



Department  
for Education

# History of art

**GCE AS and A level subject content**

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# The content for history of art A level

## Introduction

1. AS and A level subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding, and skills common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which the awarding body creates the detail of the specification.

## Aims and objectives

2. History of art specifications must allow students to demonstrate their historical, theoretical and critical understanding of art, including painting, sculpture and architecture.

3. There are no expectations for students to have prior knowledge and understanding of history of art.

4. AS and A level specifications in history of art must ensure students:

- engage actively and independently in historical, theoretical and critical study of art
- are encouraged, where possible, to research and investigate art through first-hand experience of works of art
- understand the relationship between society, culture, technology, politics and art
- understand the ways in which art has been used and interpreted by past and present societies
- understand the influences on, and contributions of, artists
- know key art historical terms, concepts and issues
- understand how visual language is used by artists to communicate ideas, including formal characteristics, materials, techniques, and processes
- are able to analyse and make critical judgements about art
- use evidence to substantiate structured arguments about art
- study a sufficient range of artists and works of art to ensure an appropriate depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding of specified movements/periods and themes

# Subject content

## Knowledge and understanding

### Context

5. AS and A level specifications in history of art must require students to know and understand:

- the influential artists and art of key historical movements, periods and types of art (see appendix 1<sup>1</sup>)
- how the work of influential artists typifies the key movements, periods and types of art
- art historical terms and concepts including those relevant to specific movements, periods, and types of art (see appendix 1)
- changes in art over time, including:
  - how cultural, social, political and technological factors have influenced the development of movements/periods and types of art
  - how cultural, social, political and technological factors have influenced artists
  - significant developments in materials, techniques and processes and how they contributed to changes in art
  - the ways in which art has been used and interpreted by past and present societies

6. In addition A level specifications will require students to know and understand:

- how art historical movements/periods have been influenced by other movements/periods
- critical texts that discuss specific artists' work, their contribution and influences
- how exhibition/gallery curatorship influences the reception of works of art

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<sup>1</sup> The lists at appendix 1 are not exhaustive and awarding organisations may include further types of art, periods and movements in specifications. Where this is the case awarding organisations must include a rationale for these to demonstrate that they are of comparable breadth and/or depth to those listed and that they are clearly relevant to the subject.

## Use of visual language<sup>2</sup>

7. AS and A level history of art specifications must offer opportunities for students to study artists' work produced between 500 Before Common Era (BCE) and the present day. Students must study work produced before and after 1850.
8. Through study of examples of artists' work, students must know and understand:
- how artists have used formal characteristics to achieve specific intentions in their work, including:
    - composition
    - colour
    - light
    - line
    - shape
    - volume and mass
    - scale
    - pattern.
  - how the form of works is influenced by:
    - function
    - style
    - materials, techniques and processes
  - how specified artists' use of visual language has been influenced by the work of other artists
9. In addition, A level specifications must require students to know and understand:
- how originally intended, and subsequent environments and settings, contribute to the overall impression of works of art

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<sup>2</sup> Visual language in this document is defined as the formal characteristics and achieved effects (including form), the materials, techniques and processes used, as well as various methods of communication other than visual such as tactile, sensory and intellectual.

## Areas of study

10. Areas of study must provide an appropriate focus for students to demonstrate in-depth knowledge, understanding and skills. They must allow content specified in paragraphs 5-9 to be taught in context and allow opportunities for students to demonstrate contextual understanding throughout their course of study.

11. Specifications in history of art must require students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills through an in-depth study of two areas of study at AS and four areas of study at A level.

12. For one area of study at AS and two areas of study at A level, students must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of art from a specific art historical movement/period.

13. Each area of study must require students to study artists and works of art representative of the movement/period and know and understand in detail:

- a minimum of three works each for at least two specified artists<sup>3</sup> at AS and A level, including how the artists influenced, and/or was influenced by, the work of at least two other artists who contributed to the movement/period
- how the work of specified artists typifies the movement/period
- work representing at least two types of art at both AS and A level
- at least one critical text relevant to the period(s)/movement(s), artists and/or work studied at A level

14. For one area of study at AS and two areas of study at A level, students must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of developments in art and connections between movements/periods (before and after 1850) in the context of specified theme(s).

The themes can relate to (but are not restricted to) the following perspectives:

- societal/cultural
- political
- technological
- religious.

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<sup>3</sup> Works of art may be studied where the name of the artist is unknown (e.g. work from the roman period), however these works must be understood by art historians to have been produced by at least two different artists and a minimum of six works must still be studied overall. Where an artist is not specified, the individual work(s) of art must be specified.

15. Each area of study must require students to study works of art by artists representative of the theme and know and understand in detail:

- work from at least three different periods/movements at AS and A level
- a minimum of two works each for at least three specified artists<sup>4</sup> and at least a further four works relevant to the same theme at AS and A level
- work representing at least three types of art at both AS and A level
- at least one critical text relevant to the theme, artists and/or works studied at A level

16. AS history of art specifications must offer a minimum choice of four areas of study (at least two period/movement specific and two thematic) and A level specifications must offer a minimum choice of six areas of study (at least three period/movement-specific and three thematic).

17. Within AS and A level specifications, each area of study must have a different focus and be clearly distinct.<sup>5</sup>

18. Each area of study must offer comparable demand and draw on content from paragraphs 5-9.

19. Across all of the areas of study students must know and understand:

At AS:

- at least three types of art
- work from at least three different periods/movements
- the work of at least six different artists, of which three specified artists in detail
- at least eighteen works of art, of which twelve in detail

At A level:

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<sup>4</sup> Works of art may be studied where the name of the artist is unknown (e.g. work from the roman period), however these works must be understood by art historians to have been produced by at least three different artists and a minimum of six works must still be studied overall. Where an artist is not specified, the individual work(s) of art must be specified.

<sup>5</sup> As long as the total minimum requirements are met (paragraph 19), specifications at AS and A level may allow some of the same artists and/or periods/movements to be studied twice across areas of study and the same types of art to be studied across all areas of study. At A level students may not study the same period/movement for the two period/movement specific areas of study. At AS and A level students may not study the same work of art more than once across the areas of study. The specified artists, works and types of art and/or movements/periods at AS can be the same as those specified at A level as long as the minimum requirements are met.

- at least three types of art
- at least four critical texts
- work from at least five different periods/movements
- at least twelve different artists, of which six specified artists in detail
- at least thirty six works of art, of which twenty-four in detail

## Skills

20. AS and A level specifications in history of art must require students to develop the ability to:

- use appropriate art historical terminology to communicate, through extended written responses, in-depth knowledge and understanding of art
- analyse artists' use of visual language (set out in paragraph 8) apparent in images studied and not previously named for study<sup>6</sup> and apply knowledge and understanding to interpret the intentions for their work
- analyse and evaluate factors that have influenced specific artists, movements/periods and types of art
- develop evidenced, structured arguments in support of their own critical judgements

21. In addition A level specifications must require students to:

- use a wider range of evidence, including critical texts to substantiate more sophisticated arguments and critical judgements, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the work of artists, movements/periods and types of art
- analyse artists' work to identify more complex interdependencies between visual language and the effects achieved
- analyse and evaluate the inter-relationship, connections and influences of different artists and movements

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<sup>6</sup> Students must analyse examples of work not previously named for study at AS and A level representing at least three types of art.



## Appendix 1

The lists below are not exhaustive. Awarding organisations may include further types of art, periods and movements as long as they are of comparable breadth and/or depth to those listed. They must also be clearly relevant to the subject.

Type of art	Definition
Painting	The application of pigment to a two-dimensional surface (usually). Need not be contained within a frame.
Sculpture	The art of making two- or three-dimensional representative or abstract forms, especially by carving stone or wood or by casting metal or plaster.
Architecture	The built environment: could include non-built or unfinished projects; structures like bridges, towers etc.
Performance	Performance art: presented to an audience within a fine art context, and is traditionally interdisciplinary.
Installation	An art object designed for a particular space; often site-specific and designed to transform the perception of a space.
Video	An event captured and manipulated through technology.
Conceptual	Art in which the idea or concept presented by the artist is considered more important than the finished product, if any such product exists.
Land art/site- specific art	Land art: landscape and artwork are inextricably linked; site-specific art: created to exist in a certain place.

Art Historical Periods/Movements	Definition	Relevant terms and concepts (including styles)
Greek (850 – 31 BCE)  students study from 500 BCE	Greek idealism: balance, perfect proportions; post-and-lintel construction; idealised forms (both in sculpture and architecture).	The Classical style: harmony, balance, symmetry; architectural orders (Doric, Ionic, Corinthian); sculpture: Archaic, Classical to Hellenistic; ceramics: geometric to black/red vase figure wares.
Roman (300 BCE–476)	Roman realism: structural use of the arch/barrel vault and concrete.	Verism: psychological penetration in sculpture; borrowings from the Greeks; interior decoration and encaustic portraits; stadia and propaganda.

Art Historical Periods/Movements	Definition	Relevant terms and concepts (including styles)
Byzantine (330 –1453)	Art of the Eastern Roman Empire from 4th Century CE to the Fall of the Roman Empire.	<p>Christian art form (although derived from forms of Greek and Egyptian). Hieratic/other-worldly.</p> <p>Mosaics (tesserae) icons; panel painting; architectural terminology specific to Byzantine structures.</p>
Middle Ages (500–1400)	<p>Celtic art</p> <p>Carolingian</p> <p>Romanesque</p> <p>Gothic</p>	<p>Celtic: asymmetrical; curvilinear abstract ornament; zoomorphic.</p> <p>Carolingian: Emperor Charlemagne and successors - first conscious attempt to revive the Classical Greek and Roman heritage; illuminated manuscripts; large-scale architecture.</p> <p>Romanesque: muscular architectural style, rounded headed arches; linear sculpture, distorted to convey religious emotion.</p> <p>Gothic structures: flying buttresses; rib vaults; pointed arches; stained glass. Sculptural 'S' curves, tapestries, Books of Hours.</p>
Early and High Renaissance (1400 –1550)	Rebirth of classical culture.	<p>Intellectual influence from Humanism.</p> <p>Neo-Platonism; greater command of anatomy (in visual arts); linear and atmospheric perspective; increasing secular subjects as well as history/mythological works in painting and sculpture. For architecture: a classical revival – harmony clarity and repose.</p>
Venetian and Northern Renaissance	The Renaissance spreads northward to France, the Low Countries, Germany and	Northern: Rapid developments in oil painting (glazes); woodcuts; altarpieces; panel paintings in Flanders; empirical perspective (rather than mathematically

Art Historical Periods/Movements	Definition	Relevant terms and concepts (including styles)
(1430 –1550)	England.	calculated linear perspective) and direct observation; non-idealised.  Venetian: influences from Northern Europe; brilliant colour; religious and secular (sometimes erotic) painting.
Mannerism (1527–1600)	Art that breaks the rules; artifice over nature.	Elegant distortions and stylistic trickery for bizarre effects. Disquieting paintings – triumph of style over content; virtuoso decorative arts. Mannerist buildings – antithetical to the principles of the High Renaissance; complex and novel.
Baroque (1600 –1750)	Splendour and flourish for God; art as a weapon in the religious wars. Exuberant Counter-Reformation art that progresses to more secular Rococo throughout the period.	Religious impulse of the Counter-Reformation: dynamic movement, synthesis of architecture; painting and sculpture acceptable/appealing to the masses; later Baroque (Rococo) – lighter and more playful; asymmetrical.
Neo-classical (1750 –1850)	Art that recaptures Greco-Roman grace and grandeur.	Classical revival – Palladianism (in architecture); preference for the linear and symmetrical in painting.
Romanticism (1780 –1850)	The triumph of imagination and individuality.	Literary influences: sublime and picturesque; nature dominates; insistence on the rights of imagination.
Realism (1848 –1900)	Celebrating the working class and peasants; en plein air rustic painting.	Rejects idealistic tendencies of Romanticism; social realism.

Art Historical Periods/Movements	Definition	Relevant terms and concepts (including styles)
The 19 <sup>th</sup> Century French avant-garde*	Including: Impressionism (1865 –1885) Capturing fleeting effects of natural light. Post-Impressionism (1885 –1910) A soft revolt against Impressionism.	Impressionism: colour applied in small touches (rather than broad brush-strokes) to create brighter/more immediate paintings; painting in front of the motif.  Post-impressionism: Pointillism; divisionism; use optical mixtures of colour.  *Including non-French artists working in France and French artists working outside France.
Art Nouveau (1890 –1914)	Stylised forms based on nature/geometry.	Art Nouveau: exaggerated asymmetrical decorative style; undulating forms; inspired by natural forms; offshoot of Symbolism and Arts & Crafts.
Fauvism and German Expressionism (1900 –1939)	Non-naturalistic colours to produce emotional effects; abstraction.	Fauvism: loosely formed 'group' working in the south of France; experimental paint handling and use of colour alone to evoke a sensation in the viewer.  German Expressionism: general concept of democratising art; techniques vary; no formal stylistic intentions – but anti-Impressionist; anti-naturalistic subjectivism.
Futurism, Suprematism, De Stijl and Constructivism (1905 –1920)	Pre- and Post-World War I art experiments: new forms to express modern life.	Futurism: celebrating machines and speed; anarchic attitudes to predecessors.  Suprematism and De Stijl: simple geometric forms; primary colours appropriate to the modern world.  Constructivism: iconoclastic, based in Marxist ideology – architectonic forms;

Art Historical Periods/Movements	Definition	Relevant terms and concepts (including styles)
		the unification of art and society.
Cubism (1907–1914)	An early 20th-century style and movement in art, especially painting, in which perspective with a single viewpoint was abandoned, and use was made of simple geometric shapes, interlocking planes and (later) collage.	Experiments with form: repudiation of subject; flattening of the canvas; fragmentation (analytical Cubism); elimination of space (in synthetic Cubism): collage; Cubist sculpture takes similar approaches.
Art Deco 1925 – 1939	<p>New style of design in applied arts and architecture.</p> <p>Objects and images that reflected speed, travel, luxury, leisure and modernity that were desirable after the traumas of the Great War.</p>	<p>Lavish ornamentation; clean lines; simplified forms; strong colours. Geometric rendering of natural forms. Considered for a long time as the antithesis of both Art Nouveau and Modernism in general, but shares affinities with both.</p> <p>The impact of Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism and abstraction are reflected in the lines, forms and colours of Art Deco.</p>
Dada and Surrealism (1917–1950)	<p>Dada: various interventions, depending on location.</p> <p>Surrealism: painting dreams and exploring the unconscious.</p>	<p>Dada: retaliation to art being bound with bourgeois capitalism; theatrical; nonsensical; provocative.</p> <p>Surrealism: Freud's Interpretation of Dreams; Automatism; frottage; Dalí's Veristic Surrealism.</p>
Bauhaus (1919 –1933)  International Modernism	Bauhaus: German 20th-century school of design, the aesthetic of which was influenced by, and derived from, techniques and materials employed,	Bauhaus: aimed to bring together all arts under the primacy of architecture. While it combines them, it also favours functionality over ornamentation, and asymmetry and regularity over symmetry. Bauhaus architecture rejected decorative details and aimed to

Art Historical Periods/Movements	Definition	Relevant terms and concepts (including styles)
(1920s –1960)	<p>especially in industrial fabrication and manufacture.</p> <p>International Modernism: an influential modernist style in architecture characterised chiefly by regular, unadorned geometric forms; open interiors; and the use of glass, steel, and reinforced concrete.</p>	<p>use classical architecture and its scientific, geometric aesthetic without ornamentation of any kind.</p> <p>International Modernism: avant-garde architectural style; worked from the inside ('form ever follows function'), logical planning (rather than axial symmetry).</p>
<p>Abstract Expressionism</p> <p>(1940s – 1950s)</p>	<p>Post-World War II: pure abstraction and expression without form; no obvious subject.</p>	<p>Consciously American; gestural painting borrows from Surrealism (automatism) calligraphic and colour field. Formal and technical innovations; flat, hard-edged, colour relationships and space.</p> <p>Non-figurative.</p>
<p>Pop Art</p> <p>(1960s)</p>	<p>Art responds to and absorbs consumerism.</p>	<p>Socially democratic; more like commercial design/advertising; style-less; and responds to popular culture.</p>
<p>Postmodernism and Deconstructivism</p> <p>(1970 – present)</p>	<p>Art that challenges conventional categories reworking and mixing past styles.</p>	<p>Postmodernism: free, often ironic, appropriation of past styles; new materials; new audiences and new sites for display.</p> <p>Deconstructivism is influenced by the theory of 'Deconstruction', which is a form of semiotic analysis and is characterised by unpredictability and controlled chaos.</p>

Unless otherwise stated, dates are within the Common Era (CE).



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