

Project formats

Learning goals

By the end of the chapter you should be able to:

- Select a suitable project outcome and the format to use
- Evaluate the best type of format to work with
- Know that you can change your mind, or combine types/formats.

You need to produce an outcome for your Extended Project which should be either a design, a performance, a report, a dissertation or an artefact. These outcomes fall into four broad suggested formats. They are:

- a dissertation
- a report or investigation
- a production
- an artefact.

Your project may not fall neatly into one of these types, and may be a mixture of two. Students working in a group might want to offer different formats, with one doing a production and another a dissertation. This is permissible, as OCR allows the mixing of formats.

A dissertation

This should be about 5,000 words, but do not worry if it is slightly over or under this number.

It may contain maps, diagrams, data and illustrations if necessary. You may have appendices if you wish, but they should be of real importance and should not form more than 20 per cent of the total. Do not use appendices to show off a list of facts you have discovered which do not add anything to the project in terms of your skills.

A dissertation should contain:

- an introduction
- a table of contents with page references
- the main body of the dissertation
- any works cited listed in a bibliography (which may have comments on the value of the resources used. They need not necessarily only be written sources, as interviews could be an equally important resource).

Moderator's hint
You can combine formats if you wish, such as part-artefact and part-report.

There is a separate section in the book on how to write a dissertation, but remember that your skills are being assessed (such as planning and evaluation), so always bear that in mind and do not become carried away by the content. If for example you are taking geography A Level and want to do a dissertation on some aspect of human geography which really interests you, this is allowed provided it is a clear **extension** of that learning and not just old coursework reworked. Your supervisor will advise you on this issue.

Moderator's hint
You may do a project on some aspect of Physics if you are doing Physics A Level, but it must clearly be an 'extension' of your A Level studies.

Factors which lead to successful dissertations

Do not treat the project as a conventional piece of coursework. Remember, content itself is not marked. The project will be judged on your ability to do the following successfully:

- Manage a project, thinking of a broad topic and a title (in that order), planning and preparing for the project, acquiring new skills (research, data use, etc.) (20 per cent of the marks).
- Use sensibly and think critically about a wide range of resources – not just a couple of text books and Wikipedia (20 per cent of the marks).
- Develop and realise: this means writing the dissertation after you have completed the research, checking it carefully and submitting it on time. You must give your school/college time to assess it properly (40 per cent of the marks).
- Review the whole project. Demonstrate clearly that you have continuously reflected on what you have done. Did you change title? Did you change format? Did you change the focus of the project? If so, why? On reflection was it a good idea? What would you do better next time? What have you learned to do or avoid doing? (20 per cent of the marks).

Moderator's hint
Moderators are looking for evidence of a wide range of resources.

You should keep good records of all aspects of the project, not just notes taken for the 'content' part. Remember that the **content** itself is not the most important thing; marks are awarded for demonstrating skills.

Successful dissertations

- are based on something that interests you personally
- are based on a hypothesis or question, e.g. 'How successful was Winston Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer?', rather than 'The cause of

the collapse of Northern Rock'. The latter type can end up as tedious lists which do not demonstrate your skills

- are not done because they might be useful for your A Level/Diploma and were suggested by someone else. They are done because **you** want to work on that topic
- demonstrate your own enterprise and initiative, planning and project management skills, not just your willingness to sit in a library and read books.

Less successful dissertations

- are weighed down in detail and focused on content – like coursework
- provide little evidence of the skills for which marks are awarded, such as planning
- are obviously reworked parts of the A Level course
- have a limited range of resources used: just a couple of textbooks and Wikipedia
- are done in the wrong format; a dissertation instead of a report
- have no review/evaluation.

Moderator's hint
The dissertation can often seem to be the easy option when thinking about formats for your project, but it can be the hardest format in which to demonstrate skills.

A report or investigation

This should also be about 5,000 words, with allowances for data, statistics, etc. If required, the data/results can be a part of the word count. No one is going to count the words. If you use a lot less, but have a lot of key data which you have organised (as opposed to just downloaded), then that is fine. The possible range of reports/investigations is enormous, for example:

- comparing provision for disabled people among different local authorities
- advanced geography fieldwork
- MPs' expenses
- media coverage of certain types of events
- business methods.

Key to success here is to choose an issue which interests you, is manageable and accessible, has accessible resources, gives you scope to achieve high marks, and lends itself to this format.

HOW TO SUCCEED

Making sure that resources are available can be essential for a report/investigation.

The report/investigation will be judged on your ability to do the following:

- Manage a project; your ability to plan will be vital here.
- Use critically a wide range of different resources, such as interviews, published data as well as secondary sources, different types of media, etc.
- Collate the information and ideas gained from those resources effectively.
- Deliver a finished product in a comprehensible form, on time.
- Review effectively what you have done. What worked? What did not work? Why? What have you learned? What would you do better next time? What would you not do again? Why?

Successful reports/investigations:

- are clearly written by well-motivated students who felt strongly about the subject
- demonstrate very obviously the planning skills and enterprise of the student
- take very seriously the requirement to use a wide range of resources and to evaluate critically. There should be plenty of comments such as ‘This interview was very useful because...’ or ‘This information came from a very biased source as ...’
- have a clear conclusion based on solid evidence
- show a real willingness to reflect on the whole process and learn for the future.

Moderator's hint
 Poor planning and limited resources are often the main reasons for awarding low marks for reports.

Less successful reports:

- look suspiciously like material required for other exams
- show poor planning as insufficient time was left to use key resources
- discover too late that a key resource was unavailable
- take on too big a topic, or too limited a topic which gives too little scope to demonstrate the required skills
- never reach a conclusion
- lack evaluation (the most frequent reason for low marks).

An artefact

This could be something you have made or designed. The possible range is vast: it could be artwork, a costume for a play, a working model, an educational game. It could be a design or a series of designs; the whole idea is to give you the maximum scope possible. If in any doubt about the format, contact your awarding body about it. There have been cases where the student was discouraged from doing an artefact because their school or college was worried about the student going into areas beyond the experience/expertise of the supervisors and the college. Usually these worries were totally unnecessary.

HOW TO SUCCEED



Artefacts lend themselves very well to the Extended Project as they can offer so many chances to demonstrate the skills for which high marks are awarded.

Successful artefacts have included the following:

- a dress
- sculpture
- computer programs
- building designs
- steam engines.

You will need to submit a written report with your artefact, at about 1,500 words. Some of those words may be in the form of a commentary on different parts of the designs. No one is going to count the words carefully if you are clearly meeting the assessment criteria. You can use this report to meet the AO1, AO2 and AO4 criteria, demonstrating the following skills:

- 1 Planning: for example, how you anticipated problems, obtained the right resources at the right time.
- 2 Critically using the 'wide range of resources'.
- 3 Reviewing and evaluating.

HOW TO SUCCEED



Make sure that your report allows you to achieve marks for managing, researching and evaluating.

AO3 should be covered by the artefact itself.

Your artefact will be judged on your ability to do the following:

- Manage the whole project, from the initial idea stage through to completion. Strong evidence of your planning will be critical here.
- Use a wide range of resources critically. The resources could range from interviews through to the designs of other artefacts, or secondary and primary sources. The potential list is vast and the type of resources will depend very largely on the nature of the project.
- Complete the artefact in a specified time. There have been cases where the actual artefact has not been completed but there was enough evidence (such as photographic) of the process for marks to be gained.
- Review and evaluate the whole process. What worked? Why? What did not? Why not? What was learned? What would or would not be repeated next time?



EVIDENCE

Good evidence of detailed planning and use of a wide range of resources is vital for success with artefacts.

Successful artefact-based projects:

- are well planned (good planning is perhaps more important and a greater challenge in this format than in the others)
- involve the anticipation and learning of necessary skills (for example, arc welding, reading French)
- demonstrate the individuality and enterprise of the student
- reach outside the conventional educational 'box'
- have a high level of review and evaluation.

Less successful artefact-based projects:

- have bright ideas but bad planning
- do not achieve the timescale
- discover too late that the acquisition of a certain skill is vital to complete the project
- do not think through the transition from the bright idea to actual artefact
- expect too much help from others.

A production

As with the other formats, there is a huge range of possibilities here. It could be a play, a film, a concert, a DVD, an event. Again, if you are not sure, contact OCR for advice.

Moderator's hint
Do not be frightened about going down the artefact route; it can lead to brilliant projects.

Remember what it is being assessed: if your planning, researching, evaluation, etc. is perfect, but you forget your lines in the performance of a play which you have written and in which you have the lead role, marks will not necessarily be deducted (although you might want to reflect on your line-learning skills and how to deal with pressure for AO4!).

This project format will be judged on your ability to do the following:

- Plan the production: did you allow sufficient time to rehearse?
- Use a wide range of resources critically.
- Deliver the production.
- Reflect and evaluate on the whole process. What went well, and why? What did not, and why? What would you do better next time?

HOW TO SUCCEED



Do not concentrate too much on the production itself; remember it is a way of demonstrating your skills.

Successful productions:

- manage to translate the bright idea into an actual production without harming the essential 'creativity' behind it
- are realistic, downsizing as necessary
- remember the assessment criteria: a stunning piece of film-making or music-writing will not achieve an A grade without the production demonstrating your planning, investigation and evaluation skills
- take the written report seriously. It should not be a rushed afterthought which neglects evidence of your skills. The production itself does not always display the skills required, particularly to a lay audience.

Less successful productions:

- do not actually happen: the idea simply does not translate into practice
- forget what is being assessed. You might be the next Steven Spielberg, but if there is no evidence of planning or no report you will not gain high marks
- lack evidence of planning and resource use. If you are writing a play then you must still demonstrate your research and evaluation skills
- become the vehicle for one person's ego, or disintegrate over personality clashes
- do not provide evidence of individual contributions and skills within a group production.



Working in a group

Remember the rules for group productions (see the next chapter – Group Extended Projects).

Changing formats

If you decide halfway through your project that you want to change format, for example that a dissertation would be better presented as a report, this is permissible. The end product is the one which will be assessed. You need to keep a proper record of the reasons for the change however, as that will be important for both your AO1 and AO4 marks.