



Student Performance

2007 AP® Studio Art

The following comments on the 2007 portfolios for AP® Studio Art were written by the Chief Reader, Raúl Acero of the University of Redlands in Redlands, California. They are intended to help teachers better prepare their students to submit an AP portfolio in 2-D Design, 3-D Design, or Drawing. Professor Acero describes how the portfolios are scored; discusses the 2007 submittals; and offers suggestions for how teachers can help students improve their portfolios. Teachers are also 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. In June 2007, 108 experienced college and high school teachers gathered at the Studio Art Reading to determine how well the students addressed this task.

This entire Studio Art Exam *is* a “free-response question,” but it is divided into parts that allow the 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: Students submit 5 actual works that demonstrate mastery of design or drawing for 2-D Design or Drawing, or 10 slides of 5 works (two views of each) for 3-D Design.

Section II Concentration: Students submit 12 slides of works describing an in-depth exploration of a particular artistic concern.

Section III Breadth: This is a variety of works demonstrating an understanding of the principles of drawing or design; students submit 12 slides of 12 different works for 2-D Design or Drawing, or 16 slides of 8 different works (two views of each) for 3-D Design.

Scoring Standards and Criteria

Two to three different Readers using a 6-point scale score each section of the portfolio. The scores are recalculated by statisticians so that 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 translated into the AP 5-point grading scale. This system allows 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 AP grades to help decide if a new student is ready to “pass 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 pass out of a requirement to bring their portfolio with them when they come to college. Often college faculty will withhold judgment about the student's readiness until they view the actual work in the portfolio.

The scoring guidelines (or rubrics) are a set of criteria that the Readers use to guide them in assigning scores. 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 Reading. Current scoring guidelines can be downloaded from AP Central[®]. Go to “The Exams” and then navigate to “Exam Questions.” Select Studio Art: 2-D Design, Studio Art: 3-D Design, or Studio Art: Drawing. On the page that opens you will see “Scoring Guidelines.” Clicking on the scoring guidelines link will cause Adobe Acrobat to launch and the PDF version of the guidelines will appear. Note: no matter which exam you select to navigate from, all of the Studio Art Scoring Guidelines (contained in one document) will be downloaded, not just the guidelines for the portfolio selected.

Portfolio Assessment—2007

The 2-D Design Portfolio

- **2-D Design Quality**
2-D was a very strong portfolio this year. Readers noted excellent examples in all areas and an increase in overall quality. Photography and digital submissions remained strong with some excellent examples of design-based student work. Mean scores for 2-D Quality were very good, higher than quality scores for the Drawing Portfolio.
- **2-D Design Concentration**
The mean scores for 2-D Concentration were about the same as those for the Drawing Concentration. Readers felt that this section remained problematic for the same reasons as those cited for the Drawing Concentration (see below). However, students did score better in this area than last year. Helping students define what a concentration is, as opposed to selecting work that seems to “go together,” is key.
- **2-D Design Breadth**
The mean scores for this section were a bit higher this year than last. Readers noted that the quality of the breadth section was good, but (as in recent years) often students did not really display breadth in design issues. Instead they sometimes showed many different works, or works in a variety of media, or a single medium, frequently photography, to

demonstrate breadth. Some examples of breadth that used only one medium were good to excellent; regardless of medium or media, active engagement with a broad range of design issues is one of the main requirements of this portfolio.

The 3-D Design Portfolio

- **3-D Design Quality**

3-D Quality scores dropped slightly again this year. Readers commented that the work was not as good as last year. Mean scores for this portfolio were lower than for the other portfolios.

- **3-D Design Concentration**

Mean scores for 3-D Concentration were lower than concentration scores for the other portfolios. 3-D Concentrations suffered from the same problems as concentrations for the other portfolios (see Drawing Concentration section, below).

- **3-D Design Breadth**

As with the rest of the 3-D Portfolio, this section was of lower quality than last year. Readers saw a great many ceramics portfolios that did not address design issues: for example, an entire portfolio of thrown, glazed pottery with little thought to relationships between form and glaze. Teachers should concentrate on explaining the interaction of surface and form to express design issues. The 3-D Portfolio has been very good in years past, and I hope it will improve a bit next year.

The Drawing Portfolio

- **Drawing Quality**

This year's Drawing Portfolio was strong with many high-scoring submissions. The mean scores for quality were a little higher than the concentration and breadth scores. As in 2006, Readers noted that it was hard to find portfolios receiving scores of 1 but also difficult to find work meriting the highest score of 6. Teachers are doing a good job explaining the requirements of this portfolio to their students. Since requirements are clear-cut, the Drawing Portfolio seems to maintain consistency from year to year.

- **Drawing Concentration**

The mean scores for concentration were lower than the Drawing Quality scores. It is clear that students and teachers are still struggling with the goals and definitions of "concentration." However, there seemed to be improvement this year. Readers noted more cohesive concentrations. As in years past some students did not provide a strong enough visual idea, one able to sustain them over the course of the creation of a concentration. Readers noted that some concentrations were based on vague ideas that sounded "very intellectual."

The concentration encourages the student to learn to put together a cohesive body of work. It is a challenging proposition, but there are any number of ways to help students think about their concentration. The goal is to have them create work that holds together visually and conceptually. The idea does not have to be grandiose—it can be a simple idea explored well.

- **Drawing Breadth**

The mean scores for this year's breadth section were higher than the concentration scores. Readers noted that submissions for breadth seemed better than in years past. Students have struggled with this section, but it may be that this year's group better understood the requirements for breadth.

Final Thoughts

At this year's Reading we saw a demonstration of the software being developed for digital submission of student portfolios. The exact timetable for the change from slides to digital submissions is uncertain, so teachers are advised to keep an eye on AP Central for the latest updates.

The Readers and I appreciate the great effort that goes into completing the Studio Art Exam. The way to better scores is to understand that two of the three portfolios are design-based exams. It is important to teach the principles and elements of design, because students must demonstrate an understanding of them in order to receive good scores on their portfolios. In my workshops teachers often tell me that students who show their work in galleries or who are considered the "best" in the school have gotten low scores on AP Studio Art. They are naturally concerned about this and question the methods used to score portfolios. However, the fact that a student has shown work in a gallery does not always translate into demonstrating knowledge of design, and that is what the exam is about. The scoring guidelines available on AP Central provide the best way of seeing how Readers apply the criteria to students' work.

The AP Studio Art Reading is a fascinating and monumental task. The exam has grown and the work improved over the years. This is an important program that keeps students engaged in creative work that contributes to the betterment of society. In these times of shrinking or nonexistent budgets for the arts, the commitment of teachers to their students is beautifully manifested in the thousands of portfolios we review each summer. I am very happy to be part of the process and congratulate all the fine teachers and students who make this exam such a success.