

NCAD
Portfolio
Guidelines
2026

**NATIONAL
COLLEGE
OF ART
& DESIGN**

What is a Portfolio?

It all starts with an idea...

A portfolio is a collection of art and/or design work you have created yourself. It is an opportunity for you to showcase your ideas, your skills and your creativity. We want to see how your imagination can generate a rich and visually interesting body of work. Building a portfolio will demonstrate your commitment to working through a process from initial ideas and observations right through to thoughtfully researched and developed work. We want to see more than your finished work...

Show your process through notebooks, worksheets, sketch pads etc.



What to Include?

What to Include?

Work to your strengths. If you can draw or paint or sew or sculpt, mould, carve, photograph, film, create, imagine, explore, or turn the ordinary into something special, show us! Be creative and excite us with your work! Include recent or current work. Your portfolio reflects how you think and how you work now.

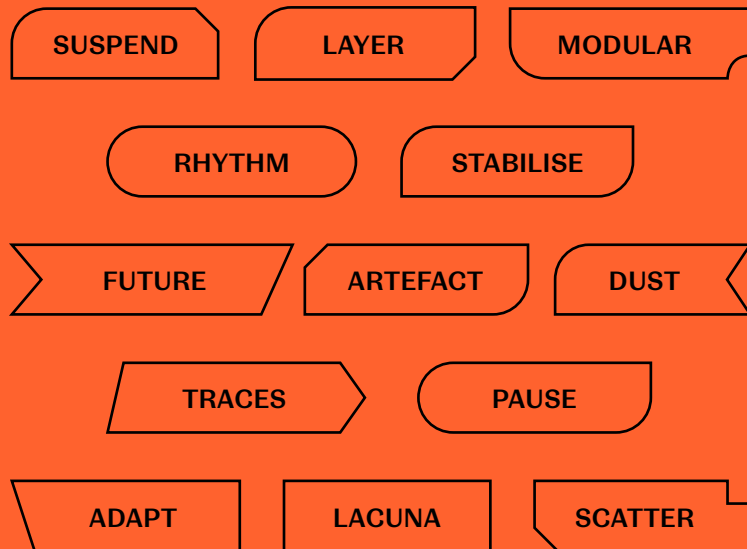
Work completed within the last two years is relevant whether undertaken independently or as part of projects for school-leaving or further education assessments. Your notebooks give us an insight into how you think. It is where you visually record ideas that you would like to develop. Notebooks are not perfect. Use them to show us the problems and inventive solutions you encounter along the creative journey.

What is a Portfolio?



How do I use this guide?

The guide is designed as a resource to help structure your portfolio for presentation. Use it as a reference to help frame your work in a way that shows your creative thinking. Looking for inspiration to get started? These suggested Guide Words could help trigger your imagination:



Guide Words can spark ideas, inform research and help to build a theme or narrative around your portfolio. Keep in mind that your portfolio will be reviewed by each department you apply to. Focus your work so that it is relevant to your preferred department(s). Unsure as to which area of Fine Art or Design suits you best? Visit NCAD website - QR code on backpage.

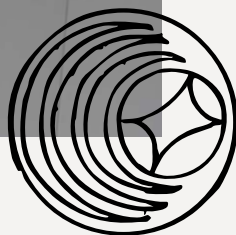
Things to consider

Use primary sources. Show us you can make direct observations using a variety of media and drawing processes. Experiment with line, tone, colour, form and surface. Mix things up! Your research should be visually rich, well-considered and show thorough exploration of ideas using a variety of material and processes.

Who or what inspires you? Use your notebooks to show an awareness of developments within the creative industries as well as an interest in individual artists, art movements and/or designers.

Be brave. The portfolio journey can be a lonely one. Seek out a support network and look to family, friends and teachers for suggestions and opinions as you work. Think of the narrative of your portfolio and how it is composed. Organise and then upload your work sequentially to show the links between your observations, research and creative outcomes. Let your work speak for itself. Present your work so that your work is visually accessible. You should upload between 10 and 20 images/worksheets/pieces including at least 1 notebook (see page 18).





Entry Routes/Courses

First Year Common Entry — AD101
Education & Art or Design — AD202

Drawing, Painting, Mark-Making / Observation /
 Experimentation / Ideas Worksheets / Creative
 Notebooks / Primary Sources

Common Entry brings together a mix of creative minds. You will learn as much from your peers as from your tutors and lectures. You will broaden your frame of reference, discover new potential and be guided as to which area of art or design fits your specific skillset.

Your First Year Common Entry portfolio should be inquisitive and deeply explorative. Using primary sources for inspiration, show us your fascination with the world around you. We want to see you combine your curiosity with observational, research and problem-solving skills to re-interpret your surroundings and develop new forms of visual expression.



Communication Design

Graphic Design and Moving Image Design — AD102

Communication / Problem Solving / Design Briefs /
Drawing & Observation / Typography / Creative Notebooks

Graphic and Moving Image Designers are excellent communicators. Your drawing skills are rich and vibrant, and often explore rather than just represent. You like to work from structured design briefs.

Your Graphic and Moving Image Design Portfolio should reflect your interest in communicating through design. Show us your strong image-making and problem-solving skills. Demonstrate how you can combine text and image to create an interesting aesthetic that communicates a clear message. Play with scale, tell stories, and always consider the message your viewer/user/audience will receive.

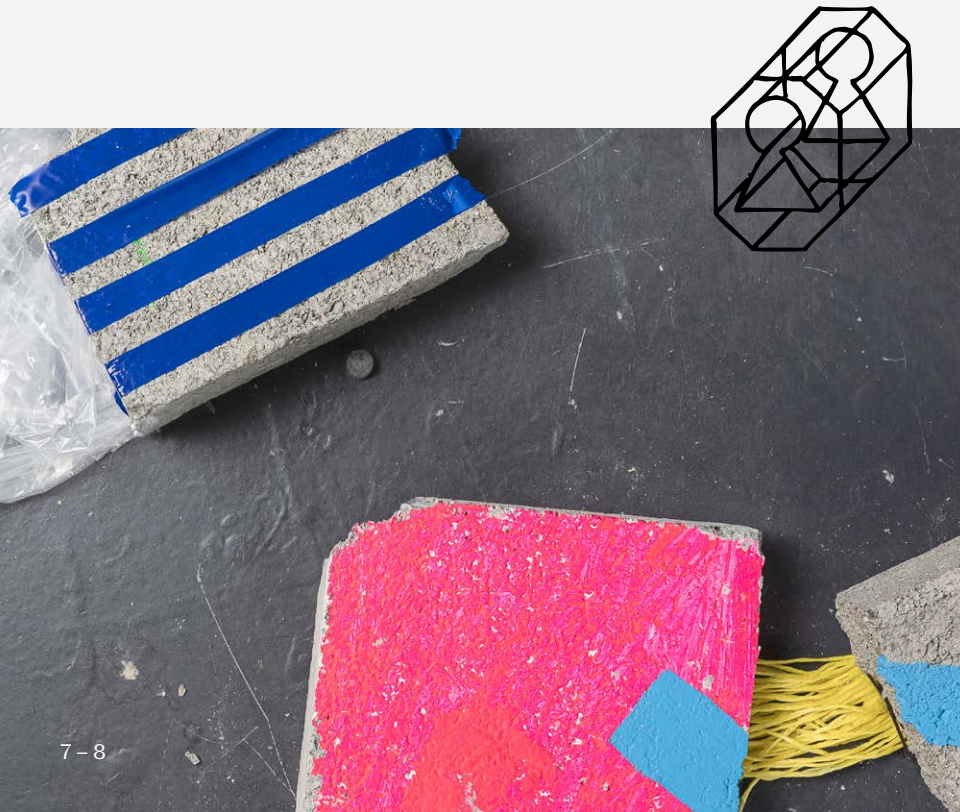
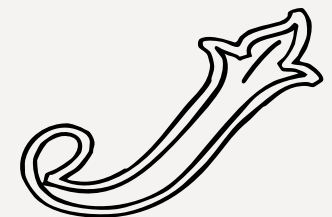


Illustration — AD217

Imagination / Problem Solving / Visual Language /
Creative Thinking / Composition & Narrative /
Engaging Aesthetic

Illustrators have rich and versatile imaginations. You solve complex design problems with seemingly effortless skill, often distilling complicated information into a simple form.

Your Illustration portfolio should be rich in various styles of illustration. How, for example, might you illustrate one of the guide-words? If you had to illustrate an idea how would that differ between say a billboard to a postage stamp? You should focus on solving design problems.



Design for Body and Environment

Textile & Surface Design and Jewellery & Objects — AD103

We're looking for creative students who like to experiment, think deeply, and explore their own ideas. If you're curious, imaginative, and not afraid to try new things, Textile & Surface Design or Jewellery & Objects could be for you!

Your Textile & Surface Design (TSD) portfolio should show that you're confident using painting, drawing, and mixed media in creative ways; a focus on texture, pattern, structure, 3D forms, and even photography; a strong sense of composition (how you arrange things), use of colour, and original ideas; research showing you're aware of modern trends and materials in textile and fashion or interior design.

Your Jewellery & Objects (J&O) portfolio should show your design process and the ideas behind your work; strong drawing skills using different materials and styles; 3D work that shows how you work with materials and explore shape, texture, and surface; your own creative style, and how you experiment and think like a designer.



Fashion Design — AD211

At NCAD, Fashion Design is inspired by Ireland's history of craft, textiles, and creativity. We love big ideas, trying new things, and thinking differently. We're looking for students who are curious, imaginative, and not afraid to challenge the usual way of doing things.

Your portfolio is a way to show how your ideas grow and develop. We want to see how you research, experiment, and use your creativity. You should include work with soft materials or 3D design on or around the body, this might include experimenting with shape, texture, or wearable forms as a way of exploring your ideas.

Your Fashion Design portfolio should show any work you've done with clothes or textiles; customising or reworking garments, knitting, stitching, printing on fabric, or experimenting with materials in creative ways.

Design for Body and Environment

Applying for AD103 Textile & Surface Design and Jewellery & Objects OR AD211 Fashion Design - your portfolio should show:

What to include

Research & Idea Development – Show us how you take an idea and grow it into a design. Start with what inspires you, then show how your ideas change and grow.

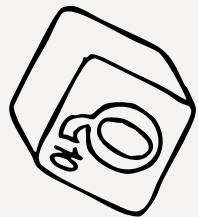
Drawing & Design Communication – Show off your drawing skills. Use different styles - observational, realistic, technical, gestural, loose sketches or experimental images.

2D to 3D Thinking – Show how your flat drawings or designs become 3D shapes like clothing, objects, or interior ideas.

Materials, Colour, Texture & Pattern

How to present your portfolio

Make sure your portfolio is well-organised and tells the story of your creative process. Everything should connect, from your research and sketches to your final samples and designs. Include sketchbooks that show how your ideas developed along the way showing you're aware of modern trends and materials in textile and fashion, interior design, jewellery and objects.



Product and Interaction Design

Product Design – AD212

Problem Solving / Idea Generation / Concept Development / Presentation / Creative Notebooks / Drawing & Model Making

Product Designers are problem solvers for everyday life. You identify design flaws quickly and want to find a solution. You want to help people on a practical level and make the world a better place, one design at a time.

Your Product Design portfolio should show existing products and think how you could improve on their design. Challenge yourself to create a solution for an everyday problem.



Interaction Design – AD222

Digital Experience / Technology / Engagement / Cutting-Edge Design

Interaction Design (IxD) is a broad field that ranges from designing apps to creating interactive environments.

Your Interaction Design portfolio should show how we experience things and how to solve problems. That could take any form. For example making clothes to interact with the world differently, or building a clock that makes people think about time in a new way. Your projects do not have to be digital but if you like to code, play with Arduino, or design websites or apps, include these too.

Fine Art and Applied Art – AD104

Fine Art Pathways

Media / Painting / Print / Sculpture

Individual Expression / Visual Awareness / Observation
Skills / Subject Engagement / Imagination & Interpretation

Fine Artists are thinkers and observers. You see and interpret the world differently and have a highly individual visual expression. You may find that you work with traditional and new materials and media.

Your Fine Art portfolio should show an emphasis on visual awareness. You should look at how you express yourself, explore a variety of media and engage with your subject matter. Original digital artwork, photography and audio-visual work is welcomed and encouraged within your Fine Art portfolio.



Applied Art Pathways

Textile Art & Artefact / Ceramics & Glass

Please include a short personal statement about your interest in Textile Art and Artefact and/or Ceramics and Glass with your portfolio. Max 100 words.

Your Ceramics and Glass portfolio should show

interests in working with hard materials; observational drawing; interests in form/volume and sculpture; interests in the 'making' processes; command of skills and keenness for craftsmanship; interests in traditional techniques alongside new technologies and approaches; an ability to convey ideas and thinking; and thinking through making.

Your Textile Art & Artefact portfolio should show

strong drawing through a wide range of media and interpretations; interests in colour, texture and detail; interests in traditional as alongside new technologies and approaches; interests in historical, social and cultural narratives; interests in the 'making' processes, command of skills and keenness for craftsmanship; an ability to convey ideas and thinking; and thinking through making.

How is my portfolio reviewed?

Creative Enquiry and Visual Research – Begin with gatherings. Show us how you observe the world around you. Visually describe, explain, record and invent through real-life observation.

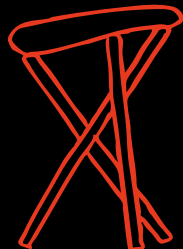
Idea Development and Material/Technical Exploration – Develop your ideas beyond the known or purely observed. Be playful, imaginative, experimental and inventive. We want to see how your research can produce new creative outcomes.

Critical Judgement, Selection and Resolution – Identify which ideas have the most potential. Take at least one of your creative proposals and develop it thoroughly to a level of completion. Show how your creative outcomes and solutions have evolved as part of the research process.

Other considerations:

Commitment – The review panels will assess your commitment to the portfolio process. They want to see that you can sustain your work and follow through with your ideas.

Suitability – In addition, the panels from different areas will look to see the extent that you have addressed the specific portfolio requirements of each entry route as outlined in the previous pages.



Find out more

If you would like more information, guidance, and support on how to **begin working on your portfolio**, how to prepare your portfolio for various study pathway options at NCAD, **sample portfolios from current NCAD students**, guidelines on how to **submit** your portfolio, **FAQs** - as well as information on free **open days and events** - go to our website.

Click [Study At NCAD](#) and then click [Undergraduate Portfolio](#)



Join the Undergraduate Mailing List to receive updates and notifications on undergrad study at NCAD:



This guide is kept deliberately short and open for interpretation. We want you to create:

Your Portfolio – Your Way.

Portfolio submissions to NCAD are digital

An online submission process does not change what we are asking of you in terms of how you develop your work, the processes you use and how you document that process, including the use of worksheets and notebooks (see page 5-14). However, you will need to document your work digitally through scanning/photography/film.



When can I start to submit my digital Portfolio?

You can start your NCAD Portfolio Submission as soon as you have applied to the CAO for 2026. You will need your 2026 CAO number which is an 8-digit number beginning with '26'. If you do not use this number it may result in a delay or inability to match you with your score.

The Portfolio Submission Platform will be open from November 2025 right up until the closing date, allowing you to submit your work at your own pace.

You can save your progress and return to review and edit as many times as you like, up until the deadline of 17:00 on 6th February 2026 IST. Please check the NCAD website for updates.

Match your CAO application

Only submit a portfolio for an NCAD course that you have listed on your CAO application. Otherwise your portfolio may not be reviewed or you may not receive a score for a course that is not listed on your CAO application.

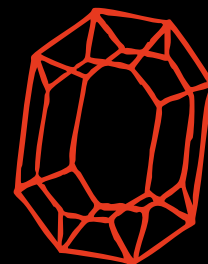
Like applying to the CAO, it is your responsibility to make sure your Portfolio Submission has been made correctly and submitted on time.

What will I need?

You can use a smartphone camera to document (photograph/video) your work. Please use the best quality smartphone camera that is available to you. Make sure you have nice lighting: natural light works best and don't forget to give the lens a wipe!

How to document your work

A standard portfolio contains between 10 and 20 A1 /A2 or A3 worksheets as well as at least 1 notebook. Each worksheet can contain more than one artwork / drawing / sketch.



You will need to document all your worksheets, as image files or as PDFs. It is a good idea to limit the number of separate files you upload, it can work well to combine a number of worksheets into a single PDF.

You can document your notebook as a set of images in a PDF. Alternatively, you can take a video of your notebook by recording as you turn the pages. If you make a video, you do not need to narrate it or talk us through each page. Remember, whatever format you choose to document your work, the most important factor is that your work is clear and easily legible.



Formats and File Size

You can upload files in the following formats:

- jpeg / jpg / png / gif
- avi / m4v / mov / mp4
- PDF

The maximum file size is 1GB for each file you submit whether that's an image, video or PDF. If your PDF file size exceeds this limit please split the PDF into smaller sized PDFs for upload. If a video file exceeds this limit, please supply a link to YouTube / Vimeo or similar.

Important: We will not be able to review work that is password protected. You cannot supply links to any other website or file sharing app. We will not review any material uploaded to Google Drive, Dropbox, Googlesites, a website you have created yourself, WeTransfer links or anything considered similar. Please ensure any documents are coming directly from your computer.

All your work must be uploaded to the NCAD Portfolio Submission Platform.

Other Considerations

Remove your work from any plastic or other folders that will obscure detail. Place your work flat on a large surface and include the entire sheet in the frame. Aim to document your work in good daylight or under a strong artificial light. Make sure there are no shadows over your work.

Portfolio Submission

Each Restricted NCAD Studio Programme listed on your CAO application will require a portfolio submission on the platform.

For example, if you are applying to AD101 Common Entry and AD102 Graphic Design, you will need to go through the process twice. One portfolio for each course. This allows you the option to tailor your portfolio to suit each course.

If you plan to submit the exact same portfolio for each course then the platform will allow you to make a copy of your submission. We have information about this on our website.

Make sure that the status of your submission is set to "Submitted" before the deadline. If you leave your submission at "In Progress" it will not be reviewed.

Optional AD212 Product Design / AD222 Interaction Design

From 2026 onwards a portfolio submission for AD212 Product Design and AD222 Interaction Design will be optional. While we welcome your portfolio submission it will not be a requirement for admission. If you do submit a portfolio you can gain up to 200 bonus points to add to your Leaving Cert/CAO points.

Scheduling my Portfolio Submission

You should factor in plenty of time to document your work. You should also factor in time to register with and upload your work to the portfolio submission platform. Don't leave things till the last day.

Deadline for Submission

Friday 6th February 2026. Please check [the NCAD website](#) for updates.



Key Dates

Wednesday 26th November 2025	NCAD Open Day 2025
Sunday 1st February 2026 - 17:00	CAO Closing Date 2026
Friday 6th February 2026 - 17:00	Portfolio Submission Deadline 2026

Information Sessions

20th October 2025 - 17:00 - 18:00	Virtual Portfolio Information Session
21st + 22nd October 18:00 - 19:30	On Campus Portfolio Information Sessions
29 October 2025 - 10am - 3:30pm + 7 January 2026 10am - 3:30pm	Product and Interaction Design Portfolio Workshops

Contact us

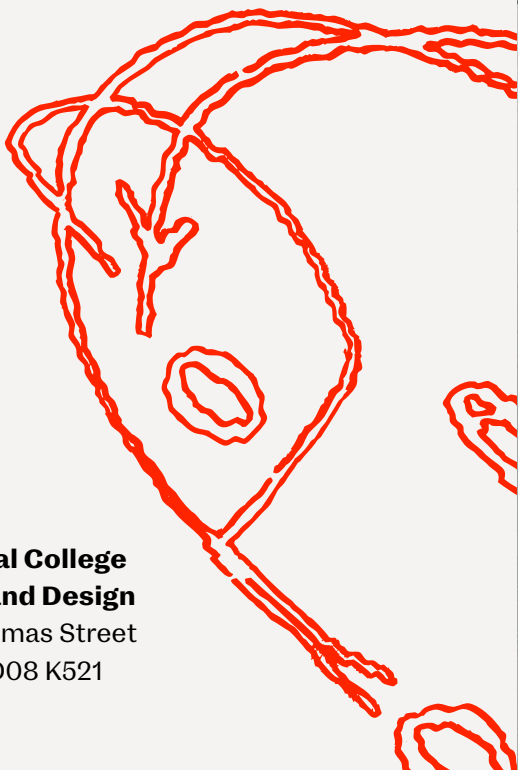
National College of Art & Design
100 Thomas Street,
Dublin D08 K521,
Ireland

admissions@ncad.ie

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