

Moderators' report

GCSE

ART AND DESIGN

OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in Art and Design (Art, Craft and Design, Fine Art, Graphic Communication, Photography, Textile Design, Three-Dimensional Design, Critical and Contextual Studies)

J170-J176

For first teaching in 2016

J170-J176/01/02 Summer 2025 series

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Introduction

Our Moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on centres' assessment of moderated work, based on what has been observed by the moderation team. These reports include a general commentary of accuracy of internal assessment judgements, identify good practice in relation to evidence collation and presentation, and comment on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. The report also highlights areas where requirements have been misinterpreted and provides guidance to centre assessors on requirements for accessing higher mark bands. Where appropriate, the report will also signpost other sources of information that centre assessors will find helpful.

OCR completes moderation of centre-assessed work in order to quality assure the internal assessment judgements made by assessors within a centre. Where OCR cannot confirm the centre's marks, we may adjust them in order to align them to the national standard. Any adjustments to centre marks are detailed on the Moderation Adjustments report, which can be downloaded from Interchange when results are issued. Centres should also refer to their individual centre report provided after moderation has been completed. In combination, these centre-specific documents and this overall report should help to support centres' internal assessment and moderation practice for future series.

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General overview

The 2025 OCR GCSE Art and Design (9–1) series again showcased the imagination, skill, and creative talents of candidates across the United Kingdom and overseas. Entries spanned all specification titles, including Art, Craft and Design, Fine Art, Photography, Graphic Communication, Textile Design, Three-Dimensional Design and Critical & Contextual studies. Similarly to 2024, it is to be noted that there is an increase in submissions from centres offering 3D Design, as part of a suite of Art and Design qualifications, favouring the flexibility of the framework provided by the specification through delivery of the core content.

Candidates in this series have continued to benefit from the stimulating and well-structured application of the specification by teachers and Art educators who have exhibited passion and resilience in teaching and learning, to provide candidates with vast opportunities to make and create Art in all manner of exciting ways. Never less so, was this evident in the highly individual starting points, themes, project briefs explored by candidates through both the Portfolio and the Externally Set Task. Often the personal nature of the themes explored resulted in a body of work that felt authentic, imaginative and sometimes daring.

A particularly striking feature of the 2025 submissions was the inventive blending of media, techniques and processes explored by candidates. Across all specification titles, candidates embraced both traditional and digital methods, often seamlessly integrating hand-drawn elements with digital design tools. The widespread use of mixed media allowed candidates to deepen the visual and conceptual complexity of their work. When done effectively, media choices clearly stemmed from research and exploration, highlighting the strength of contextual investigations and critical engagement.

Teachers and Art educators should never underestimate the vital role they play in acting as conduit in nurturing candidate creativity. Moderators noted that very often submissions presented for moderation often tell more about a centre's own creative journeys, rather than just work presented for external assessment. While this did not detract from the application of the 2025 OCR GCSE Art and Design standard, sophisticated realisation of intentions in both components do not happen overnight and are a testimony to careful curriculum mapping from the outset providing well-planned and engaging courses that encouraged technical development alongside personal expression. The curriculum structure often facilitated strong links between contextual understanding and practical work, encouraging students to make meaningful connections between their sources and their artistic decisions.

Moderators also commented on candidates' confident handling of materials and processes. In specialisms such as Textile Design, detailed and delicate fabric work was complemented by a noticeable increase in skilled drawing across all forms. In Graphic Communication and Three-Dimensional Design, students employed inventive and often surprising techniques to solve design problems and present innovative outcomes. These submissions showcased both high level technical proficiency and deep creative thinking.

In many successful submissions, in both the Portfolio and Externally Set Task, work was enriched by candidates' engagement with contemporary social, political, and environmental themes. These submissions demonstrated not only artistic ability but also a maturity and awareness of the world around them. Whether addressing climate change, identity, or societal inequality, candidates often used their work as a platform for meaningful commentary. This was less evident in centres running a skills-based approach, where candidates were required to adhere to step-by-step guidance and delivery of learning, which sometimes prevented real creative independence.

Gallery, museum and 'field trips' for location visits arranged by centres often played a crucial role, offering inspiration and encouraging thoughtful engagement with wider cultural contexts. Where

candidates had experienced Art first-hand, the influence was often significant and profound. Even when visits were broad and not directly linked to themes for the Portfolio or the Externally Set Task, the exposure to diverse artworks helped inform students' creative decisions. Sketchbooks often included visual documentation of these visits including the collection of postcards, floorplans, notes, and sketches, demonstrating how those experiences subtly shaped their creative direction. These visits often sparked new ideas, leading to exploration with materials or as is perfectly acceptable, a change in the direction of the creative journey.

Although written annotation is not a formal requirement in the OCR GCSE Art and Design specification, short reflective notes were frequently seen in sketchbooks. These comments provided valuable insight into candidates' intentions, decision-making, and development of ideas. When used purposefully, annotations helped illuminate connections between research and practice and offered clarity on artistic developments and refinements throughout the creative process.

Ultimately, this year's submissions showcased an exciting blend of innovation, drawing skill, and conceptual depth. The range and quality of work submitted spoke volumes about the support provided by centres and the dedication of candidates. The 2025 series confirmed that GCSE Art and Design remains a thriving space for young people to express their voices, take creative risks, and create work of real substance and impact.

Administration and moderation

A gentle reminder to centres: comprehensive guidance regarding the visiting moderation process, before, during, and after the visit is available on the [OCR website](#) and [Teach Cambridge](#). This includes essential instructions, required documentation, and details on how to communicate with your moderator before the scheduled visit. While the moderation panel understands how busy centres are during the summer examination period it is vitally important that communication, usually via email is swift and conducted in a timely manner. The moderation panel is made up of teachers and Art educators who are working in centres themselves, and this requires some flexibility in arranging mutually convenient dates for moderation visits.

It is interesting to note that moderators recognised that on the whole, centre representatives and their teams were afforded the appropriate time to assess and internally moderate across teaching groups and specialisms, before the upload of marks to OCR Interchange. This provides essential opportunities to ensure comparative judgements are made between different teaching groups and across different specification titles to ensure that the OCR GCSE Art and Design marking criteria is applied accurately and fairly to all candidates.

For the 2025 series, most centres successfully met the 15th May deadline for the submission of marks, with some accommodating moderation visits ahead of that date. These early submissions greatly supported the scheduling process, offering moderators increased flexibility to arrange visits. Centres are reminded that attempting to specify a moderation date is not appropriate unless exceptional circumstances have been discussed and approved with OCR.

All marks were submitted via OCR Interchange, which automatically generated a confirmation email along with the list of candidates selected for moderation. It's important to note that two separate sample lists are sent for each specialism: one for Component 1 (Portfolio) and another for Component 2 (Externally Set Task), usually addressed to the exams officer or relevant centre representative.

The majority of centres used the official interactive centre mark forms for both components; CCS443 for the Portfolio and CCS444 for the Externally Set Task, submitting them to moderators ahead of their visit. Visiting moderators cross-reference marks recorded on the centre marks forms against those submitted on OCR Interchange. Where transcriptional errors are identified ahead of the centre visit, in most cases the moderator can help resolve these errors, however it is absolutely essential that centre marks forms are emailed to the moderator well in advance of the moderation visit. Unfortunately, a few centres still manually transcribed marks, which led to occasional clerical errors that were not identified by centre QA processes before the submission of marks to OCR Interchange. Centre Authentication Forms were appropriately retained onsite and made available for moderator inspection.

Moderators widely praised centres for their efforts in presenting candidate work effectively. In most cases, submissions were displayed vertically on walls or display boards, accompanied by sketchbooks or preparatory sheets. Where wall space was limited, tables were used, and work was laid out in the correct rank order per component. While it is recognised that the display of 15 sampled candidates per component, and where a centre offers multiple GCSE Art and Design titles, this can require a significant space it is absolutely essential that candidates' work is displayed to best benefit.

Providing floor plans or display maps for the Portfolio and Externally Set Task components proved especially helpful, supporting a smooth and well-organised moderation process. Although the automated OCR sample request email does not present candidates in rank order, it remains essential that the work is displayed accordingly. Centres generally adhered to the requirement to present the 15 sample candidates' work for each component in separate rank orders. A critical aspect of moderation is the accuracy of the rank order established during internal centre assessment. Particularly where students are taught in different groups or by multiple teachers, best practice requires thorough internal

standardisation. This ensures consistency across specialisms and accurate assessment that reflects the true achievement of each candidate.

Samples for moderation under no circumstances should be presented on the floor or retained in folders for the moderator to sort through. Centres are politely reminded that work presented for moderation for both components should be carefully selected and presented appropriately. It was noted that some centres presenting samples in folders neglected to 'select and present' candidates' best work for moderation which resulted in inconsistencies in qualities across the assessment objectives. Moderators were then left with the task of finding the candidates' better work to compare against the 2025 standard, which often resulted in a lengthy moderation visit.

For digital submissions, centres are to be commended for their adaptability and care in presentation. It is now common practice to offer multiple devices or screens to allow moderators to compare work efficiently and in rank order. Providing guest access to internal networks or cloud platforms further facilitated the smooth assessment of digital content.

Centres are to be thanked for the prompt despatch of samples identified by the moderator. While it is an Ofqual requirement that awarding bodies select moderated samples that are retained for a range of purposes, including CPD, Standardisation and Awarding, the moderation panel recognises the efforts of many centres to accommodate this process. Moderators selected over 1800 samples from all specification titles, from across the entire mark range for both components. All samples are viewed by the senior moderation team and representatives from OCR. Samples are selected to provide examples of candidate work, for each level of the OCR GCSE Art and Design marking criteria, used to set standards and very often, much of the work is retained for the purpose of CPD.

Good practice

As the visiting moderation period draws near, please ensure your exams officer or centre representative with responsibility for marks submission understands the necessity of prompt communication, forwarding relevant emails to the centre Art team without delay.

Check and double check the transfer of marks from the Centre Marks Forms (CCS443 for the Portfolio and CCS444 for the Externally Set Task) to OCR Interchange to avoid transcriptional errors.

Moderator tips

The sample request email from OCR will not be in rank order. Ensure that all 15 samples per component are displayed in separate rank orders, in a quiet venue.

Whenever possible centre representatives should be available if needed by the moderator to discuss the samples. This should not cause alarm; often moderators need to speak with teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the candidates' work.

Component 1: Portfolio

Component 1 comprises of a portfolio of work that can be produced to a centre- or learner-set starting point leading to final artefact(s)/product(s)/personal outcome(s). This portfolio consists of a project, theme or course of study and is presented in appropriate format(s) for the specification title and area(s) of study chosen.

- Developed ideas through investigations and demonstrated critical understanding of sources from a given starting point.
- Produced material informed by context that is relevant to the development of their ideas.
- Refined work by exploring ideas, selecting and experimenting with media appropriate to their chosen specification title and area(s) of study.
- Recorded ideas, observations and insights relevant to intentions as work progresses.
- Presented a personal and meaningful response that realises intentions.

The nature of Portfolio work varied significantly across centres. In many cases, centre staff selected themes and starting points aligned with their own teaching strengths or built around foundational skill-based exercises that revisited knowledge from the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Other centres chose to use previous Externally Set Task themes, using candidate exemplar work and resources to inspire the development of ideas.

Where this structure was in place, students were often encouraged to take creative risks and engage in problem-solving, leading to exploratory work that supported creative growth. However, moderators frequently observed that early exploratory tasks were correctly and deliberately edited out of the final submission. In several instances, initial sketchbook pages were physically bound together or hidden, indicating the appropriate selection and presentation of best work for moderation.

In contrast, many centres adopted a more student-centred approach by encouraging them to pursue themes rooted in personal relevance. Topics included 'Natural Forms', 'Conflict', and the ever-popular 'Self-Identity' incorporating much portraiture. While this candidate-led direction often supported creativity and a sense of independence, moderators noted that some submissions lacked a clear direction towards resolved realisation of intentions. In some cases, sketchbooks resembled visual journal, rich in reflection and exploration but occasionally lacking balanced coverage across all four assessment objectives.

Sketchbooks continued to be an essential tool, and where they demonstrated a coherent development of ideas, tracking the journey from initial investigations and development of ideas to final realisation, they served as both a functional and cohesive package presenting candidates' creative ambition. However, some sketchbooks, while visually engaging, took on a scrapbook-like format, filled with disparate collected or self-made images. In these cases, moderators found it difficult to trace a clear creative progression, and evidence of meeting the assessment objectives was sometimes inconsistent or superficial.

Moderators also noted an increase in the number of centres providing candidates with sheets, headed up and labelled with the assessment objectives. While permissible and can serve as a teaching and learning tool supporting candidates in understanding how their work relates to the assessment objectives, teachers must remember that when assessing candidate's portfolio should be viewed as a whole and judgements regarding the extent to which all of the assessment objectives have been met should be made across the submission as a whole.

Good practice

Ensure the 'selection and presentation' of candidates' work has been considered before terminal centre marking. The entire 'course' in all its forms should not be presented.

The realisation of intentions evidenced a variety of individual outcomes and Portfolio journeys, showing most candidates had some freedom to explore their interests; centres seem to have taken on board that if you give the candidates a choice to respond to something that interests them there will be improved engagement, motivation and outcomes.

Moderator tips

Quality over quantity is an important consideration when investigating sources for Assessment Objective 1. Too many artist references dilutes legitimate critical understanding and analysis.

Pertinent and relevant annotation provides direction and evidences candidates' understanding of sources and how they intend to use said knowledge and understanding in the development of their creative journey.

AO1: Develop ideas through investigations, demonstrating critical understanding of sources.

In 2025, an increasing number of candidates were exposed to direct contextual experiences through school-organised trips to galleries and museums. In some cases, workshops and artist-led sessions although still relatively rare, offered further enrichment, while individual visits by candidates to local galleries or studios consistently had a positive effect on the development of their work. These experiences often influenced creative decisions and expanded candidates' creative perspective and understanding.

Candidates across all specialisms were encouraged by their centres to engage with critical and contextual research throughout both components, but more so in the Portfolio. Teachers and Art educators rightly recognised that this aspect is best approached not as a standalone task, but as a fundamental part of the creative process. Centres that promoted meaningful investigations into a variety of historical, cultural, modern, and contemporary practitioners helped candidates gain deeper insight and direction. Contextual understanding was also frequently broadened through exposure to more commercial approaches such as advertising, product design, media, interior design, publishing, and architecture, reinforcing how art and design apply to a wider professional context as part of the aims and learning outcomes of the specification.

While some centres continued to rely on traditional 'masters' for contextual grounding, a continued gravitation toward contemporary influences has again influenced sources investigated. YouTube videos, lesser known artists, craftspeople and designers using Pinterest, Instagram and other social media apps was prevalent in samples seen by the moderation panel.

This reflected candidates' engagement with contemporary culture and where successful, provided for obvious links to the starting points for the Portfolio and the themes selected for the Externally Set Task. This included references to national and internal news coverage of current affairs, film, street art, video games, and popular culture, all of which helped ground the work in the lived experiences of students.

The most successful work often came from candidates who selected sources that had a genuine personal resonance. When artists or references were closely linked to a candidate's own ideas or lived experiences, they became a powerful catalysts for further investigation and creative development. This was noted by the moderation panel in centres that provided structure and sometimes a range of teacher directed sources and then enabled candidates to widen their perspective and independently demonstrate their critical understanding of sources, applying their knowledge to the practical work.

Despite many centres making strong efforts to encourage visual documentation of the creative journey, annotation still played a useful role in articulating understanding. Although the core skills of the OCR specification states candidates should record their ideas both visually and through written annotation, many centres acknowledged that brief notes can enhance clarity, especially when explaining the rationale behind artistic decisions or the relevance of chosen sources.

Where sources investigated provided ideas through selection and critical analysis, directing choices made in the application of materials, media, techniques and processes, samples presented a very clear journey through the assessment objectives without the need for signposting. That said, there remains a concern that contextual research is sometimes approached as a superficial, checklist-style task. In some cases, candidates fulfilled Assessment Objective 1 simply by collecting and pasting internet images into their sketchbooks without deeper analysis or at times any connection to the theme of their work. Moderators noted that such approaches were occasionally over-rewarded. At its most effective, contextual reference directs the creative journey, it directs choices made in recording ideas and the

selection of materials and media, and the influences of sources and investigations should be evident in the realisation of intentions. All the component parts of the Portfolio and the Externally Set Task should all lead to a conclusion in the form of a realisation of intentions that binds the 'whole' together.

Good practice

Develop ideas through investigations informed by selecting and critically analysing sources from both contemporary and historical backgrounds.

Where sources investigated clearly influenced the selection of materials, media, techniques and processes, outcomes benefited.

Moderator tips

Often, centres provide candidates with a range of sources to investigate which can lead to submissions that appear all very similar. Encourage candidates to investigate their own selection of sources and contexts that are relevant to the theme of the Portfolio or Externally Set Task.

Candidates should provide evidence of their understanding of the purpose, intentions and functions of art, craft and design and how this impacts on their own work.

AO2: Refine work by exploring ideas, selecting and experimenting with appropriate media, materials, techniques and processes.

Many centres remained committed to offering candidates broad opportunities to engage with a wide range of techniques, materials, and processes, helping them shape and develop their ideas towards a final outcome. The integration of digital media and online visual references was reported to significantly support the development and refinement of work, with candidates increasingly showing confidence in altering and adapting their approach based on exploration of themes or lines of enquiry. The exploration of media was generally purposeful, and the most successful candidates demonstrated a clear awareness of when and how to make changes to refine their work effectively.

Moderators observed a variety of methods used to support the refinement process. Some candidates applied the styles and techniques of artists directly to their own work, adjusting and adapting these methods to suit their own creative direction. This provided clear evidence of the link between Assessment Objective 1 and its influence on techniques and processes explored by the candidates. Many centres encouraged a combined approach, with candidates actively reviewing and responding to the progression of their work. By the very nature of samples seen and the number of candidates entered for J171 Fine Art, drawing in all its forms, painting, printmaking, and mixed media remain at the forefront of approaches employed by centres and candidates. However, this series it was noted that a significant number of Fine Art and Photography submissions were providing evidence of 3D Design exploration. Laser-cutting, 3D printing and printmaking were combined to create some magnificent installations and sculptural outcomes for Photography and Fine Art. Successful portfolios were often marked by thoughtful material exploration, clearly linked to contextual sources and aimed at expanding or extending initial ideas. In contrast, less successful work often included repetitive imagery or poorly matched materials that lacked direction and did not support the development of the project.

Digital photography and image editing tools were widely used to aid refinement, with many candidates employing techniques such as digital drawing, animation, photographic manipulation, and composition planning to explore and develop ideas. These processes were particularly evident in Graphic Communication and Photography but also contributed to the other specification titles. The moderation team noted that there was a significant increase in the number of centres using photography as a source of primary observation to draw from, to digitally manipulate creating photomontage and candidates' own images transferred via sublimation, to be further manipulated through machine embroidery. Within Textile Design, candidates experimented with a range of traditional and contemporary techniques, including dyeing, weaving, printing, and embroidery. These processes allowed students to explore texture, surface, and colour in innovative ways, translating creative concepts into practical outcomes. The variety of methods used enabled candidates to demonstrate their creative and technical skills, often producing outcomes that reflected both personal expression and links to investigations for Assessment Objective 1.

Candidates explored imaginative approaches such as layering, photomontage, and three-dimensional textile work wrapped around wire sculptures. The realisation of intentions provided evidence of some carefully crafted garments, but the moderation team noted that very often outcomes for Textile Design were moving away from bodice design to items where fashion and function was less of an importance. Similarly to outcomes observed in 2024, centres recognise that Textile Design exists as an Art form in its own right focussing on aesthetic and conceptual exploration.

Good practice

Where dry drawing media is used to create design ideas before digital interpretations and are then scanned and presented in preparatory studies it is essential to ensure that the quality of the drawing matches the qualities exhibited in the digital drawing.

An inventive use of media, materials and techniques and processes, rather than replication based solely on transcription from sources, provides for sophisticated refinement rather than repetition.

More successful submissions linked media, materials, techniques and processes to critical understanding gleaned from investigations for Assessment Objective 1.

Moderator tips

For successful refinement, avoid repetition of imagery but instead develop ideas to create original work.

Use image editing techniques that link to sources investigated.

Ensure the exploration of materials, media, techniques and processes is with purpose to the creative journey of the work.

AO3: Record ideas, observations and insights relevant to intentions as work progresses.

The OCR GCSE Art and Design (9–1) specification, requires candidates to demonstrate their ability to record ideas, observations, insights, and independent judgements as their work develops. This should include the use of appropriate specialist vocabulary and may be presented in various forms. Drawing in all its forms, understandably central to the nature of the subject, is expected throughout the submission, whether through direct observation, secondary source studies, transcriptional imagery, photography, wire modelling, annotation, machine stitching, or written notes from gallery, museum, or site visits.

Moderators noted that recording through both primary and secondary observation was widespread across centres. On the whole, from the samples seen, this took the form of tonal pencil studies, compositional sketches using paint and dry media, thumbnail drawings and photographs and annotation that provided additional insight into the candidates' development of ideas.

In Textile Design, the recording process was notably diverse and very often stemmed directly from approaches investigated for Assessment Objective 1, providing the recording of ideas that linked specifically to research conclusions. Candidates in this specialism frequently used Fine Art techniques, producing high-quality pencil and coloured pencil studies, correlated with primary photographic recording, which were then translated into textile media, such as embroidery and a particular emphasis was noted on the use of machine stitch this series, creating transpositions from sources explored for AO1. It was pleasing to see candidates in this specialism demonstrating their skill and technical abilities in drawing and the subsequent translation of drawn designs presented through stitch, wire, hand and machine embroidery, both of which were time-consuming and required significant skill and patience in comparison to approaches used in other specification titles.

Photography was increasingly used as a key method of recording ideas across all specialisms. This was often combined with digital manipulation to explore scale, composition, and media interpretation. Moderators commented on the increase in the use of contact sheets as a means of identifying sources to work from, including grid enlargements, graphite transfers from photocopies, or indeed to print photographs to be used to create physical photomontage. This subsequently provided a range of evidence and develop candidates' skill and understanding in the forms of drawing most appropriate to their chosen specification title. This was a prime example of candidates using drawing in all its forms for different needs and purposes.

In Graphic Communication, candidates benefited from the analytical study of branding and design products to clarify their development of ideas. Typography continued to be a strong focus, with both hand-rendered and digitally created typefaces evident. However, unless the hand-drawn font designs demonstrated confident and sophisticated skill, its inclusion could sometimes expose a stark contrast in quality, particularly where hybrid approaches to the presentation of both digital and paper-based sketchbooks were common. In addition to this, moderators noted that the use of industry standard graphic design software such as Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign and Canva provides tools that can complement candidate work and create very polished outcomes. While this is permissible and the use of such tools should be explored, identification of the candidates' own designs should be made very clear in the presentation of both components. Annotation using keywords and appropriate terminology, providing explanation of processes used, helps support further this and the further refinement of both ideas and designs.

Although the specification does not require candidates to achieve technical mastery in drawing, it does stress the importance of drawing for different purposes in the creative process. Similarly to how compositional understanding is fundamentally essential in the specification title Photography, drawing should first evidence an understanding of fundamental ways in which mark-making can be created to

portray meaning, ideas and intentions communicated through colour, line, form, tone and texture. Moderators noted that strong submissions showed that raw drawing (predominantly in the form of pencil drawing), like raw photography, was valued as a foundation for further development.

A useful tool for further explanation in all specification titles, written communication also played an important role in many candidates' submissions. Thoughtful annotations often conveyed personal reflections and a deep understanding of art and design's cultural and societal context. Specialist vocabulary appeared in various forms, whether through annotation in sketchbooks and journals, commentary in PowerPoint slides, or written notes on presentation sheets. These reflective insights were most commonly seen in Component 1 and helped clarify the rationale and evaluation behind creative decisions. In one centre visited, candidates had each recorded a video introduction, providing a brief explanation of their intentions and as their work developed through the creative journey and offered evidence of refinement of ideas as the candidate outlined their next steps.

Photography, as a specialism, continues to rely on digital formats for recording, however moderators noted a welcome increase in wet-work processes such as cyanotype printing and photograms, along with a revival of physical techniques like photomontage and collage. These methods offered a refreshing contrast to the often overused digital filters and editing tools found in image editing apps. However, as noted in 2024 some candidates continue to undervalue the concept of Photography as a primary function of recording ideas. Moderators noted that many sketchbooks and PowerPoint presentations exhibited multiple contact sheets as evidence of record. Often the contact sheets were too small to provide an accurate representation of the candidates' recording skills with the compositional quality of the photographs overlooked as the images were manipulated through layering (multiple exposure) and other editing processes.

Good practice

Recording across specification titles should be considered transferable. As an example, machine embroidery is a valid method of recording ideas for Fine Art, ensuring the practical work links to sources investigated for Assessment Objective 1 and is appropriate to the context of the work.

Recording in all its forms should provide evidence of insights, knowledge and understanding in support of the realisation of ideas.

Moderator tips

Where transposition of imagery is used, ensure appropriacy is at the forefront of candidates' approach. Avoid transposition that fails to inform creative journey.

Where a range of materials, techniques and processes are used to record ideas, evidence of skill should be comparable across each alternative media.

AO4: Present a personal and meaningful response that realises intentions and demonstrates understanding of visual language.

Across most centres, candidates presented their work with careful attention to format and layout, particularly in the realisation of their intentions. Portfolios typically included either sketchbooks or mounted sheets accompanied by a final outcome. Photography submissions mirrored this structure, with digital presentations often complemented by A3 sketchbooks and printed outcomes. In the Externally Set Task (EST), outcomes tended to be more concise, given the constraints of the 10-hour supervised session.

Moderators noted that the most successful submissions considered the Portfolio as a cohesive, unified body of work. Centres that recognised the importance of presenting a personal and meaningful journey, rather than relying on a single final piece to meet Assessment Objective 4, tended to produce more holistic outcomes. The very nature of the subject is such that the development of ideas evolve over time and while Assessment Objective 4 is not considered as a conclusion or final piece, it provides candidates opportunities to explore the infinity of Art and Design ideas.

This year, the encouraging trend of centres and candidates collaborating across specification titles continued. Fine Art approaches were prevalent in all specialisms, usually as drawing, in all its forms, underpinning the Core Content section of the OCR GCSE Art and Design specification. Moderators particularly noted that Photography supported the recording of ideas in Graphic Communication, with many images transcribed through image editing software. Graphic Communication often incorporated primary photographs used in the creation of marketing and advertising materials and sublimation printing of candidate photographs appeared often in Textile Design.

Submissions that demonstrated thorough planning, such as initial sketches, tests of materials, contextual research, and the use of candidates' own photography tended to be more cohesive and successful. In contrast, some entries followed a predictable, linear structure: artist research, basic recording, surface-level material exploration, and a final outcome. These lacked depth in reflection and refinement, resulting in weaker personal responses and limited engagement with formal elements or visual language.

There was clear evidence that candidates' outcomes developed meaningfully from their initial contextual investigations, with themes grounded in personal or cultural interests. It was refreshing to see inspiration drawn from more contemporary and diverse sources, rather than only from historically traditional artists. The trend in candidates exploring themes connected to street art, animation, graphic novels, and popular culture continued, however it was noted by moderators that in pursuance of a personal and meaningful response, through exploration of contemporary practice, very often outcomes and the realisation of intentions sometimes lacked understanding of visual language due to the very nature of the style and approach of sources investigated. Sometimes the sources explored although appropriate, could disguise candidates' legitimate skill and achievement in demonstrating their knowledge and understanding through practical work.

Although Assessment Objective 4 should not be interpreted as solely the final piece, moderators noted that the majority of outcomes remained two-dimensional in form. These were usually presented on surfaces including large-scale paper, corrugated cardboard and sometimes canvas. Elsewhere, evidence of sophisticated garment design, wall hangings and Barbara Hepworth inspired suspension bridge design and construction, demonstrated some very sophisticated and mature outcomes at GCSE level. Mixed media was often a defining feature in imaginative work, with many candidates experimenting with texture, layering, surface variation, and photomontage in Photography to achieve compelling final results.

Again, moderators noted the continuing trend for candidates to give valid consideration to the physical presentation of their sketchbooks, however in some cases, an excessive focus on decorative sketchbook presentation continued to be observed. Candidates appeared to devote significant time to visual embellishments early in the course, only to lose momentum and clarity later on. As one moderator observed, “there was a lot of decoration under the label of ‘Presentation’. Many candidates invested hours at the beginning, but lost time and energy for refining actual content later.” Centres may wish to redirect candidate efforts towards clarity and purpose, encouraging decoration only when it enhances or supports the intention behind the work.

Good practice

Quality over quantity and less is more. Assessment Objective 4 is not just a final piece. Assessment Objective 4 is the overall package and provides evidence of a cohesive creative journey.

The realisation of intentions should demonstrate a sustained application of the creative process.

Moderator tips

There was often evidence of only surface-level connections to contextual sources, which had limited influence on candidates' outcomes. A deeper critical understanding of formal elements and the visual or contextual qualities in the work of artists and practitioners would have strengthened candidates' ability to develop their ideas and effectively realise their intentions.

Component 2: Externally set task

A genuine sense of candidates rising to the challenge was evident across submissions, with most centres promoting the EST as an opportunity for candidates to engage independently with the development of their ideas. The themes offered in the EST were broad, thought-provoking, and enabled many candidates to explore highly personal responses. From conversations with centre representatives and through evidence provided in the preparatory studies, moderators reported that there was an honest enjoyment from candidates for the themes of the question paper. *Dining Room* and *Music* proved particularly inspiring across all specialisms including Graphic Communication, Textile Design, and 3D Design. Less so *Movies*, which often provided for predictable outcomes and much transcription of movie posters and movie memorabilia.

In some particularly ambitious samples seen, Textile Design outcomes demonstrated creative contextual links for *Hair*, with investigations into Korean decorative hair styles, and ethnic associations linked to the work of Kione Grandison and Jessica Spence alongside a number of photoshoots conducted in Barber Shops and Hairdressers.

Construction appeared less popular, across the specification titles but was frequently visited for 3D Design candidates, making interpretations from construction site machinery, architectural design and interesting interpretations of construction in natural forms. Design inspiration was drawn from the interior of seashells, honeycomb and microscopic imagery of seedpods blended with reference to Eduardo Paolozzi and Nunzio Paci's growth decay and regeneration studies, culminating in sculptural bridge designs.

A strength noted by moderator's recognised individual engagement with the themes and exploration of preparatory studies that provided very personal departures. While the majority of centres offered candidates a full choice of EST starting points, a few continue to limit the number of themes made available, occasionally structuring the experience with pre-selected resources. This approach, while well-intentioned, often resulted in restricted personal outcomes and limited creative independence.

Many candidates selected rich and culturally relevant references to develop their ideas. Sub-themes were created skirting the EST themes, while providing candidates with opportunities to address current affairs and social issues. Dining Room provided some very interesting interpretations of the theme, exploring family dynamics and adolescence, with much reference to Sarah Jones's 'The Dining Room (Francis Place 1)'. Freedom for candidates to select from the full range of themes offers choice and allows for meaningful and personal realisation of intentions.

Most centres showed strong organisational planning, allowing candidates to use the preparatory phase and the ten-hour supervised time effectively. Submissions that benefited from two focused blocks of supervised time tended to show greater clarity and completion in their final outcomes. Where candidates were well-prepared, the realisation of intentions reflected thorough planning, exploration of materials, and clear personal direction. However, moderators noted that for some candidates, preparation for the supervised time was limited, with the realisation of intentions concluding with the reproduction of preparatory work to larger scales, which at times was over-ambitious and neglected to consider the impact of scale on materials and media being employed to create the final realisations.

Across specification titles, candidates demonstrated thoughtful development of ideas. Drawing, photography, and the collection of visual and contextual resources were used to good effect. Many submissions showed strong links between earlier learning and the EST, with candidates using previously acquired knowledge and skills to generate new ideas. Gallery and museum visits, personal photography, and reflective annotation often enriched the developmental journey. Photography remains a vital tool across all specialisms, not only in its own right but also as a supportive medium for recording ideas.

Candidates used photographic imagery in increasingly sophisticated ways with digital manipulation, compositional development, and creative reinterpretation.

Moderators observed a continuation of cross-specialism integration, particularly where centres already promote this approach in Component 1. Photography and Graphic Communication techniques were widely used to support idea development in other areas. For example, Fine Art submissions included photographic processes and textile embellishments; Textile Design featured traditional Fine Art recording techniques; and Graphic Communication submissions often incorporated photographic imagery for packaging, advertising, and editorial design. Fine Art entries also showed experimentation with photomontage, digital layering, mixed surfaces, and painted or stitched overlays.

Overall, the variety of materials, themes, and techniques seen in submissions indicated strong engagement with the assessment objectives. The freedom offered by the EST themes was generally well supported by centres, who encouraged candidates to develop personal, meaningful responses. This allowed individuality and creativity to flourish, resulting in dynamic, well-considered final outcomes.

Select and Present

For both components of the OCR GCSE Art and Design, candidates must present a well-organised body of work that clearly evidences all four assessment objectives. The importance of **quality over quantity** has been regularly highlighted in moderators' reports, and it is encouraging to see many centres making significant progress in this area. However, some uncertainty remains regarding how much work is **enough** for assessment, and a few centres continue to equate volume with value, often to the detriment of meaningful outcomes.

Moderators continue to see instances where candidates submit large volumes of undeveloped or loosely connected work. Such submissions often include repetitive or superficial explorations that did not lead to meaningful realisation of intentions. This was again, particularly evident in Photography, with some PowerPoint presentations containing over 100 slides, which is simply too much. Often photographs were duplicated, altered only slightly through contrast or colour saturation adjustment which failed to exhibit work that refined with purpose.

GCSE Art and Design is typically delivered over two years. Understandably, work produced early in the course may lack the refinement and depth of later pieces. It is therefore essential that candidates, with guidance from teachers and Art educators, select only their strongest and most representative work for the final Portfolio submission. Not every piece created over the two years needs to be submitted. Instead, the emphasis should be on work that demonstrates clear progress, purposeful development, and confident understanding of the assessment objectives.

While the use of secondary source imagery is permitted within the OCR GCSE Art and Design specification, its contribution to assessment is minimal unless it is actively developed. Work based on secondary sources must show evidence of meaningful transformation, whether through media experimentation, technique development, or concept refinement, demonstrating a clear and purposeful link to the candidate's intentions. The transposition of secondary sources, in a range of different media, does not provide evidence of critical analysis and it is essential that the influence of sources investigated can be recognised as having an impact on the direction of the creative journey towards the realisation of intentions.

Candidates need to see the clear lines of attainment through the assessment objectives, and fully discernible, selection, revision and completion are paramount. Most centres impressed on candidates that consistent quality and selection far outweigh a large quantity of unrelated and substandard work

regardless of levels of achievement. A minority of centres are still encouraging candidates to produce large volumes of work which fail to fully develop their ideas with tenuous strands of exploration which subsequently fails to inform a meaningful outcome.

Collected secondary source imagery, while permissible in the OCR GCSE Art and Design specification holds little achievement value unless further advanced through transposition, exploration of media, materials, techniques and appropriately linked processes and can be seen to hold purpose towards the realisation of intentions.

Moderators noted that at times work journals and sketchbooks were viewed in moderation samples for both components, but less so for the Externally Set Task, were reduced to 'scrapbooks' rather than sketchbooks and sometimes candidates presented the same image photocopied and then presented with assorted colours, different marks, or different shading, something which does not reflect the development of their ideas or particularly lend anything to the creative journey.

Good Practice

Consider 'quality' not 'quantity'.

Where candidates have completed multiple projects throughout the course, select the project that demonstrates their creative journey 'over time' and provide evidence for all assessment objectives.

Avoid submitting sketchbooks that evidence inconsistency in skill over time. As an example, work created towards the beginning of the course may not necessarily compare favourably to work created towards the end of Component 1.

Moderator Tips

Select and Present the candidates 'best' work for moderation.

Avoid presenting for moderation the 'course'.

Common Misconceptions

Centres should use the OCR GCSE Art and Design marking criteria for each component, rather than mark to where they feel a grade boundary sits.

Moderators are not involved in marking work, instead, they compare the centre's marking to national standards to check that it's accurate. Internal marking and moderation help ensure consistency within the centre, while external moderation by OCR checks that marking is in line with national expectations.

Moderators are unable to amend the rank order of the work displayed and it is therefore the responsibility of the centre to make sure the order is correct. Centres are reminded to display each component and specialism separately.

The quality of work submitted is crucial rather than the quantity. The specification asks candidates to carefully select, organise, and present their work. A well-chosen, high-quality portfolio is much more effective than a large volume of work. Moderators do not need to see the course, or indeed candidate improvement, but clear evidence of achievement.

Moderators to be able to moderate work in corridors and open spaces, which often become populated or are prone to interruptions.

Teacher assessment can include giving weight to 'creative risk-taking' or the candidate's journey, neither of which are in the Assessment Objectives.

Candidates' work can be presented on the floor or combined with teaching and learning exercises produced as part of the course.

Moderators can view candidate submissions in very tight or confined spaces.

Do not need a desk with a power supply nearby. The moderator requires a suitable clear surface on which a laptop and paperwork will be used.

Malpractice

The integrity of candidate work must be always maintained, with no third-party involvement in either supporting pieces or final outcomes. For example, AI content creation tools such as ChatGPT may have been used to generate written notes.

It is also possible for candidates' own work to be plagiarised if made available, via online technology, on social media or online forums. Candidates posting their work online, in part or full, before an assessment session is complete, including the period for Review of Results, should be avoided.

Online platforms where work is stored must be secure.

In the Externally Set Task, preparatory work must be submitted before the 10-hour time period. Centres should not allow candidates to continue working on any preparatory materials either during, or after, the 10 hours has taken place.

Centres are reminded that candidates' submissions must not include inappropriate, offensive or disturbing material including obscenities, lewd comments or drawings, offensive comments aimed at others, and sexist or racist remarks.

Summary

This report highlights several recurring themes and key points identified by moderators during the 2025 series.

Most notably is the importance of thorough and consistent recording of ideas, with candidates expected to clearly document ideas, creative processes and decisions, throughout their creative journey in ways appropriate to their specialism and their individual strengths.

Practical skills and technical proficiency in a variety of media are crucial, with successful candidates demonstrating strong observational skills and innovative use of materials, with the inclusion of digital recording becoming increasingly prevalent in the qualification.

This report highlights the successes of the candidates seen during moderation and the quality of teaching found in the deployment of the OCR GCSE Art and Design (9-1) specification. By building on these strengths and addressing the common misconceptions, centres can continue to support students in producing clear, purposeful evidence for each assessment objective—helping to nurture the next generation of artists and designers.

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