Quick guide to artefacts

Students undertaking a project qualification can submit either a research-based written report or can opt to produce a practical project or 'artefact' with an accompanying shorter research-based written report. The specification for each project qualification provides information on the word count for each type of report.

We have seen a large number of excellent artefact projects during moderation. The following guidance is designed to help you and your students avoid some of the more common pitfalls associated with producing an artefact.

What is an artefact?

An artefact can be a physical outcome such as a book or a short film or it can be a presentation to a specific audience, a play, it could be an event such as a fashion show or a musical evening. In fact there is almost no limit to what can constitute an artefact, as long as it has research at its core.

What all artefact projects have in common is that they must have a clear research aim/purpose and be well evaluated.

Students who choose artefact projects must understand that the planned research should form the largest part of their project and that the production of the artefact can only commence once this detailed and wide research is completed. While the written report is shorter for artefact projects than for other written outcomes, all artefact projects must be research-based.

Common problems

Title selection

During moderation we have seen very successful projects with titles such as:

- a monologue and analysis of Myra Hindley
- how to recreate the Aurora Borealis in a school laboratory
- create an original scene for the musical 'Wicked'.

These titles, in isolation, may not suggest the level of depth and analysis of research materials necessary for success in the Level 1, 2 or EPQ but they were all very well-executed and achieved A or A* grades. For artefacts it is frequently the aims and objectives, set by the student, which demonstrate clarity and focus.

When formulating titles, supervisors should encourage students to develop a proposal that incorporates how they will measure the success of their artefact after they have created it. One such example we saw at moderation is:

"To build a 'High Performance' Desktop PC and evaluate it against commercial pre-built alternatives."

The student who submitted this project had a clear idea of what it was they wanted to achieve and how they were going to measure its success.

The following sections provide advice related to the assessment objectives which may be of help to students undertaking artefact projects, and their supervisors.

AO1 – Manage

In addition to a clear and focused title with clearly expressed aims and objectives, students should be encouraged to develop a detailed project plan that shows what skills they need to acquire/develop in order to succeed.

It is important that students log what they plan to do/have done throughout the project process. Students should be encouraged to record **why** they have taken decisions/performed certain actions rather than merely **describing** what they have done.

Students should provide evidence of monitoring their own progress/achievements against their objectives through the log. They should be encouraged to understand that the production log forms the 'backbone' of their project (see 'Quick guide to the production log' for more information) and moderators need to see evidence of progression throughout the project process.

AO2 – Use of resources

One common mistake we see with artefact projects is the idea that they do not need to have a research focus. This is **not** the case. Students producing artefacts must still have clear research aims and they should still use a wide range of resources in order to complete their projects. Depending upon the nature of the project being undertaken, these resources might be less conventional than for students undertaking a long research-based report but they should still be critically analysed and assessed in the same way as for any other project.

If, for example, a student is planning to record a song and sound quality is an important part of the project, that student might conduct research into the equipment that is available. Such research may take the form of the more traditional book and internet-based research or may include interviews with people who have experience in the field or perhaps tests of various pieces of equipment. What remains important is that, throughout this process, they analyse and evaluate the reliability and validity of the resources they are using.

AO3 – Develop and realise

When a student has produced an artefact it is obviously important that they have produced a finished product that is of a high standard, but this alone is not enough to earn the highest marks available for this AO.

Students need to demonstrate that they have made appropriate decisions throughout the project process, choosing the correct materials to work with, for example. They must ensure that their final outcome is consistent with the plan they finally agreed, a project that has not been well-managed can easily veer off in an unexpected direction and if these changes are not documented and explained in the production log, students can fail to reach the top mark band, despite having produced a high-quality artefact.

Students who produce artefacts must still complete a research-based written report. The report that accompanies their artefact should not be a 'write-up' of what they have done but, rather, should demonstrate a synthesis of the research and how the research has influenced the design decisions that underpin the final product.

Students should ask of themselves: 'Have I done what I said I was going to do?'

Students should present a clear and detailed evaluation of the project as a whole. They should use this opportunity to discuss not only the strengths and weaknesses of the artefact, but also of their own performance throughout the project process.

The temptation to focus solely on the quality of the outcome may seem overwhelming to students but they should be encouraged to discuss the entire project process and evaluate the process honestly and critically.

Their conclusions and findings should be clearly articulated and ensure that they are communicated in a way that is accessible to readers (including AQA moderators), who have not been involved in their project process.

Further guidance and support

There are a number of ways that you can access further guidance and support if you have students considering producing an artefact:

- There are a number of artefact projects that have been used as exemplar material for standardisation. These can be accessed via e-AQA. If you do not have access to e-AQA, please contact your examinations officer.
- Contact your project adviser.
- Contact the projects team at projects@aqa.org.uk and 0161 957 3980.

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