

How to Excel in GCSE Photography: The Exam

A Simple Guide for Students and Parents

What the GCSE Photography Exam Is

- The GCSE Photography exam is not a written test. It is a 10-hour practical exam completed under supervised conditions, usually across several sessions.
- Before the exam, students are given several weeks of preparation time. During this period, they are expected to research, plan, experiment, and develop ideas in their sketchbook or digital portfolio.
- The final exam photograph(s) are assessed alongside all preparatory work. Examiners look at the whole creative process — including research, experiments, contact sheets, edits, and written analysis — not just the final images.

What Students Should Focus On

During the preparation period, students should:

- Choose a theme or idea they are genuinely interested in
- Take first-hand photographs (their own images, not downloaded ones)
- Research relevant photographers and clearly show how their work influences ideas
- Experiment with camera settings, lighting, composition, locations, and viewpoints
- Explore editing techniques using appropriate software
- Refine ideas by selecting, improving, and developing stronger images
- Plan the final shoot(s) carefully before the exam begins
- During the 10-hour exam, students work independently. This time is for capturing and producing final photographic outcomes, not for starting new research. Students may refer to their sketchbook or digital planning for guidance.

How Parents Can Support at Home

Parents do not need specialist photography knowledge to be supportive. Small practical actions can make a big difference.

Helpful support includes:

- Providing a quiet, organised space for editing or planning
- Encouraging steady progress rather than last-minute rushing
- Asking open questions such as:
“What are you photographing next?” or “How are you developing your idea?”
- Helping students organise equipment, memory cards, and files
- Encouraging confidence and creativity rather than perfection
- Celebrating effort, experimentation, and improvement is far more valuable than focusing only on the final images.

How to Prepare for the 10-Hour Exam

Before the exam, students should:

- Practise any camera techniques or editing skills they plan to use
- Check that equipment is working (camera, battery, memory card, software access)
- Prepare locations, props, models, or lighting setups in advance
- Write a simple step-by-step exam plan
- Understand editing time, printing requirements (if relevant), and file organisation
- Get enough rest and arrive calm, confident, and organised
- Parents can help by checking equipment is ready and encouraging a sensible routine.

The GCSE Photography exam is the final stage of a long creative journey. It is not something to fear — it is an opportunity to demonstrate skills, creativity, and what you have learnt throughout the course.

Useful Websites

Artyideas.com - for artist research – created by Mrs Crawford specifically to help students with AO1

www.photographywithmisswilson.weebly.com lots of student friendly resources written specifically by Mrs Crawford for GCSE photography students

[GCSE Photography: A Student Revision Guide](#) - useful technical photography guide

[GCSE-Photography-Knowledge-Organiser.pdf](#) - visual

[Student Resources | Tate](#) - art gallery website featuring resources for GCSE and A-level students