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# St Mary's College

## PHOTOGRAPHY (A LEVEL AQA) Pre-course reading and guidance





# A LEVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

## WHY SHOULD I CHOOSE PHOTOGRAPHY?

- › Photography is a popular subject at A Level as many students are attracted to the combination of both technical instruction and the creative freedom it offers.
- › If you choose to study Photography, you'll have considerable scope in choosing and pursuing your own projects. As a result, the work of our students is diverse and they develop strong technical, digital, traditional (artistic) and analytical skills in producing photographic portfolios and outcomes. The course aims to develop understanding of a wide range of photographic approaches and subsequently students generally develop their own style and approach to their work.
- › Whether you're interested in digital photography, traditional SLR work or film-making, you'll receive expert support and tuition.

## WHAT IS THE COURSE STRUCTURE LIKE?

- › The course is a **two year** course. It consists of **two components** and both are coursework-based.
- › **A personal investigation (60% of A Level grade)**
- › **An externally set exam / unit (40% of A Level grade). Themes are released on 1<sup>st</sup> February in Year 2.**



# A LEVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

The A Level course develops skills in a range of photographic genres such as portraiture, documentary photography, still life, macro and landscape. You will learn how to analyse the work of other artists and photographers, considering how they use formal elements in their work, such as line, shape, tone, symmetry, pattern, composition and texture. You will explore techniques using a range of media and produce exciting and creative photographic outcomes. You will respond creatively to briefs whilst developing your own style approach.

## **The personal investigation (60% of A-level) - commences June in Year 12:**

Having explored different skills and techniques in Year 12, you are to select a topic that is of personal interest to you and conduct a photographic investigation.

### **Examples:**

How has 'Fashion Photography' changed over the last 100 years.

'An investigation into the effective use of natural and artificial lighting'



# PERSONAL INVESTIGATION

The expectations for the personal investigation to fulfil course expectations and exam criteria are:

- › A 1000-3000 word commentary to support the explorative and photographic part of the investigation. This is submitted as an A4 typed document with supporting images and bibliography.
- › Research of the theme (mind map and inspirational images).
- › Research and analysis of the work of 6+ relevant and inspiring artists and photographers.
- › Shoot plans and Photoshoots conducted, inspired by each of the photographers studied.
- › Edited, developed and refined images to produce a collection of final pieces and a final outcome (this could be three-dimensional, a banner, a booklet, a poster etc).
- › Analysis and evaluation of the development process throughout in an A3 portfolio of work.



# EXTERNALLY SET TASK:

The externally set task (exam) is released on 1<sup>st</sup> February in Year 13 and a twelve week preparation period commences.

Students will select one topic from a selection, and they will then research photographers and respond personally and creatively to this theme.

To fulfil exam criteria, the format for the exam unit should be:

- Initial research of the theme.
- Research and analysis of diverse work of 6-7 relevant and inspiring artists / photographers.
- Shoot plans and Photoshoots conducted.
- Edited, developed and refined images to produce a collection of final pieces and a final outcome.
- Analysis and evaluation of the development process throughout.



# HOW TO ANALYSE A PHOTOGRAPH

- › Why do we analyse the work of others? If we don't understand the meaning behind someone's ideas, how can we create an in-depth and personal response to it?
- › You need depth, demonstration of knowledge and use of a specialist vocabulary to achieve a high grade.

## How to analyse a photograph

- › Images are loaded with codes, signs and signifiers. Some come from ancient history, others are loaded with religious meaning. This language of signs is called semiotics, understanding semiotics and representation is key to properly understanding and analysing an image.
- › Once you have uncovered why a photographer or artist has created a certain piece of work, then you can take that 'why' and apply the principle of it to your own work. It will allow you to explore different subject matter, themes and methods of picture-taking, all whilst maintaining the same fundamental idea.



# Signs and Meaning

This is a sign, it represents something and has a meaning.

When you see it on the road, you are supposed to stop.

It is written in the English language, so you need to know English in order to understand it.

If you speak Arabic and have never seen an English word before, would you know what it means? Universally the colour red is associated with causing alert or is associated with danger. Even if you do not know the language you may be able to decipher it's meaning. Red can also be associated with love and passion, but not in this case. The sign is placed on a road, so this gives it context and frames it's meaning.

The possible associations and representations of a literal sign, language and colour are numerous. Even in as something as simple as a road sign a great deal of knowledge is required to know it's meaning.

You have to know:

- › the language
- › the meaning of the colour
- › understand the context the sign is in
- › and that it is a road sign.





# CRITICAL THEORY



**Understanding how objects communicate different meanings in different contexts.**

- › An apple can represent different things depending on the context.
- › The colour – does it represent anger, love, passion, desire, danger?

**An apple could represent:**

- › the apple not falling far from the tree (knowledge of local sayings, folk tales and language)
- › tree of life – fertility, bounty, plenty
- › religious symbolism – story of Adam and Eve and forbidden fruit
- › health – healthy eating
- › in Norse mythology it is associated with immortality (knowledge of cultures other than your own)

You can begin to understand that even simple objects in isolation can have multiple meanings.

The setting that the object is then placed in can have an effect on that reading of that object and it can affect the overall interpretation of an image.

How then do we piece together the meaning of an image with many objects?





# ANALYSING an image..



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# A guide to evaluating a photograph:

The prompts below will guide you through this process. Analysis should always flow grammatically as one piece of written work and would not be simply brief and direct responses to questions.

## Photographic content, form, process and mood

- › What is it? What is it about? What is happening?
- › Where and when was it taken?
- › What do you think that the relationship between the photographer and subject/s is?
- › What does the photograph represent?
- › What has the photographer called the photograph?
- › Does the title change the way we see the photograph?
- › Is it a realistic depiction?
- › Have any parts been exaggerated or distorted? If so, why?
- › What is the theme of the photograph?
- › What message does the photograph communicate?



## Form - looking at the formal elements

- › **Colour** -Is the photograph colour or black and white? How does this affect the mood?
- › **Tone** -Is the photograph high or low contrast? How and why?
- › **Line** -What sorts of lines are there in the photograph? How have they been positioned in relation to the rest of the composition? What effect does this have?
- › **Shape** -What sorts of shapes are there in the image? Do they remind you of anything? Do you think the photographer meant this? What kind of marks does the photographer use?
- › **Pattern/Texture** -What kinds of patterns and/or textures are there in the photograph?

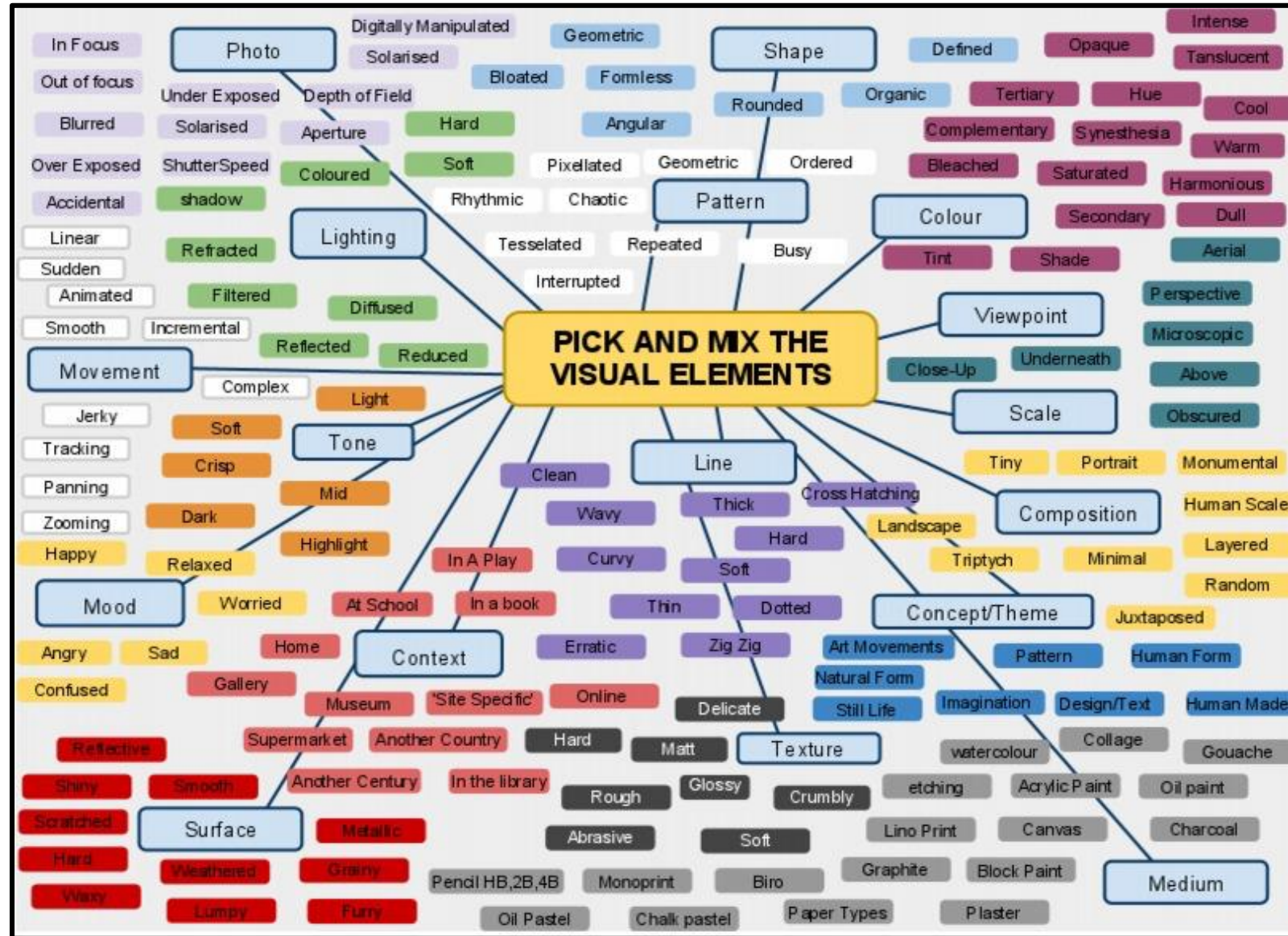
## Process - how the photograph has been taken, developed/manipulated and printed

- › Was the photograph taken inside or outside?
- › What time of day?
- › How was it lit? How many light sources can you make out? What is the evidence for this?
- › What materials and tools have been used?
- › Has the photograph been manipulated or distorted in any way? How and why?

## Mood - looking at the communication of moods and feeling

- › How does the photograph make you feel?
- › Why do you think you feel like this?
- › Does the colour, texture, form or theme of the photograph affect your mood? How and why?

# WHAT TOOLS TO USE TO ANALYSE A PICTURE?



A guide to selecting terminology for analysing a photograph.

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# Resources to develop your photography knowledge:



Author	Title	Publisher
Berger, J (2013)	Understanding a Photograph	Penguin
Blanks, T (2013) Sloman, P	New Fashion Photography	Prestel
Clarke, G (1997)	The Photography: A Visual and Cultural History	Oxford University Press
Farrell, I (2011)	A Complete Guide to Digital Photography	Quercus
Golden, R (2001)	20th Century Photography: A complete guide to the greatest artists of the photographic age	Carlton Books Ltd
Jaeger, A-C	Image Makers Image Takers	Thames & Hudson
Jeffrey, I & Phaidon (2000)	The Photography Book	Phaidon
Koetzle, H M (2002)	Photo 2 (Icons)	Taschen
Langford, M (1998 edition)	Story of Photography: From Its Beginnings to the Present Day <b>For technical skills see Michael Longford's series of books</b>	Focal Press
Lenman, R (editor) (2005)	The Oxford Companion to Photography	Oxford University Press
Modrak, Rebekah (2010)	Reframing Photography: Theory and Practice	Routledge
Mulligan, T & Wooters, D(2005)	A History of Photography from: 1839 to present	Taschen
Parr, M and Badger, G (2006)	The Photo Book History V2	Phaidon Press 1
Pénichon, S (2013)	Twentieth Century Colour Photographs	Thames & Hudson
Rush, M (2003)	Video Art	Thames & Hudson



# Resources for developing creative photography techniques and a bank of photographers from different genres (these are also available in the faculty to loan).

- Masters of Photography – a complete guide
- Magnum
- 50 Photographers you should know
- The landscape Photography workshop
- Understanding exposure
- New A-Z of creative Photography
- Icons of Photography
- Creative Digital Photography
- Icons of Photography – the 20<sup>th</sup> Century
- Creative Digital photography – 52 weekend projects
- Photoshop CS5 All-in-one For Dummies
- Collins complete Photography course
- Creative Photography handbook
- 50 Photography projects
- The photographer's eye
- The photography handbook
- Photographers A-Z
- Street photography now
- Understanding close up photography
- Brilliant Photoshop CS5
- Understanding flash photography
- 150 photographic projects for Art students.
- The photographer's mind

# Any further questions?



Contact details of teachers of PHOTOGRAPHY:

[rpostill@smchull.org](mailto:rpostill@smchull.org)

[oreading@smchull.org](mailto:oreading@smchull.org)

Mrs R Postill

Mrs O Reading