



Student Performance Q&A: 2012 AP® Studio Art Portfolios

The following comments on the 2012 portfolios for AP® Studio Art were written by the Chief Reader, Herb Weaver of Georgia Gwinnett College in Lawrenceville, Ga. 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. The entire Studio Art Exam is a free-response question, but it is divided into parts that allow the AP 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 I: Quality. For the 2-D Design and Drawing Portfolios, students submitted five actual works that 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, which typically means that seven Readers score the entire portfolio. The 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 converted into the AP Exam score. 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 grades 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 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 AP Reading. Current scoring guidelines can be found at AP Central® (apcentral.collegeboard.org).

Portfolio Assessment — 2012

The 2-D Design Portfolio

- 2-D Design Quality**

Submissions for the 2-D Design Portfolio continue to experience tremendous growth in both numbers and quality of work. 2-D Design submissions were creative as well as inventive because of the variety of media approaches. The Quality section remained very strong this year and again featured excellent examples of design-based photography and digital work.

- 2-D Design Concentration**

As a more lucid understanding of the definition of a concentration emerges, scores reflect a trend that suggests stronger artwork in this portfolio section. Workshop presenters and high school teachers are seemingly providing an informed explanation and definition of what a concentration involves.

- 2-D Design Breadth**

An improvement in the Breadth section was noted in 2012 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 overall quality of the work in the 3-D Design portfolio showed some improvement over previous years. The use of found objects and other inexpensive materials are being introduced and implemented into the creative process more effectively. As in the past, however, images of details should be more thoughtfully composed to better inform the purpose.

- 3-D Design Concentration**

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

- 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 scores 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, and at the end of the year students are likely scrambling to find enough work to submit for the portfolio.

The Drawing Portfolio

- **Drawing Quality**

The Drawing portfolio consistently scores the highest yet seems the least inventive. Although the Drawing Exam is not experiencing the same growth as the 2-D Exam, the consistency of the Drawing Portfolio remains strong, albeit somewhat conservative in approach. It appears that every student knows what a good drawing is, and therefore that notion becomes the goal. Perhaps, students should consider transferring their superior technical skills in drawing and develop a keener sense of investigation and inventiveness. For the most part, teachers seem to grasp the Drawing section most effectively and do a good job in teaching this portfolio to their students.

- **Drawing Concentration**

Because the Concentration section requires a great deal of preplanning, students would benefit most if an extraordinary amount of time were dedicated to development of a plan of action at the beginning of this endeavor. 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 that students submit 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 section to better ascertain a proper selection of artworks for this particular portfolio.

Final Thoughts

I am convinced that, for the most part, students entering college are less prepared than in the past, except for AP students. Although this statement about lack of preparation may reflect a slow shift toward “the old curmudgeon” attitude in my 28th year as a college art professor, I am continually impressed with the work ethic and deeper understanding of the subject when dealing with AP students, who give me hope for the future.

Having taught on the high school level and knowing how much effort it takes to develop a successful art program, I am most appreciative of the dedication and commitment of high school teachers. While working at the AP Reading, I am continually humbled by the knowledge, wit, and enthusiasm exhibited by my Studio Art teacher colleagues. One of the topics that surfaces from time to time is the amount of artwork required for each portfolio. Some suggest that less required artwork would translate into better quality artwork. Although there is merit in that argument, I strongly encourage teachers to hold firm. More than anything, when adjusting to study habits in college, students draw on the time-management skills they honed in AP classes.

To keep the art classroom fresh and alive, I encourage teachers to engage in as many networking opportunities as possible. Whether it involves exchanging ideas with other local teachers, 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 such resources for teachers as the publication *Evaluating the AP® Portfolio in Studio Art*, which 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.