learners achieving higher marks for this AO showed they were able to absorb the information and weave it into their own commentary often making insightful links to wider contextual factors.

This is an extract from a learner's submission, which achieved a mark in band 4 for AO3. This is merely an extract example of the standard expected at this level. It must be noted that a holistic approach it taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported mark awarded for AO3:

"The use of primary red, blue and yellow also allows the pink to stand out in the image, signifying its importance in the piece. The colour pink, especially the triangle, in this context represents the homosexual community. The triangle holds a lot of weight in the piece as it embodies the reclamation of homosexuality and the first pushes towards equality in the 80s. During World War 2 the pink triangle was used to brand homosexuals and identify them in society as defects and targets for hate, the reclamation of this symbol, although still a controversial topic in contemporary society, implies strength and a feeling of community which we can assume Haring wanted to feature heavily in the piece".

This demonstrates the learner's ability to pick up on a number of the contextual factors identified within the text provided and then link these to wider contextual factors, themes and ideas.

AO4: Communicate independent judgements demonstrating understanding of the work of creative practitioners

For this AO learners must communicate independent judgements and demonstrate their understanding of the work of both creative practitioners. For many learners this AO was addressed towards the end of their written submission through a summary of their findings and ideas regarding both practitioners, comparing their respective work. This is not something that has a right or wrong answer but it is important that learners do make a clear decision as to whether the work of the practitioner they have studied or the work of the unseen practitioner best fits the theme and justify why. There was evidence that most learners were able to reach a conclusion, but unfortunately for several learners the justification of their decision was often very tenuous, with some finding this hard to articulate. However, for some learners this assessment objective was met through some well-articulated, passionate and insightful responses.

This is an extract from a learner's submission that achieved a mark in band 4 for this AO. This is merely an extract example of the standard expected at this level. It must be noted that a holistic approach it taken to marking and there was more in the whole submission that supported mark awarded for AO4:

"The photographs of Sebastiao Salgado span the entire world containing all the emotion captured in each moment. I as a viewer of these images feel like I was there when it was taken, I felt like I was part of the culture seen in his pictures. In order to cross a boundary within the world of art the very concept of what the artist is doing must challenge the agenda of opinions before. It is where new waves of art come from, the deep parts of our creative minds that harbour all manner of controversial and shameful ideas. The tactic is to employ them without hesitation or a lack of will. New things are being challenged all the time and by looking at the state of the political art world in tandem with analysing Salgados work I can confidently say that he was more influential and effective in crossing boundaries".

Summary

Based on responses seen in the January 2020 series, centres and learners are offered the following advice:

- Encourage learners to undertake a sustained investigation into their selected practitioner.
- Ensure research is relevant to both the practitioner and the set theme.
- When undertaking visual analysis of the work of both practitioners encourage learners to make clear reference to the visual elements within the work and not purely focus on concepts or context.
- Develop wider understanding of the impact that social, political; religious and environmental issues have of the creation of work to support understanding of context.
- Develop the ability to justify decisions and clearly articulate this to support higher achievement in AO4.