



Student Performance

2005 AP® Studio Art

The following comments on the 2005 portfolios for AP® Studio Art were written by the Chief Reader, Penny McElroy of the University of Redlands in Redlands, California. They are intended to help teachers better prepare their students to submit an AP portfolio in 2-D Design, 3-D Design, or Drawing. This document describes what should be included in each portfolio and what the Readers who evaluate the portfolios look for when they are assessing a student's work. This is followed by comments on the 2005 portfolios and suggestions for helping students submit their work.

Exam Overview

In the AP Studio Art Exam, students attempt to earn college credit and possibly advanced placement in college classes by completing a portfolio of high-quality artwork. The student selects which portfolio to submit, 2-D Design, 3-D Design, or Drawing. These correspond to foundation courses commonly found in a college curriculum. In June 2005, 94 Readers gathered to determine how well the students addressed this task.

The entire AP Studio Art Exam is a “free-response question,” but it is divided into parts that allow Readers to focus on a particular aspect of art making and assess the student's relative ability in each area.

Description of the Portfolios*

Section 1: Quality

For 2-D Design and Drawing: Submit five actual works that demonstrate mastery of design [drawing]. For 3-D Design: Submit slides of five works (two views of each) that demonstrate your mastery of three-dimensional design.

Your mastery of design [drawing] should be apparent in the composition, concept, and execution of your works, whether they are simple or complex.

* Text is from the 2004-05 Studio Art Poster. The poster, which is updated annually, has photos from actual Studio Art portfolios and detailed instructions for submitting student work.

Section II: Concentration

Works describing an in-depth exploration of a particular artistic concern—submit 12 slides.

For your concentration you are asked to devote considerable time, effort, and thought to an investigation of a specific visual idea. To document your process, you should present a number of conceptually related works that show your growth and discovery.

A concentration is a body of related works that:

- grow out of a coherent plan of action or investigation;
- are unified by an underlying idea that has visual and/or conceptual coherence;
- are based on your individual interest in a particular visual idea;
- are focused on a process of investigation, growth, and discovery; and
- show the development of a visual language appropriate for your subject.

A concentration is NOT:

- a variety of works produced as solutions to class projects;
- a collection of works with differing intents;
- a group project or collaboration;
- a collection of works derived solely from other people's published photographs;
- a body of work that simply investigates a medium, without a strong underlying visual idea; or
- a project that merely takes a long time to complete.

Section III: Breadth

A variety of works demonstrating understanding of the principles of design [drawing issues; three-dimensional design]—Submit 12 slides of 12 different works [2-D Design & Drawing]; 16 slides of 8 different works [3-D Design].

The best demonstrations of breadth clearly show experimentation and a range of conceptual approaches to the work. It is possible to do this in a single medium or in a variety of media.

Scoring Standards and Criteria

Two to three different Readers using a 6-point scale score each section of the portfolios. Each section counts for one-third of the final score. The scores are averaged and recalculated by statisticians and translated into the AP 5-point grading scale. This system provides a balanced look at each student's work and provides an accurate assessment of overall performance.

“Cut points” that divide each score point are set by the Chief Reader to correspond with grades the work would be likely to receive in a college foundation class (AP 5 = A, and so on). Colleges use this grade to help decide if a new student is ready to “pass out” of some foundation requirements, or if the student has done well enough to earn college credit in art. It is advisable for students who wish to earn credit or pass out of a requirement to bring their portfolio with them when they go off to college. Often college faculty will withhold judgment about a student's readiness until they view the actual work in the portfolio.

Scoring guidelines are criteria that the Readers use to guide them in assigning scores to the work. Current scoring guidelines can be downloaded from the College Board's Web site for AP professionals, <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com>. Click on "The Exams" and then navigate to "Exam Questions." Select an exam (Studio Art: 2-D Design, Studio Art: 3-D Design, or Studio Art: Drawing). On each portfolio's home page you will see "Scoring Guidelines." Clicking on the Scoring Guidelines link will cause Adobe Acrobat to launch, and the PDF version will appear. Note: No matter which portfolio you select to navigate from, all of the scoring guidelines for Studio Art will be downloaded, not just for the particular portfolio you selected.

Assessing Sections

Section I: Quality

This section of the portfolio is an opportunity for students to show their very best, most developed work. The best work in the quality section demonstrates intentional manipulation of media in the service of a visual idea; there is a sense of confidence, visual intelligence, informed risk taking, imagination, and "voice." The student has obviously developed both technical art skills and creative-thinking/problem-solving skills. The work shows a high level of engagement with the process of making art as well as commitment and challenge. The degree to which the work demonstrates these qualities determines the score that the student earns on this section. In less successful portfolios, the work may show strong technical competence but lack a sense of invention or imagination, or vice versa. It might seem purposeful and have verve but be less resolved than one might hope to see in a student's very best work.

An average portfolio will often be a mixed portfolio, with some works much stronger than others, demonstrating some technical competence and some manipulation of ideas without the two qualities necessarily working well together. If the work addresses ideas, the student may not have the technical skills to depict them, or vice versa.

The poorest work shows little, if any, evidence of thinking; solutions tend to be trite. This work often exhibits very weak command of composition and technique. The student may not have had enough experience to understand how to develop and express a visual idea.

Section II: Concentration

This section of the portfolios is intended to provide students with the opportunity to work in the way that most professional artists do: on a body of work that is "unified by an underlying idea that has visual ... coherence." This is intended to be a prolonged and focused investigation. It should be something that is of vital interest to the student and that lends itself to the student's way of working. Perhaps obviously, the quality of the artwork and the evidence in it of the quality of the student's investigation and development play an important part in the score the student earns.

Teachers should spend as much effort and time helping their students to develop creative and original concentration ideas as they do in teaching and evaluating the manual skills in students' work. Too often Readers see facile manipulation of art materials in service to tired, clichéd ideas. It is a disservice to students to neglect the conceptual aspects of art in deference to the physical. One way to promote creative thinking is to make sure that students see and discuss artwork made by professional artists. When professional art is a touchstone of excellence in the classroom,

students are less likely to fall back on well-worn ideas. Another way to promote superior conceptualization is to make this aspect of the art an important part of regular, rigorous, yet supportive class critiques.

Strong to excellent concentrations show a clear and focused idea that remains at the heart of the work even as the idea develops. The sense of transformation in the progression of the slides is evident. These works are engaging in both form and content. They are evocative, eliciting an aesthetic response in the viewer.

There is often a sense that the average concentrations are not completely well handled or very effectively explored. Sometimes the idea is so broad that it is difficult for the student to do much with it (for example, "faces," or "nature," or "pencil drawing"). Though it is possible to be too narrow, as well, it seems that more students have trouble focusing their ideas than broadening them. It is often productive to ask students who have these broad ideas for concentrations, "What is it specifically about faces that interests *you*?" "Why choose a topic that is so well traveled in the art world, so prone to cliché?" "What do you have to say about faces that is unique?" With this kind of supportive yet challenging questioning, students can move beyond their first (and "worst," some might say) ideas to a concentration topic that is individual and engaging on many levels. However, average concentrations have not perceptibly benefited by this questioning. They generally demonstrate limited investigation (perhaps the students were not as interested in the topic as they thought); there is little growth in the work; or although the work might be technically well handled, it is not really a concentration.

The weakest concentrations are frequently not convincing; there is often a real sense that the student did a lot of work in art class, then made up a concentration statement to try to fit it all together. The evidence of thinking in these concentrations is generally not easy to see, and the pieces may not be very technically adept. Such a concentration might be a good start but not include enough work to be an effective investigation.

Students have an opportunity to illuminate their work with a concentration statement. Though these statements are not scored, they provide invaluable assistance to Readers looking at the work. A good concentration statement gives a clear and concise verbal accompaniment to the visual work in the portfolio. The statement conveys a sense of the direction of investigation in the concentration and provides insights into what the student learned in the process of doing the work. It is fruitful for students to write a concentration statement at the beginning of their work and then revise it when the portfolio is due. This reflection over time provides students with excellent insights into the process that goes into the creation of their work and ensures that the statement actually helps the Readers to look at the work. (It is advisable to type the statement to ensure readability.)

The order of slides can also be illuminating. One of the qualities Readers are looking for is development of skill and idea. If slides are placed to effectively demonstrate this, it works to the student's benefit. Readers generally read the slides left to right, top to bottom, and a common assumption is that the more recent (well-developed) work is at the bottom. Readers adjust when this is obviously not the order the student used, but in general it is a good idea to place the slides to match the Reader's natural reading preferences. If students use a different scheme to order the slides, it would be helpful to have a brief description of this order included in the concentration statement.

Section III: Breadth

The breadth section of the portfolios should demonstrate a range of abilities with technique, problem solving, and ideation.

Work that scores highest in this section shows a wide range of abilities and approaches. This work persuades Readers that the artist has an excellent command of the tools and concepts of art and can use them to create imaginative and engaging pieces. The works move beyond class exercises to show assimilation of the concepts and maturity in handling them.

Average portfolios are frequently varied, containing a few strong pieces mixed with less successful works. The works might be of good quality but are so similar in form and content that they would be mistaken for a concentration rather than a breadth section. Portfolios that are generally of good quality but are predominantly classroom exercises without evidence of individual thinking may receive average scores.

The very weakest work shows a lack of understanding of the tools and concepts of art. Some of the weakest portfolios show no breadth whatsoever, betraying a lack of understanding of the concept of breadth, and possibly a lack of variety in the student's experience of art thus far. Some portfolios in this score range are incomplete.

A persistent debate continues about the definition of breadth: media or materials vs. content and approach. It must be emphasized that Readers look for and honor both kinds of breadth, even though the content/approach breadth is sometimes less easy to spot. The breadth section offers a set of criteria that balance those of the concentration. In one, the student is asked to focus on a single compelling topic or mode of working, and in the other, the student is urged to experiment and show versatility in idea and technique. Of course, it is impossible to completely divide breadth skills from concentration skills; an effective concentration should show a number of approaches to the topic, and the best work in breadth demonstrates commitment to an idea or mode of working. Studio Art Readers are dedicated to working within this Venn diagram of overlapping concerns, trying to tease out the distinctions between them. This is not the easy way, but it is congruent with contemporary art practice and with promotion of the view that high school student artists are in fact *artists* and should be given as much autonomy in the structuring of their study of art as possible.

Assessment by Portfolio—2005

The 2-D Design Portfolio appears to have stabilized. Readers observed that the work submitted for this portfolio was more on task in terms of use of the principles of design than has been evident in recent years. Though it is clear that high school teachers and students still struggle with the lack of clear distinction between 2-D Design and Drawing, the work revealed a higher level of understanding of the overlap.

Two-dimensional design is in a sense an umbrella—everything that happens on a two-dimensional surface, regardless of media, is designed. This means that a work of art that is created with drawing materials will have aspects of two-dimensional design that contribute to its success. The drawing may be well designed, showing sophisticated positive and negative space/shape relationships. It may be visually unified. It may be visually balanced. It may use color in a creative

and informed way. If so, then this drawing could also be said to be a good example of two-dimensional design.

So then, how do AP Readers evaluate work that is both a drawing and a design? If it appears in the Drawing portfolio, they evaluate it as a drawing, giving preference to drawing issues and qualities, i.e., using a drawing “lens.” (It should be noted, however, that the drawing lens includes composition; two-dimensional design is never absent from the evaluation of a work of two-dimensional art. However, in the Drawing portfolio, the evaluation of composition is mingled with evaluation of such aspects of drawing as line quality, tonal values, illusory space, representation/abstraction, etc.) If the work turns up in a 2-D Design portfolio, Readers use a two-dimensional design lens to evaluate the work. The design qualities of the work are considered foremost. Active engagement with the elements and principles of design is assessed.

- **2-D Design Quality**

The quality section retained its strong showing from last year. Readers saw more examples of well-designed photography and digital work than in the past. The best portfolios focused on design issues and demonstrated mastery of these concepts within the chosen medium.

It is in this section that the controversy about technique vs. design often arises. It is possible to create a beautifully made, technically proficient photograph, and yet have this work be less successful as an example of effective two-dimensional design. The converse is also true—a work may be a very effective design but show only rudimentary command of the medium. It is important to emphasize that Readers primarily look for successful manipulation of the principles of design when evaluating works submitted for 2-D Design. Most of the high-scoring work shows technical mastery as well as excellent command of the principles of design. However, excellent technique alone is not sufficient to earn a high score on the 2-D Design portfolio.

- **2-D Design Concentration**

The concentration section suffered from an uneven understanding of the concept of concentration, as well as inconsistent development of visual ideas (see additional comments about across-the-board problems with concentrations in the Drawing Concentration text on the next page). Teachers might look to bodies of work by famous artists to help students understand what is meant by the phrase “development of a visual idea.” Check out Richard Diebenkorn’s *Ocean Park* series of paintings, Joseph Cornell’s *Medici* series of assemblage boxes, Deborah Butterfield’s horse sculptures, and Faith Ringgold’s story quilts as examples.

- **2-D Design Breadth**

This year, as in 2004, it seemed that students were really struggling with the concept of breadth. Readers saw many portfolios that defined breadth as simply many works in different media, without any breadth of approach evident. 2-D Design also receives the most portfolios that use a single medium (frequently photography) to demonstrate breadth. Though it is possible to articulate a variety of design issues in a single medium, students who attempt this are often not focusing on a breadth of design issues. Students who wish to execute the breadth section in a single medium should select works in which the breadth in their approach is obvious.

The 3-D Design Portfolio, though only occupying a small percentage of the total number of exams is, in many ways, Studio Art's "star" portfolio. The work is generally strong, revealing obvious good teaching. For each of the past four years Readers have seen increasingly sophisticated work in this portfolio—work that demonstrates a solid understanding of three-dimensional design principles. However, there is a consistent problem with detail slides and second views that is most obvious in this portfolio. Students often include details that are not very informative and second views that do not display much more than the first view. This is a wasted opportunity. Second views and details that truly deliver more information help the Readers understand the work better and score accurately.

- **3-D Design Quality**

Quality remains high. Though functional ceramics is still the most common three-dimensional design medium, Readers noted more ambitious and inventive work in this section this year.

- **3-D Design Concentration**

The concentrations tended to be the strongest parts of the 3-D Design portfolios. In general, they were on task and of good quality, with a high level of artistic thinking demonstrated.

- **3-D Design Breadth**

Overall, the quality of work in this section was weaker than in the other two areas. The best work incorporated breadth of approach and media, but sadly, many 3-D Design breadth sections were not very broad.

The Drawing Portfolio has traditionally yielded higher quality work overall, in part because of its clarity and focus. Possibly another aspect of this success is the fact that drawing can be taught very well with a minimum of tools and equipment. Further, most high school teachers understand that drawing is a fundamental art skill, and it is usually a keystone in art programs.

- **Drawing Quality**

This section seemed less strong than in years past, especially at the high end of the 1–6 scoring scale. There were fewer of the truly "stellar" level 6 portfolios, though there were also fewer truly unaccomplished level 1 portfolios. Readers noted an increase in the number of mixed media works that had a digital component. Digital work is not allowed in the Drawing portfolio, so those portfolios were scored as irregular.

- **Drawing Concentration**

Though the drawing concentrations were generally better this year than last, it is clear that teachers and students still struggle with the definition of "concentrations." The Studio Art Poster and Course Description ask for sustained development of a visual idea in this section, and this was often the area that Readers found lacking in the work. They also noted that vague or unclear concentration statements often seemed to go together with weaker or undeveloped work. At times it seemed that the concentration statement was developed after the work was completed, rather than as a guiding "starting point." More work should be done to help students develop cogent and original concentration statements at the beginning of their work on the concentration. Students are better able to do their best work when they clearly understand the goal they aspire to fulfill.

- **Drawing Breadth**

Readers noted more “breadth” in the breadth section this year. Students and teachers seem to have developed an understanding of breadth in approach as well as materials. This helped students score better on this section across the board than they have in years past.

Submitting Student Work

Good-quality slides are extremely important. Slides are not projected at the Reading; they are viewed with magnifiers on a light box. If the slides look dark when projected, they will be very difficult to see on the light box. Readers cannot fairly evaluate what they cannot see. Using the light box also means that work that fills the whole frame of the slide and is appropriately exposed is slightly advantaged because it is easier to see. Neutral backgrounds (black, white, or medium gray) are a must. If students use brightly colored backgrounds, they make it very difficult for Readers to concentrate on their work. Advise students not to do it—it is distracting and looks unprofessional.

It is recommended that students shoot slides over the course of the year rather than waiting until the portfolio deadline to shoot them all. If slides are shot early, then those that are too dark or out of focus can be retaken. To evaluate the slides, students should look at them as the Readers do, with a magnifier over a light box. If the student cannot see the work, a Reader will not be able to either. The *AP Studio Art Teacher’s Guide* has a description of effective slide-shooting procedures. Other helpful resources include:

- *Photographing Your Artwork*, 2nd edition, by Russell Hart; Buffalo, N.Y.: Amherst Media, 2000 (available at amazon.com).
- *Photographing Your Craftwork: A Hands-On Guide for Crafts People* by Steve Meltzer; Loveland, Col.: Interweave Press, 1993. (This edition is out of print but may be available in libraries; an earlier edition, published by Madrona, is for sale at amazon.com.)

“Sharing” of work between students is prohibited and is often discovered. Readers have amazingly good visual memories, and the AP Program does make the effort to track down possible occurrences of this kind of cheating. Copying work or claiming someone else’s work as one’s own also falls into this category. It is dishonest, and students should be admonished not to do it.

Three years ago, the AP Program instituted an “overlap check” to determine how well students were adhering to the rule prohibiting use of the same work in the concentration and breadth sections. Readers discovered an alarming amount of this kind of cheating. Violators received a letter notifying them of the discovery of the cheating, and Readers adjusted the scores on the breadth section accordingly.

Following the directions on the AP Studio Art Poster is vital to doing one’s best on the exam. The poster is revised every year, so teachers and students should read it carefully, rather than assuming that they know what is there. Putting slides in the proper place, and putting them in right side up, avoiding shiny coverings on actual work, using neutral colored mats, etc., are all requests made of students, and it is to students’ benefit to follow the guidelines. Doing so makes accurate assessment of the strengths of the work easier to accomplish.

AP Studio Art Readers are grateful to be part of a process that celebrates the dedication, creative talent, and passion for art apparent in the work of so many student artists and their teachers.