



Student Performance Q&A: 2014 AP® Studio Art Portfolios

The following comments on the 2014 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 Exams, 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 — 2014

The 2-D Design Portfolio

- **2-D Design Quality**

Once again, significant growth occurred in the submissions for the 2-D Design Portfolio which now represents 55% of all portfolios. More and more, a trend toward design-based photography and digital work constitute the majority of the submissions. The work continues to be creative, inventive, and fresh because of the variety of media approaches. The Quality section remained very strong, overall portfolio requirements were achieved, and growth in quantity and quality will continue.

- **2-D Design Concentration**

Scores for 2-D Concentration were consistent with the previous year. As workshop presenters focus on the Concentration as a point of clarification, along with carefully selected examples on AP Central, the understanding of a concentration has improved. The strong scores seem to reflect more confidence in student work.

- **2-D Design Breadth**

Engagement with a broad range of design issues proved to be the norm in the successful portfolios. Like last year, some students still focused on works that featured a variety of media instead of breadth in design issues; demonstrations of successful solutions to a variety of design concerns proved to be the most accomplished works.

The 3-D Design Portfolio

- **3-D Design Quality**

The 3-D Design portfolio represents less than 10% of the AP Studio Art portfolio submissions. The overall quality of the work in the 3-D Design portfolio continues to show some improvement every year. The increase in the use of found objects, dumpster-diving items, and other inexpensive materials was evident and well-implemented into the creative process. Because scores are given based on “what is seen” in the images, the “second view” or detail image could be more engaging to enhance the true nature of the work.

- **3-D Design Concentration**

The 3-D Concentrations showed slight improvement compared to those submitted in previous years. The 3-D Concentration could improve even more if a cohesive plan of action is developed in the classroom as an initial starting point and foundational basis. A meaningful theme instead of selecting works that just “seem to go together” could enhance the overall score.

- **3-D Design Breadth**

As usual, 3-D Breadth scored the lowest of all exam sections. It has been suggested that we should reduce the requirements because 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. In keeping with the requirements of a foundation college course my suggestion would be to implement a series of summer assignments in 3-D to address this obstacle.

The Drawing Portfolio

- **Drawing Quality**

The Drawing portfolio consistently scores the highest yet seems the least creative and the least likely area where students might experience risk-taking. Although the Drawing Exam is not experiencing the same growth as the 2-D Exam, the consistency of work in the Drawing Portfolio remains strong, albeit somewhat conservative in approach. Teachers and students seem to grasp the basic Drawing concepts most effectively and most participants transfer this knowledge into strong artwork. Students should incorporate their superior technical skills in drawing and develop a keener sense of investigation and inventiveness — perhaps even “playfulness” — into their compositions.

- **Drawing Concentration**

Drawing Concentrations were the most accomplished of all the exams. As often stated, the Concentration section requires a great deal of planning and 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 the idea of what represents a “concentration” improves, and this year was no exception.

- **Drawing Breadth**

The artwork that students submit in the Quality and Concentration sections of the Drawing Exam exceeds that of the Breadth section, which does not make sense. Proper selection of artworks for the Breadth section should be chosen with an eye on the guidelines defined in the poster.

Final Thoughts

At a recent workshop, one of the participants referred to a student’s AP score of 3, 4, or 5 as “passing.” I suppose in a technical sense, that is an accurate assessment; however I refuse to think that students who earned a 1 or 2 didn’t gain some valuable insight as well. All AP Studio Art students are better prepared to enter the college ranks, and better prepared to enter the “real world” also. This applies to enhanced skills in art and in other areas as well. Students who successfully complete an AP Studio Art program have gained a deeper understanding of the meaning of discipline, planning and organizational skills, and the ability to multi-task. These are all valued traits that seem essential for what it takes to succeed in life and in the college environment.

My colleagues at the Reading, college and high school teachers, as well as employees from the Educational Testing Service and the College Board, all share a common objective to “serve the student” who has taken the exam. It seems rather simplistic but the dedication and commitment of these educators to fulfill this important goal fuels the human machine to evaluate and score portfolios in a “bubble of energized fervor and clarity.” Although I have never been to war, I liken the experience to being in the trenches in the heat of battle, willing to go “above and beyond” the norm for the sake of a greater cause. We take our task of scoring portfolios very seriously because it is important to us to be diligent and fair-minded in response to the student who has put forth a great deal of effort to complete the work. I am sure there are times when students and teachers do not agree with the results of our assessment, but hopefully, no matter what the score, learning and growth have occurred from the experience.

Over the years, some teachers have asked about the possibility of a section-by-section breakdown of the scores. Although I can see the point to some degree regarding the usefulness of knowing exactly where the strengths and weaknesses are, the overarching philosophy of the “whole body of artwork” supersedes the notion of compartmentalizing assessment. In an effort to further the journey toward excellence I urge teachers to continue using a variety of outside resources for teachers like 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. And finally, don't hesitate to enroll in a Summer Institute or invite a consultant to your school for that added boost of enthusiasm.