Your first page.

The examiner reads this page before deciding how to read the rest. It says what you are looking at and why, and it proves you have already started looking. Two things sit on it: your intention, in writing, and your first observations, from life.

WHAT IT IS

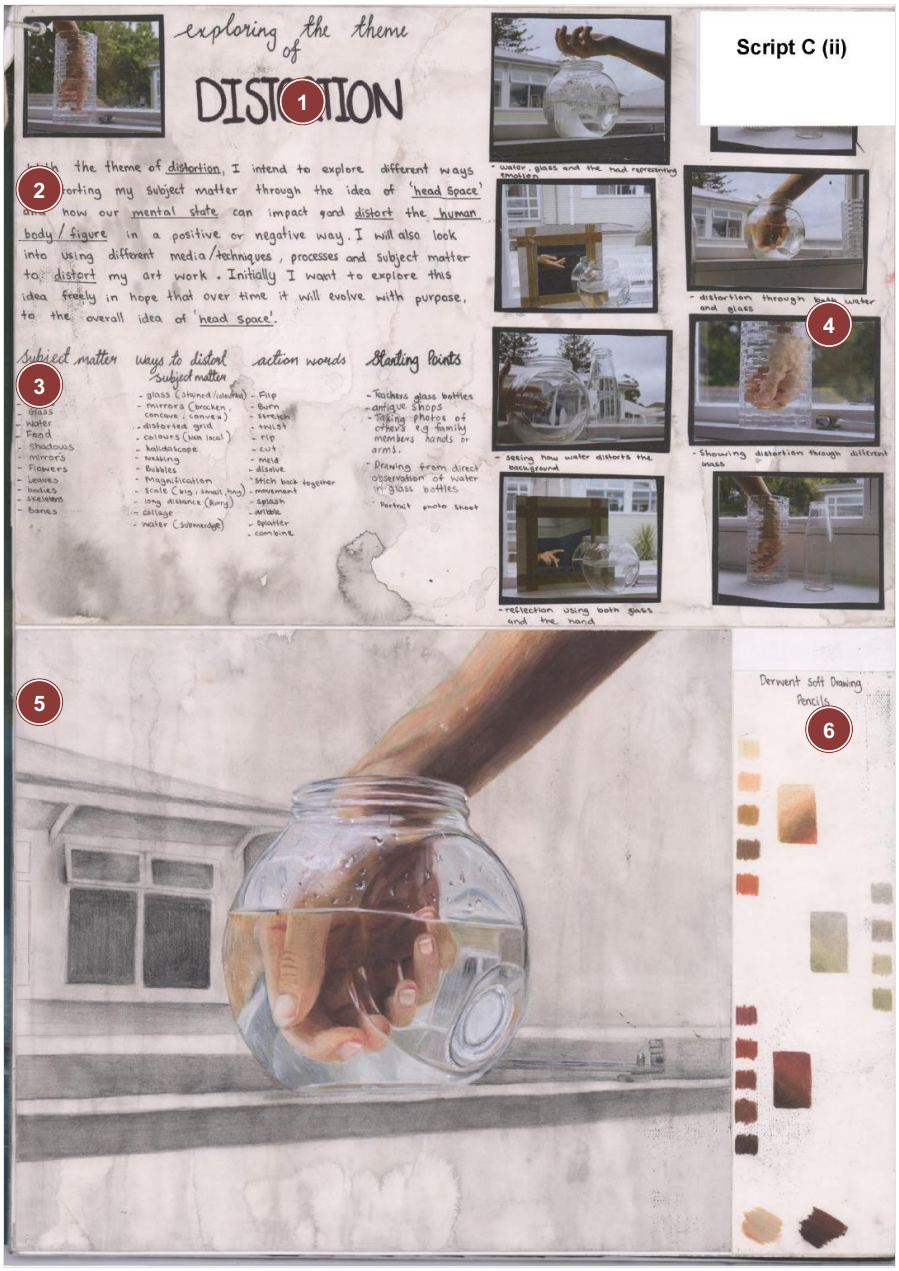
An introduction and your initial observations. The theme named once. A short statement of intention. Your own photographs of your sources. One drawing from life, the largest thing on the page. The medium you used, named. That is the whole list.

WHAT IT IS NOT

Not a title page. Not a mood board of other people's images. No artist research yet, no experiments, no final piece; those have their own pages later. A page with your theme in large letters and nothing of yours under it earns nothing.

WHERE IT COMES FROM

The formal elements studies and the weekend studies from the first two weeks. Your intention and mind map, due Monday 14 September. They meet as the Stage 1 page, composed in class on Friday 18 September with this guide open, read that day in progress as A0, and on the table finished at A1 on 9 October.



Sample 1, Component 1, the opening page (Cambridge Script C, from the department handbook, p.123). A Cambridge candidate's work, reproduced for teaching. Read it top left to bottom right, the way the examiner will.

The exemplar, taken apart

1. **The theme, named once.** "Exploring the theme of Distortion." Large, hand-lettered, and that is the entire title. The word does not appear again as decoration anywhere on the page.
2. **The intention, one paragraph.** What: different ways of distorting the subject through the idea of head space. Why: how a mental state can distort the body. How: different media, techniques, processes. Then one honest line about where it stands: explore freely at first, in the hope it evolves with purpose. Four sentences carry the whole page.
3. **Four word lists.** Subject matter. Ways to distort it. Action words. Starting points. This is the mind map flattened into columns. Every word is a page the student could make later, and several of them became pages.
4. **Their own photographs, captioned for what they show.** "Distortion through both water and glass." "Reflection using both glass and the hand." Not what the picture feels like. What it shows. Each one is a source the drawings can go back to.
5. **One drawing from life, the largest thing on the page.** A hand in a bowl of water on a windowsill. The first proper look at the theme, and the page is built around it. The photographs are small because they are sources. The drawing is big because it is the work.
6. **The medium, tested and named.** Derwent soft drawing pencils, swatched in the colors the drawing needed. Cambridge asks you to say what you used, on every piece of work. Here it is a rule kept and a color test at the same time.

The whole page. The biggest thing is the most important thing. The writing sits next to what it explains. There is air. Nothing here is borrowed, and nothing is on the page for coverage. That is what a page that argues looks like.

Build it in this order

Choosing comes before gluing. Writing comes before choosing. If you start by laying studies on the page, the page will show everything you made and argue nothing.

1 Write the intention.

Three sentences in the frame: I am investigating. Because. I will record. A partner strikes every empty word. Then one honest line about where you stand today. Type it. Cambridge wants annotation legible, and typed is legible.

THE TELL A stranger can say what you will make next.

2 Flatten the mind map.

Three or four columns: subject matter, ways of working, action words, starting points, meaning the places you will find your sources. Ten words a column. Every word something you could actually draw, do, or go to.

THE TELL At least one word surprised you when you wrote it.

3 Choose the studies.

From the formal elements studies and the weekend studies, pick the ones that make one point about your theme. Three or four, not nine. Line them up, name the weakest, and leave it off.

THE TELL Something you made this week is missing on purpose.

4 Photograph your sources.

Your own photographs, of your own objects, in daily reach. Print them small. Under each, one line saying what it shows: the light, the angle, the surface. Use your own recording here; cite any contextual material.

THE TELL Every caption is information. No caption is a mood.

5 Put the strongest drawing largest.

From life. It anchors the page and everything else is smaller than it. If your best drawing is small, that is the drawing to enlarge next, not the one to hide.

THE TELL Cover the writing and the page still says what the theme is.

6 Label everything.

Under every study: the medium, the size, and one line a stranger learns from, a decision, a rejection, or an observation. Anything that is not yours says so, and says whose it is.

THE TELL No caption repeats what the eye already has.

7 Leave air.

Decide what the eye meets first, then second, then third. Place those three, then stop and look. If the page is full, remove something. A crowded page cannot argue.

THE TELL You can point to the empty space and say why it is there.

8 Photograph it and file it.

Square on, in even light, no shadow across it. Make your own faithful crop, check color, name, and file to the portfolio template. The portfolio goes to Cambridge as a digital file. The examiner sees the photograph, never the page.

THE TELL Every word on the photograph can be read at screen size.

Before you file it

Tick honestly. A box you cannot tick is your homework tonight, not a box to leave blank.

- [ ] The theme is named once, and only once.
- [ ] The intention says what, why and how, in three or four typed sentences.
- [ ] Every photograph is mine and its caption says what it shows.
- [ ] At least one drawing is from life, and it is the largest thing on the page.
- [ ] Every study carries its medium and its size.
- [ ] One line under each study that a stranger learns from.
- [ ] Something I made this week is left off, on purpose.
- [ ] Sources are identified; recording shows my own investigation.
- [ ] A stranger could say what my theme is and what I will do next, with me out of the room.
- [ ] Photographed square, in even light, named, and filed to the template.

What costs marks

THE MOOD BOARD
Other people's images pasted around your theme. It records nothing you observed, and the examiner cannot tell whose eye it is.

THE EMPTY TITLE
The theme in large letters with nothing of yours beneath it. A title is not a page.

THE LABEL THAT DESCRIBES
"This is a shell, drawn in pencil." The eye already has that. Write what you decided, rejected, or noticed.

THE FULL PAGE
Everything you made, glued down. Select relevant evidence. The portfolio is judged across each AO; one weak study does not set a cap.

THE MOOD WORD
"Dreamy," "powerful," "interesting." Annotation records information. Mood words record nothing an examiner can use.