

2025 NCEA Assessment Report

Subject: Visual Arts
Level: 1
Achievement standard(s): 91914, 91915

General commentary

The 2025 round of verification for Level 1 external assessments highlighted that the sector continues to develop diverse and robust approaches to meeting the requirements of each external standard across all levels of achievement.

Evidence presented in candidate submissions was predominantly grounded in practical art disciplines such as painting and printmaking, although digital art, design, and photography approaches were also employed in many submissions.

Successful candidates and teaching and learning programmes demonstrated several common practices that contributed to strong achievement outcomes. Programmes that began with a structured approach and then allowed students the flexibility to develop ideas individually were particularly effective. This balance provided clear, structured guidance while also creating opportunities for personal creative exploration.

The second year of digital submissions presented some challenges relating to specifications and file types. Several recurring issues were encountered during verification:

- schools uploading more than seven samples for verification
- unfocused photographs or low-quality scans that did not adequately display candidate work
- schools mixing up candidate submissions when uploading work to the assessment portal
- duplicate candidate evidence being uploaded and submitted
- files of permitted types that were unable to be viewed within the assessment portal
- excessively large files that took considerable time to open.

The digital submission and verification model places responsibility for documenting and uploading candidate work in the hands of teachers, which introduces the potential for errors beyond the candidate's control. Taking time and care in documenting and uploading candidate work would mitigate most of these issues.

Teachers and schools are reminded to check assessment specifications carefully and to minimise errors by downloading and viewing files within the assessment portal before submitting. This will be even more important with Level 2 Visual Arts also transitioning to digital submission in 2026.

PPT and PPTX file formats presented a number of issues during the verification process. Although slideshows can be used to produce candidate work, files should be exported as a PDF or MP4 for assessment and verification purposes.

Some schools submitted multiple files for each candidate. It is recommended that only one digital file is uploaded per candidate for a submission.

Achievement standard 91914: Explore Visual Arts processes and conventions to inform own art making

Assessment

The assessment required candidates to submit a portfolio, that reflected the requirements of the Standard, in one of the formats outlined in the assessment specifications.

Commentary

The standard requires candidates to experiment with processes, materials, and techniques to respond to (Achievement), produce options for (Merit), or refine (Excellence) an art-making intention. Overall, candidate submissions for Achievement Standard 91914 demonstrated a better understanding of the standard across the sector. While most candidates presented evidence through practical art-making approaches such as painting and printmaking, many also explored design, digital art, and photography.

Whenua and moana were prominent themes, with candidates frequently engaging with landscapes, seascapes, beaches, and maunga. Local environments and kāinga waewae were central to many approaches. Plants and nature were common, particularly in printmaking.

Other popular themes included pūrākau, cultural narratives and, in some instances, original stories developed by candidates. Level 1 mainstays such as 'Ko wai au?' and ahurea tuakiri / cultural identity remained popular, along with subjects like architecture, birds, portraiture, and pattern.

Successful submissions were often supported by appropriate selections of established practice that aligned with student capability. Commonly referenced practitioners included:

- Aotearoa New Zealand artists: Nicky Foreman, Penny Howard, Sofia Minson, Don Binney, Nigel Brown, Star and Aroha Gossage, John Pule, Sandy Adsett, Robyn Kahukiwa, Jason Hicks, Fiona Pardington, Michael and Sheyne Tuffery, and Mark Adams.
- International artists: David Salle, David Hilliard, Jerry Takigawa, David Carson, Neville Brody, David Hockney, and Victoria Siemer.

When using established practice as inspiration (which is not a requirement of the standard), kaiako should guide students to include only enough research to set or outline an art-making intention; for example, a small, clearly labelled image and brief annotations about conventions. Large blocks of written analysis or biographical detail, while important for teaching and learning in Visual Arts, do not contribute valuable evidence for assessment of this standard.

Emulation can support process development, but higher achievement requires candidates to apply learning to original work.

Approaches that supported success at all levels included:

- structured, but not templated, programmes
- early structured activities with flexibility in later pages; scaffolding for those who need it, and creative agency for others
- research and brainstorming limited to one page or less overall to maximise space for practical exploration
- densely populated pages, with small studies rather than full-page artworks
- for digitally produced submissions, digital work was arranged for visibility and hierarchy through scale
- use of additional media to assist in the development of new ideas; for example, handmade collage as a process to inform further ideas for digital work or resolved paintings

- small studies or sketches showing art making intentions, or multiple small studies to explore compositional or colour possibilities
- curated and hierarchical arrangement of pages in the submission to illustrate candidate intention and choices.

Common limitations to achievement that were identified included:

- deviation from assessment specifications: while submissions with fewer than eight pages were considered holistically, they often lacked sufficient evidence for the 5-credit weighting of the standard; in line with specifications, only a maximum of eight pages per submission (excluding title pages) were reviewed for verification purposes
- excessive use of pages for written research, analysis, biographical details, or found imagery and mood boards, leaving limited space for practical evidence
- pages presented as isolated tasks with no developmental connections, which limited the ability to show development processes and thinking, and made it difficult for candidates to attain higher levels of achievement
- submissions that contained resolved or sustained outcomes only, without process or development; resolved or sustained outcomes can appear as an outcome, but should not dominate the submission.

While planning for sustained works is appropriate, sustained outcomes should only appear in Achievement Standard 91914 submissions as part of a development process. Achievement Standard 91915 is better suited for the assessment of sustained works.

Additionally, pages containing supplementary evidence for Achievement Standard 91913 often focus on constructing a single outcome, rather than exploring multiple approaches. While this does not prevent Achievement, such submissions can limit a candidate's ability to demonstrate a range of approaches or provide options for development. Additional exploration or development alongside this evidence would give candidates greater opportunities to access higher levels of achievement.

To ensure smooth verification and to maximise candidate success for Achievement Standard 91914, teachers and schools should:

- read assessment specifications carefully
- ensure candidates select and submit eight pages of evidence, which can then be collected in a physical format for provisional grading by the school
- digitise only the seven samples selected for verification
- in preparing files for verification, ensure each A3 page corresponds to one PDF page
- submit high-resolution scans or images that show detail and texture, and avoid pixelation
- check scans to ensure pencil work is clearly visible and all content can be viewed (i.e. no folded pages appear in the PDF)
- only upload and submit seven submissions for marking in the digital portal, unless fewer candidates were assessed
- check that submissions submitted for verification match the verification schedule
- double-check uploaded files once in the portal, looking for duplicates or errors caused by the upload.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- submitted eight A3 pages of work, in line with assessment specifications
- demonstrated technical capability using processes, media, and techniques appropriate to the New Zealand Curriculum Level 6 within a workbook context

- explored media through swatches, tests, or recorded processes
- produced loosely related outcomes in response to a theme or topic
- showed limited possibilities for further investigation
- Provided some evidence of a development process, such as one or two compositional sketches or collage plans
- focused on one narrow theme or subject matter without exploring further
- produced larger studies with fewer works per page, or presented resolved or sustained works without supporting process work.

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

- experimented with a range of media and processes
- selected appropriate established practice to inform their work
- arranged pages carefully to make best use of space
- tested and trialled processes, then applied them in small studies
- connected ideas across the submission through colour, subject matter, or approach
- used collage, mock-ups, or small sketches to show options for development
- curated evidence that was relevant to advancing the art making intention.

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

- refined a range of processes, materials, and techniques, demonstrating competent use within a workbook context
- maintained a consistent focus on progression and next steps throughout the submission
- made clear links between processes, thematic and stylistic ideas, across the submission
- refined the intention and context being explored
- created thumbnail sketches or plans that explored a variety of options, compositional or otherwise, before executing with media
- presented densely populated pages, often with multiple processes explored on each page
- reflected on previous trials and processes consistently to advance work forward
- considered visual hierarchy when collating evidence (e.g. smaller earlier works and more space allocated to more developed studies)
- prioritised visual thinking and practical investigation over written exposition.

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

- left large areas of multiple pages blank within the submission
- submitted fewer than the specified eight A3 pages of evidence
- presented a single resolved outcome on each page with no supporting process work
- Provided excessive amounts of mood boards, established practice research, or other written material, to the detriment of sufficient visual art making evidence
- provided evidence of recording only or artist emulation, without meeting the expectations of New Zealand Curriculum Level 6, in terms of using processes, materials, and techniques.

Achievement standard 91915: Create a sustained body of related artworks in response to an art making proposition

Assessment

The assessment required candidates to submit a portfolio, that reflected the requirements of the Standard, in one of the formats outlined in the assessment specifications.

Commentary

Overall, candidate submissions for Achievement Standard 91915 demonstrated a good understanding of the standard by the sector. The framing of this assessment to a familiar folio-board convention continues to allow teachers opportunity to draw upon existing knowledge.

As the sector settles into the standard, there were several notable trends in candidate approaches, media, and observed subject matter.

- Proposition: Visual pepeha, birds, and the New Zealand landscape continue to be consistently popular themes. There was a noticeable increase in boards focusing on nature and landscape, particularly those incorporating photography, as well as a rise in portrait-based work.
- Techniques: Collage featured prominently this year, including photographic collage and cut-up paintings, with mixed results in terms of quality. Cyanotypes emerged as a distinctive process used by some candidates.
- Illustration and drawing: A greater number of submissions were primarily illustrative, often influenced by pop culture and animation. There was also a marked increase in submissions that used pencil only, resulting in more drawing-focused submissions.
- Artist models :The influence of artists such as John Pule, Vanessa Edwards, Nicky Foreman, and Shane Cotton was evident in candidate work.
- Digital trends: Tessellated landscapes were the most common theme in photographic boards. Personal identity, frequently inspired by Jerry Takigawa, was also an effective focus in photography. For digital art boards, Victoria Seimer remains an extremely popular artist model.

Higher levels of achievement were often observed when candidates used a broader range of approaches to art making, rather than relying on emulation or being constrained by the style of provided artist models. Successful candidates used influences as a starting point to enhance and personalise their own ideas.

The inclusion of small, initial studies of subject matter at the beginning of a submission, provided a solid foundation for subsequent development. These initial responses to the art-making proposition often informed later decisions and supported the progression of ideas across the board.

Opportunities to reuse successful prints within larger mixed-media works were also noted as effective. This practice encouraged reflection and refinement, and reinforced thematic and technical connections within the body of work.

The use of paint pens was most successful when applied appropriately, ensuring that the technique supported the intended outcome.

Common limitations to higher achievement that were identified included:

- Sufficiency: Performance was negatively impacted by noticeable empty spaces on boards or areas filled with repeated printed imagery.
- Sustained: A number of processes were not taken to a sustained conclusion;for example, Gelli plate prints that were not reworked further, retaining the appearance of found imagery; and portrait works where faces were unpainted without clear purpose.
- Development: The most significant factor limiting achievement was the repeated use of the same image with minimal or no development across the portfolio.

- Authenticity: The use of unmodified found imagery, including copyrighted material, such as images of famous people or cars, raised concerns regarding authenticity and integrity.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- successfully created a body of works that were related through consistent subject matter and theme; however, ideas presented within the portfolio were often repetitive, limiting complexity and depth in the artistic outcome
- demonstrated basic competence in art making and established a clear connection of ideas across the portfolio
- showed a fundamental understanding of shape, proportion, perspective, and space for New Zealand Curriculum Level 6; however, work was frequently reliant on traced or found imagery, reducing originality in the visual content
- applied a considered colour palette across the portfolio, contributing to visual cohesion within the body of work
- Presented painting boards that contained 6–8 sustained artworks, providing sufficient opportunity to demonstrate development; digitally produced boards tended to include 10–12 outcomes, incorporating development works and final outcomes
- demonstrated development primarily through shifts in perspective of the same subject matter, which helped progress ideas, even though the overall process was sometimes repetitive
- at the beginning of the Achievement grade range, the overall quality of work was inconsistent, with one or two artworks appearing unfinished or lacking the same sustained level as other works on the board.

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

- used a range of media with confidence, demonstrating sustained control of processes throughout the body of work
- ordered and sequenced artworks reflectively, showing considered planning in the presentation of the portfolio; ideas were moved forward through reflection, clear sequencing, and confidence in processes
- developed compositions that supported the progression of ideas in response to the art-making proposition, with ideas progressed through a range of processes, ensuring active development beyond simple repetition
- presented digitally produced submissions that combined photography and design, with a weakness often evident in one of these areas
- at the higher end of the Merit grade range, demonstrated sustained control of media and development, with some evidence of fluency; however, this was not consistently evident across the entire portfolio
- demonstrated some fluency in media use but produced a body of work that lacked cohesion, resulting in submissions that remained within the Merit range, as fluency alone was insufficient to achieve Excellence.

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

- established the art-making proposition clearly from the outset, ensuring it underpinned the entire body of work
- took full control of their art-making proposition, using structured, teacher-led programmes to enhance their own style and strengthen connections
- demonstrated fluency across all approaches used within the portfolio, demonstrating conceptual depth and showing autonomy in their art making

- reflected on and refined artworks by approaching the proposition with a conceptual and overarching idea, presented effectively in varied forms
- produced compositions that showed complexity through techniques such as grids, line divisions, repetition, scale changes, and flipped imagery
- incorporated different viewpoints and perspectives alongside a cohesive colour scheme
- displayed technical fluency in digital processes through confident execution and clear consideration of the intended audience
- for digitally produced submissions that introduced typography, clarified font choices before successfully integrating type into the artworks.

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

- submitted insufficient work, resulting in empty sections on the board
- did not clearly establish an overall proposition or theme, causing works to appear disjointed due to a lack of thematic connection in subject matter
- produced artwork that did not meet the required curriculum level, often due to a lack of foundational art-making skills
- applied paint in a flat manner, lacking tone, highlights, shadows, or texture, which made works appear superficially 'coloured in'
- presented figures and objects with poor proportions
- presented outcomes in later works unrelated to the art-making proposition, halting the progression of ideas
- created compositions hindered by large areas of negative space that lacked intentional artistic purpose
- produced final artworks that reflected a lack of proficiency in working at the required scale (such as A3), resulting in unfinished outcomes.
