



Student Performance Q&A: 2016 AP® Studio Art Portfolios

The following comments on the 2016 free-response questions for AP® Studio Art were written by the Chief Reader, Paul Jeanes of the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Maryland. 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 AP Studio Art Exam is a free-response question, but it is divided into parts that allow the AP Readers to focus on a particular aspect of art-making and assess students' 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 submit 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 AP Readers using a 6-point scale scored each section of the portfolios, which typically means that seven Readers score an 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 students' work and provides an accurate assessment of their 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 — 2016

The 2-D Design Portfolio

- **2-D Design Quality (Selected Works)**

With a significant increase in portfolio submissions this year, 2-D Design continues to have the highest volume of the submissions when compared to Drawing and 3-D Design. Overall, students did well this year with the mean score for 2-D Design Quality of 11.02 out of 18 possible points. There are increasing numbers of student works that are being made with digital means, the most common of which utilize simple and straightforward digital photography. With digital photographic technology becoming more and more accessible in the 21st century, I believe that we, art educators, need to help students be more creative and sophisticated in their use of this particular tool. Positively, it does appear as though students are becoming more proficient with digital imaging software, as the highest scoring works show levels of sophistication that were not evident in the works of years past. I would encourage teachers to continue to help students explore a wide array of potential media and approaches in the 2-D Design portfolio.

- **2-D Design Concentration (Sustained Investigation)**

This year, the mean score for 2-D Design Concentration was 6.83 out of 12 points, which was consistent with years past. While many of the mid-range and high-scoring portfolios do effectively utilize the elements and principles of 2-D Design, many don't display evidence of a rigorous investigation of an idea. AP teachers from around the country have commonly acknowledged that the Concentration section is the most difficult for their students to work through, but I believe it is perhaps the most important portfolio for their development as young artists. If students can become more investigatory by asking themselves guiding, exploratory questions, their visual works will inevitably become more sophisticated and their critical thinking skills will develop as a result. As mentioned in AP publication materials, students are strongly encouraged to submit images that clearly document their processes of thinking and creating in their Concentration portfolios.

- **2-D Design Breadth (Range of Approaches)**

The mean score for 2-D Design Breadth was 6.73 out of 12 possible points. The Breadth portfolios were consistent this year with years past. AP teachers are encouraged to note that works in Breadth can demonstrate either a range of conceptual approaches and/or a range of technical approaches. The highest achieving Breadth portfolios tend to demonstrate both of these rather than a simple exploration of different tools.

The Drawing Portfolio

- **Drawing Quality (Selected Works)**

This year, the mean score for Drawing Quality was 10.92 out of 18 possible points, which is favorable and consistent with last year. AP Readers anecdotally noted that the Drawing Quality works were amongst the strongest works when compared to the 2-D Design and 3-D Design. Observably, the portfolios that scored in the high range demonstrated more risk-taking and experimentation than their counterparts from 2015. Students used a variety of processes and tools to make drawings that were both traditional and experimental and that integrated both digital and analog means. As mentioned last year, I would offer the suggestion for teachers and students to continue to explore the guiding questions “What can a drawing be?” and “What can a drawing do?” as they explore various notions of drawing.

- **Drawing Concentration (Sustained Investigation)**

Drawing portfolio submissions subtly increased this year and the mean score for Drawing Concentration was 6.58 out of 12 points. On the whole, students did a great job of thinking *through* drawing by using drawing processes to develop their sustained investigation into a topic and idea. It is encouraging to see how many students are integrating observational methods of drawing with digital drawing devices rather than using the well-worn method of copying photographs by mimetic means. Observably, there were more sketches submitted this year that documented student’s thought processes. These notational-type sketches were often used to support a student’s more resolved “finished” works in the Drawing Concentration portfolios. We encourage students to continue to submit such notational sketches, as they help to highlight how the student is thinking through their chosen concentration.

- **Drawing Breadth (Range of Approaches)**

This year, the mean score of Drawing Breadth was 6.60 out of 12. As with the majority of the 2-D Design Breadth portfolios, it is more common to see students experimenting with a range of media than with a range of differentiated concepts or approaches. The purpose of the Breadth section is to provide a space for the student to engage in a three-part exploration with their ideas, processes, and media. Students should be encouraged to use the Breadth section as a space to conduct individual creative experiments that can build toward developing an idea or question to investigate in the concentration portfolio section. It is evident in the most accomplished Drawing Breadth portfolios that students are exploring a variety of ideas, processes, and media simultaneously.

The 3-D Design Portfolio

- **3-D Design Quality (Selected Works)**

The overall 3-D Design portfolio submissions increased this year with the mean score of 9.84 out of 18 in the 3-D Quality Section. While the 3-D portfolio has the smallest number of submissions and the scores are incrementally lower than in 2-D and Drawing, there were more high-scoring works this year than in 2015. Of the high-scoring portfolios, there were examples of students experimenting with performance works, installation works, and works that involved the human body. While these types of experiments suggest innovation in this portfolio, the majority of student

works were small-scale objects that focused on basic form building. It is highly encouraged for students to begin to think more spatially in the creation of their 3-D works, while maintaining a focus on using the elements and principles of design.

- **3-D Design Concentration (Sustained Investigation)**

The mean score for 3-D Design Concentration this year was 6.30 out of 12, which is consistent with scores from previous years. One of the most challenging aspects of the 3-D Design portfolio is that there are so many options and variables for the student to consider in the creation of their works. In the 3-D Concentration section, this challenge is heightened because the student is being asked to focus on an investigation over a sustained period time. Students are encouraged to think about how many ways they can integrate their questions and ideas into their 3-D works so that those ideas are clearly observable in the visible form. It is advisable to keep the ideas simple and clear so that a deep investigation can occur through the materialization of the idea in the 3-D form.

- **3-D Design Breadth (Range of Approaches)**

As in the previous few years, the 3-D Design Breadth portfolios scored the lowest of all the exams with the mean score of 6.00 out of 12 points. While this portfolio is challenging, it is strongly suggested that students focus on exploration, inventiveness, and compositional organization in the works for this section.

Final Thoughts

As the Chief Reader of the AP Studio Art Exam, I want share my sincere thought that the AP Studio Art course provides an exceptional opportunity for every student who chooses to participate in it. As those of us who work in the AP Program know, it is more than just an exam. It is an invaluable educational and life experience for the student. Regardless of the score that the portfolios receive, students who have completed AP Studio Art have gained new insights into how to think creatively, how to make informed decisions about their works, and how to sustain focus and concentration over an extended period of time. These transferrable skills will not only benefit students in their art-making and admittance to college, but will benefit them as they move into the “real world” outside of academia.

At the AP Reading, it is always a privilege to have the opportunity to see the creative works of high school students. My colleagues at the AP Reading, who are all experienced college and high school educators, as well as employees from the Educational Testing Service and the College Board, all share the mindset that we are committed to giving the student “the benefit of the doubt” as we assess and score each and every portfolio. Each portfolio represents an individual who put forth a great deal of time and energy and thought in their creative endeavor. We treat the work in each portfolio as evidence of that endeavor, and we all continually remind ourselves that the student’s education is our number one priority.

Please take time to check out the valuable resources for teachers such 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. In addition, there are many excellent articles by AP Studio Art teachers and links to other resources on the AP Studio Art course home pages for 2-D Design, 3-D Design, and Drawing on AP Central. Additionally, if you are a teacher, don’t hesitate to enroll in a Summer Institute or to invite a consultant to your school for an added boost of informed enthusiasm.