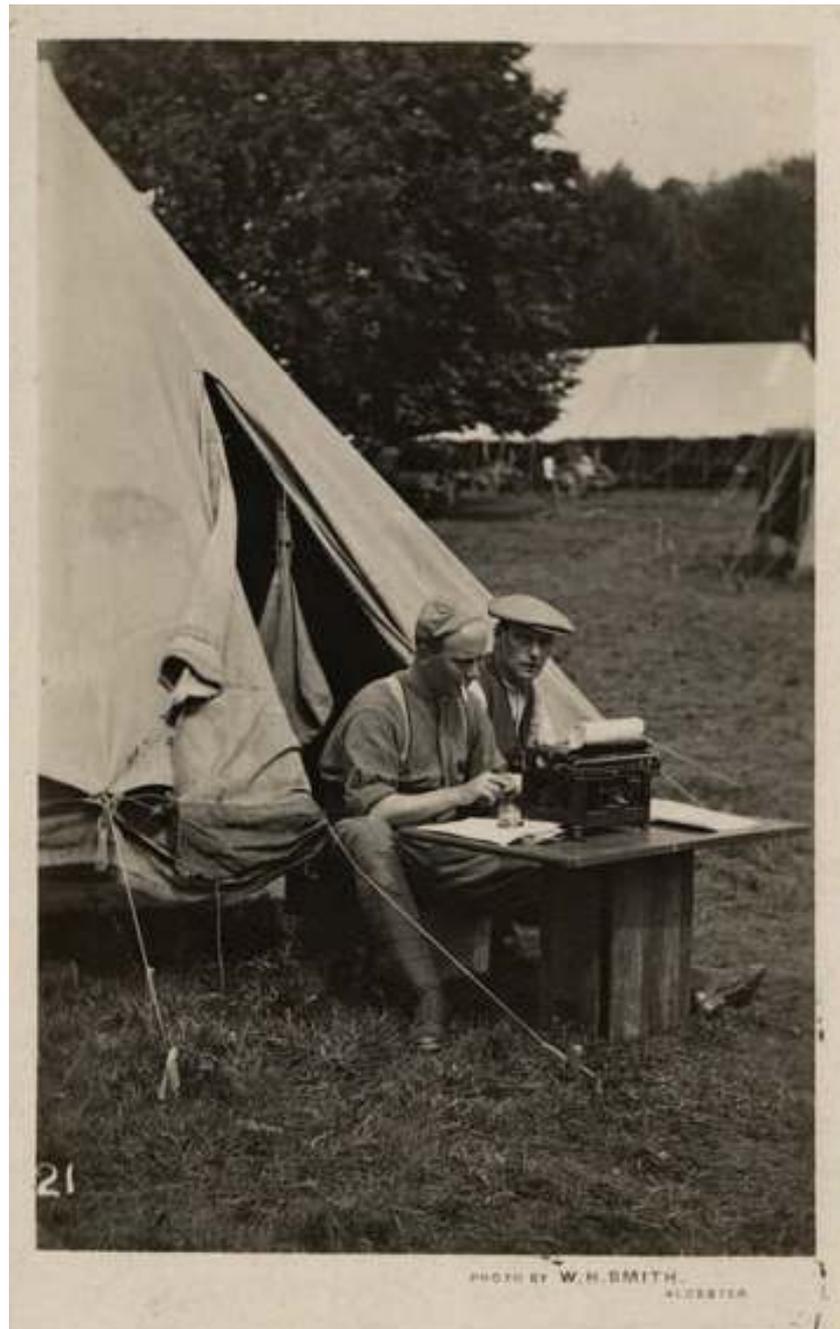


Photography 3

Contextual Studies



Level HE6 – 40 CATS

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Cover image: W. H. Smith, *Two men sitting outside a tent with a typewriter on a table before them*, 1915

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Introduction

“While some people may think of theory as the work of reading difficult essays by European intellectuals, all practices presuppose a theory. Even someone who claims to be ‘against theory’ is, ironically, actually articulating a theoretical position on theory (albeit one that is far from new or very useful). Certainly theory can be difficult, but so is ice-skating to the novice. Like most things, theory becomes easier with practice; just like new words and concepts that inevitably belong to that discipline become easier with practice too.”

(Bate, 2009, p.25)

Contained within this course is the task that you may have been looking forward to since you enrolled on your first OCA course: your extended written project. On the other hand, though, the prospect of producing an extended piece of writing such as this may have been the cause of considerable anxiety to you. If this sounds familiar, remember you are not alone. Completing a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree extended written project is a substantial task, even for someone with considerable experience of researching and writing. But many have been in your situation and have made it through relatively unscathed! If you're entering into this course with some trepidation you should find that the tasks contained within it have been organised to allow you to work up to your extended written project in manageable stages, and that you'll get as much out of this course as previous practical ones.

Course aims and outcomes

The aims of this course are to:

- support you to develop your ideas and produce a critique that provides a theoretical framework for your portfolio of work
- help you gain comprehensive knowledge as well as critical and contextual understanding of the photographic field of your choice
- consolidate your critical, analytical and reflective skills so that you can articulate abstract concepts into coherent written information
- build your confidence in applying information management skills and appropriate technology to produce a written critique of high academic standard.

On successful completion of the course you'll be able to:

- undertake research and study demonstrating comprehensive knowledge of your area of specialisation and build a theoretical framework for your creative practice
- synthesise and articulate your critical, contextual and conceptual knowledge and understanding into a coherent critique of advanced academic standard
- apply your own criteria of judgement, review, criticise and take responsibility for your own work with minimum guidance
- select and apply information management skills and use appropriate technology in the production of an accomplished critique with minimal supervision.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria for *Contextual Studies* are listed below. If you're going to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, make sure you take note of these criteria and consider how each of the assignments you complete demonstrates evidence of them. On completion of each assignment, and before you send your assignment to your tutor, test yourself against the criteria; in other words, do a self-assessment, and see how you think you would do. Note down your findings for each assignment you've completed in your learning log, noting all your perceived strengths and weaknesses, taking into account the criteria every step of the way. This will be helpful for your tutor to see, as well as helping you prepare for assessment.

- **Demonstration of subject based knowledge and understanding** – Broad and comparative understanding of subject content; knowledge of the appropriate historical, intellectual, cultural or institutional contexts (25%).
- **Demonstration of research skills** – Information retrieval and organisation; use of IT to assist research; ability to evaluate IT sources; the ability to design and carry out a research project, locate and evaluate evidence from a wide range of primary and secondary sources (visual, oral, aural or textual) (25%).
- **Demonstration of critical and evaluation skills** – Engagement with concepts, values and debates; evidence of analysis, reflection, critical thinking, synthesis, interpretation in relation to relevant issues and enquiries (25%).
- **Communication** – The ability to communicate ideas and knowledge in written and spoken form, including presentation skills (25%).

The course at a glance

Part one: Visual culture in practice

The first part of *Contextual Studies* will introduce you to or expand your knowledge of some of the fundamental themes and movements within art, design and visual culture over the past century. You'll be familiar with some of these already but this is an opportunity for you to deepen your understanding and potentially identify future areas of research. There will be a short narrative on each of these topics, followed by an essay to read and take notes on. For your first assignment you'll write a 1,000-word essay that will introduce your practical work (the work that you are doing or have done in *Body of Work*) to your tutor and relate it to one of the themes discussed in Part One. This assignment is diagnostic and won't count towards your final grade if you have your work formally assessed

Part two: Literature review

This part of the course will help you to develop your research skills – in particular, how to identify relevant research resources and evaluate and scrutinise them successfully (e.g. the difference between 'narrative' and 'analysis'). You'll look at different types of primary and secondary resources and consider what 'texts' are useful and appropriate to incorporate within a piece of academic writing. Assignment Two is a 2,000-word literature review, which you'll use as the starting point for your extended written project research.

Part three: Writing your extended written project

Part Three looks at advancing your writing skills, such as how to structure your extended written project, and is split into three assignments. For Assignment Three you'll submit a plan for your extended written project plus a sample text. For Assignment Four you'll submit the first draft of your extended written project (5,000 words); your assignment should be as complete as possible at this stage. Following feedback from your tutor, you'll present your final draft for Assignment Five.

Much of the content of Parts Two and Three will be helpful for your first assignment, so read through the entire course guide before you begin.