

2025 NCEA Assessment Report

Subject:	Visual Arts
Level:	2
Achievement standard(s):	91320, 91321, 91322, 91323, 91324

General commentary

Candidates' levels of achievement are best supported when their art-making practice is viewed as a continuum of learning across the senior years. It was observed this year that performance at Level 2 appears to be influenced by requirements at Level 1 Achievement Standards. At Level 2, candidates need to sustain systematic productivity across two A1 panels. A skill that could be built on the single-portfolio at Level 1 with an expectation to shift to a two-panel submission at Level 2. Observed portfolios suggested that workload and/or time management may need improving to sufficiently develop work for two panels.

Achievement-level submissions typically demonstrated a selection of works showing connection to a thematic visual proposition. While the advancement of ideas or technique was not always consistently evident, there was generally a sense of decision-making related to pictorial and / or conceptual purpose, and work was presented at the appropriate curriculum level.

Fewer schools appear to be submitting samples they believe may fall within the Not Achieved range. As this boundary is significant for credit awarding, submissions that may help clarify this distinction remain valuable. Not Achieved submissions commonly sat below New Zealand Curriculum Level 7 and / or were incomplete. Incompletion was seen not only in empty spaces but also in limited engagement with visual conventions. Research was restricted, projects under-resourced, and some large works or template-based pieces suggested time pressures.

Merit-level submissions showed purposeful decision-making, adequate resourcing, and technical proficiency. These candidates showed a cycle of making, reflecting, and using their reflections to reform and extend ideas.

Candidates working at Excellence demonstrated the ability to create space between phases of work early enough to make informed decisions about new directions. Strong initial ideas enabled the extraction of themes and imagery, which were then explored through technically accomplished artefacts.

At Level 2, candidates are expected to demonstrate decision-making through the critical editing and selection of works. Showing aspects of the learning journey is appropriate within this context. Instances of highly uniform class tasks, such as illustrating the same nursery rhyme, did not always provide opportunities for genuine engagement with subject matter or for exploration beyond familiar visual styles. High-achieving candidates showed they could flexibly control individual direction, extension, and regeneration of ideas.

Some concerns emerged in 2025 relating to technological short-cuts. A small number of issues were identified where candidates had used found or AI-generated images as the basis of painted works. Such practices reduce opportunities for authentic learning. Schools are responsible for applying authenticity policies, and candidates need to be aware of assessment specifications, which state that appropriated imagery, AI-generated content, paraphrasing tools, and unacknowledged copying must not be included in portfolios. Supporting candidates to generate authentic starting points remains

essential, as early ownership of imagery and ideas enables deeper exploration of conventions informed by established practice. Authentic inquiry, experimentation, and self-expression underpin sound art-making practice.

Similar short-cut behaviours appeared in Design submissions, where some candidates placed a single outcome, such as a logo, onto multiple mock-ups without re-engaging in making or responding to the characteristics of the new format. This limited opportunities for idea reformulation and sometimes resulted in insufficient evidence of understanding. The ease and polish of such templates is a concerning trend, particularly when their use is not recognised as an authenticity consideration. A notable number of Design submissions were overvalued relative to the national standard, resulting in review reports.

Design must align with the Visual Arts Curriculum, including the Achievement objectives of Understanding Contexts, Communicating Ideas, Practical Knowledge, and Developing Ideas. Opportunities to learn design conventions and engage in practical making would be valuable for these submissions. Mock-ups may function as end points once a critical design process has occurred.

In Photography, more submissions featured investigations of place, people, and culturally relevant spaces. There was also increased reliance on the camera's recording capabilities and visual effects, with fewer explorations of post-production PPMT. Approaches relying on place-based imagery require access to spaces that can be revisited.

Moving Image remains a niche medium. With well-supported sequencing, storyboarding, transitions, editing, and exploration of the field's codes and conventions, candidates can achieve well. However, many Digital Moving Image submissions were misinterpretations of the Submission Specifications, presenting digital versions of two-panel portfolios rather than time-based work. For a submission to qualify as DMI, it must show evidence of actual time-based work and/or documentation of time-based art or design practice.

Sculpture was strongly represented, with submissions demonstrating sufficient work, understanding of processes, and material consideration. Documentation was of a high standard.

In Print, singular prints and high-level processes were often evident but not always clearly connected to ideas. Use of photocopies or paint on print boards suggested a gap in understanding the conventions of Painting and Printmaking. Ensuring candidates enter the correct field for their primary mode of practice remains important.

Process

Use of online resources is encouraged to shape the depth and breadth of study in preparation for this assessment. Referencing a range of art-making practices relevant to the local context can strengthen assessment practice. Regional subject associations and connections between schools – formal or informal – can assist through shared critique and discussion. National exemplars can be accessed at: <https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/subjects/past-exams-and-exemplars/visual-arts/>

The verification process generated a similar number of review reports to last year, except for Design. Verification reports are issued when: two or more grades are adjusted a full grade step; a grade is changed by more than one step; or two or more submissions are verified as Not Achieved where provisional grades were Achievement, Merit, or Excellence. Reviewing verification reports and using feedback to support future interpretation of the Achievement Standard may support some schools.

NOTE: From 2026, all visual material submitted at Level 3 must be original and self-generated.

Report on individual achievement standard(s)

Achievement standard 91320: Produce a systematic body of work that shows understanding of art making conventions and ideas within design

Commentary

In 2025, many design submissions demonstrated a clear awareness of established design practices, alongside an increasing use of original imagery created through photography, illustration, and drawing. Portfolios reflected a sustained interest in narrative-driven projects, character, and brand development, and the exploration of contemporary design contexts. Many submissions showed evidence of purposeful engagement with design conventions, including layout, hierarchy, typography, and iterative development.

At the same time, submissions revealed emerging challenges associated with the rapid adoption of AI tools and the use of pre-existing intellectual property. While AI was sometimes used as a supporting tool, over-reliance on generated assets limited opportunities to demonstrate originality, fluency in media, and iterative decision-making. Similarly, choosing briefs closely tied to existing brands or IP constrained authentic exploration, restricting the ability to develop and regenerate design ideas. Overall, 2025 portfolios presented significant strengths in both originality and creative thinking. Clearer process documentation and intentional design decision-making enhanced evidence of candidate understanding, and consequently achievement at Merit and Excellence levels.

Well-constructed briefs/proposals supported proposition building, decision-making, idea extension, and regeneration. Narrow, inappropriate, or IP-based briefs limited opportunities for creative development. Existing brands or IP (e.g. games, festivals, comics) constrained engagement with conventions, typography, and brand design, even when full re-designs were attempted.

Logical sequencing of briefs was key to demonstrating Merit and Excellence. Submissions that began with early conceptual ideas presented in smaller formats, progressing to resolved outcomes at larger scales, made design thinking and creative development clearly visible. Merchandising briefs were often misunderstood; mock-ups (e.g. logos on t-shirts) function as presentation tools but are not standalone outcomes. Clear labelling of briefs clarified the design process, distinguishing exploration, concept development, and final outcomes, and strengthened overall portfolio coherence. Limited understanding of product and merchandise design was evident in some submissions where work was restricted to simple logo placement. Effective investigations explored multiple aspects of design, including packaging, form, material, format, and functional considerations, allowing candidates to demonstrate engagement with conventions and principles relevant to product and merchandise design.

Successful illustration portfolios demonstrated layout, hierarchy, pacing, and narrative. Weaker submissions focused solely on producing illustrations without compositional planning, typographic experimentation, or format decision-making. Repeated early-stage typographic layouts limited opportunities to advance ideas or demonstrate understanding of conventions.

AI was primarily used to support mock-ups or generate reference images. When AI-generated content became central to the design outcomes, it limited opportunities to demonstrate original image generation, mastery of media, control of design conventions, and iterative development. Over-reliance on AI tended to homogenise visual style, reducing evidence of purposeful decision-making, experimentation, and idea regeneration. AI should be used as a supporting tool, not a replacement for original creative thinking and engagement in the codes and conventions of design. All AI-generated material must be clearly labelled.

Portfolios must provide sufficient evidence to meet the 12-credit weighting of the standard. Submissions that contained an inadequate volume of developmental work, relied on overly large single outcomes, or demonstrated limited breadth of tasks often did not meet the required standard.

Strong portfolios showed progression from early conceptual exploration to refined outcomes across multiple briefs, allowing clear demonstration of the design process, decision-making, and iterative development.

Commonly successful outcomes:

- posters
- double-page spreads
- logo and brand development (image-based and typographic)
- brochures and promotional material
- food and product packaging
- app and web interface design
- early-stage image generation (digital drawing, thumbnailing, collage).

Popular contexts:

- energy drink and food branding
- cafés and hospitality
- school sports and co-curricular branding
- narratives, gaming, and character-based illustration
- storybooks and youth-focused literature
- social and environmental causes
- fashion and jewellery brands
- music festivals, events, and band identities.

These contexts supported authentic design challenges, iterative development, and had the capacity to demonstrate originality, fluency, and purposeful engagement with design conventions.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- communicated established design practices such as layout, typography, iterative development
- used original imagery
- engaged with design contexts
- developed ideas, but the work was limited in scope.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- showed clear process documentation showing intentional design decision-making and iterative development
- showed logical sequencing from small concepts to more large-scale outcomes
- explored multiple aspects of design.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- demonstrated strong originality supported by sustained use of self-generated imagery
- demonstrated progression from conceptual exploration to refined outcomes
- delivered intentional design thinking through clear distinction between exploration, development, and final outcomes
- showed high-level engagement with design conventions, showing fluency and control.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- relied on overly large single outcomes or insufficient developmental work, resulting in inadequate evidence
- over-relied on AI-generated assets, limiting originality and iterative decision-making
- tied work to existing brands or merchandise that constrained idea development and reduced evidence of understanding product conventions.

Achievement standard 91321: Produce a systematic body of work that shows understanding of art making conventions and ideas within painting

Commentary

Overall, the submissions for painting this year demonstrated a healthy mix of traditional approaches and new interpretations. The number of exceptional portfolios achieving Excellence continues to demonstrate consistency and a high-performance level, especially when candidates demonstrate authenticity, personal conviction, and an intelligent command of wet media.

The following specific observations highlight successful practices and areas requiring critical attention moving forward.

Candidate Agency

Across submissions, certain patterns were evident in how candidates engaged with their work. Submissions that demonstrated stronger achievement commonly reflected engagement with authentic painting conventions, the development of a personal visual and technical vocabulary, and evidence of individual responses supported by considered selection of artist references relevant to their ideas.

Characteristics evident in higher-achieving submissions: Candidates had often selected artist references that aligned closely with their chosen subject matter. Their work tended to reflect a clear personal direction, supported by a structure that enabled them to incorporate their own voice. This was often visible through varied approaches, individual decision-making, and diversity in outcomes.

Characteristics evident in more uniform or limited submissions: Submissions in which candidates appeared to work from the same prescribed artist model or imagery often showed reduced variation in ideas, resulting in similar visual responses across a class group. In these instances, fewer candidates tended to move beyond the Achievement range, and evidence of personal direction or individual agency was more limited. Where candidates were able to make genuine choices within an otherwise consistent framework, stronger outcomes were still observed.

Authenticity and derived/reference Imagery

The use of derived or easily copied internet images (e.g. sourced from Pinterest) tends to severely limit idea development and restricts a candidate's ability to explore and extend ideas in an original way.

Sourced images: The blatant use of original sourced images, with little/no evidence of the candidate's interpretation was alarming this year. This must be strictly monitored by teachers. When explicit plagiarism or breach of copyright is identified, the assessment specifications are applied.

Originality and Understanding: Candidates who consistently achieve at higher levels often take their own photographs as reference images. This process ensures they possess a deep understanding of their subject matter, supports originality, and allows for easier regeneration and extension of ideas by integrating traditional and contemporary artist references.

Use of Mixed Media: Collage and Photocopying: Collage can be an appropriate and effective tool when used for the correct purpose within the submission's structure.

Generating Ideas: Collage can be used as an effective drawing tool and is a great way for candidates to generate subject ideas and compositional subject matter on Panel 1.

Reframing Ideas: Collage can also be used effectively to re-frame an idea later in the portfolio.

Cautionary use: As the portfolio progresses, the work must quickly move back into using paint and wet media. If collage is used excessively, particularly on Panel 2, it can appear as if the candidate is disguising a lack of facility in painting. Collage must be thoroughly integrated as part of the generation and developmental process, and then the ideas can be expanded and extended into painting.

Painting over photocopies: This is rarely effective, and if used excessively, can compromise the integrity of the whole submission. Using photo release techniques as part of a mixed media approach is an accepted practice, and using parts of a photocopy in a composition, as demonstrated by some of the artists referenced by candidates this year (including Nicky Foreman), is also part of established practice. The key words here are: purposefully and critically.

Dry Media, Paint Pens, and Embellishment

The popularity of paint pens, jewels, sequins, and glitter was noted this year. These materials can advance an idea when used as an integrated part of an overall proposition with wet media and paint.

Ceiling on Achievement: An over-reliance on dry drawing materials, too many outlines, or an overuse of paint pens can quickly put a ceiling on the achievement for some portfolios. A lack of wet media may prevent higher grade levels.

Painting priority: An overreliance on unnecessary embellishment or outline was often seen as insufficient engagement with the paint medium. Drawing is a recognised approach to setting up a proposition; however, for this standard, it should be integrated with wet media. Whole portfolios solely reliant on pencil, felt pens, coloured pencils, or graphite limited candidates' opportunities to reach Excellence.

Abstraction, Creative Play, and Purposeful Experimentation

This year, it was encouraging to see a renewed interest in abstraction and a wider exploration of media. As always, success in this area is closely linked to clarity of intention.

Successful practice: Successful candidates worked with a clear purpose in their mark-making. Their portfolios demonstrated a strong understanding of the characteristics and limitations of their chosen media. Portfolios placed at Merit and Excellence frequently showed a sophisticated use of layering, subtle and intentional colour nuances, careful building of surface textures, and a confident understanding of abstraction as a genre. These qualities contributed to some of the most rewarding developments seen in submissions this year.

Unsuccessful practice: Creative play is an essential part of visual inquiry, and the question 'What would happen if? can open the door to unconsidered and valuable possibilities. However, candidates must understand the distinction between purposeful experimentation and unresolved accidental effects. Creative play becomes unsuccessful when it results in muddled, unclear, or inconsistent outcomes. An over-reliance on accidental effects, such as heavy drips or uncontrolled bleeding of colour that interrupt rather than support the composition, can stall the development of ideas. Repetition without refinement, or experimentation without critical selection, does not meet the expectations of the standard. Candidates need to:

- ask explorative questions that reveal new visual possibilities
- understand when an experiment is informing the proposition, and when it is merely producing surface effects
- select, refine, and build deliberately on their most successful investigations
- ensure that creative experimentation advances, clarifies, and strengthens their work.

Composition, Layout, and Final Works

The works on the last panel are arguably the most important, as they provide the candidate with the opportunity to demonstrate high levels of skill and to bring their ideas together into a finished statement.

Limiting composition: Large works with random compositional elements or with irrelevant decorative borders that do not connect with other works in the portfolio can limit opportunities to meet the criteria for the higher grades of Merit and Excellence.

Hierarchy of images: There must be a clear hierarchy of images. Works on Panel 1 should follow the guidelines to demonstrate series and sequences of work, developing into significant works to show clarification of ideas. As the portfolio flows, the end of the submission should showcase the regeneration of ideas, and this often needs to be a larger, important work, but it should not monopolise a whole or half-panel.

Teacher guidance: Teachers may provide a layout plan to those candidates who cannot independently conceive of the need to finish with a strong, large, culminating work, ensuring the candidate feels secure in the ordering of their work to communicate their intention. Candidates need to be supported in understanding the importance of critical selection and editing to demonstrate systematic and purposeful decision-making in the layout of their portfolio.

Authentic Topics, Themes, and Technical Application

While a wide range of themes were presented, from New Zealand landscape/heritage, colonialism, climate change, spirituality, and gothic themes to light-hearted topics like toys and lollies, the success of the theme is based on its execution and authenticity.

Theme relevance: Consideration must be given to the relevance of themes, including pictorial narratives around fairy tales and Disney characters. By their nature, candidates rely on second-hand or derived sources for their imagery. Concerns were raised this year about the appropriateness of some of the darker themes. See educational guidelines around these, as there are implications for the health and well-being of some candidates in this context.

Overused motifs: Portraiture remains a popular approach; however, it must be supported by strong conceptual intention so that ideas can be extended and regenerated. Without this, the outcomes are often limited and struggle to offer new or inspirational directions. Other recurring motifs, particularly eyes in all possible variations, were noted across submissions. This motif was frequently used as a catch-all device rather than as a considered visual element connected to the proposition. Similarly, skulls and blood were common motifs, but in many cases lacked the depth or rationale needed to support higher-level thinking.

Technical requirement: The technical application must meet the curriculum level. Thin or flat paint and 'colouring-in' that resembles painting by numbers is not appropriate at Level 7 of the Curriculum.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- presented a narrow proposition, restricting them from developing/extending ideas.

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- presented a narrow proposition, restricting them from developing/extending ideas
- required more variation in the compositions
- relied on large-scale works, particularly on Panel 2, limiting opportunities for the portfolio to move forward
- focused on the initial drawing stages, creating limited opportunities to investigate paint conventions throughout the submission

- relied on paint pens/felt-tip pens/gel pens to colour in the images or to add detail to the paintings
- demonstrated limited use or understanding of related established practice, often only referencing a single artist or approach
- avoided adding detail (particularly the hands or faces of people/animals)
- provided limited or very little evidence of layering paint.

Candidates who were awarded Achievement with Merit commonly:

- referenced and applied understanding of established practice to explore ideas
- used multiple artist references to help shift and extend ideas in the portfolio.
- demonstrated more originality in artwork or approaches, although some use of copied images was occasionally identified; however, combined with personal interpretation and expression, a limited use is acceptable
- used colour and blending/mark making cohesively throughout the submission, showing understanding and control of the selected conventions
- introduced topics or themes and allowed for extension through varied compositional approaches
- presented artwork that looked authentic, with the candidate's individuality evident on the portfolio
- developed work consistently and with purpose.

Candidates who were awarded Achievement with Excellence commonly:

- selected the appropriate paint approach intelligently, with a clear understanding of the art-making opportunities presented by the manipulation of their chosen media
- used media with fluency, often benefiting from risk-taking and purposeful experimentation.
- demonstrated an understanding of light and colour relationships throughout, and the use of tonal modelling, depth of colour, luminosity, and application of paint are consistently fluent
- provided opportunities for extension beyond the finish or endpoint presented on the portfolio. often, these are created because the candidate has selected the best opportunities several times across the submission
- demonstrated an advanced understanding of compositional devices, interpreting and drawing on the influences of established practice with intelligence, making these concepts their own through sophisticated reflection and integration.

Candidates whose work was assessed as **Not Achieved** commonly:

- presented incomplete or insufficient work
- worked below the curriculum level
- presented single unrelated works that did not meet the requirement for a systematic body of work
- copied images or content directly from the internet.

Achievement standard 91322: Produce a systematic body of work that shows understanding of art making conventions and ideas within photography

Commentary

The majority of candidates investigated personal photographic projects. This allowed candidates to foster meaningful engagement with their chosen topics, to drive their own creative work, and to revisit and rephotograph their chosen subject matter. Candidates had a good grasp and grounding of photographic practice and photographic approaches. In particular, candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the camera in the framing and settings used to effectively record from subject matter and draw with light.

This year, documentary-style approaches remained a prevalent trend. These approaches were commonly used to explore subject matter connected to personal or cultural identity, e.g. documenting family members, sporting activities and significant sites. These often included investigation of places of cultural or religious importance (e.g. churches or mosques), and accessible rural locations such as farms and beaches.

Highly successful candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of established practice and the documentary genre. This understanding enabled them to apply a range of photographic conventions, explore subject matter through effective framing and compositional devices, and advance their ideas through a documentary approach that supported the extension or regeneration of ideas across the submission.

Common approaches were documentary investigations that explored cultural identity. This often started out by investigating still life photography of cultural taonga with significant objects set up in table-top or flat-lay arrangements as a series to start off the investigation. In some cases, cultural dance and performances were documented in a studio to follow on from these still-life investigations to further explore the ideas.

Still life and object-based investigations were also common and were often driven by an interest in formal properties. Some candidates extended their exploration by altering the state of their subject matter (e.g. freezing food or flowers) to further investigate ideas.

Some candidates explored toys or figurines within a story-driven framework, but the narrative sometimes limited the scope of the investigation. In order to fully investigate ideas within a narrative approach, candidates need a good understanding of the achievement criteria to ensure they can investigate a broad range of ideas rather than staying confined to the initial storyline.

Less common approaches included:

- exploration of social issues or dark themes, e.g. mental health, depression, bullying, and the negative effects of using technology
- narrative-driven approaches
- surreal, digitally manipulated, imaginative worlds
- digital moving image (only a few submissions of this type).

Technical trends

- Many candidates used slow shutter speeds and light painting to develop and advance ideas.
- Scanography was a popular photography convention used. When used successfully and appropriately, it was a technique that enabled candidates to further develop and advance their ideas.
- Double-exposure and multiple, translucent-overlay techniques were often used to bring everything together at the end of Panel 2. This approach worked well when it was purposeful and conceptually driven.
- Takigawa and Mauren Brodbeck were very popular artist models. Successful candidates used Mauren Brodbeck within the appropriate context to explore picture-making ideas with buildings and architecture subject matter.
- Many candidates mirrored imagery and did so to create reflected landscapes. Sometimes this was used further into tessellated imagery and pattern making. This approach was far less common.
- Most candidates printed out their photographs on high-quality photographic paper. Lustre and matte printing papers were more popular than gloss. The benefit of using a good quality of photographic printing helped the readability of the work, particularly when there were subtle shifts in colour or layered imagery.
- It was common for candidates to print out their full A1 sheet and then attach this directly to their folio board. While this saves time, this decision can hinder the readability of the individual works, especially if there isn't much space between photographs.

- Some candidates used collage and cut-out techniques to extend ideas. At times, this was rephotographed or scanned and then printed out. Successful candidates who chose to work in this manner had good control and were competent with using this technique.
- The use of typography as transparent or opaque layers and overlays on top of photographs remain popular. This was handled with varying degrees of success. Submissions that were successful in this approach referenced established photography practice and the use of typography sensitively and appropriately handled. The decision to use text was deliberate and was used to add deeper conceptual meaning to the photographic investigation. Less successful submissions used text and written words in photographs to communicate ideas to the viewer that the photograph was not successful in portraying.
- Most candidates were conscious of how to organise their layout. They made good decisions in the sizing and sequencing of individual works in series and rows, significantly enhancing the readability and systematic flow of the portfolio.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- generated and developed ideas driven by a proposition that was limiting or narrow
- made some decisions in the pictorial investigation that moved forward systematically and methodically
- included work in the layout that was relevant to the proposition; showed relationships and connections between the imagery; and made decisions about the sizing and sequencing of the works
- demonstrated some understanding of conventions and used photography media and techniques with an appropriate level of control.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- established a clear pictorial, thematic, or conceptual proposition
- demonstrated understanding of established practice
- used media and techniques competently that were relevant to their investigation
- purposefully made decisions in the selecting, sizing, organising and sequencing of the works, e.g. used a hierarchy in their images, often demonstrated through carefully considered variations in size
- developed coherent links between phases of working that consciously advanced the proposition.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- demonstrated a sophisticated, assured use and technical facility in their use of photography conventions, media, and techniques
- made critical decisions, and chose the best options to investigate and move ideas forward
- demonstrated a strong understanding of established practice and how to implicitly use artist models
- used a range of photography conventions, media and techniques
- revisited, refined, clarified and reconstructed ideas from their previous work, and regularly introduced new elements to re-form and regenerate ideas in new directions
- works and sequences of works moved on from previous work, while drawing from and regenerating the initial proposition.

Candidates whose work was assessed as **Not Achieved** commonly:

- developed some work that was not methodically ordered or sequenced
- presented incomplete or insufficient evidence, including empty rows or the repeated use of the same photographs in different parts of the submission—sometimes resized or cropped to give the impression of new work
- worked was not at Level 7 of the Curriculum, e.g. images were pixelated, demonstrating issues with image clarity, or file management issues such as exporting the layout file in low resolution
- presented individual photographic works that were not methodically ordered or sequenced, resulting in insufficient evidence of a systematic body of work.

Achievement standard 91323: Produce a systematic body of work that shows understanding of art making conventions and ideas within printmaking

Commentary

The portfolios submitted for verification in 2025 reflected continued strength in printmaking practice across schools nationwide. A high level of technical skill was evident in some submissions, particularly in dry-point etching and monochromatic lino or woodcut processes. Many submissions demonstrated confident handling of tools and processes. Many also reflected well-planned programmes that allowed candidates to explore ideas with increasing levels of control, subtlety, and awareness of the print surface.

Successful portfolios showed a focus on both technical mastery and thematic depth. Candidates explored a wide range of themes, including environmental concerns; cultural narratives (often thoughtfully personalised); colonial, historical and political ideas; architecture; and native flora or fauna. A smaller number of submissions investigated personal or fantasy-based themes, referencing gaming or imaginative imagery. Across these varied subjects, the most successful portfolios introduced ideas with a purposeful intent right from the start. They revealed clear links between conceptual thinking and technical processes, allowing candidates to produce coherent, resolved bodies of work.

Submissions widely varied in their range of approach to producing a body of work. Some focused on developing increasing levels of control and understanding of one or two printmaking processes. Others combined media and multiple printmaking processes within single compositions. This included dry-point etching combined with lino or woodcut, Chine collé, collage, or the use of stencils, alongside traditional print techniques. These hybrid approaches were most successful when candidates understood how to integrate each process purposefully, using their chosen methods to reinforce compositional intent. However other hybrid approaches were not successful, taking a generative approach, or combining materials and processes merely as decorative additions.

The Verification Panel observed that many Level 2 candidates demonstrated high levels of facility in the execution of print processes, particularly in etching and relief printmaking. The fine, deliberate line work in wood and lino blocks was of note, as was the sensitivity shown in tonal control and inking within dry point etching. Many submissions reflected strong teaching and well-sequenced programmes that enabled candidates to refine their technical skills through sequential, purposeful printmaking.

A consistent observation, however, was that some candidates did not reach the higher-grade ranges because of limited conceptual or compositional development. While individual prints often displayed a high level of technical skill, the printing of singular imagery, without broader compositional or thematic investigation, restricted opportunities to demonstrate extension (Merit) and regeneration of ideas (Excellence). Submissions that narrowed their propositions too early, or failed to extend beyond initial imagery, often resulted in interchangeable or repetitive panels that did not demonstrate

the systematic development required at Level 7 of the Curriculum. Integrating artist model research and compositional investigation is a good way to support higher achievement, as candidates can make informed decisions and sustain extension through multiple sequences.

Candidates who attained high levels of achievement had reflected on earlier pieces and made conscious choices to continue working in their most effective ways, refining the use of processes and imagery. These submissions demonstrated thematic awareness and depth, clear intentionality and increasing control. They advanced ideas conceptually and technically with success across the portfolio.

Several areas of concern were identified in 2025 submissions:

- Developing ideas in genuine and original ways is key to success. A number of candidates relied on found imagery from the internet, using it to create linked but one-off works that did not underpin the development and extension of ideas. This approach limited the possibility for a genuine learning journey and should be discouraged.
- Compositional exploration was evident in some submissions, but this was not always supported by an equal extension of printmaking skill. Candidates should be encouraged to develop both pictorial ideas and technical proficiency in tandem, thus ensuring that conceptual ambition is matched by technical understanding.

Teachers and candidates are reminded of the importance of submitting original works on the portfolio. Photocopies or reproductions should only be included when necessary to indicate scale or media used, and these should be clearly labelled. Overreliance on photocopied or photo-transferred imagery detracts from the originality and authenticity of work.

Folio layout and sequencing remain key to communicating the systematic development of ideas. Some submissions featured excessive amounts of preliminary drawing or mood board-style imagery on Panel 1, reducing the space available to establish a clear printmaking proposition. Similarly, repeated use of the same print plate or block with only colour variation did not show extension or regeneration of ideas, often leading to repetitive outcomes.

Using media and processes other than those belonging to the field of printmaking needs to be carefully considered. Processes such as collagraph combined with paint overlays, painted, photocopied backgrounds with collage, or stamping approaches using collagraph shapes were generally ineffective in demonstrating understanding of printmaking. Several submissions had relied on the use of paint as a key medium across multiple sequences. This had a detrimental effect on the candidates' ability to demonstrate a sound understanding of printmaking processes and techniques. Likewise, overuse of textural materials without compositional focus diluted the visual impact of some works. Candidates should be guided toward purposeful exploration of core, printmaking conventions, including plate preparation, inking, registration, colour, tone, layering, and composition.

Finally, photo transfer and digital manipulation require careful consideration. When used without conceptual intent, these processes can appear superficial or can obscure the handmade qualities central to printmaking.

Summary

The 2025 verification confirmed that printmaking in schools continues to strengthen, particularly in technical proficiency in multiple and varied processes. To ensure candidates achieve at higher grade levels, equal emphasis should be placed on conceptual and compositional development, informed by artist models and critical reflection.

When candidates are supported to think and make iteratively, balancing technical excellence with creative inquiry, the results demonstrate originality, depth and maturity, positioning printmaking as a vibrant and evolving field within Visual Arts education.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- produced a body of work that was organised and presented in a systematic manner
- demonstrated sufficient control and understanding of printmaking materials, tools, and techniques at Level 7 of the New Zealand Curriculum
- generated and developed ideas in a basic but sequential way, though sometimes limited by a narrow focus or singular imagery
- showed technical skill without yet extending ideas compositionally or conceptually.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- developed more than one idea or compositional approach on Panel 1, then extended and refined the ideas on Panel 2
- purposefully selected or combined printmaking processes and techniques to enhance compositional and conceptual intent
- demonstrated extension in both technical handling and conceptual thinking
- showed conscious decision-making in the use of colour, tone, and layout to strengthen the visual outcomes
- used artist models to inform stylistic and compositional shifts that added variety and depth to the portfolio and supported the investigation of original ideas.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- introduced both conceptual and pictorial propositions from the outset and developed these through iterative exploration
- demonstrated regeneration of ideas, making new print blocks or reinterpreting earlier imagery in inventive and purposeful ways
- showed high levels of facility and refinement, working with purposefully selected printmaking processes
- made strong, independent decisions about composition, sequencing, and colour that reinforced conceptual meaning
- drew clearly on established practice to inform intelligent, personalised, and authentic work
- worked in a reflective and self-directed manner, showing curiosity and conceptual clarity throughout the portfolio.

Candidates whose work was assessed as **Not Achieved** commonly:

- did not demonstrate sufficient skill or understanding of printmaking processes at Level 7 of the New Zealand Curriculum
- relied on singular or copied imagery without development or transformation
- presented disconnected works without a systematic progression between panels
- focused on decorative surface effects, collage, or painting approaches rather than clearly identifiable printmaking techniques
- provided insufficient or no evidence of idea development, compositional understanding, or technical control.

Achievement standard 91324: Produce a systematic body of work that shows understanding of art making conventions and ideas within sculpture

Commentary

Sculpture offers a unique opportunity to engage in creative exploration, particularly for candidates new to the visual arts. As a subject that covers an extremely broad range of approaches to artmaking, candidates can enter study that reflects their particular technical skills and conceptual motivations. As sculpture outcomes are so varied, a candidate's individual technical skills can be celebrated.

Sculpture submissions this year were extremely well considered and sat comfortably within the sculptural frameworks expected within this field. There were sound explorations of media, often demonstrating purposeful selection and relevance to the sculptural problem being explored. Appropriate selections of artist models were evident and used to support candidates' engagement with established practice. Deep dives into sculptural approaches allowed candidates to authentically own their investigations and demonstrate a keen awareness of the processes they were engaging with.

The transition from small-scale maquettes to fully realised works was used effectively this year to reflect on and extend ideas. This allowed for candidates to gain a stronger understanding of the qualities of various materials and the value of revisiting ideas to push them into new or diverse directions.

This year saw some ambitious intentions that lead to successful large-scale outcomes. It was pleasing to see notations to clarify scale and material choices when these were not evident through the images alone. Some larger scale works also supported candidates to push past the development of ideas and begin to explore investigations linking site to materials. The incorporation of interactive projects was also well considered.

Strong editing and sequencing of work was seen again this year, further supporting the clarification of ideas and recognition of best options for moving work forward. There were fewer portfolios relying on large numbers of photographs of individual works, with candidates opting instead to present just enough images to allow for a clear reading of each work. This allowed additional space on the portfolio for candidates to further extend and regenerate ideas.

Submissions where emphasis was placed on documenting the process of sculpture-making instead of final outcomes limited candidates' opportunities to extend or regenerate their ideas sufficiently. Effective hierarchy was also harder to achieve due to confusion around final works and works in progress. Unless the sculptural investigation is specifically exploring a process-based practice, documentation should be limited to final outcomes rather than how a work was made.

Sculptural outcomes were well documented consistently this year, with candidates recognising the importance of strong lighting, and clear and focused images to support the reading of their work.

Teachers are encouraged to send Sculpture submissions for verification, as the numbers of submissions in this field are relatively low. Receiving feedback in relation to the standard is particularly valuable in smaller fields such as Sculpture, where there are fewer samples from which to select exemplars.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- generated ideas in a systematic way, but often within a limited proposition
- demonstrated an appropriate use of sculptural materials
- presented a sufficient, though minimal number of sculptural outcomes, which limited opportunities to extend ideas

- presented appropriate documentation of the sculptural outcomes
- used appropriate sculptural conventions with the level of control and practical knowledge expected at the lower end of Level 7 of the New Zealand Curriculum.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- had a clear thematic or conceptual framework that drove the investigation
- used sculptural conventions with purpose
- demonstrated a competent use of appropriate media and techniques
- presented evidence of an extension of ideas
- included sound photographic documentation to best represent the work produced.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- identified a clear proposition that thoroughly explored a range of appropriate established sculptural conventions
- presented work that was technically fluent and understood the materiality of each of their chosen media
- built on previous outcomes to advance the proposition and to clarify and regenerate ideas
- demonstrated a critical awareness of the field of practice in which they were working
- used highly appropriate sculptural drawing techniques to effectively transition between series throughout the submission
- used fluent photographic documentation to support the clarification and regeneration of ideas
- identified a hierarchy of work through strong editing and layout of images.

Candidates whose work was assessed as **Not Achieved** commonly:

- presented an insufficient number of sculptural outcomes for the 12-credit weighting of the standard
- generated ideas but did not sufficiently develop them
- demonstrated insufficient understanding of established practice to inform sculptural outcomes
- used processes, procedures, materials, and techniques at a level that was below the practical knowledge requirements of Level 7 of the Curriculum.
