

Understanding the IA inquiry question and focus

A great body of work starts with a great inquiry question. Use these tips to assist students to develop great inquiry questions:

- Inquiry questions need to be open-ended meaning there are multiple ways to answer the question. But open-ended does not mean vague.
- Inquiry questions need to be specific enough to suggest a line of inquiry and ideas that genuinely require research and new knowledge.
- A question that can be answered by almost any artwork or artist is too broad.
- Inquiry questions do not need to start with *How do artists...*, but when they do, they should not be answerable by almost any artist or artwork. *How do artists use colour to communicate meaning?* is too broad.
- Instead, try questions that specify a line of research for visual language, meaning and expression e.g.:
 - *How do artists communicate conflicting viewpoints in self-portraiture?*
 - *How do artists use representations of water as a metaphor for emotion?*
- Inquiry questions need to relate to ideas inspired by the stimulus. Note how the stimulus is included in the performance level descriptors of the ISMG in 3 out of 4 criteria.
- Try questions that:
 - have a more personal context e.g., *How does my experience as an immigrant impact my connection to Australian culture? How can I tell the stories of the individuals who appear in my family photo albums?*
 - connect multidisciplinary fields e.g., *How are native species adapting to climate change?*
 - require deep digging e.g., *What time-saving inventions have failed in my lifetime?*
- Key artists might also be interested in similar fields of research or perhaps connect through approaches to representation, narrative or symbolism. Inquiry questions lead to narratives, ideas and representations.
- Question starters are useful to stretch students to develop more specific questions. Try the question starters in the QCAA [Supporting resource: Stimulus and inquiry questions](#):
 - Who is responsible for...
 - Who do I...
 - What happened when/to...
 - What will happen if/when...
 - What caused...
 - What do I think about...
 - What is it like to be...
 - What is the origin of...
 - What is the result of...
 - Where is...
 - Where do I...
 - When will...
 - Why does...
 - Why do I...
 - How can I...
 - How am I...

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The focus

The purpose of IA1 is to generate a focus for the body of work. The stimulus and the inquiry question are the starting point for the body of work journey. The focus defines the direction of further inquiry, artworks and intended meaning. A focus that is too vague won't lead to a connected body of work. A 'defined focus' reaches conclusions and expresses meaning about the interrelationships of new knowledge and art practice. The focus should create clear links between the stimulus, the inquiry question, the research and impact of artists practices on experiments that lead to new knowledge and a clear direction for phase two of the inquiry.

- **An example of a 'defined' focus (Resolving criteria – PLD 3)**

Inspired by the presence of native bees in the stimulus environment, I have investigated the enormous impact bee population decline will have on every aspect of our ecosystem. Bees contribute to complex, interconnected ecosystems that allow a diverse number of different species to co-exist and are vital in the production of the world's food resources. Through both personal and contemporary contexts, my body of work will aim to communicate the importance of bees in our future. I will continue exploring ways of incorporating natural materials to construct 3d forms inspired by the complexity of bee societies, hierarchical groups, repetition and scent. I am also interested in Anne Noble's diverse use of technology to document bee populations and Pierre Huyghe's figurative bee-hive forms to communicate the impact of bee decline for myself and wider society.

- **Compared to a focus that is too general to guide inquiry:**

For my body of work, I will focus on the contemporary issue of racism and will also take into account the personal and cultural context by using different media and different techniques to enhance the meaning of these issues.

A focus that does not specify new knowledge and complex interrelationships within the inquiry is not defined and should not move beyond mark 2.