

Photography GCSE Overview

Year 10

The year 10 photography course begins with students learning digital SLR (single lens reflex) camera controls whilst learning about the origins and history of lens media. The core photographic rules of focus, shutter speed and depth of field are explored and the students demonstrate these techniques in their own photography. The origins of lens media from the camera obscura, to the modern digital image and the evolution of the photographic image are studied. The students learn the timeline, from the creation of the earliest images of Nicéphore Niépce, to the 20th Century black and white film imagery of Vivian Maier and finally on to the contemporary digital portrait photography of Nick Knight.

Having studied the basics of the digital SLR the course moves onto more challenging photographic techniques of ISO (light sensitivity), Grey card (correct colour range), types of lighting and how they affect contrast in photography. Long exposure light-painting photography based on the work of Michael Bosanko is explored. It teaches the students about the camera exposure triangle and how to manipulate it correctly depending on light conditions. The pros and cons between the use of flash and bulb lighting are explored and how warm and cool colour tones affect portrait photography. How colour affects the mood of the model and can be used to create tonal range and therefore contrast is studied. The students demonstrate how valuable angle of lighting, backdrop and coloured gel lighting can dramatically affect their own work.

Having taken photography, carefully considering lighting, the students now learn post-shooting editing techniques using digital software and how this can be used to enhance their work. They start with how manipulating the colour tones, hues, saturation and contrast affects the work. They then move onto the more advanced use of layers and how digitally combining images can create interesting outcomes. The student's portfolio of work is printed and presented in a work-book, the presentation of which is a focus. The importance of the 'contact sheet' and how to correctly select from it and analyse the best outcomes is a vital component.

Camera control and editing techniques now lead onto the formal elements and critique of photography. The students explore the formal elements of visual language; line, form, colour, pattern, texture, in the context of lens-based and light-based media. They are asked to demonstrate in their own work an understanding of the rules of composition and how photography can be used to create narrative. A working vocabulary and knowledge of specialist terms relevant within Photography and lens-based and light-based media is created. They look at and learn about different genres and styles in relation to lens-based and light-based media and how photographic images relate to social, historical, vocational and cultural contexts.

Having developed their camera control, editing and critique skills the final year 10 project now asks them to demonstrate what they have learnt. Students design and build a small scale film set and costume based on the theme of 'identity'. They are asked to explore their own 'identity' whilst looking at how other photographers have responded to the world around them. They study the work of more traditional photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson to the contemporary costume

work of Cindy Sherman. They present a final set of images that explore all of the skills acquired during the year.

The GCSE Photography course encourages and nurtures an inquisitive and explorative approach to students' own learning. The students develop, through their photography, a more mature understanding of themselves and the world around them. The course aims to enable students to appreciate their own and others' photography and to encourage individuality and creativity. The course nurtures skills in creative thinking and problem solving and generates self-motivated, independent learners. It is structured to enable students to confidently develop their own ideas with guidance and support.

They explore images and resources from past and recent times to inspire their own work. Students are expected to demonstrate a wide range of skills and techniques and use different approaches to recording lens based images. They must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how feelings and meanings are conveyed and interpreted in images and how they relate to social and historical context. They have to develop a working vocabulary of specialist terms and genres in photography and they are encouraged to discuss images in lessons and annotate their work with their own opinions.

Year 11

In Year 11 the students now apply the photographic skills and techniques learnt during year 10, but they are asked to work within a short time frame. They are expected to establish and develop their own personal responses to photographers' work whilst responding to an exam question. Throughout year 10 the students document their work in their sketchbook and that formed part of their coursework. In year 11 they now work at a larger scale on A2 boards and they start with a mock exam project. The project is 10 school weeks in length and culminates in a 10 hour final personal response.

This project forms part of their coursework portfolio. The project must show evidence of them developing ideas through their own investigations, demonstrating critical understanding of sources. They need to refine their work by exploring ideas, selecting and experimenting with appropriate media, materials, techniques and processes. Throughout the project they need to record their ideas, observations and insights relevant to their intentions as the work progresses.

At the end of the 10 school week time frame they create a personal and meaningful response that realises their intentions and demonstrates understanding of visual photographic language. The project must demonstrate their ability to sustain work from an initial starting point to the realisation of their final piece.

Year 11 - Externally set task assignment worth 40% of their grade

The year 11 course culminates with students receiving an examination paper which is worth 40% of their GCSE grade; it begins nationally after a date set by the exam board. The students choose from a range of exam questions that always offer students a variety of approaches to photography. The

questions are often an individual word such as 'framing' or 'messages' and they are sometimes a group of words such as 'light and dark'.

These exam questions are discussed and explored during lessons and for the first 4 weeks of the project student's work on responses to photographers chosen by their teacher. Students then select their own exam questions and develop their work in accordance with the assessment objectives. There must be evidence of critical understanding of sources, refinement of their work, experimentation with appropriate media, materials, techniques and processes. Throughout the project they need to record their ideas. The project follows the same time frame as the mock with a 10 hour timed examination at the end in which students produce a personal response to their exam theme.

The students portfolio of work is then to be marked and moderated by the photography teaching staff and it is then checked by an external moderator. Homework is set regularly and builds upon the skills and knowledge gained in lessons. A successful coursework portfolio is a result of effort and hard work.