



**New and  
improved  
with more  
examples!**

# ACES folio 2023 /24

**The ACES Tayside  
guide to creating a  
digital portfolio  
2023-24**

## About ACES Tayside

ACES is a nationally funded initiative based across the four art schools in Scotland. Our job is to encourage, educate and empower senior-phase pupils to consider careers and higher education in art, design and architecture.

Our broad programme of events and 1-1 support helps pupils to explore their options, create a competitive application and develop a strong portfolio of work.

ACES advice is always impartial, and we support pupils wherever they want to go.

For more information about our events, support and to see if you are eligible to be a part of aces, please visit our website.

[www.dundee.ac.uk/aces](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/aces)

[aces@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:aces@dundee.ac.uk)

01382 384030

[@acestayside](#)



## The ACES Tayside guide to creating a digital portfolio

Most courses look for a digital portfolio. This may be all that they will ask to see, or it may be used as an initial selection and then they may invite you for an interview.

**This guide will explain:**

- How can ACES help me?
- What a digital-portfolio is and what to include
- Getting organised and making a plan
- Documenting and editing your work
- How to put together your portfolio slides
- Annotation and text
- Saving your portfolio
- Uploading your portfolio
- What happens next
- Formats and deadlines for each university
- Portfolio planning sheets

## How can ACES help me?

ACES is here to guide and support you through the whole process of thinking about and applying to creative courses.

We'll help you get there – whether that's straight to university from school, or via FE college.

Even though ACES Tayside is based at the University of Dundee, you don't have to be applying to Dundee to come and take part, or to gain our advice. We will help you get to wherever is right for you.

### Come to our on campus events

Our on campus events are the best way to explore your options and make work for your portfolio.

Plus you'll meet other people who are applying to a creative course too. ACES friends are the best!

- **All our events are listed on our website:** [www.dundee.ac.uk/aces](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/aces)
- They are always free, and we provide all materials!
- Options include: Explore Days, Life Drawing Courses, Portfolio Preparation Courses, Skills Days, Gallery Trips – and more!

### Come to our online application info sessions

Whether it's finding out where to apply, what a university is looking for, how to write a creative personal statement or start your digital portfolio – we've got you covered.

**Our online sessions are listed on our website:** [www.dundee.ac.uk/aces](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/aces)

### Book a 1-1 chat with us

Our ACES staff have a wealth of knowledge about all the creative courses and universities in Scotland – and beyond!

Having a chat with us means that we can get to know you and your aspirations in more depth, and can make recommendations for courses, universities, portfolio ideas and more.

You can get in touch via email: [aces@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:aces@dundee.ac.uk)

Our chat can be in person – in school or at the University – or online

## What is the digital portfolio?

A digital portfolio is just that – a digital version of your full portfolio. To create one you will need to photograph or scan in your work and sketchbooks, and present them as digital slides.

### What format do they want?

Frustratingly, different universities and courses have different requirements. It's essential to do your research and prepare early.

The formats and deadlines are listed later in this booklet

Be aware that you may have to make two (or even three) slightly different portfolios – depending on where you are applying. Once you've got one done it's easy to do though!

## What to include?

Everyone will have different amounts of work from different projects.

Broadly speaking you can include work from any creative subject in school at Higher or Advanced Higher – if the quality is good enough – including (but not limited to):

- Art & Design
- Graphic Communication
- Design & Manufacture
- Photography
- National Progression Awards

Work from Nat 5 could be included, but make sure that the demonstration of skill is good and that it isn't too similar to Higher.

Bear in mind that universities want to see ideas and development more than lots of technical drawing – particularly from Graph Comm and Design & Manufacture. A 3D drawing of a stapler (for example) doesn't actually demonstrate your thinking or ideas or research.

It's also important to show that you are engaged with being creative outside of the classroom – so work from extra curricular activities and workshops or work that you create in your own time may be suitable and included. For example:

- Portfolio Preparation Classes
- Life Drawing
- Explore Days
- Summer Schools

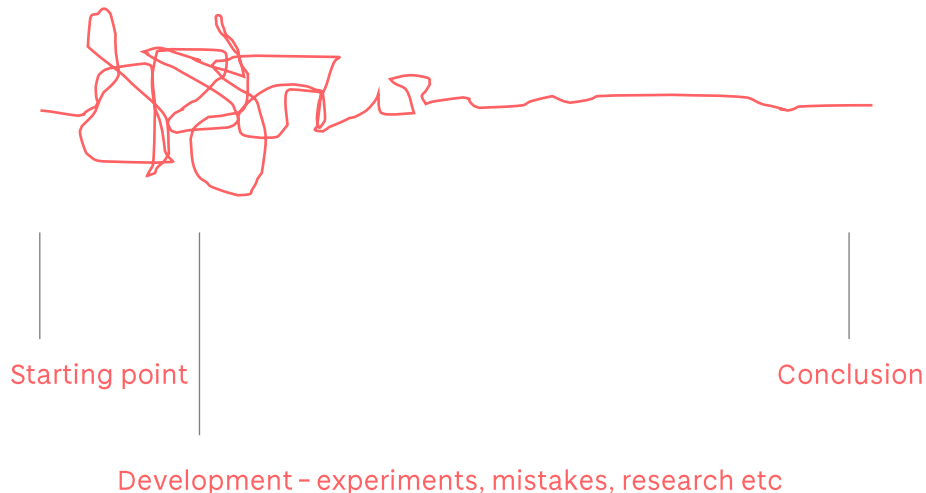
Please remember to document your experience and work at these kind of sessions!

# What to include

## Development is the most important thing

Development is the most important thing - universities need to see that you can work an idea through from start to finish, and they want to see the journey you have taken to do this.

Remember the squiggle!



## Good development should show the following:

- **Research:** ideas, theory, relevant artists, designers or architects.
- **Observational study:** drawings, photographs, collections.
- **Experimentation:** playing, developing your media, your subject, your skills.
- **Development:** keep track of what you are doing and show evidence of this - photograph your work at all stages and include these in your sketchbooks.
- **Sketchbooks** are vital, and some courses specifically ask to see them.
- **Drawing** in general is important - always try to draw from life rather than photographs wherever possible. Be confident!

## Make it relevant to the course you're applying to

It's important that your portfolio is relevant to the course that you are applying to. For example, if you're applying to 3D courses such as Architecture or Interior Design, you should include some 3D work or engagement with space.

## Getting organised and making a plan

Making a start on the digital portfolio process might seem a bit overwhelming. You might feel like you don't have enough work, or can't figure out what to do next to build up a project.

Our best tip is to get it out of your brain and onto paper – make a visual plan. This will help you see what you've already got, and where the gaps are. There's a template for your plan at the back of this booklet.

Don't worry about the order or design of your portfolio slides right now – this is the stage for making lists and notes.

Get all of your work together (you can do this project by project) and gauge how many slides each project will need to show development.

As a guide, each Nat 5 or Higher should probably have one slide. Advanced Higher should take up multiple slides.

Remember – ACES classes will help you make work too!

Here's an example of a quick plan for a 12 slide portfolio:

Higher Art	Higher Design	ACES Life Drawing	ACES Life Drawing
Adv H Art	Adv H Art	Adv H Art	ACES Explore Day
ACES Portfolio Prep	ACES Portfolio Prep	ACES Portfolio Prep	ACES Portfolio Prep
ACES Printmaking	H Photography	Spare – for new work	Spare – for new work

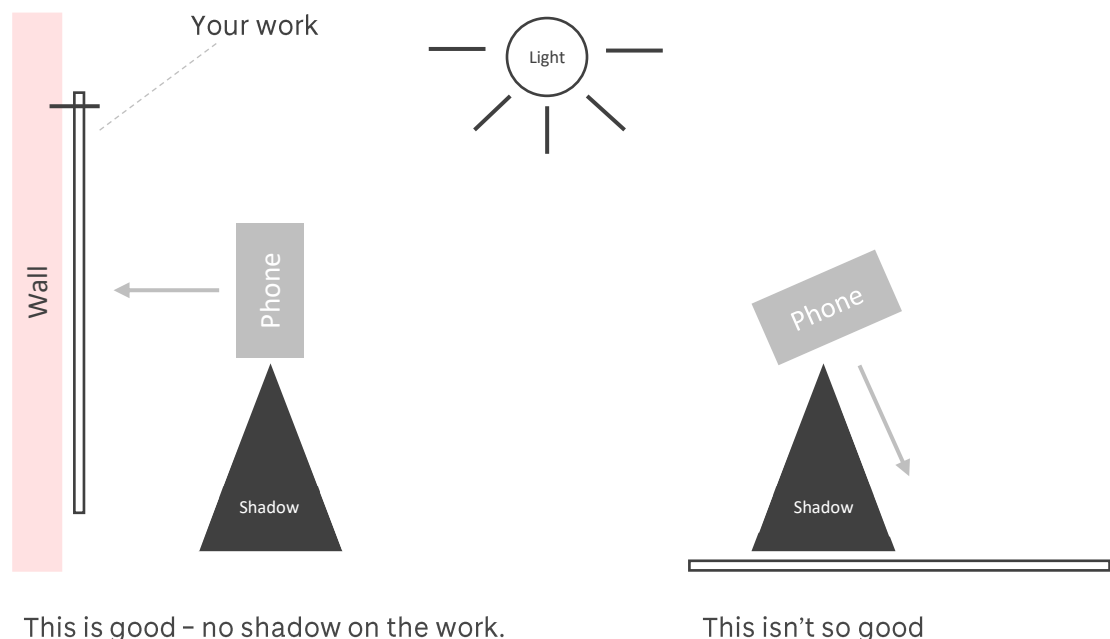
# Documenting your work

## Photographing your work

- For larger pieces of work, or if you do not have a scanner, you will need to photograph it.
- You will need a clean space with good lighting - natural is best if you don't have professional studio lights.
- Place your work against a blank background. For 3D work you can create a curved background large sheets of paper. Alternatively you can tack your work to a clean, white wall.
- Some work will photograph better outside or on location

## Camera

- Your mobile phone camera should be good enough.
- Remember to hold the camera square to the work - not on an angle - otherwise your work won't be square in the photo
- Think about lighting - are you casting a shadow?!
- For flat work, take your photographs as close to your work as possible. For 3D work, make sure you have good space around your work. You might also want to photograph your work from different angles.
- Make sure that flash is turned off, and if possible, adjust the white balance of your camera to match the light you are using.



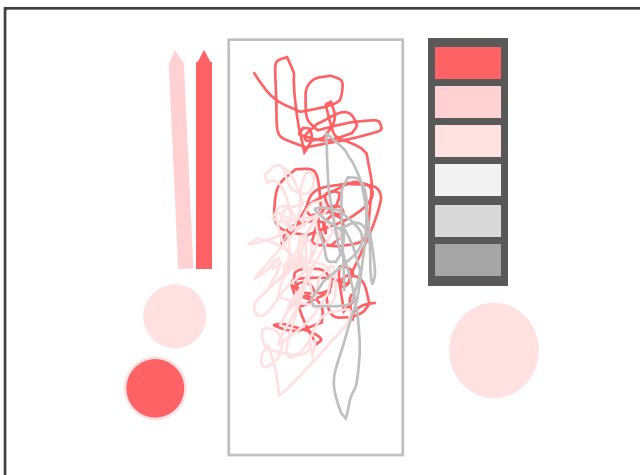
# Documenting your work

## Scanning your work

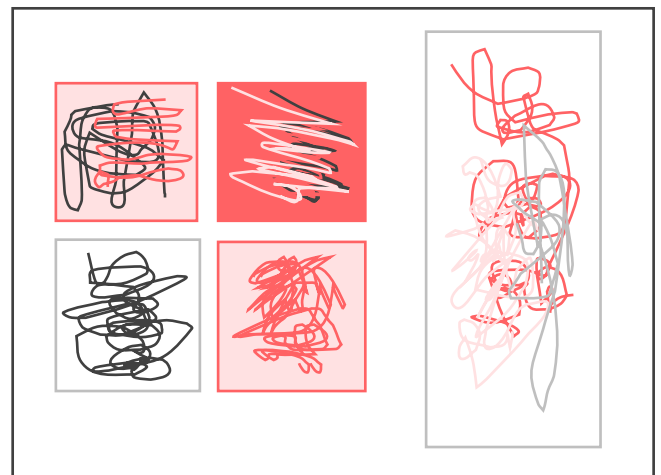
- For smaller work and for sketchbooks, it's probably easier to use a scanner or a scanner app such as Adobe Scan.
- For bulky sketchbooks you might need to press down as it scans to avoid a grey shadow on the spine of the book.

## Editing your work

- Make sure that your work looks its best by cropping out any borders or backgrounds and/or making the images a little brighter.
- This also isn't the time to show off your photoshop wizardry by changing the colours, creating layers etc. That is making new work! Keep it simple and minimal – and no filters.
- Any photo-editing software will do to help tweak your images – you can download Paint.net for free from [www.getpaint.net](http://www.getpaint.net). Your phone might be able to do the edits that you need, and powerpoint itself has simple editing options in the 'format image' tab.
- Your portfolio isn't a Pinterest or Instagram flat lay – we don't want to see paintbrushes or other stationery in your photos. They take up valuable space and distract from your work.
- See below! The flat lay on the left takes up space that could be better used to show off development work.



Flat lay – work with art materials.  
No development and can't clearly  
see the work



Good development and final piece.  
Everything is clear with room to  
breathe!



# Documenting your work

## SQA Work

The sheets that your SQA work is organised onto are too crowded for university portfolios. They often have your statement attached too which takes up a lot of space.

If you simply photograph the entire sheet and put it on a slide, it's hard for selectors to see each individual piece of work. When they try to zoom in the images become blurry.

Our recommendation is that you photograph each piece of work on the sheet individually and upload it into the portfolio as a separate image file.

For design sheets where you might have odd shaped pieces of work attached, it would be great to crop out the background or corners of other pieces of work.

This will make everything cleaner, brighter and easier to see.

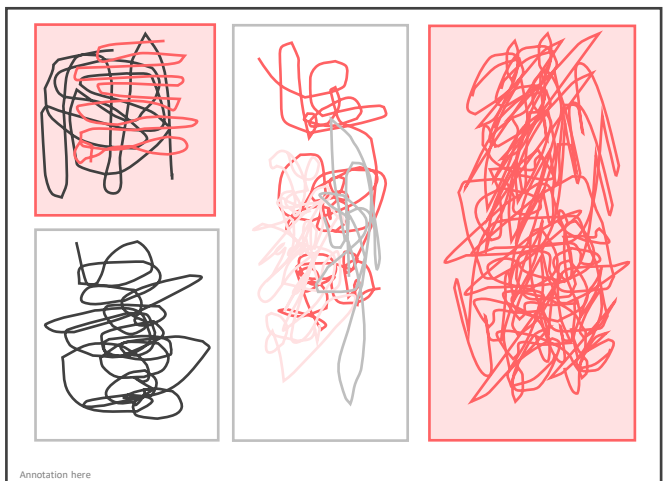
Here's an impression of a full SQA sheet.

It's pretty crowded, the text takes up a lot of space, the images are wonky, the background and borders are distracting



...and here's the same 'work' presented differently

Everything is neat and tidy, the work is filling the space more room to breathe, the white background allows the work to be the main focus, annotation is simple



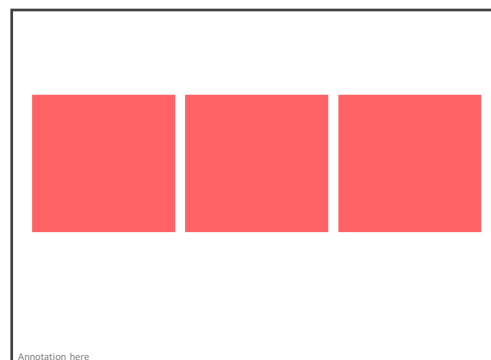
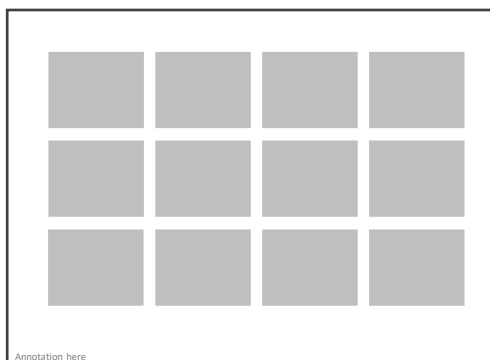
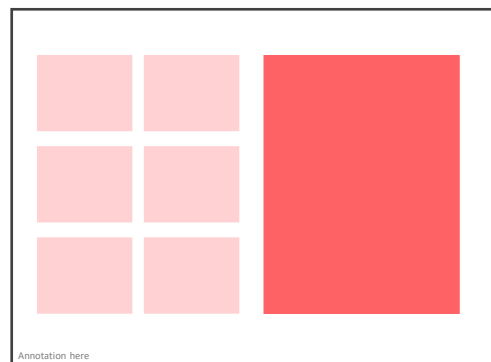
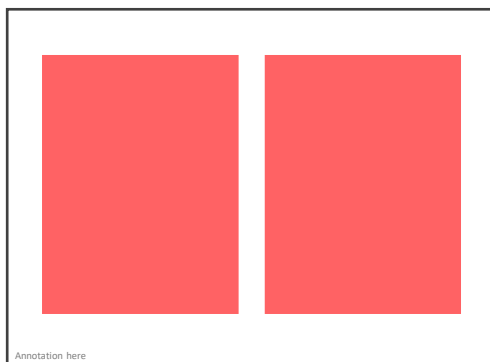
# Putting your slides together

ACES favourite software for this is Microsoft Powerpoint as it's easy to move your work around and you can save it in a variety of formats (e.g. PDF or JPEG).

## Getting started

- Open PowerPoint and create 15-20 blank slides – standard width, not widescreen.
- You can start to Import your photographs and arrange them on your slides.
- It's a good idea to have a rough plan of what each slide will show as you go along – but powerpoint makes it so easy to move things around. Be flexible!
- Presentation is important, so take care in how you arrange your work. Pay attention to the details – align your work well, make good use of the space and include multiple images per slide.
- You can include photography, film and animation work.
- For 'final' pieces you might want to give it a whole slide.

## Example layouts – but it really depends on your work!



## Annotation and text

- A small amount of text on each slide is a good idea as it will help selectors know what they are looking at.
- Keep it simple and get to the point – your work should speak for itself.
- Use a clean font and keep it quite small (size 12 maximum). Grey text looks better than black.
- Make sure that your text is tucked away in the corner and is the same on each slide
- Here's an example!
- Edinburgh College of Art allow you to write a small amount of text with each JPEG that you upload.
- Glasgow School of Art and Heriot Watt require an additional statement about your creative work.



### **ACES Portfolio Prep Club**

Mixed media drawing experiments: charcoal, graphite, ink, wax

*Using a variety of media I created my own drawing tools to experiment with mark making.  
I really like the texture of the graphite and ink together.*

## Saving your portfolio

Once you're all done arranging your work, you should compress your images. This will reduce the overall file size. To do this:

- Click on **any image**
- Go to the **format tab** and click on **compress pictures**
- **Untick** the 'apply only to this picture' box and ensure **the 'delete cropped areas of pictures' is ticked.**
- Try selecting the highest target output possible e.g. 'print'
- Click ok and save

### Saving your portfolio as a PDF

File > Save As > PDF - Simple!

If your PDF file size is over the limit then go back to your PowerPoint and compress your images again, but select a lower target output e.g. screen. Re-save your PDF – the file size should be smaller.

### Saving your images as JPEGs

This is slightly more complicated.

- File > Save As > Choose your folder location
- Select JPEG in the 'save as type' drop down > Edit the File Name e.g. Joe Bloggs – UCAS ID – ECA Portfolio
- Click ok
- A box will pop up 'Which slides do you want to export' > Click 'All Slides'
- Find the folder and JPEGs – check each one is under the MB limit by clicking on it. At the bottom of the screen it should say how big it is.

## Resizing your JPEGs

If the file size is too big:

### Option 1

- Repeat the image compression in your PowerPoint, and re-save all of your JPEGs

### Option 2

- Open each JPEG in Photoshop/Paint
- Resize your image by percentage – this will depend on how oversized your image is. Try 95% at first.
- Save your image, check it again. NOTE – Photoshop might show the file size as larger than it actually is, so check File Manager or Computer.
- Repeat until it is below the file size limit.

## Uploading your portfolio

You will receive instructions from each of the courses that you have applied for – be sure to follow them carefully.

Most universities now have an online portal that you will need to log in to. Check what you need in advance and make sure that any log in details are working.

## What happens next?

You should receive confirmation that the university has received your portfolio.

If the university/course only requires a digital portfolio (no interview) then you will receive a decision from them in due course.

If the university/course is using the digital portfolio as part of the selection for interview, then you will either be invited to an interview or be rejected.

Sometimes this process can take several weeks. Remember – no news is not bad news!

# University portfolio requirements 2024

Frustratingly, different universities and courses have different requirements. It's essential to do your research and prepare early.

The following advice is correct as of August 2022.

Please see individual university websites for full details and deadlines.

## University of Abertay

- Courses in Computer Arts
  - Digital Portfolio, 10 images
  - Deadline: please see website

## University of Dundee

- All courses APART FROM Architecture
  - Digital portfolio (15 slides, PDF, 50MB limit)
  - **Deadline: March**
  - You **may** be invited to submit a second portfolio or attend an interview in March/April.

## University of Edinburgh

- Architecture
  - No portfolio requirement.
  - No interview.
- Courses in Art and Design
  - Digital portfolio only. 25 slides.
  - ECA are announcing their updated plans about format and how to submit in autumn 2023.
  - **Deadline:** February
  - No interview.
- Film and Television
  - One digital video file or URL to one video, up to 5 minutes, accompanied by a short passage of text. In addition, you will be asked to give written answers to three questions.
  - **Deadline:** February
  - No interview.

# University portfolio requirements 2024

## Edinburgh Napier

- Film, Interior & Spatial Design, Photography and Product Design
  - As part of the application process, you will usually be invited to submit a portfolio and/or attend an interview.
  - Please see their website for individual course requirements.

## Glasgow School of Art

Art and Design courses have a two-step application process. Step one is a digital portfolio, and from this you may be invited to a zoom interview.

Architecture will make offers based on the digital portfolio only.

- Architecture: 10 images/slides – JPEG or PDF
- Design subjects: 15 images/slides – JPEG or PDF
- Fine Art subjects: 20 images/slides – JPEG or PDF
  
- Each JPEG can be no longer than 2MB and 72dpi resolution
- Ideally each JPEG should have dimensions of 1024x763px (standard screen dimensions, not widescreen).
- PDFs must be no larger than 50MB

GSA also requires a 500 word statement. This is separate to the UCAS personal statement, and must focus on your creative work only.

**Digital portfolio deadline:** February

**Interview:** February - April

## Heriot Watt University

- All creative courses
  - Digital Portfolio
  - 10-15 images – JPEG or PDF
  - Heriot-Watt also require a creative statement. This is separate to the UCAS personal statement and must focus on your creative work only.
  - Interviews are usually held from early January.

## University of the Highlands and Islands

- All creative courses
  - Digital Portfolio
  - Interviews are usually held from February.
  - Please see their website for individual course requirements

# University portfolio requirements 2024

## Queen Margaret University

- Courses in Costume Design and Construction
  - Digital Portfolio, 14 images
  - You will also be asked to complete a short design exercise and attend an online interview

## Robert Gordon University

- Architecture
  - Usually no portfolio is required if you are studying or have studied a creative subject at Higher or Advanced Higher.
  - No interview.
- Courses in Art and Design
  - Digital Portfolio, 25 images, uploaded to [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)
  - Digital portfolio deadline: February
  - You **may** be invited to attend an interview in March/April.

## Strathclyde University

- Architecture
  - Usually no portfolio is required if you are studying or have studied a creative subject at Higher or Advanced Higher.
  - No interview.

## University of the West of Scotland

- Courses in Computer Animation Arts
  - You may be required to submit a portfolio





1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

## Notes

