



CCHSG A-Level Art and Design

Planning for and writing your related study

What is the Related Personal Study?

Put simply it is an illustrated essay – continuous prose of at least a 1000 words, worth 12% of your overall A-level. In summary the essay should:

- Be no more than 3000 words (short and punchy is better than drawn out and draining).
- Focus on a specific artist/photographer or art movement (or alternatively, a concept or artifact).
- Be related to your own investigations and practical coursework.
- Include supporting images - from your chosen focus, your own work, and relevant wider connections.
- Include a bibliography
- Be informative, insightful and provide a personal perspective.
- Be a well-presented labour of love; a pleasure for others to pick up and read.





Getting started

Deciding which artist, art movement or theme to base your personal study on should not be a tricky decision. **The Personal Study is related to your practical, personal investigations - your key themes and inspirations to date.** Your sketchbooks and experiments should point you in the right direction. But it is okay to take a relevant sidestep and use the Personal Study as an excuse to learn more about a connected artist or theme (rather than following a line of enquiry you are already exhausted with).

Give your Personal Study a punchy title

Once decided on your focus, set this out with a concise and ambitious title. A two-part title or question might help. For example:

- Liar! Jeff Wall, photography and truth
- Modernism, Abstraction and the work of Barbara Hepworth
- The Human Figure: Sizing up Euan Uglow


This might seem pretentious, but don't worry about it. Devise a relevant title that inspires you to then fill its boots. Exhibition titles are devised with similar intentions. For example, Pierre Bonnard: The Colour of Memory, or Fernand Léger: New Times, New Pleasures.

Write an introduction that leaves the reader wanting more

Your introduction should tempt the reader in, but not at the cost of a whole week of your life shuffling around sentences. A common mistake is to throw a thesaurus at the opening paragraph. Much better to start in a more straightforward way and simply get some initial thoughts down. The introduction can always be revisited and reshaped later, once you've found your writing style.

Your introduction might:

- Explain your interest in the subject and the connection that you have to this.
- Set out your intentions clearly.
- Provoke a desire to read on (for example, by using intriguing yet-to-be-answered questions).
- Reference relevant threshold concepts - the big ideas (or transformative knowledge) significant to your focus.



Below are two examples of Personal Study introductions. The first is more straightforward, the second a little more elaborate:

INTRODUCTION EXAMPLE 1

"I am fascinated with themes of identity. In particular I am interested in what 'identity' might mean to a portrait artist, and how they might set out to understand and capture a person's identity. Grayson Perry, contemporary artist, forms a main focus for this essay. His TV documentary "Who Are You?" has been a big influence on my work this year. After watching this series I found myself reflecting on how I might create a portrait that goes beyond simplistic observations to capture a stronger sense of identity."

INTRODUCTION EXAMPLE 2

"There's a common perception that a person's identity is fixed - a fully-formed pearl found deep inside, resistant to change. But this perception strikes me as absurd. Identity is a far more complex, evolving matter. It can certainly be a struggle to determine one's own personal identity, let alone identify or reveal someone else's. But this is a challenge every artist faces. Grayson Perry, in his TV documentary "Who Are You?" immersed himself into the lives of his subjects. His aim: to see through cracks of façade; to delve deeper beneath the surface and into the core of a person. Perry considers identity to be a journey, a voyage in pursuit of who we are: "Our identity is an ongoing performance that is changed and adapted by our experiences and circumstances." This notion interests me. Perry clearly grasps the interchangeability of identity. His documentary sparked my enthusiasm and provoked a question I've been wrestling with ever since: How do I create a portrait that reaches beyond accurate representation to reveal the complexities of an individual identity?"

The following sentence starters seem to fit with the style of example 1, above:
I am choosing to focus on... (Artist / art movement) because.../ It astounds me how.../
I find it fascinating that.../ I found myself reflecting upon.../ I'm curious to know
why.../I hope to...show, share, highlight, discover...

These provide a sound enough framework to begin with, but perhaps lack the descriptive verve of Example 2.

Example 2 uses a more elaborate style that incorporates a creative metaphor (identity as a pearl inside us all) and also a direct quote from the artist. Confident statements provide a greater sense of authority ("this strikes me as absurd", "Perry grasps the interchangeability of identity"), but also - importantly - the writer is not setting themselves up as an absolute expert. There remains a reflective tone ("a question I've been wrestling with is...").



The meat in the sandwich

With a word limit of 3000 words, there's good reason to be concise. Short and punchy is best. You need to move quickly to the main content of your essay - the meat in the sandwich. And this should certainly give the reader something to chew on - the more flavour the better.

Flavour might come in the form of:

- **Revealing insights to specific artwork(s)** – descriptive writing incorporating lesser-known facts; wider contextual connections; personal insights - perhaps in relation to your own practical work and experiences. But don't dismiss how an artwork makes you feel or impacts upon your senses. Be sensitive to your intuition and honest in accounting this.
- **Imaginative leaps and connections** – this might include linking an artwork or idea to another work or idea, or perhaps a significant moment in time. Connections might be made between styles, techniques or ideologies; moments of personal, historical or cultural significance can be linked with thoughtful insights or questions.
- **Narrowing your focus** – when the possibilities seem endless, narrowing your focus might help. For example, if referencing a particular artwork, consider focusing on one of these 4 aspects: TECHNICAL, VISUAL, CONTEXTUAL and CONCEPTUAL. Do you want to provide technical insights (the type of materials used, the technical skills involved etc.), or perhaps a visual analysis is more fitting (of subject matter, composition etc.)? All essays should demonstrate contextual understanding, and reveal concepts and ideas, but this might not be necessary for every artwork referenced.
- **Accompanying images/illustrations** – Your Personal Study should be accompanied with relevant images/illustrations, but there is no set way to do this. Most students opt to embed these alongside their writing for ease of reference. Think carefully about the relevance, order, scale and placement of images, and reference them consistently within your text.

You can do this in a couple of ways:

“An example of this expressive technique can be seen in Figure 1.”

OR

“This technique was very expressive (Figure 1) and...”

The images should then be captioned accordingly, e.g.
Figure 1, Artist name, title, date



Writing your thoughts

Personal thoughts should be carefully considered, honest and insightful. Be wary of superficial or obvious statements.

Consider the progression in the approaches below:

Your initial reaction – informed by instinct, intuition, emotional response, existing knowledge etc. This is appropriate when your initial reactions are justified e.g. “I’m intrigued by this because...”; “when I first encountered the work I was taken by surprise because...” But if what follows is a basic and superficial understanding of wider contexts then your writing will not develop, for example: “I’m interested in Cubism because I like how Picasso’s artworks are made up of cube-like shapes”; or “Pop Art appeals because it uses bright colours and film stars”.

Based on a deeper understanding/complex grasp of wider contexts – demonstrating a confident stance; justified, informed opinions; an ability to make imaginative connections etc. Compare these improved examples to the previous overly simplistic responses: “I’m interested in Cubism, particularly how the concept of recording multiple viewpoints evolved through experimenting with - and challenging - traditional methods of depiction...”; “I’m interested in how Pop Art emerged as a response to Abstract Expressionism. It strikes me as a mischievous movement; an antidote to the excessive chin-holding culture which pervaded galleries at that time...”

From an alternative perspective – demonstrating an awareness that art is not fixed in meaning but subject to interpretation; that the opinions of others can provide alternative perspectives Or counter-balance an argument etc. Placing yourself in someone else’s shoes can demonstrate a deeper awareness of the capacity of art to evoke various opinions and responses. For example, consider the perspective of a feminist, a modernist, or a post-modernist. “Rothko may have set out to provoke a sense of claustrophobia with his Seagram Restaurant commission, but I can imagine a dining capitalist might have been less sensitive to the colour fields on the wall, and more preoccupied with the greenbacks in hand...”



Concluding your essay

This is an opportunity to summarise your study and reward the reader for staying with you. You might:

- Revisit the aims or investigative questions set out at the start. You do not need to have definitive answers though. Sensitive and honest reflections, or even new, increasingly complex questions are fine.
- Summarise key thoughts that have arisen from your study.
- Offer reflective, personal opinions on your research, and how this has shaped - or will shape - your own practical work.
- Share thoughts on potential opportunities for future exploration, if given more time.
- Include a short reflection on the process of the study itself – the research and thinking skills that you've developed along the way.
- There is need to cover all of these though. Identify the insights that resonate most, and don't let your hard work whimper out in these final stages.

Including a bibliography

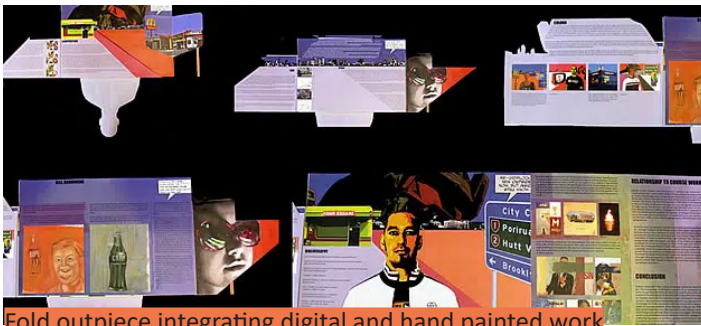
A bibliography is an essential requirement. This lists the resources that you have used for your essay (books, websites, articles, videos etc.). Try to keep track as you go, rather than having to revisit once the essay is completed. Set it out like this:

- Author – put the last name first.
- Title – this should be underlined or in quotation marks.
- Publisher - in a book this is usually located on one of the first few pages.
- Date – the date/year the book/article was published.

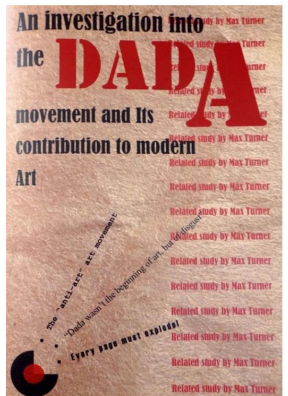
For example: Cotton, Charlotte, 'The Photograph as Contemporary Art', Thames & Hudson, 2009.

Presenting your Essay

Your essay might be presented as a printed book using Adobe InDesign and websites such as Blurb, or it might be a spiral bound illustrated essay. You could present your research as a website, a blog, large format presentation sheets or even as an artefact... it is important to remember to link your presentation style to the content and make it relevant to your intentions.



Fold outpiece integrating digital and hand painted work



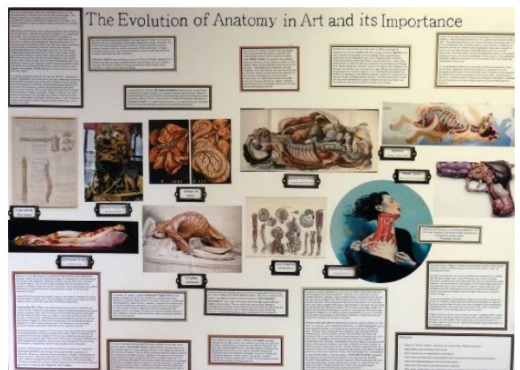
Traditional printed book



A sculptural/artefact submission



Simple presentation boards comprising illustrations alongside thoughtful narrative



How are you assessed?

The related study is worth 24 marks towards the total of 120 marks for your final A-Level grade. Those looking to secure an A or A* at A-Level will need to secure 21-24 marks in their RPS, achieving a level 6 outcome.

The mark scheme for the related study is as follows:

Level 1	Simplistic ability to communicate ideas, with minimal exploration of critical and contextual understanding. Some inaccuracy and incoherence in recording when using specialist language and vocabulary are demonstrated. Simplistic knowledge and understanding are shown when presenting the study and realising intentions. Connections, where appropriate, between visual and other elements are minimal.
Level 2	Limited coherence when communicating ideas, with some exploration and limited evidence of critical and contextual understanding. Limited accuracy and partially structured recording when using specialist language and vocabulary are demonstrated. Some evidence of knowledge and understanding is shown when presenting the study and realising intentions. Connections, where appropriate, between visual and other elements are limited.
Level 3	Effective communication of ideas, with appropriate exploration and clear evidence of critical and contextual understanding. Accurate and mainly structured recording when using specialist language and vocabulary are demonstrated. Evidence of knowledge and some understanding is shown when presenting the study and realising intentions. Connections, where appropriate, between visual and other elements are appropriately developed.
Level 4	Detailed communication of ideas with informed exploration, refinement and critical and contextual understanding. Purposeful use of specialist language and vocabulary in recording is demonstrated. Evidence of knowledge and well-developed understanding is shown when presenting the study and realising intentions. Connections, where appropriate, between visual and other elements are well developed and purposeful.
Level 5	Well-considered communication of ideas with insightful exploration, refinement and critical and contextual understanding. Extensive and well-considered use of specialist language and vocabulary in recording is demonstrated. A high level of structured and reasoned knowledge and understanding is shown when presenting the study and realising intentions. Connections, where appropriate, between visual and other elements are fully developed and insightful.
Level 6	Sophisticated and sustained communication of ideas with thorough exploration, refinement and excellent critical and contextual understanding. Extensive and sophisticated handling of specialist language and vocabulary in recording is demonstrated. An accomplished level of structured and reasoned knowledge and understanding is shown when presenting the study and realising intentions. Connections, where appropriate, between visual and other elements are sophisticated.

