

Tips for sketchbook work

A sketchbook is a creative document that contains both written and visual material. It is a place for researching, exploring, planning and developing ideas - for testing, practising, evaluating and discussing your project. It is the place where you learn from other artists and express and brainstorm ideas.

The sketchbook is an important part of your Coursework project. It shows the journey (or development) towards your final piece and usually contains:

- **Drawings, diagrams, thumbnails, composition plans, paintings and/or designs** (particularly those that are incomplete or experimental)
- **Practise and trials of different techniques and processes**
- **A range of mixed mediums and materials.**
- **Evidence of first-hand responses to subject matter and artworks**, demonstrated through observational drawings, photographs and annotated pamphlets and sketches from exhibitions or gallery visits. (Note: the sketchbook must NOT be used as a dumping ground for fliers and pamphlets. If you are going to glue something in, evaluate it, discuss its relevance and explain how it helps to inform your own work)
- **Digital printouts of relevant artist work.**

Note: The sketchbook should NOT be used as an all-purpose journal for doodling cartoon characters or scribbling notes to a friend. All work contained within your sketchbook must support your Coursework project as a whole.

HOW TO ANNOTATE AN ART SKETCHBOOK

The following tips and guidelines should help you understand how to add quality notes to your pages:

- **Reveal your own thinking and personal responses** (rather than regurgitating facts or the views of others)
- **Explain the starting points and ideas**, emphasising personal relevance and your own connections to subjects
- **Critically analyse and compare artwork of relevant artist models** (both historical and contemporary artists, from a range of cultures). Discuss aesthetics, use of media, technique, meaning/emotion/ideas and the influence of an artist upon your own work. While it is important to conduct research into your artist models (and to convey an understanding of this information), avoid copying or summarising large passages of information from other sources. Instead, select the information that you think is useful for your project and link it with your own viewpoints and observations. Use research findings to make you sound clever and knowledgeable – to prove that you are aware of the artists and cultural influences around you – and to help you to critically evaluate artworks (by giving you background information and a peek into the mind of an artist): do not use it to fill your sketchbook with boring facts
- **Demonstrate good subject knowledge, using correct vocabulary** (phrases such as ‘strong contrast’, ‘draws the eye’ and ‘focal point’ etc)
- **Reference of all images, artwork and text from other sources**, ensuring that artists, websites and books are acknowledged (it should be obvious to an examiner which work is yours when viewing a page, so cite sources directly underneath the appropriate image. Photographs taken by yourself should be clearly labelled, so examiners know the work is yours and reward you for it)
- **Communicate with clarity**. It doesn’t matter whether you jot down notes or use full sentences, but never use ‘txt’ speak and try to avoid incorrect spelling, as this indicates sloppiness and can hint to the examiner that you are a lower calibre candidate

When annotating an Art sketchbook, it may benefit you to contemplate the following:

- What subjects / themes / moods / issues / messages are explored? Why are these relevant or important to the artist (or you)?
- What appeals to you visually about this artwork?
- How does the composition of the artwork (i.e. the relationship between the visual elements: line, shape, colour, tone, texture and space) help to communicate ideas and reinforce a message? Why might this composition have been chosen? (Discuss in terms of how the visual elements interact and create visual devices that 'draw attention', 'emphasise', 'balance', 'link' and/or 'direct the viewer through the artwork' etc.)
- What mediums, techniques (mark-making methods), styles and processes have been used? How do these communicate a message? How do they affect the mood of the artwork and the communication of ideas? Are these methods useful for your own project?
- Remember that these questions are a guide only and are intended to make you start to think critically about the art you are studying and creating. If you need further help with analysing artist work, the article about writing the Personal Study contains a section about critical analysis which you are likely to find useful.