



Student Performance Q&A: 2015 AP® Studio Art Portfolios

The following comments on the 2015 portfolios for AP® Studio Art were written by the Chief Reader, Paul Jeanes of Maryland Institute College of Art. 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 — 2015

The 2-D Design Portfolio

- **2-D Design Quality**

As in 2014, the 2-D Design portfolio continually makes up 55 percent of all of the studio art portfolios submitted. The 2-D Quality section remained strong, and the works continued to evolve with students using a variety of multimedia approaches to create works that emphasize 2-D Design. There is evidence of increasingly more digital-based artworks, including digital photography, digitally produced graphic design, and digitally manipulated design-based drawing. This is in addition to works made with traditional media, such as works on paper, analog photography, and design-based analog drawing and painting. Because there is such a wide array of media and approaches possible in the 2-D portfolio, the 2-D Quality section appeared to be as fresh and innovative as ever.

- **2-D Design Concentration**

The 2-D Design Concentration portfolios were consistent with the previous year. The concentration section challenges students as they think through their ideas by making images with a sustained focus. This year's portfolios were inventive and creative, and they suggest that students are integrating higher levels of creative thinking into their works. There was some indication that students are trying to show their working process through images of their sketchbooks and plans, which is encouraged.

- **2-D Design Breadth**

The 2-D Design Breadth was also consistent with the previous year in that students tend to focus on using a range of media without investigating a variety of design issues. The most innovative and creative portfolios focus on a range of approaches while simultaneously using a range of media, rather than choosing either one or the other.

The 3-D Design Portfolio

- **3-D Design Quality**

The 3-D Design portfolio is the smallest of the three portfolios as it makes up less than 10 percent of all of the AP Studio Art submissions. The overall quality of the work in the 3-D Design Quality seems to be at a stasis from last year. Every year, there is an increasing number of works that are more “conceptual” in nature and that utilize performance and action processes, site-specificity through installation, although the majority of 3-D works seen in 2015 were object-oriented and displayed an engagement with designing basic 3-D forms in space.

- **3-D Design Concentration**

The 3-D Concentration portfolios are consistent with those submitted in previous years. Overall, the 3-D Concentrations could improve if there was more emphasis on ideation through form building rather than an emphasis on making and selecting works that merely seem similar in appearance and materiality.

- **3-D Design Breadth**

The 3-D Breadth portfolio scored the lowest of all the exam sections, as it did in 2014. As noted in the 2-D Breadth, the most innovative student portfolios focus on using a range of approaches while experimenting with a range of media.

The Drawing Portfolio

- **Drawing Quality**

As in the previous year, the Drawing portfolios in 2015 were the highest scoring portfolios of all three sections, yet the works appear to be the least creative and the least innovative, despite the program’s emphasis on creative thinking, experimentation, and risk taking. Students are displaying their working knowledge of basic drawing concepts although the approaches, tools, and media used to create those drawings seem to be somewhat conservative. There is an increasing number of drawing portfolios that rely on mimetic approaches, where students tightly render photographs without utilizing expressive mark-making or innovation in image construction or composition. A suggestion for teachers and students may be to ask not only “What is drawing?” but more importantly “What can drawing be?” Some responses to the latter question can be found on AP Central, through the sample portfolios and images from the current and past AP Studio Art exhibits, all of which are posted there.

- **Drawing Concentration**

Observably, the works in the Drawing Concentration portfolios were consistently at a high level this year. There were more examples of students using and displaying their sketchbook ideas through notational drawings, which provided evidence of their thinking regarding a specific topic of interest. The Concentration section encourages students to investigate a theme or topic of interest over a period of time, which is always a challenging endeavor. Students’ portfolios suggest that their comfort level investigating ideas through drawing is higher than with the other two portfolios sections.

- **Drawing Breadth**

The Drawing Breadth portfolios were consistent with the previous year and were the least innovative in displaying a range or “breadth” of approaches. Perhaps this can be attributed to the range of media usage in the 2-D Design and 3-D Design portfolios. In thinking about the question “What can drawing be?” I would suggest that teachers and students continue to experiment with a variety of tools and approaches to make drawing outside of what could be considered traditional approaches.

Final Thoughts

As the new Chief Reader of the AP Studio Art Exam, I must express my sincere belief that the AP Studio Art course is 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 a test. It is an invaluable educational and life experience for the student. Regardless of the score 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 duration of time. These life skills will not only benefit students in their art-making and admittance to college, but they will retain long-term benefits as they move into the “real world” following 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, don’t hesitate to enroll in a Summer Institute or to invite a consultant to your school for an added boost of informed enthusiasm.