



Student Performance Q&A: 2011 AP® Studio Art Portfolios

The following comments on the 2011 portfolios for AP® Studio Art were written by the Chief Reader, Herb Weaver of Georgia Gwinnett College in Lawrenceville, Georgia. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

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 2011, 145 experienced college and high school teachers gathered to determine how well the students addressed this task.

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

Composition of the Portfolios

Section 1: Quality. For the 2-D Design and Drawing Portfolios, students submitted five actual works which demonstrated mastery of design or drawing. For the 3-D Design Portfolio, 10 digital images of five works (two views of each) were submitted.

Section II: Concentration. Students submitted 12 digital images of works describing an in-depth exploration of a particular artistic concern.

Section III: Breadth. In this portion of the portfolios, students submitted a variety of works demonstrating an understanding of the principles of drawing or the relevant aspects of design. In particular, 12 digital images of 12 different works for 2-D Design or Drawing, or 16 digital images of eight different works (two views of each) for 3-D Design, were required.

Scoring Standards and Criteria

Two to three different Readers using a 6-point scale scored each section of the portfolios. This means typically that seven Readers score each entire portfolio. The scores are recalculated by statisticians so that scores assigned for each section (Quality, Concentration and Breadth) are equally weighted. Each section counts for one-third of a student's final score, which is then translated into the AP 5-point score scale. This system gives a balanced look at the student's work and provides an accurate assessment of his or her overall performance in art.

The "cut-points" that divide each score point are set by the Chief Reader to correspond with scores the work would be likely to receive in a college foundation class (AP 5 = A and so on). Colleges use the AP score to help decide if a new student is ready to "test 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 test out of a requirement to bring their portfolios with them when they come to college. Often college faculty will withhold judgment about a student's readiness until they view the actual work in the portfolio.

The scoring guidelines are criteria that the Readers use as guides in assigning scores to the work. The scoring guidelines evolve from year to year, based on the experience of the Chief Reader and Table Leaders, but they are not changed during the actual Reading. Current scoring guidelines can be downloaded from the Studio Art section of AP Central®.

Portfolio Assessment—2011.

The 2-D Design Portfolio

- **2-D Design Quality**
Submissions for the 2-D Design Portfolio continued to experience tremendous growth in both numbers and quality of work. 2-D Design submissions were creative as well as inventive because of a variety of media approaches. The Quality section remained very strong this year and featured excellent examples of design-based photography and digital work.
- **2-D Design Concentration**
Stronger artwork and scores in this portfolio section suggested there is a clearer understanding of the definition of a concentration. Workshop presenters and high school teachers provided an informed explanation and definition of what a concentration involves.
- **2-D Design Breadth**
An improvement in the Breadth section was noted in 2011 because of an increase in active engagement with a broad range of design issues. Although some students still focused on works in a variety of media instead of breadth in design issues, the best work demonstrated successful solutions to design concerns.

The 3-D Design Portfolio

- **3-D Design Quality**

The quality of the 3-D Design Portfolio improved. Ceramics and jewelry seemed to dominate the majority of work submitted; however, use of found objects and other inexpensive materials was often inventive, demonstrating exploration of 3-D design concerns. Sculptural issues need to be more thoroughly addressed. The images of “details” should be more thoughtfully composed to better inform the purpose.

- **3-D Design Concentration**

The 3-D Concentrations as a whole were comparable to last year. Similar to the 2-D and Drawing sections, the 3-D Concentration could improve dramatically if students were selecting a genuine series of thoughtful works woven within a meaningful theme instead of selecting works that simply seem to go together.

- **3-D Design Breadth**

The key to successful completion of 3-D Breadth is to focus more on defining relationships between surface and form to express design issues. Of all the sections in all three exams, 3-D Breadth scored the lowest perhaps because of a lack of addressing design issues. It can be difficult to create the necessary volume of artwork in the classroom which causes students to scramble to find enough work to submit for the portfolio at the end of the year.

The Drawing Portfolio

- **Drawing Quality**

Although the Drawing Exam did not experience the same growth as the 2-D Exam, the consistency of the Drawing Portfolio remained strong, albeit somewhat conservative in approach. It appeared that every student knew “what a good drawing is” and therefore that notion became the goal. Students should consider transferring their superior technical skills in drawing to developing a keener sense of investigation and inventiveness. For the most part, teachers comprehended the Drawing section and did a good job in teaching this portfolio to their students.

- **Drawing Concentration**

Because the Concentration section requires a great deal of preparation, students would benefit from dedicating time in the beginning of the project to developing a “plan of action.” The Concentration section encourages students to work out a cohesive body of artwork in a theme-based rationale. Each year definitions of a “concentration” show growth and some students were able to grasp the true intention of a “theme” quite effectively.

- **Drawing Breadth**

The artwork submitted in the Quality and Concentration sections proves that the potential is in place for the Breadth section, and it might be a matter of reviewing the basic tenets of the “Breadth” to better ascertain a proper selection of artworks for this particular portfolio section.

Final Thoughts

I find that those involved with the making of art are usually eager to share their ideas and techniques with others. There is a sense of community and genuine willingness to help other students, teachers, workshop presenters and AP Consultants among the AP Studio Art Program in an effort to better understand the life-changing advantages of uncovering the creativity in oneself.

I encourage teachers to engage in as many networking opportunities as possible. Whether it be exchanging ideas with other teachers in your local area, enrolling in an AP Summer Institute, or inviting an AP Consultant to your school, there is a plethora of valuable information to be shared. Also, consider using various resources for teachers, in particular the publication *Evaluating the AP® Portfolio in Studio Art*, a valuable resource that includes substantive comments by a former Chief Reader on student work that received a variety of scores. All sections of all portfolios are included in this full-color text, which is available at the College Board Store (store.collegeboard.com). In addition, there are many excellent articles by Studio Art teachers and links to other resources on the Studio Art Course Home Pages for 2-D Design, 3-D Design and Drawing on AP Central.

As a teacher, there is nothing quite like the joy of experiencing the moment when a student seems to “get it,” and part of that eureka moment originates from meaningful instruction. Over the years I have witnessed continual and transformational growth in the AP Studio Art Program in both quantity and quality of artwork. I believe the best is yet to evolve as we all continually strive to achieve the best results for our students.