INTERNATIONAL ARTS OLYMPIAD

STANDARDIZED STUDY GUIDE

Music • Literature • Architecture • Visual Arts • Contemporary Art • Performing Arts & Dance

Prepared for the Olympiad's theory examination

About This Guide

This guide brings together the six subject areas of the International Arts Olympiad in one consistent format. Each section explains the scope of study, the specific topics to review, and the way questions are expected to assess historical knowledge, artistic language, interpretation, and contextual analysis.

Shared Examination Format

Across all areas, questions are multiple choice with five options (A–E) and only one correct answer. A short source text, artwork, image, quotation, scene description, synopsis, or pair of works may be provided. Students must combine close reading of the material with their knowledge of artistic movements, creators, techniques, historical contexts, and cultural meanings.

Subjects Included

AREA	FOCUS
1. Music	Programmatic music, crooning, and the 1960s psychedelic movement.
2. Literature	Genres, narrative elements, literary movements, and critical comparison.
3. Architecture	Architecture as cultural expression from Antiquity to Modernism.
4. Visual Arts	Painting and sculpture through major modern artistic movements.
5. Global Contemporary Art	Global production, digital media, and social critique.
6. Performing Arts & Dance	Theater, cinema, dance, performance, and hybrid languages.

1. Music

AREA: MUSIC

SECTION OVERVIEW This section studies music through its historical development, sociopolitical implications, and relationship with real-world events. Students should connect musical language to the circumstances in which it emerged and to its cultural impact.

Study Content

Nineteenth Century: Programmatic Classical Music

- Camille Saint-Saëns's The Carnival of the Animals (1886).
- Its history, origins, historical and social context, and cultural impact.
- A basic understanding of Saint-Saëns, the work's publication, and the motivations behind its creation.

Music of the 1920s and 1930s: Crooning

- What crooning is and how the vocal technique developed.
- Its social context, early public reception, and cultural repercussions.
- Why the technique matters and how its meaning and use have been redefined over time.

The 1960s Psychedelic Movement

- The social context of the United States, with emphasis on the hippie movement.
- Woodstock 1969: its history, featured artists, and major highlights.

How the Content Will Be Assessed

Each question presents a short supporting text, such as a synopsis excerpt, character statement, scene description, or quotation connected to a work. The student must interpret the source alongside historical and conceptual knowledge about the movement, artist, author, or musical language being discussed.

2. Literature

AREA: LITERATURE

SECTION OVERVIEW This section approaches literature as an artistic and cultural expression. It values critical reading, analysis of literary features, and an understanding of the relationship between literature, society, and different cultures.

Study Content

Literary Genres

- Characteristics of poetry, short stories, novels, and drama.
- Differences among these genres and their forms of expression.

Elements of Narrative

- Narrator, characters, time, setting, plot, and conflict.

Literary Movements

- General characteristics of Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, and Modernism.
- Connections among movements, their historical contexts, and major authors.

Text Analysis and Comparison

- Identifying themes, expressive devices, and literary characteristics.
- Comparing texts by different authors, periods, or cultures.
- Recognizing similarities and differences in language, style, and theme.

Literature and Culture

- Literature as artistic, cultural, and historical expression.
- Universal themes: identity, freedom, love, memory, justice, nature, and human relationships.
- The relationship between literature and social context.

How the Content Will Be Assessed

Questions may include excerpts from poems, novels, short stories, or plays. In some cases, two texts may be presented for comparative analysis. Students may be asked to identify genres, interpret narrative elements, recognize literary movements, compare texts, and understand literature as an artistic and cultural expression.

3. Architecture

AREA: ARCHITECTURE

SECTION OVERVIEW Architecture began as a response to human needs such as shelter and spatial organization, but it also became a language for expressing ideas, beliefs, values, identities, and collective memory. This section asks students to understand both what buildings look like and why they were made that way.

Study Content

Architecture as Artistic Expression

- Architecture as an artistic and cultural language.
- The relationship among function, aesthetics, and symbolism.
- Architecture as humanity's memory.

Architecture of Antiquity

- Ancient Egypt: the Pyramids of Giza and monumentality as an expression of authority.
- Ancient Greece: proportion, balance, rationality, the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders, and the Parthenon.

Medieval Architecture

- Byzantine and Gothic architecture.
- Notre-Dame Cathedral.
- Verticality, stained glass, religious symbolism, and architecture as a spiritual experience.

Baroque

- Movement, ornamentation, and drama.
- Architecture as an expression of emotion.
- Aleijadinho and Brazilian Baroque.

Brazilian Modernism

- Oscar Niemeyer and the creation of modern architecture with a Brazilian identity.
- Curves and formal freedom.
- Brasília, the Cathedral of Brasília, the National Congress, Palácio da Alvorada, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Niterói.

Antoni Gaudí

- Nature as inspiration.
- Casa Batlló, Park Güell, and the Sagrada Família.
- Architecture as living art.

How the Content Will Be Assessed

Each question includes a short supporting text, such as a quotation, an art historian's excerpt, a description of a work, or a brief architectural analysis. The questions encourage interpretation and reflection: students should relate works, compare historical periods, and explain how architecture expresses ideas, values, and worldviews.

4. Visual Arts: Painting and Sculpture

AREA: VISUAL ARTS

SECTION OVERVIEW This section addresses painting and sculpture through historical, technical, and critical perspectives. Students should recognize artistic movements while relating formal choices to broader historical and cultural contexts.

Study Content

Painting

- Impressionism: major artists, techniques, characteristics, influences on the movement, and its influence on later movements.
- Cubism and Dadaism: major artists, defining characteristics, and historical context.
- Minimalism: major artists, defining characteristics, influences, and impact on contemporary art.

Sculpture

- Russian Constructivism: major artists, techniques, characteristics, and objectives.
- The Bauhaus School: major artists, objectives, and characteristics.

How the Content Will Be Assessed

Questions may present a painting or sculpture, a description of a movement, a scene description, or a quotation connected to a work. Students must interpret the source using historical and conceptual knowledge of the relevant movement, artist, or visual language.

5. Global Contemporary Art

AREA: GLOBAL CONTEMPORARY ART

SECTION OVERVIEW This section studies contemporary art as a plural field shaped by different cultures, technologies, and social concerns. Students should observe artworks carefully, relate formal choices to context, and interpret how artists respond to identity, colonialism, inequality, migration, consumption, technology, surveillance, and environmental issues. The term “non-Western art” is used only as a teaching frame and never as if it described a single culture.

Study Content

Contemporary Art and Globalization

- Plurality of languages, experimentation, mixed techniques, and dialogue with present-day issues.
- Globalization, circulation of images, and contact among artistic traditions.
- Cultural identity, hybridity, diaspora, and belonging.
- Postcolonial and decolonial perspectives: who produces, legitimizes, and is represented in art history.

Contemporary Production Beyond the Traditional Western Axis

- Artistic diversity across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and other regions.
- Relationships between tradition and contemporaneity.
- Local materials, symbols, and cultural references in contemporary languages.
- Reference artists: El Anatsui (Ghana/Nigeria), Shirin Neshat (Iran/United States), Ai Weiwei (China), and others who prompt discussion of identity, power, and cultural circulation.

Digital Art and New Media

- Art made or presented through computers, video, the internet, projections, sensors, virtual environments, and other digital media.
- Video art and moving images as artistic language.
- Interactivity and audience participation.
- Generative art based on rules, data, or algorithms.
- Art, networks, computational intelligence, surveillance, information, and digital culture.

Art and Social Critique

- Art as questioning, denunciation, reflection, or public debate.
- Recurring themes: inequality, racism, gender, migration, war, censorship, colonialism, consumption, labor, and environmental crisis.
- The difference between identifying a theme and interpreting how visual choices construct it.
- Relationships among artist, artwork, audience, and historical/social context.

Reading and Analyzing Artworks

- Support, technique, materials, scale, composition, color, shape, texture, light, and movement.
- Title, context, and possible cultural references.
- Difference between objective description and interpretation.
- Comparing works through similarities, differences, intentions, and visual strategies.
- Avoiding cultural stereotypes: context and visual evidence must guide interpretation.

How the Content Will Be Assessed

Questions may present an artwork, image, short contextual text, or two artworks for comparison. Students must interpret formal, contextual, cultural, technological, and social dimensions. More than memorizing dates and names, they should recognize the relationship among artistic language, context, and meaning.

Expected Student Competencies

- Observe a work before deciding what it means.
- Use visual elements and contextual information as evidence.
- Recognize the diversity of contemporary artistic traditions.
- Relate new technologies to transformations in artistic language.
- Understand how formal choices can create social critique.
- Compare artworks without reducing different cultures to stereotypes.

6. Performing Arts and Dance

AREA: PERFORMING ARTS AND DANCE

SECTION OVERVIEW This section studies theater, cinema, performance, and stage dance through historical, technical, and critical lenses. Students should connect forms of performance to the social contexts and artistic languages that shape them.

Study Content

Theater

- Origins of theater: tragedy and comedy in Ancient Greece.
- Theater of the Oppressed (Augusto Boal).

Cinema

- French New Wave.
- Elements of film language: editing, framing, soundtrack, and cinematography.
- Surrealism.

Dance

- Modern dance.
- Dance as expression, cultural identity, heritage, and resistance.

Performance and Hybrid Languages

- Performance art.
- The relationship among body, space, culture, and audience.

How the Content Will Be Assessed

Questions present a short supporting text, such as a synopsis excerpt, character statement, scene description, or quotation related to a work. Students must interpret the source while applying historical and conceptual knowledge of the relevant movement, artist, author, or artistic language.