



Student Performance

2008 AP[®] Studio Art

The following comments on the 2008 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 2008 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 of 2008, 130 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 1 Quality: Students submitted 5 actual works that demonstrated 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 submitted 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 submitted 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 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 grade 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 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 (or rubrics) are criteria that the Readers use to guide them 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 Reading. Current scoring guidelines can be downloaded from the Studio Art section of AP Central[®]. Click on "AP Courses and Exams" on the site's Home Page 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 bring you to a page where you can open a PDF of the latest version of the guidelines. 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—2008

The 2-D Design Portfolio

- **Overall**
The 2-D Design Portfolio often includes very inventive work, perhaps because there is such a range of media allowed.
- **2-D Design Quality**
The Quality section remained very strong this year. Photography and digital work included some excellent examples of design-based student work. As was the case in 2007, mean scores for 2-D Quality were higher than Quality scores for the Drawing Portfolio.
- **2-D Design Concentration**
Just as last year, the mean scores for this section were about the same as those for the Drawing Concentration. Readers felt that the Concentration section for all three portfolios remains problematic. Helping students define what a concentration is, as opposed to selecting work that seems to "go together," is key.

- **2-D Design Breadth**

Mean scores for this section were higher than for the Concentration section this year. However, as has been the trend in recent years, students often do not engage with a sufficient range of design issues. Readers noted that the quality of the Breadth section was good, but often students did not really display breadth in design issues. Instead, they sometimes showed many different works or works in a variety of media without demonstrating accomplishment with many design principles and elements. Active engagement with a broad range of design issues is one of the main requirements of this section of the portfolio.

The 3-D Design Portfolio

- **Overall**

Mean scores for this portfolio were lower than for the other portfolios. The 3-D Portfolio seems to be declining in quality. However, fashion portfolios were often quite good. Note: Readers asked that more care be taken in photographing jewelry; the pieces were often hard to see.

- **3-D Design Quality**

Quality scores dropped again this year. Readers commented that the work was not as good as last year.

- **3-D Design Concentration**

Mean scores for this section were lower than for the Concentration sections in the other portfolios. Concentrations in 3D suffer from the same problems as the other portfolios (see 2-D Concentration, above). This is a continuing problem area.

- **3-D Design Breadth**

Again this year, as with the rest of the 3-D Portfolio, this section was of lower quality. The 3-D Portfolio has been very good in years past but sadly has been in decline for two years now. Readers often see many ceramics portfolios that do not address design issues, such as an entire collection 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 Drawing Portfolio

- **Overall**

Teachers are doing a good job teaching the Drawing Portfolio to their students. Since the portfolio is clear-cut, it seems to maintain consistency from year to year.

- **Drawing Quality**

This year's Drawing Portfolio was strong, with many high-scoring submissions. Readers again noted that it was hard to find many portfolios deserving a score of 1 (the lowest score) or 6 (the highest). On the 6-point scale, mean scores for Quality were about .2 points higher than the means for Concentration and Breadth. Quality continues to be a strong and cohesive part of this portfolio.

- **Drawing Concentration**

As mentioned previously, mean scores for this section were slightly lower than the Quality scores. It is clear that students and teachers are still struggling with the goals and definitions of “concentration.” The Concentration section encourages students to learn how to put together a cohesive body of work. It is a challenging proposition. 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 looked more like a Breadth section or were just a “hodgepodge” of work.

There are many ways to help students think about their concentrations. 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 very slightly higher than the Concentration scores. In years past, students have struggled with this section, and this year was no exception.

Final Thoughts

For 2009 the College Board is requiring that digital images be used instead of slides for AP Studio Art submittals. A small number of schools participated in a pilot study of digital submission and evaluation in 2008, and Readers noted the advantages to this method, including the fact that they could see the artwork much more clearly. The entire process is geared to making the scoring of student work much easier, and I am grateful that we have adopted this method. Please go to AP Central or see the Studio Art Poster for more information on digital submissions.

As always, it is my sincere pleasure to serve the students who take the AP Studio Art Exam.