# Common questions about National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Art and Design

## National 4

### What is the structure of the National 4 course?

The National 4 course contains three units. Candidates should attempt all outcomes in each unit.

### Art and Design: Expressive Activity (H202 74)

This unit contains two outcomes:

♦ In outcome 1, candidates describe things that have influenced and inspired artists and their work.
♦ In outcome 2, they produce creative ideas for expressive artwork.

### Art and Design: Design Activity (H204 74)

This unit contains two outcomes:

♦ In outcome 1, candidates describe things that have influenced and inspired designers and their work.
♦ In outcome 2, they produce creative design ideas and development work in response to a given design brief.

### Art and Design Practical Activity — Added Value Unit (H206 74)

This unit contains two outcomes:

♦ In outcome 1, candidates produce a piece of expressive art in response to a theme or stimuli.
♦ In outcome 2, they produce a piece of design work in response to a given design brief.

Unit assessment support packs (UASPs) for each unit are available on SQA's secure site. These packs provide information on how to gather evidence and make assessment judgements.

**What is the threshold for the number of assessment standards candidates need to meet to achieve the National 4 Added Value Unit?**

Candidates must meet 7 out of the 10 assessment standards to achieve the National 4 Added Value Unit.

# National 5 and Higher

## What is the structure of the National 5 and Higher Art and Design courses?

**National 5**

There are three externally assessed course assessment components:

♦ question paper — 40 marks (scaled to 50 to represent 20% of the total mark)
♦ expressive portfolio — 100 marks (40% of the total mark)
♦ design portfolio — 100 marks (40% of the total mark)

**Higher**

There are three externally assessed course assessment components:

♦ question paper — 60 marks (23% of the total mark)
♦ expressive portfolio — 100 marks (38.5% of the total mark)
♦ design portfolio — 100 marks (38.5% of the total mark)

# National 5 and Higher course assessment — question paper

## How are marks applied to the National 5 and Higher question papers?

There are two [SQA Academy courses available for Art and Design question paper marking](#) — one for National 5 and one for Higher.

These courses aim to increase teachers' and lecturers' understanding of the question papers. They provide information and guidance, and include interactive marking exercises where users can practise awarding marks to example responses. There are three modules in each course. The courses are free, but you must create an SQA Academy account to access them.

# National 5 course assessment — question paper

## What are the changes to the question paper?

After the return of full assessment requirements for most National Courses in session 2023–24, we resumed our routine review and maintenance activities. After listening to feedback from teachers and lecturers, we carried out a consultation with stakeholders, with the aim to reduce the volume of assessment in this component.

Based on the feedback from our consultation, we have reduced the exam duration and the number of marks available in the National 5 Art and Design question paper. These changes aim to make the question paper more accessible to candidates, while continuing to assess the required skills, knowledge and understanding.

Starting from session 2024–25, the question paper is worth a total of 40 marks, which is scaled to 50 marks to retain its 20% weighting in the overall course assessment. The length of the exam is reduced to 1 hour and 20 minutes.

### Mandatory questions

The number of marks available for each of the mandatory questions (questions 1 and 7) is reduced from 15 to 10.

There are 6 marks available for part (a) of each mandatory question. In question 1(a), candidates comment on the work of one artist, referring to three given prompts. In question 7(a), candidates comment on the work of one designer, referring to three given prompts.

There are 4 marks available for part (b) of each mandatory question. In question 1(b), candidates identify and describe influences on the work of their artist from part (a). In question 7(b), candidates identify and describe influences on the work of their designer from part (a).

Candidates are no longer required to give an opinion on a specified aspect in the mandatory questions.

### Optional questions

We have not changed the number of marks available for the optional image questions. These are still worth 10 marks each. However, each optional question is now split into part (a) and part (b) to better reflect how marks are awarded for these questions. There are 8 marks available for part (a), where candidates comment on three given prompts for their chosen image, and 2 marks are available for part (b), where candidates give their opinion on their chosen image.

### Course support

We revised the course specification and specimen question paper (including marking instructions) in May and June 2024 to exemplify these changes. You can find this on the subject page for [National 5 Art and Design](). The marking instructions included in the

specimen question paper give full details on how we award marks. They include examples of responses that would and would not gain marks.

The SQA Academy course on National 5 Art and Design question paper marking (see link on page 2) was also updated to reflect the changes to the paper.

## Do candidates have a choice of questions in the question paper?

The National 5 question paper has two sections: Expressive Art Studies and Design Studies. Candidates should attempt both sections.

In the Expressive Art Studies section, candidates answer two questions: the mandatory question and one of the five optional questions.

In the Design Studies section, candidates answer two questions: the mandatory question and one of the five optional questions.

## How many artists and designers do candidates need to study?

Candidates should study a range of different artists and designers to allow them to respond effectively to the optional questions. These questions require candidates to demonstrate specialist knowledge and understanding of art and design practice and issues.

Questions 1(a) and 7(a) ask candidates to comment on the work of one artist and one designer they have studied. Candidates should study artworks and designs that prepare them to respond appropriately to three unseen prompts.

In questions 1(b) and 7(b), candidates identify and describe influences on the work of their artist and designer from part (a).

## Does the National 5 question paper have specific categories?

No, the National 5 question paper does not identify specific categories. However, it has questions on 2D and 3D artworks. In the Expressive Art Studies section, people, places and objects (or combinations of these) are represented by including works that use a variety of approaches to materials and techniques, such as:

♦ painting
♦ photography
♦ mixed media work
♦ sculpture
♦ installation
♦ contemporary and traditional approaches

A range of 2D and 3D design areas are represented in the Design Studies section, including examples of design work from the following broad categories:

- visual communication or graphics
- product design
- environmental design (architecture, structures, or interiors)
- jewellery
- fashion or textile design

## Do candidates have to write about a contemporary artist or designer?

No. Candidates are not penalised if they do not refer to a contemporary artist or designer.

## Do candidates have to give biographical information about artists or designers?

The National 5 question paper does not ask for biographical information on artists or designers. However, candidates can include biographical information in response to questions 1(b) and 7(b) when they are explaining how influences can be seen in the selected artist's or designer's work. Candidates do not gain marks for general biographical information that they have not related to any of the work of the selected artist or designer.

# Higher course assessment — question paper

## Do candidates have a choice of questions in the question paper?

The Higher question paper has two sections: Expressive Art Studies and Design Studies. Candidates should attempt both sections.

In the Expressive Art Studies section, candidates answer three questions: the mandatory question and two of the five optional questions.

In the Design Studies section, candidates answer three questions: the mandatory question and two of the five optional questions.

## Does the Higher question paper have specific categories?

The Higher question paper does not identify specific categories. However, it has questions on 2D and 3D artworks. In the Expressive Art Studies section, people, places and objects (or combinations of these) are represented by including works that use a variety of approaches to materials and techniques, such as:

- painting
- photography
- mixed media work

- ◆ sculpture
- ◆ installation
- ◆ contemporary and traditional approaches

A range of 2D and 3D design areas are represented in the Design Studies section, including examples of design work from the following broad categories:

- ◆ visual communication or graphics
- ◆ product design
- ◆ environmental design (architecture, structures, or interiors)
- ◆ jewellery
- ◆ fashion or textile design

## How many artists and designers do candidates need to study?

Candidates should study a range of different artists and designers to allow them to respond effectively to the optional questions. These questions require candidates to demonstrate specialist knowledge and understanding of art and design practice and issues.

Questions 1 and 7 ask candidates to demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of one artwork and one design, and to explain how social, cultural and/or other influences impacted the artwork and design. Candidates should study artworks and designs that prepare them to respond appropriately to these questions.

## Do candidates have to write about a contemporary artist or designer?

No. Candidates are not penalised if they do not refer to a contemporary artist or designer.

## Do candidates have to give biographical information about artists or designers?

The Higher question paper does not ask for biographical information on artists or designers. However, candidates can include biographical information in response to questions 1 and 7 (which are mandatory questions) when they explain the impact of social, cultural and/or other influences on an artwork or design. If they do include biographical information, it must be connected to the impact on the selected work. Candidates do not gain marks for general biographical information that they have not related to the selected artwork or design.

# National 5 and Higher course assessment — portfolio

## Where do candidates include the flyleaf for National 5 and Higher?

Candidates must complete a flyleaf for both the expressive and design portfolios. The flyleaf gives candidates the opportunity to clearly indicate if they have included their evaluation.

The completed flyleaf must be attached to the back of the first sheet of the portfolio.

You can find [flyleafs for National 5 and Higher on our website](#).

## How can candidates present their portfolio work?

Candidates can present their work in a variety of ways. However, they must label their submission with the sheet number and total number of sheets (for example, '1 of 3') on the back of each sheet in the portfolio.

For both the design portfolio and the expressive portfolio, all work, including 3D work, should not exceed three A2 size, single-sided sheets or equivalent.

Portfolios must be able to be folded to a size not exceeding A1.

Layering of work is not acceptable. All work selected for external assessment should occupy its own space on the sheets.

Expressive portfolios and design portfolios must be packaged separately for submission to SQA. So, centres should submit one package containing candidates' expressive portfolios, and one package containing candidates' design portfolios.

For further details, please refer to the [Art and Design Portfolio Assessment](#) web page.

The selection of candidate work should reflect the requirements of the National 5 or Higher portfolio assessment task.

## What is the minimum and maximum amount of work for each portfolio?

Each portfolio must not exceed three A2 size, single-sided sheets or equivalent. Candidates do not have to use the maximum allocation of sheets. There is no defined minimum amount of work; however, candidates should demonstrate a full creative process as outlined in the portfolio assessment task. We have published guidance that explains how candidates can access the full range of marks by creating concise portfolios. You can find this guidance on the subject pages for [National 5 Art and Design](#) and [Higher Art and Design](#).

## Can teachers and lecturers help with mounting the portfolio work?

The course specifications for National 5 and Higher state that candidates must carry out the assessment independently.

Candidates may discuss the various options with their teacher or lecturer, but the final decision on which work to include, as well as the layout, must be the candidate's own. This is because 40 marks are available in each portfolio assessment for the candidate's understanding of the creative process.

The physical sticking down of the work does not attract marks. Teachers and lecturers can help with mounting as long as the candidate has selected and laid out their work independently. Teachers and lecturers must not alter the candidate's selection or layout of work in any way if they help with mounting.

## How should candidates present their evaluations?

Candidates must complete and submit the mandatory evaluation templates with their expressive and design portfolios. You can find these templates on the subject pages for [National 5 Art and Design](#) and [Higher Art and Design](#) under the 'coursework' tabs.

Candidates should complete the evaluations on the A4 templates and include them on the first sheet of the portfolio. The evaluation should not obscure the candidate's expressive or design work. The portfolio, including the evaluation, should not exceed three A2-sized sheets or equivalent. There is no word count, but evaluations should not exceed the A4 space provided. The evaluation template is set up with a font style and size that should not be amended.

Evaluations should focus on evaluative rather than descriptive comments. For further information, please refer to the detailed marking instructions in the National 5 and Higher Art and Design portfolio assessment tasks.

Candidates must attach the expressive evaluation to the expressive portfolio and the design evaluation to the design portfolio. On the flyleaf for each portfolio, candidates should indicate that they have checked they have attached the correct evaluation.

## Should the portfolios demonstrate evidence of the candidate's investigation into artists and designers?

No. Candidates demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of artists and designers and their work in the question paper. However, a candidate's portfolio is likely to draw on and develop aspects of this understanding through their use of visual and/or design elements, or their choice of theme and/or stimulus.

Candidates could choose to refer to aspects of their study of artists and designers — such as a particular painting or piece of design — if it helps to communicate their intended approach.

## Can teachers and lecturers provide candidates with investigation and research images for the design portfolio?

During their design portfolio assessment task, candidates gain marks for compiling a selection of relevant research and investigation material. Therefore, they should carry out this activity independently. Teachers and lecturers should not provide compilations of market research, for example, sheets containing images of relevant designs.

## Should candidates include drawings in their design portfolio investigation and research?

There are no discrete marks available for investigation drawings in the design portfolio. Candidates can include photographic images instead. However, they may choose to include drawings if it is appropriate for their design area. For example, in illustrative graphics or repeat pattern portfolios, their own drawings could provide useful material for development.

## How many materials should candidates use in their expressive portfolios?

It is up to candidates how many materials they use. Some candidates choose to experiment with a variety of materials, while others decide to focus on one material or process. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to consider their strengths and preferences when making creative decisions about materials.

## Can candidates use digital techniques in their expressive portfolio?

Yes, candidates can produce some or all of their expressive portfolios using digital techniques. However, printed copies of the work must be submitted.

It is helpful if candidates indicate through labelling or brief annotations that the work is digital, so markers can distinguish it from colour copies of traditionally produced artwork.

Candidates can also discuss their working methods and creative choices in their evaluations.

As candidates receive marks for skill in using a selection of materials, techniques and/or technology, teachers and lecturers should make sure that digital artwork submitted has been produced entirely by the candidate, using appropriate software.

## Can candidates use photography in their portfolio?

### Expressive portfolio

There are many possible creative approaches to the expressive portfolio, and this includes using photography as a media. It is unusual that portfolios at the National 5 and Higher levels are entirely photographic in nature, and it is more common for candidates to use photography as part of their creative process. However, there has been a small number of entirely photographic submissions over the years, and markers have been able apply the marking instructions to these portfolios. As with any approach, teachers and lecturers should make sure that candidates have opportunities to demonstrate the processes and skills on which they are assessed. This can be done by adding brief annotations to their portfolio to explain that images included are their own photographs, and/or by including relevant information in their evaluations.

### Design portfolio

It is acceptable for candidates to use a photograph and add graphic elements to the photo to create, for instance, a magazine cover, album artwork or a poster. Some candidates who submit graphic design portfolios use their own photography to generate imagery. Markers

can apply the marking instructions to design portfolios where the candidate has chosen to use photographs.

## How are the portfolios marked?

Art and Design portfolios are marked in a central event by a team of markers. The markers are teachers and lecturers who are currently delivering the courses. All markers for Art and Design receive training before they mark any candidate work. The training is carried out by a team of senior examiners, who provide confirmation of the portfolio tasks and marking instructions. The senior markers also demonstrate how the marking instructions are applied by using a selection of example portfolios from the current examination year. These benchmark portfolios are available throughout the marking, along with examples of portfolios from previous years, to ensure the national standard is applied consistently each year.

Quality assurance processes are put in place to ensure marking is carried out to a consistent standard throughout the full marking period. These quality assurance measures include a 'double-blind' marking system that means every portfolio is assessed by at least two separate markers, as well as senior marker checks and support.

## Can candidates have their portfolio work returned to them?

Yes, candidates can request that we return their National 5 and Higher portfolios. For further information, please visit the return of materials web page.

## Are there exemplar portfolios?

Exemplar portfolios are available on the Understanding Standards website and on SQA's secure site under the 'Understanding Standards' tab.

## Why are the exemplar design portfolios published on SQA's secure site?

Design portfolios often contain market research and other images that SQA does not have permission to publish on our open site. For this reason, we are required to publish the exemplar design portfolios on SQA's secure site to comply with copyright restrictions.

# Advanced Higher

## What is the structure of the Advanced Higher Art and Design courses?

### Advanced Higher Art and Design (Expressive and Design)

Both of the Advanced Higher courses contain one externally assessed component: a portfolio. The portfolio has three sections:

♦ practical work — 64 marks

♦ contextual analysis — 30 marks

♦ evaluation — 6 marks

## How can candidates present their practical work in the portfolio?

Portfolio sheets at Advanced Higher level can be up to A1 in size. Candidates can submit a minimum of six A1 sheets and a maximum of 12 A1 sheets or equivalent. Candidates should number their portfolio sheets to indicate the order in which markers should view them. Numbering can go on the front or back of the sheets.

Candidates can submit sketchbooks as evidence to show further development and/or resolution of initial ideas. Candidates must bookmark the appropriate pages if only part of a sketchbook is to be marked. Sketchbook pages are included in the overall allocation.

Candidates can submit 3D work, or photographs of 3D work, as part of the portfolio. Any 3D work they submit counts towards the overall allocation.

Candidates should submit photographic prints, and not the actual work, for:

♦ 2D work larger than A1 size

♦ work using valuable or expensive materials

♦ fragile work

♦ work that is large, heavy or otherwise difficult to handle

♦ work that is dangerous to handle, for example, because it contains sharp or hazardous materials

Digital submissions must not exceed 5 minutes.

Practical work exceeding the maximum size will receive a penalty. Candidates should include the size of their portfolio on the flyleaf.

## How can candidates present the contextual analysis?

The contextual analysis has a word limit of 2,000 words. Candidates should include the word count on the flyleaf. Candidates will receive a penalty if their word count is more than 10% over the limit.

The contextual analysis should include clearly captioned images of the artworks or designs researched. Candidates must clearly cite the sources within the text and reference them using appropriate conventions.

The contextual analysis should analyse an artwork or design, or group of related artworks or designs, associated with the practical work. It should also explore selected aspects of contextual connections or ideas that link to the topic. Candidates may deal with these two parts, analysis and context, separately or together.

## How should candidates present their evaluation?

Candidates must complete their evaluation on the SQA evaluation template provided on the subject pages for the Advanced Higher Art and Design (Expressive) and Advanced Higher Art and Design (Design) courses. There is no word count, however, candidates must not exceed the space given on the template (approximately 400 words). They must not amend the evaluation template's font style and size.

Within the evaluation template, candidates can give a summary of their creative intentions for the expressive portfolio, or a summary of their design brief for the design portfolio. They can also briefly explain how their contextual analysis relates to their practical work.

## Are there exemplar Advanced Higher portfolios?

Exemplar portfolios, including commentaries, are available on the Understanding Standards website (expressive portfolios) and SQA's secure site (design portfolios and all contextual analysis documents).

## Can candidates submit a moving image piece or animation as the final piece for an expressive portfolio?

A moving image piece or animation can be a final piece of expressive work. Please note that digital submissions must not exceed 5 minutes.

There are specific marks for coherence in the Advanced Higher portfolio assessment task, so candidates should structure and present their practical work as a sustained and thorough enquiry that clearly shows the process of developing ideas. For moving image or animation, candidates should make sure that the final piece relates to the research and development work, such as storyboards.

## Can candidates have their Advanced Higher portfolios returned to them after the external assessment?

Yes, candidates can request that we return their Advanced Higher portfolios. For further information, please visit the return of materials web page.

# Accessibility

## Can visually impaired candidates do National Qualifications in Art and Design?

Yes. Art and Design portfolio assessments are open and flexible so that they can be tailored to individuals' strengths and preferences. Teachers and lecturers can help candidates to select suitable approaches depending on the nature of their visual impairment. For example, a candidate with a severe visual impairment could find working in 3D more accessible. In some cases, working in a large scale, or with particular approaches to colour and shape, can be a solution. Colour blind candidates often work successfully by using monochromatic techniques in expressive, and responding to design briefs in which use of colour is not a key requirement.

In the National 5 and Higher question papers, candidates select artworks and designs to study for the mandatory questions. Therefore, they can select artworks and designs that are accessible to them. For example, a visually impaired candidate could study local sculptures that they can interact with, and products that they can use. Colour blind candidates could select monochromatic artworks and designs where colour is not a key feature. Advanced Higher candidates could take a similar approach to select an accessible topic for their contextual analysis.

Teachers and lecturers should contact the SQA Assessment Arrangements team at the start of the course to discuss reasonable adjustments that can be put in place to support visually impaired candidates with portfolios and question papers.

You will find general questions and answers about National Qualifications on our website at www.sqa.org.uk/faq.