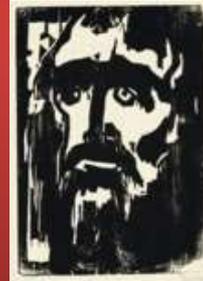


Unit F431

# KS5 Personal Investigation

## *JFS Student Guide*



# Personal Investigation

Your Personal Investigation has to include a written personal study that relates to your theme. This booklet will give you some guidelines for how you can approach this.

Taken from the OCR specifications

## ***Related personal study***

*This should allow candidates to place their work within an historical and/or contemporary context. This part of the unit ensures that candidates are able to demonstrate through text and imagery that they have made informative, pertinent and critical connections to artists, designers or craftspeople working within the same or related fields or genres.*

*The presentation of this related personal study may be demonstrated through a range of forms such as written, visual, oral or other appropriate forms.*

*The word limit of this related personal study is 1000–3000 words. Candidates who select video, audio or appropriate alternative methods of presentation should provide transcripts to help with the moderation process; however, it is the video, audio, etc, that the candidate presents that should be used for marking purposes.*

## Challenges and Purposes

The first challenge is to understand the purpose of the investigation. As a unit of work this must demonstrate that you can:

- **convincingly communicates evidence of an inventive development of ideas through investigations; perceptively analysing objects, ideas, images and artefacts;**
- **demonstrates evidence of a mature understanding of purposes, meanings and their related contexts;**
- **quality of language is mature and fluid and is fully engaged with informing development of ideas and images.**

It is particularly important that you realise that the quality of your written language and ability to articulate your ideas effectively are a key element to a successful unit.

To do this you must be able to TRANSLATE the visual into the verbal. To do this you must first understand the "language" of the discipline - that is, you need to familiarise yourself with the terms and concepts necessary to describe a work of art.

Craft your description so that it delivers some argument or point of view. A good **INVESTIGATION** must show what you want to say about a work of art and use your description to make that point. In short, you must master the art of simultaneously **analysing** and **describing** the work of art you have chosen to discuss.

## Activity

Consider the descriptive analysis below from a student. Look at how detail is used to support the point that Ghisi is requiring his viewer to venerate the great philosophers who are the subject of the work:



Raphael – The School of Athens

*In Ghisi's engraving of Raphael's School of Athens, the world's ancient philosophers are gathered in a great hall, almost as if they were actors on a stage. While they engage in animated interactions with one another, the viewer is left standing outside the picture space, slightly below the eye-level of the engraving's figures. A sense of veneration is almost demanded by the composition, with the lines from the vaulted ceiling, the tiled floor, and the upper window all converging to one vanishing point equidistant between the heads of Aristotle and Plato. While this vanishing point creates a sense of balance between their two philosophies, a symbolic merging of two great minds, it also emphasises the distance between the historical figures and the viewer, particularly in Raphael's enormous original, which looms several feet over the viewer's head.*

Note how all of the details in this paragraph support the argument that Ghisi has arranged his work to evoke a sense of veneration for the philosophers of the past. The writer offers no details that are irrelevant to this argument. Note, too, that in this paragraph the writer focuses on the formal elements of composition. He does not interrupt this discussion by turning to other matters, such as colour and light. In short, the writer has created a coherent argument in his paragraph.

## Five Categories to help!

1

**Formal Analysis** asks students to consider the formal parts of a work of art, and to create from a discussion of these parts some interesting or fresh way of seeing or understanding the work in question

2

**The Sociological Essay** looks at a particular historical era and asks how that era influences a particular work or artist. It might also raise more general social questions - for example, difficulties facing women artists, the impact of economics on art, and so on. For example, a sociological essay might explore how Walker Evans' photography of the rural poor affirmed Roosevelt's decision to create the Farm Security Administration.

3

**Biographical Essays** explore the relevance of an artist's life to his or her art. For example, a biographical essay might note how Monet might credit the role of colour theory and its influence on his work

4

**Iconography** (which means, literally, "image writing") is work that seeks to identify images through an exploration of the symbols in a piece of art. Barnett points out that in Rembrandt's *The Assassin* the subjects of the painting appear to be Dutch citizens. However, an exploration of the painting's symbolism (the presence of a knife, for example) reveals that these figures might be more accurately identified as saints.

5

**Iconology** (which means, literally, "image study") uses literary and other texts to interpret a work. For example, such an essay might use ancient versions of Greek myths to shed light on pictorial representations of that myth in Archaic Greek art.

## Example – Formal Analysis

The following example is from a student paper on Kathe Kollwitz's lithograph, *Death Reaches for a Child*.



*The placement of the figures in space plays an essential role in the picture. The three figures occupy the bulk of the framed area. The woman technically occupies the most drawn space; however, the figure of Death dominates and controls the space of the other figures. His head almost touches the uppermost border, but he does not strain against it. In a sense, the figure of Death becomes the top part of the frame. The vertical nature of Death's domination over the mother and child makes the compression of space all the more menacing. The woman strains against the borders that Death constricts. She attempts to break out of these confines with her extended elbow, which pushes against the right-hand edge of the picture, but resistance is futile. Her arm is necessarily attached to the arm of Death, as all three figures are inextricably bound both physically and symbolically.*

## Pre-writing strategies

Let's imagine, for the sake of argument, that you've been instructed to go over to the National Gallery, to find a work of art (or two) that move(s) you, and then to write a formal analysis of the work or works in question. *How do you proceed?*

1. Take a pad of paper and a pencil with you so that you might record your thoughts as they occur to you. A tape recorder is an option, too.
2. Choose your work(s) carefully. Find a painting or a sculpture that "speaks" to you - not just emotionally, but intellectually as well.
3. Consider your response to the work. What emotions does it raise? What ideas does it provoke? What about the work, in particular, do you find provocative? How does the artist manage to evoke these ideas and feelings? Take notes.
4. Consider how the piece is displayed. Is it a piece that needs to be displayed in a wide open space? Do other works near it complement it? Does it need bright, high-contrast lighting? Does it welcome you to view it from up-close, or are you asked to view it from a distance? Are you seeing it in the context in which it was meant to be viewed, or was it made for a home or church vs. a museum?
5. Consider the formal elements of the work, taking note of all of your observations - big and small. Among the elements you will consider are:
  - \* **Medium.** Why is the artist using this particular medium? What are its advantages? Its limitations?
  - \* **Lines.** Are the lines thick or thin? Largely vertical or horizontal? Straight or curved? What is achieved by this particular use of line?
  - \* **Colour.** Is the colour realistic or expressive? Warm or cool? Bright or muted? And to what effect?
  - \* **Light.** How is light used? How is shadow used? Is there any play between the two? What is communicated to the viewer?
  - \* **Space.** What is the sense of space in the work you've chosen? Is there great depth, or is the visual plane shallow? How are the elements of the work configured in that space? How does the sense of space affect the subject matter? Affect your response to the work?
  - \* **Composition.** How do the various formal elements of the work interact? How does the composition convey the work's theme or idea? How does the eye move across the piece? How does the composition control that movement?
  - \* **Style.** What elements of the composition work to constitute the artist's style? The style of the period in which the artist was/is working?
6. Consider the context of the work. When was it painted? By whom? Where? With what other works is it in conversation? What cultural or historical matters have influenced it? What cultural or historical matters does it seem to be addressing? If you don't know much about the context of the work, make a list of questions that you might wish to pursue. These questions will guide you in your library research. Remember: the exhibit will provide information. You will want to take any brochures that the museum provides.
7. Look at your notes on the formal elements of the work in question. Then return to your initial notes on your response to the work. Do you see connections between what the artist has done, formally, and your own responses? Turn then to your comments on the work's context. Does analysis of the formal elements shed any light on contextual matters? Or vice versa? When you begin to see connections between the formal elements and the larger issues of context and personal response, you begin to see how you might make an argument about art. (For more general information, see "Coming Up with Your Topic.")
8. Make use of the National Gallery Website.

## Writing Advice

In many ways, writing an Investigation is no different from writing other kinds of papers in the Humanities. You need to focus your topic, write an HYPOTHEIS, settle on a structure, write clear and coherent paragraphs, and tend to matters of grammar and style.

In some other ways, however, writing an INVESTIGATION requires some understanding of the conventions of the discipline. We've collected a few tips here:

- \* Be sure to analyse as you describe. The comment we've heard most often from Art History professors is that students often describe a work without considering the argument they ultimately intend to make. Consider carefully the purpose of your paper, then choose and organize your descriptive details so that they illustrate not only the painting, but your analysis of it.
- \* Be aware that paragraphs in Art History papers are often constructed so that the topic sentences are at the end. Typically, students are trained in their composition courses to begin their paragraphs with a topic sentence. However, in Art History, students will often find paragraphs constructed with the topic sentences at the end. In these kinds of paragraphs, details build towards an observation or argument. When creating a paragraph that ends with it a topic sentence, you need to be especially careful that your details are well-chosen and logically expressed, and that they build towards the point you are making.
- \* Think about the ways in which you want to structure your papers. Structure them chronologically if you are discussing an artistic movement or a specific artist's progression; spatially if you are discussing the elements of a specific work; relationally if you are discussing a work in relation to a movement or another work; and so on.
- \* Avoid the subjective "I." You want your reader to feel that your point of view about a particular work comes from some formal aspect of that work, and not from some very personal response of your own. This is not to say that your personal response to a work is irrelevant; rather, it is your job as a critic or scholar to figure out what formal aspects of the work created your response, and then to explain fully how and why.

## Useful websites

[www.nationalgallery.org.uk](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk)

[www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)

[www.octobergallery.co.uk](http://www.octobergallery.co.uk)

[www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk)

[www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/index.shtml](http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/index.shtml)

[www.ica.org.uk](http://www.ica.org.uk)