

# 5 *Written* Personal Investigation Tips

## 1. THE TOPIC SHOULD BE SOMETHING THAT YOU ARE GENUINELY INTERESTED IN

The ultimate purpose of your Personal Study is to teach you something: to help you develop as an artist and to strengthen your understanding of art-related issues. The most successful Personal Studies communicate 'a strong sense of involvement through personal enthusiasm and a commitment to sustain the investigation'. Simply speaking, when you are passionate about a topic, you are more likely to do well.

## 2. A TOPIC SHOULD PROVIDE YOU SUFFICIENT MATERIAL TO WRITE ABOUT, WHILE NOT BEING SO VAST THAT YOUR PROJECT BECOMES ALL-ENCOMPASSING, DISJOINTED OR SURFACE-DEEP

In order to produce a high-quality Personal Study, you need to have a clear, well-articulated focus. This gives you something to organise your project around and encourages you to write with coherence and structure (a lack of direction is a common weakness in low achieving Personal Studies). Completing an entire project around the analysis of one or two artworks, for example, is limiting, while attempting to analyse Abstract Art in all of its entirety (without any connection to a specific artist) sets up an enormous, daunting task which cannot be given justice in the time given.

## 3. CONTRASTING AND COMPARING THE WORK OF ARTISTS CAN BE HELPFUL

Studying the work of a mainstream or critically acclaimed artist alongside a local artist can be beneficial, especially if the local artist is less established. This gives you the best of both worlds (the enthusiasm and first-hand contact from a local artist, plus the insight that comes from studying historical, contemporary and/or international artists who work in another cultural context). You may, for example, choose to focus upon two artists who paint the same subject in a different way or to discuss the influence of a famous artist upon a local painter. It should be noted that the examiners understand that many students will not be able to see all of the artworks they study in the flesh, so supporting the first-hand study with those viewed in reproduction is absolutely acceptable.

## 4. SELECT A TOPIC WHICH IS SUPPORTED BY QUALITY REFERENCE MATERIAL

While the Personal Study is centred around your own personal responses, drawing on the opinions of educated critics can provide insight and a depth of understanding: grounding, validating and/or challenging your own views. Before finalising upon a Personal Study topic for AL Art, check to see if there are existing articles, books or online reviews about the artists in question. This also helps to verify that the artist you have selected has some standing in the art community and is thus likely to be an appropriate and valuable person to study. It should be noted, of course, that in many cases, the more well-known an artist is, the less time they have to accommodate visits from eager high school students; sometimes relatively unknown artists can be very skilled and have much to teach a high school Art student.

## 5. WORD YOUR TITLE SO THAT IT CAPTURES THE ESSENCE OF YOUR PERSONAL STUDY AND INDICATES A WELL-CHOSEN FOCUS

For example: 'The Portraiture of [artist name]: An Appreciation of Light and Colour' is more appropriate than 'Portraiture in Art'. 'The use of Symbolism in Traditional and Contemporary Weaving' is more appropriate than 'The Art of Weaving'. 'An Investigation into Gender Roles in Contemporary Art' is better than 'Contemporary Art'. In the former examples, the title helps to clarify the focus of the study; the latter suggest an enormously broad study that would be difficult to complete well. Similarly, it is also beneficial to avoid overly simplistic titles that convey little information, such as '[artist name] Personal Study' or 'Fish'. Ideally, the examiner a clear idea about what your study is about (and be impressed) from the first moment they encounter your project.