

Assignment 5 - Your reflections and comments on the course as a whole



A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of my work to date:

Strengths

Research skills - I believe that throughout the course I have demonstrated that I can locate information from a variety of sources such as verbal, aural, oral and text based. Where appropriate I have visited places in person to obtain the most up-to-date and relevant details and quotes.

Photography – I have utilised photography to capture my drawings and paintings and to enhance my studies. My aim was to capture the best photos possible as this really enhances the quality of my work and the overall experience. It also makes it more engaging and interesting for my audience.

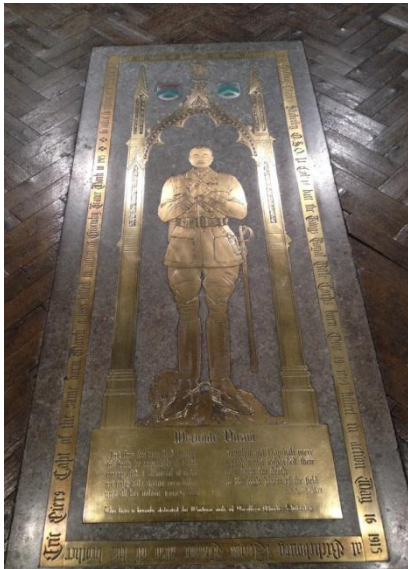


Figure 1 *The Shakerley Memorial, at St Mark's Church in Farnborough. Visiting the church was one of the high points of the course due to its rarity and magnificence. See the exercise: 'annotate a Gothic image' for more information.*

Weaknesses

Paralysis by analysis – this course has helped me realise the type of worker that I am. I have enjoyed learning about many different types and styles of art, but due to the proliferation of information available, sometimes it is difficult to decide which direction to take. I have since learnt to trust my gut instinct above all and to choose the subjects which intrigue me the most. Some of my favourite exercises were towards the end of the course; in particular the exercise: *Visit a landscape* and the *Research Point – Trompe l'oeil decorative schemes*. These tasks enabled me to write about other countries in Europe and to learn more about their history. Also, because I had actually visited these places I knew a certain amount beforehand. Hungary is one of the most fascinating countries that I've visited due to its unique language, culture, geography and history.

The Internet - as I've stated before the Internet is indeed very distracting, but I have learnt to curb this impulse by meditating more and taking regular breaks from the course. Since I submitted the previous Assignment to my tutor I have started doing yoga, pilates, aerobics and I've joined a running club. This has helped lessen the enormity of the course and has given me some much needed headspace.

Social media – since starting the course I have utilised social media to promote my work and as an incentive to finish the course. It helps me to keep track of my progress and allows me to share what I am learning with other students. The Facebook groups have been useful as I can dip in and out of conversations. The feedback from other students regarding their different approaches to tackling the coursework has been relevant and interesting. There are many students choosing to study with the OCA both here and abroad, alongside their

other commitments; and for me it is fascinating to discover how each of us tackles the workload. For me the hardest part has been to remain motivated as sometimes when I came home from work I felt too tired. But I knew with every completed exercise/research point that I was one step closer to my goal.

Having said all of this, I've found it difficult to determine when I would precisely finish as the OCA's guidelines are very loose and flexible and it depends on how quickly one can complete the course. It also depends on your other commitments as well. Since I started my studies with the

OCA over four years ago I have worked in retail, in galleries and in offices. It seems to me that in order to succeed one has to be very adept at multi-tasking!

Opportunities

I believe that the OCA presents a unique opportunity to study a variety of courses in addition to your normal day job. The main challenges are balancing the demands of the course with the rest of your life.

Since I started I have realised how much of a commitment the courses really are and this is why I am concluding my studies at the end of Level 1 rather than continuing to progress to Level 3 (for a full degree). This is due in part because of financial reasons but also because my long-term career plans are changing. I also feel that once my final painting course is complete (Painting 1 – The Practice of Painting); I would like to focus on other things, and build on other areas.

Threats

One of the most important aspects of this course has been successfully managing my time. At times I've succeeded and at other times I have struggled due to the demands of work or because of family issues.

This year has been particularly challenging as I was working full-time up until a couple of months ago. This meant that I was completing the coursework at a much slower rate than previously. I must admit it was a poison chalice as it was great to have some money and to be able to go out; but it meant that my course suffered.

Also, this summer my Uncle had a massive heart attack and was rushed to hospital; my Aunt and cousin saved his life by performing CPR. My Mother also has had urgent heart surgery to repair and replace several of her heart valves. So it has been a tumultuous period and this was my motivation to complete the course. One never truly knows what is going to happen and you can really only live in the moment.



Figure 2 Visiting the Memento Park in Budapest in 2016 was one of the highlights of my course and life so far.

Finally, I believe that some of my best work for this course has been as a direct result of going to see the work in person. One of my favourite exercises was the task: *Visit a landscape*, because I've been to the site and I've discovered a lot of new information. I was already familiar with the dark side of Communism as I visited Berlin several years ago; however before my visit to Budapest I had no idea how devastating the Soviet influence had been on the Hungarian/Central European identity and way of life. Thus the task was enormously interesting as I enjoyed relating the sculptures to the era in which they were produced.