**Personal Study Essay Structure**

**First Section: Introduction (200 words approx.)**

Outline what it is you want to explore with your personal study.

Is the essay exploring different approaches to a specific theme, genre or art movement?

Can the essay be framed around a question e.g. Is the painted portrait relevant in the age of photography? Does the camera lie? Is Craft an Art?

The essay has to have a clear focus and cannot just be a collection of written work on a variety of random artists.

You must explain your reasons for choosing your specific focus and outline how it relates to your current projects and ways of working.

For example: “I am choosing to focus on… (artist / art movement) because…it astounds me how…/ I find it fascinating that…/ I’m curious to know why…/ I hope to show / share / highlight / discover…”

For example: “I’m particularly interested in how moving to the coast influenced the work of Barbara Hepworth; living by the sea has had a big impact on my own creative development…” Doing this will also help when it comes to writing a conclusion, planting markers to revisit.

**Second Section: Cultural and Historical Context (500 words approx.)**

It is important that you put the subject of your essay into context. You should have an overview of how it has evolved throughout art history. You should outline the various ways that different artists and designers from a range of times and cultures have approached the subject. How did these different approaches evolve? Were they influenced by changes in society? How did different art movements approach the subject?

Don’t get too bogged down with this section – it is just good to show that you have read around the subject and are not just focusing on individual artists in isolation.

**Third Section: Analysis of Artworks (2000 words approx. – that is 500 on each artwork)**

Choose three or four artworks by four different artists. These artworks should be carefully chosen to highlight three/four contrasting approaches to your subject. They do not have to be limited to artworks you have copied. Make sure you outline why you have focused on those particular artists otherwise the essay will not flow (also write about them in chronological order!)

When writing about the artwork you must refer to its title, date and the name of the artist. Use the “**Guide to writing about artists’ work** and cover the following: subject matter, use of materials/techniques and the use of the formal elements to create mood/atmosphere. You must also fill out the Research notes sheet for each artwork.

However, when analysing an artwork you need to do more than just describe it! You need to show an understanding of the concepts and ideas that underpin the work. You must show that you have grasped the ethos or ideas of the artist. You need to explain what factors influenced the artist, such as: other artist’ work, art movements, manifestos, politics, changes in society, personal circumstances etc.

The examiner is interested in your opinions and personal perspective on the artwork. However, when writing personal opinions there is a danger that these can be too simplistic.

*Consider the progression in the points below:*

* **Your initial reaction** *– informed by instinct, taste, likes and dislikes, interest in / relevance of subject matter.*  
  This can offer valuable insights when justified E.g. *“I like this because…”.* However, just providing an opinion without explanation is not enough.
* **A basic / superficial understanding of wider contexts.** This might demonstrate growing understanding but is still not good enough: *“I’m interested in Cubism because I like how Picasso’s artworks are made up of cube-like shapes”; “I like Pop Art because it uses bright colours and film stars”*.
* **Based on a deeper understanding / complex grasp of wider contexts** – demonstrating a confident stance and justified, well-informed opinions: *“I’m interested in Cubism, particularly how the depiction of multiple viewpoints – stimulated by Cezanne’s explorations of form – revolutionised…”; “I’m interested in how Pop Art emerged as a response to Abstract Expressionism, it strikes me as a mischievous movement that counter-balanced…”*
* **From an alternative perspective –** Perhaps more of an expectation at degree level, but are you able to place yourself in somebody else’s shoes? For example, can you argue or justify an alternative viewpoint e.g. from a feminist, modern, or post-modern perspective? *“Whilst appreciating Rothko’s intent to provoke with his Seagram Restaurant commission, I can imagine a dining capitalist might have been entirely less sensitive to the sense of claustrophobia he envisaged…” [[1]](#endnote-1)*

It is important that you link the artwork back to the focus of your essay. It is also crucial that you compare and contrast the three/four artworks with each other, making interesting connections and outlining similarities and differences. It is really important that you also make connections with your own work and discuss how they have influenced your own development. Remember some artworks could link to your own work in terms of the subject matter others through the use of materials and formal elements.

You are allowed to use relevant quotes as long as they are attributed: you should use appropriate footnotes.

**Fourth Section: Connections with own work and Summing up**

Summarise your study and the key findings that have come from your research and analysis.

Revisit your introduction – specifically the aims or investigative questions set out at the start. (You do not need to have definitive answers though; reflective, new, unanswered questions can have value too).

Offer reflective, personal opinions on your research, and how this has shaped your own practical work. What are the similarities and differences between your work and the work of the artists you have studied? Describe how your own practical work has evolved. Outline how the artists and ideas you have studied has informed your approach to subject matter, style, scale, materials, concepts and ideas.

Share thoughts on potential opportunities for future exploration – themes / artists / experiments you might explore if given more time.Include a short reflection on the process of the study itself – the research and thinking skills that you have developed.[[2]](#endnote-2)

**Fifth section: Bibliography**

E.g. Elderfield, J, “Bonnard” Thames and Hudson, 1997

Also websites address: [www.bonnard.co.uk](http://www.bonnard.co.uk) accessed on **[date]**

**Sixth Section: Appendices**

Good quality printout of images studied clearly labelled: title, name of artist and date. Each image should be numbered, for example Fig.1 or Fig 2. Refer to this number when discussing the work in your essay

1. Extracted from the website: Digging Deep: A2 Personal study Time by Chris Francis <http://st-peters.bournemouth.sch.uk/photo/2015/04/29/2628/> accessed on 10/01/2017 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Digging Deep: A2 Personal study Time [↑](#endnote-ref-2)