

GCSE PHOTOGRAPHY FAQs

1. Can I photograph whatever I want?

For the GCSE coursework all students will follow themes and take photographs of subjects set by the teacher. Examples of themes covered include Portraiture, Landscapes, Architecture and Surrealism. However for the mock exam (beginning June of year 10) and the exam project (beginning January of year 11) students will be able to choose what to photograph from a number of themed titles set by the AQA exam board, and by this stage students will have learned how to present their work in their books effectively.

2. How much writing is involved?

Developing the ability to analyse images is an important part of the course as it shows understanding and powers of interpretation. Annotation must be present in students' photography books. You will be encouraged to develop your own opinions of imagery by giving written responses and will also be expected to make notes about their own processes and understanding.

3. Do I need experience of photography to do GCSE?

No, however you need to have an interest in images. Students will be required to take lots of photos outside of school so it suits people who like being independent and creative.

4. What equipment do I need to take photography? Can we use our phones to take our pictures?

You do not need any specialist equipment to be accepted onto the course. We teach students how to use DSLR cameras and encourage the use of mobile phone cameras to access the subject out of lessons. To support the transference of files between mobile devices or home computers and school hard drives, we teach the use of Onedrive in Office365 (the most efficient way to store, organise and manage digital files). Alternatively, students can bring images with them on a USB stick.

5. How does the exam work? Is there a written exam?

The exam project accounts for 40% of the GCSE course. At the beginning of January in Year 11, students will be given an exam paper set by the AQA examining board. This exam paper provides a number of themes and students are required to choose one to respond to. Past themes include Reflections, Light and Dark, Texture, Out of the Ordinary and Water. The project lasts for 16 weeks (inclusive of 3 weeks of holiday) and all the work completed in this period will be marked and put towards their final exam grade. At the end of this period students have two days in the dept in exam conditions completing their project in the form of a final piece. There is no separate written exam.

6. What work counts towards the coursework?

The coursework accounts for 60% of the course. You will start your photography coursework from your very first lesson. All work produced in year 9, 10 and up to January of year 11 counts towards the coursework. If choosing this option students must understand that they need to work independently at home to build on the work they do in the classroom.

7. How much of Photography involves Photoshop? Do I need experience of this?

You do not need to have used Photoshop prior to the GCSE. We will teach you certain aspects of it because it is the leading software in image manipulation in the world – and it's super fun too! Whilst there is a lot of Photoshop used, we also teach many craft based activities as well. When you start choosing your own titles and methods in the second half of the course, you can choose whether to develop ideas using Photoshop or using craft activities. There are lots of different ways to make interesting imagery and an effective response, all of equal value.

8. Which teacher will I get? Does it make a difference to what projects we do?

You will not know which teacher you get until the timetabling has been finalised for that coming year. It does not make a difference which projects you follow with your teacher; all projects will follow the guidelines for the AQA board and the assessment criteria. You will be learning lots of new skills with your new teacher.

9. Do I have to be 'creative' to do well at Photography?

The word 'creative' means different things to different people. Creativity is definitely an important aspect of Photography, and we will teach you ways to be 'creative'; how to expand ideas, how to share your opinions, and the ability and desire to experiment, use your imagination and to be able to record ideas down in an appropriate way. Perhaps rather than focus on the word 'creativity', consider if you care about your work and your presentation. Are you interested in images and how things look? If so, this is a good starting point.

10. How do I know if I'll be any good – or interested – in photography GCSE?

If you are inquisitive about the creative world, especially photography and you like exploring creative ideas, then that is a great start. Our aim is to make Photography a hobby, and we do this by teaching new skills and by bringing imagery to life. Ultimately, how 'good' you will be is dependant on the effort applied; the more you put in, the more fantastic the subject becomes.