

Choice of topic

The EE topic may relate to an area of the Diploma Programme visual arts course, but students can also choose to explore other areas of the subject. Crucially, the topic must reflect their particular interest and enthusiasm within the visual arts.

Sources of ideas may include:

- the student’s own art-making processes and resolved pieces
- the student’s visual arts journal.

Topics to avoid

- A topic that a student can answer by summarizing general secondary sources, such as universal art history textbooks and encyclopedias.
- A topic that is likely to lead to an EE that is essentially narrative or descriptive in nature, such as one that covers many aspects of art history or particularly long periods of time.
- Biographical studies of artists—unless they address a specific research question so that the student can arrive at a particular, and preferably personal, conclusion.

Visual arts and other subjects

The topic must relate directly to the visual arts. Students may find that they need to submit their essay under another subject. For example:

- Essays on “green” architecture that focus on technology rather than esthetic considerations would be better submitted under environmental systems and societies.
- Essays about film that do not focus on the visual aspects probably belong under film studies.

Examples of topics

These examples are just for guidance. Students must ensure their choice of topic is focused (left-hand column) rather than broad (right-hand column).

Focused topics 	Broad topics 
The extent to which Grady Gerbracht’s assertion that the role of the artist is “to become the embodiment of a person, a citizen, a metaphor” is particularly embodied in interactive artworks	Installation art
The artistic significance of recent poles raised by the First Nations of Haida-Gwai	The art of Native North American people
The extent to which the manipulation of cadavers can be considered art: an investigation of the interdependence of science, art and the representation of death in the works of Damien Hirst and Gunther von Hagens	Damien Hirst’s and Gunther von Hagens’s representation of death

Research question

Once they have chosen their topic, students must frame a focused research question.

The connection between the research question and the visual arts should be more than just incidental. Otherwise, students risk introducing material that is of marginal relevance, will confuse their inquiry and weaken their argument.

It is the task of the supervisor to ensure that the question:

- can be answered using artistic sources available to the student
- will encourage and enable the student to apply relevant art theory or concepts
- allows a systematic investigation that demonstrates critical artistic analysis and detailed understanding.

Students should be encouraged to formulate a research question of personal interest and to draw on a variety of sources to support their arguments. They should also be helped to identify and choose appropriate sources, both primary and secondary, and appropriate methods of research.

In some instances, it may become clear at an early stage in the research that too few sources are available to permit such an investigation. In such cases, students should change their focus.