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# Art

## How to get an H1 in the Leaving Cert Art Exam



by **Beatrice B**

*Beatrice B got a H1 in her higher Leaving Cert Art exam. She's now studying Veterinary Medicine in University College Dublin. Here she shares what she learned.*



## Art

Art is a fantastic subject. Whether you took Art for Junior Cert or not, this subject can appeal to anyone. I'm not going to lie, some artistic talent is definitely handy, but with a very doable written paper, this subject could be a good option if you've got an average ability and just need the points. The revised marking system is very much focused on creativity & originality, (so as to better prepare kids for college etc.), but your Art teacher will be happy to help. If you're considering applying to any Art college, or course that requires a portfolio, taking art in school can help you churn out the volume and variety of work that most colleges are looking for.

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## The Course

As it stands, the subject has 3 components; the **Project**, the **Drawing Exam** & the **Art History & Appreciation Paper**. Overall, the subject has **400** marks. **200** for the project (50%), **50** for the Drawing Exam (12.5%), & the remaining **150** for the written paper (37.5%).

## The Project

In 2018, the SEC decided to shake up the way Art was examined. Previously, candidates were given a few hours to create their pieces, which they could practice beforehand. This system worked well for some, but many others found the time frame too short & too stressful, and of course, as with any exam, many found ways to cheat the system and smuggle in their pieces (“here’s one I made earlier”). As a result, the current system was introduced.

- ▶ Candidates now receive an A2 booklet in which they must design two pieces. The first must be (2D) a **Still Life** OR an **Imaginative Composition**. The second piece has a few more options (which are fully explained in the pink exam booklet, given out after Christmas).
- ▶ The piece can be a **design** for a piece, **OR** something you actually make and present as a **finished work**. As for what you can make, there is a fairly wide range of options, usually including a poster, (for those who prefer 2D), modelling, puppetry, batik, embroidery and a whole load of others.



## The Booklet

- ▶ The first set of double pages, (the “**Initial Research Sheet**”), are for your **Primary Sources**. In these pages you draw/paint/sketch the real world objects that you will use as inspiration for your piece, e.g. a pair of old runners that will become Cinderella’s glass Nikes. A kiwi that will be James & the Giant Fruit Salad. That kind of thing. It’s a good idea to write little notes beside your drawings as you work, (maybe in pencil), so you can keep track of what you’re planning to use them for.
- ▶ The SEC has some rules on what can and can’t go in certain pages of the booklet, (photos etc.), so if you’re not sure, **always check** with it, and with your Art teacher. As they give marks on your “creative process” (basically the logical order in which you work to develop your ideas). The Primary sources you choose here need to cover **both** of your finished works.
- ▶ Note: Use both pages. It doesn’t matter if the object is for project 1 or 2, you don’t *have to* split the pages between them.
- ▶ Next is **Development Sheet 1** – Preliminary ideas based on your primary sources. It’s a good idea to keep your options open at this point, so take a couple of your primary sources to develop. The idea is that you “investigate” possibilities for your final piece. Don’t forget, this page is for your 1<sup>st</sup> piece only.
- ▶ The next double spread, **Development Sheet 2**, is for finalising exactly which idea you’ll go with. On these pages, mess around with layouts, colour schemes, media etc. Again, these pages are for your 1<sup>st</sup> (2D) piece.
- ▶ The next two sets of double pages are for your 2<sup>nd</sup> piece. The layout is exactly the same as Development Sheets 1 & 2.



## The Finished Pieces

- ▶ The exam is looking for 2 finished pieces. The first is a 2D piece, (but you can stick things on e.g. fabric, découpage etc.? so think outside the box), in the form of a **Still Life** OR an **Imaginative Composition**. A still life is a painting/drawing of a group of objects, inspired by your theme, as they sit in front of you. There's plenty of scope for imagination, think Picasso, Van Gogh etc. Go for it. Try make your piece, and the objects in it, original. The Imaginative Composition is a little broader. Basically, you imagine it. Then you sit down and put it on paper. Just keep in mind the time constraints.
- ▶ Your second piece can be 2D (e.g. by choosing the Poster brief), **OR** 3D (by choosing modelling, puppetry, woodwork etc.). The **details** for each option are in the pink exam booklet. Be very careful when selecting one, as many have certain **criteria** which must be met, for example, modelling cannot be painted, posters must include lettering, so make sure you won't be caught out later.
- ▶ Alternatively, you can hand up a **design** for a piece. One example from the past was to design a parade float. This could be a good option if you don't have the time or materials to make the finished piece, but obviously, try to make the decision early on.



## The Booklet in Summary

- ▶ **Spread 1** – for your **Primary Sources** – Real world objects that match the theme, and inspire your finished pieces. **FOR BOTH PIECES**
- ▶ **Spread 2** – Develop your ideas from your primary sources. **FOR PIECE 1**
- ▶ **Spread 3** – Narrow down & finalise your idea for the finished piece. **FOR PIECE 1**
- ▶ **Spread 4** – Again, develop ideas from primary sources, this time **FOR PIECE 2**
- ▶ **Spread 5** – Narrow down & finalise ideas **FOR PIECE 2**. (Design/Finished Work)
- ▶ And finally, paperwork; **Front page** – Exam No, etc.
- ▶ Page before Primary sources – Brief, Theme etc.
- ▶ **Final Page** – Summary Paragraphs for each piece

## How to make your Project the best it can be

- ▶ If you have a great idea before you get the paper, make sure to keep a note of it. You can work on ideas in the summer before Sixth year if you want, and find a way to work the brief to what you want. It might be a good idea to talk to your art teacher before the end of fifth year to get some ideas to think about over the summer. (If you're in TY, some of your projects during the year could give you the perfect opportunity to work on promising ideas)
- ▶ **Fill the page.** Gives a much better impression
- ▶ That said, leave some room when you're still in the early stages. You never know when you might think up the perfect idea.
- ▶ Any idea, even if it seems stupid, should be included. It's almost inevitable that you're gonna run out of time, and on the last day, blank pages are not what you want. If you add something in, then later decide you don't like it, you can always glue something "experimental" over it,



like a drawing on coloured paper, or do some colour swatches, or add something **extra** (a bunch of feathers, dried flower, piece of fabric, cellophane... anything will do really, 'cos this is "art").

- ▶ Also, genuinely try to **experiment**. Go back to second class and make pasta art. Anything to show off how unique and original you are. Make it **memorable**. (Obviously within reason) It's especially great if no one in your class does the same thing, the examiner will be extra impressed, and will remember you.
- ▶ Colour **swatches** are our friends. Great to bulk out that empty looking corner
- ▶ **Colour!!!!** (Or, if monochrome is your thing, then Texture!!!!)
- ▶ **Annotate** your drawings. "This is Auntie Mary's lace handkerchief that inspired my undead zombie bride's wedding dress" / "I used the colours on this Autumn leaf to create my colour scheme" / "The iridescence of this beetle gave me the idea for this character's armour" / "I liked the texture of this perished rubber tyre, but I decided to use the texture of the rusty bike instead"
- ▶ **Don't plagiarise!!!** If you get caught out, major trouble. (Also, it's lazy & boring)
- ▶ Don't forget to check all your **paperwork**. Keep in mind limitations given in the brief such as dimensions etc.
- ▶ Make sure the thing you base your project on has enough in it to keep you going. There's nothing worse than running out of steam halfway to May, so make sure to think about it
- ▶ Also, don't base your project on something you could possibly hate in the future. E.g. girl/boyfriend or similar. Even if you have a solid relationship, it would be really hard to keep going on a project that celebrates something you despise.
- ▶ Chances are, you'll be stressed out of your brains, but if it's at all possible, **enjoy it**. In the end of the day, things will be alright.



## The Drawing Exam

The exam consists of two drawings, the first is a standing pose of 15 minutes, worth **20 marks out of your 400 (5%)**. The model stands for 15 minutes, then they get a break. During their break, you can keep working on your drawing. This drawing should be quick, but **accurate**. It has to be a **full figure** sketch. Keep this drawing basic. The most important thing is **proportion**. The idea is that it tests your **observational drawing**. For the second drawing, the model sits for **30 minutes**, and the drawing is worth **30 marks (7.5%)**. You have a lot more time for this one, so show off your **style**. **Develop** the **shading, tone, form & texture**. For this one, you get the option of a full figure, **or** half figure sketch, (NB; if you chose ½ figure, you **must** include from the **hands/waist up**). Here are some tips:

- ▶ **Practice!!!** Can't stress enough how important this is.
- ▶ Practice within the **time limits**. (Super important)
- ▶ **Proportion** is more important than anything else. No matter how perfectly shaded and textured your drawing is, you'll lose a lot of marks if it's proportions are off
- ▶ **Position** the figure correctly on the page. If there's a huge difference between the gap at the bottom and at the top, you have a problem.
- ▶ Likewise, make sure you fit the **whole figure** on the page
- ▶ Lightly sketching the background, (even if it's made up), can make a huge difference to the drawing.
- ▶ Keep in mind that the examiner can't see the model. If you need to edit, feel free. (Within reason obviously. Your classmates are drawing the same person)





## The Exam Paper

*The final part of the examination is the Art History & Appreciation paper in June. The paper is worth **150 marks** out of **400**, (so **37.5%**). You have to answer **3** questions, out of about 20. The paper has 3 sections: Irish Art, European Art & Art Appreciation. You have to answer **one** question from each. The Art History course is extremely broad, so don't waste your time trying to cram all of it in when you have so many other subjects to do. My advice would be to **only learn maybe three chapters (max) for each** section, because the exam is very predictable, and having a few options makes life easier on the day.*

### Irish Art

- ▶ Covers a number of topics, from the Stone Age, right up to Georgian architecture.
- ▶ Out of 20 questions, 5 are usually on Irish Art. There will usually be an image of some famous piece, and once you know the **techniques**, e.g. filigree, enamelling etc., can **draw & annotate** your diagram, and know the approx. **era**, you can write a full answer with minimum effort.
- ▶ The topics asked are repetitive, for example, at least one topic from Pre-History (Stone, Bronze & Iron Age) comes up every year

### European Art

- ▶ Broader again. It covers from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean.
- ▶ I wouldn't learn more than **one or two art styles/periods**, as the paper is so broad.
- ▶ Again, there will usually be an image of some famous piece, and once you can **draw & annotate** it, know the **techniques**, e.g. sfumato, chiaroscuro etc., and the **artist** who made it, you can craft a full answer with minimum effort.
- ▶ (Again, the topics are repetitive, e.g., either Romanesque & Gothic (aka "Medieval"), comes up every year)
- ▶ I wouldn't learn too much for any one chapter. Mostly the exam marks how well you can **regurgitate key words**, and **label** a few **drawings**. I only learned the **main artefact** from each.



Don't waste your time.

### Appreciation Art

- ▶ To tell the truth, I didn't actually "learn off" an answer for this section, I just worked with what I got on the day.
- ▶ My go-to questions would be the Gallery Question & the Film Studies question. These two in particular are very **doable** because you can fabricate some tiny art gallery in the middle of nowhere, and the examiner won't be able to contradict you. (Of course if you've actually studied a gallery, be sure to use that). I "studied" 3 films; Coraline, Avatar & Back to the Future. The variety meant I could answer any question on films.
- ▶ I also knew that one of these two questions, (particularly the Gallery Question comes up very frequently).



## Final Tips – Thing to Remember

- ▶ **Quality over quantity.** No need to memorise every piece by da Vinci. Just know **the main ones.** You'll be covered.
- ▶ **Drawings** are the most important thing. But only if you can **label** them.
- ▶ For most things you don't need to kill yourself learning dates. The century will do.
- ▶ Make sure you have some **background** knowledge. You only need about a paragraph, so keep it basic. **Short and sweet** is the goal.
- ▶ You don't have all that long in the exam, so don't overegg the cake. See the hill. Take the hill. Move on.
- ▶ Plus the usual exam stuff. **Stay** for the duration. **Read over** etc. etc

Chances are, all you need to know is some background info, the techniques, and be able to recognise pieces. If you know this for maybe 3 chapters in each section, at least one will give you a picture, and all you'll have to do is name it and draw it in the booklet.





*Finally, I would like to wish you the best of luck in the exam! You will be fine. 😊*

