

Visual Communication Design Units 3 & 4

Chapter 8 — Analysing & evaluating design

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Chapter 8 Design analysis — 8A Analysing aesthetic decisions

Theory

Design analysis is the practice of describing, analysing and evaluating how a designer has used visual language to communicate ideas and information to an audience or users. In the examination (Section A) you analyse **design examples** supplied in the Resource Book, so the skill is not to *make* a design but to *read* one — to explain the reasoning behind what you see.

At the centre of this skill are **aesthetic decisions**. The *aesthetic* of a design is its overall look and feel — its sensory and emotional character. Aesthetic decisions are the deliberate choices a designer makes with the **design elements** (point, line, shape, form, tone, texture, colour, type) and the **design principles** (figure–ground, balance, contrast, cropping, hierarchy, scale, proportion, pattern), together with methods, media and materials, to create that character and communicate to a particular audience for a particular purpose and context.

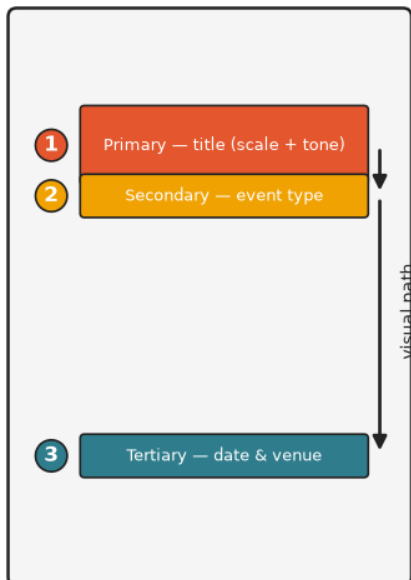
The analytical move. A strong analysis of an aesthetic decision does four things:

1. **Name the specific aesthetic** — e.g. *calm, natural, energetic, technological, playful, premium, nostalgic, minimal*. “The design has an aesthetic” or “it supports the aesthetic” says nothing.
2. **Name the design element(s) and principle(s)** the designer used.
3. **Explain *how* those choices build that aesthetic** and communicate to the audience/purpose — a cause-and-effect chain, not a list.
4. **Support the claim with evidence** drawn directly from the example.



Consider the original poster above for a fictional *RIVERLIGHT Night Market*. The designer has set warm **amber** accents (the lanterns, the lower ripple, the sub-heading) against a cool, deep **teal** ground. The **element of colour** combined with the **principle of contrast** builds a *warm, inviting evening* aesthetic: the warm points appear to glow against the dark, cool field, evoking lantern-light at dusk and drawing a young, social audience toward a night event.

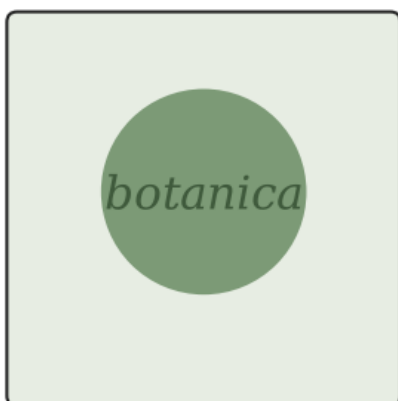
Hierarchy and the visual path. Aesthetic decisions also organise the order in which a viewer reads a design. Using **hierarchy**, the designer ranks information as *primary, secondary and tertiary*, and guides the eye along a **visual path**. A common examiner criticism is stopping at the single most dominant element — a full analysis follows the path through the secondary and tertiary layers too.



In the poster, the title *RIVERLIGHT* is primary (largest scale, strongest tonal contrast against the ground); *NIGHT MARKET* is secondary (smaller, letter-spaced); the date and venue are tertiary (smallest). The eye travels top-to-bottom down this ordered path.

Gestalt and the aesthetic. The **Gestalt principles** — figure–ground, proximity, similarity, closure, continuity, common fate and focal point — describe how the mind automatically organises what it sees. They are not design elements and not design principles, but they belong in an aesthetic analysis because they decide what the viewer perceives as a *group*, a *figure* or a *whole*. In the poster, the three amber circles at the upper right sit close together (**proximity**) and share one hue and one round shape (**similarity**), so they are read as a single cluster of hanging lanterns rather than as three unrelated dots — and it is that grouped reading, not the individual circles, that produces the lantern-lit, festive feeling. When a question asks about Gestalt, name the Gestalt principle, describe what the viewer therefore groups, separates or completes, and then say what that perception contributes to the aesthetic and the communication.

The same message, different aesthetics. Because an aesthetic comes from *choices*, the same communication need can be given very different characters. Below, two original marks respond to the same idea of a “brand”: muted greens, a rounded organic shape, generous space and a serif typeface produce a *calm, natural* aesthetic; a saturated hue, angular shapes, a tight composition and a heavy sans-serif produce a *bold, energetic* one.



calm · natural aesthetic

muted greens · rounded shape · space · serif



bold · energetic aesthetic

saturated hue · angular shape · tight · heavy sans

Relating aesthetics to purpose, context and audience. A design’s aesthetic is judged by how well it fits its **purpose** (what it is for — to inform, promote, guide, identify...), its **context** (the setting and circumstances in which it is

created, used or viewed) and its **audience or users**. The *role of visual language* is exactly this: to carry meaning and shape behaviour through visual means.

Watch-out — name the aesthetic. “The colour supports the aesthetic” earns no analysis marks. State *which* aesthetic (natural, technological, calm, vibrant...) and show how the element and principle create it.

Watch-out — analyse, don’t describe. Describing what is present (“there is a green circle”) is not analysis. Analysis explains how a choice **contributes** to the aesthetic and the communication.

Watch-out — read the whole hierarchy. Identify the primary element, then extend to the secondary and tertiary layers and the visual path — do not stop at the single dominant feature.

Watch-out — keep the vocabularies distinct. A design **element** (colour, shape, type...), a design **principle** (contrast, hierarchy...) and a **Gestalt** principle (proximity, similarity...) are three different things. Use **shape** for two-dimensional and **form** for three-dimensional.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Analyse how *one design element* and *one design principle* were used to support aesthetic decisions in the *RIVERLIGHT* poster. (4 marks)

Working	Comment
Aesthetic: the poster has a <i>warm, inviting evening</i> aesthetic.	Start by NAMING the specific aesthetic — this frames the whole answer and is where weak responses fail.
Element — colour; principle — contrast. The designer places warm amber lanterns, ripple and sub-heading against a cool, deep-teal ground.	Name one element AND one principle (the question asks for both).
The warm/cool contrast makes the amber points appear to glow, like lantern-light at dusk, and pushes them forward from the dark field.	Explain <i>how</i> the pairing works — the mechanism, not just “it stands out”.
This builds the warm evening aesthetic and signals a festive night event to a young, social audience.	Tie the choice back to the named aesthetic AND the audience/purpose to earn the analysis marks.

Example 2 — scaffolded

Evaluate the effectiveness of the dominant design element in communicating to the audience. (4 marks)

Working	Comment
The dominant element is type — the title <i>RIVERLIGHT</i> is the largest, highest-contrast feature.	“Dominant” = identify the primary element by scale/contrast.
It is effective: at a glance the audience reads the event name first, and the clear hierarchy then leads them to the event type and the date/venue.	Evaluation needs a JUDGEMENT (“it is effective”) + reasons tied to the audience reading it.
A limitation is that the date, venue and time are set very small at the foot of the poster, separated from the title block by a large empty field, so a passer-by who takes in the name at a distance may not read <i>when</i> the market is on.	A complete <i>evaluation</i> gives a limitation as well as a strength — and it must be supported by evidence you can point to in the example.
Overall , the typographic hierarchy communicates the essential information quickly, so the element is used effectively for a promotional poster.	Close with an overall judgement referenced to purpose.

Example 3 — unscaffolded

Identify one **Gestalt** principle used in the *RIVERLIGHT* poster and discuss how it organises what the viewer sees and what it contributes to the poster’s aesthetic. (4 marks)

The designer has used the Gestalt principle of **proximity**, supported by **similarity**. Three of the amber circles sit close together in the upper right of the poster, while the fourth is placed well away from them at the left; because of that spacing the mind reads the three as one group and the fourth as a separate item, rather than reading four equal dots. **Similarity** reinforces the grouping: every circle shares the same amber hue and the same round shape, and each hangs from a short vertical line, so all four are also perceived as members of one family of objects — lanterns strung above the market. This perceptual grouping is what turns an arrangement of circles into a scene, and it is central to the *warm, festive evening* aesthetic: a cluster of hanging lanterns reads as a night market at dusk in a way that scattered, unrelated marks could not, so a young, social audience recognises the celebratory character of the event before reading a word of type.

Example 4 — unscaffolded

With reference to the two marks shown, evaluate how effectively visual language communicates two different aesthetics. (6 marks)

The two marks show how visual language can give the same idea of a “brand” opposite aesthetics. The left mark, *botanica*, achieves a *calm, natural* aesthetic: a muted green, a rounded organic **shape**, generous space and an italic **serif** typeface work together so the eye rests, suggesting growth and care. This is effective for an audience seeking a gentle, botanical product. Its limitation is tonal — the dark-green wordmark sits on a mid-green disc, making the name the lowest-contrast part of the mark and the first thing to fail when the mark is reduced to a bottle cap or an app icon.

The right mark, *PULSE*, achieves a *bold, energetic* aesthetic through saturated hues, angular **shapes** and a heavy **sans-serif** set tightly in the frame; the high **contrast** and diagonal movement create urgency and excitement, which suits an active, youthful audience. Its limitation is that the composition is so tight that the wordmark runs almost to the edges of both triangles, leaving very little clear space around the letterforms, and the energy it projects is generic — the mark signals “fast and loud” without indicating what the brand actually offers.

Overall, both marks use visual language effectively for the aesthetic each is aiming at, because in each case every element and principle choice pulls in the same direction rather than competing. *botanica* is the more disciplined of the two, since its weakness is a fixable contrast problem, whereas *PULSE* buys its impact at the cost of legibility once the mark is reduced.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Using the RIVERLIGHT poster: (a) Name the overall aesthetic of the poster. (1 mark) (b) Identify one design element the designer used to create it. (1 mark) (c) Explain how that element helps create the aesthetic. (2 marks)

Q2. Using the hierarchy diagram of the poster: (a) Identify the primary, secondary and tertiary information. (3 marks) (b) Describe the visual path the designer has created for the viewer. (2 marks)

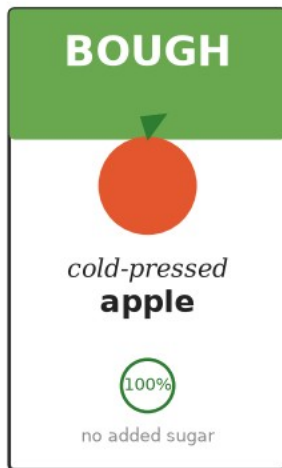
Q3. Referring to the two marks *botanica* and *PULSE*: (a) Name the aesthetic of each. (2 marks) (b) For each, identify one design element and explain how it supports that aesthetic. (4 marks)

Q4. Explain the difference between a design **element**, a design **principle** and a **Gestalt** principle, giving one example of each from the poster. (3 marks)

Q5. Using the poster, distinguish between the terms **shape** and **form**, and state which is present in the poster. (2 marks)

Q6. Explain how **contrast** contributes to the communication of the poster’s purpose. (3 marks)

Un scaffolded



Questions 7–14 refer to the BOUGH cold-pressed apple carton shown above, unless otherwise stated.

- Q7.** Analyse how one design element and one design principle were used to support the aesthetic of the BOUGH carton. (4 marks)
- Q8.** Name the aesthetic of the BOUGH carton and, with reference to evidence, explain how it is appropriate for the product's purpose. (4 marks)
- Q9.** Evaluate the effectiveness of the hierarchy on the BOUGH carton in communicating to a shopper. (4 marks)
- Q10.** Analyse how the designer has used **colour** to communicate the qualities of the product. (3 marks)
- Q11.** Identify one **Gestalt** principle the designer has used on the BOUGH carton and discuss how it organises what the shopper sees and what it contributes to the carton's aesthetic. (4 marks)
- Q12.** Compare the aesthetic of the BOUGH carton with the aesthetic of the RIVERLIGHT poster, referring to at least one element and one principle in each. (6 marks)
- Q13.** Explain how the designer has used the principle of **balance** on the BOUGH carton, and how it contributes to the carton's aesthetic. (3 marks)
- Q14.** Evaluate how effectively the visual language of the BOUGH carton communicates its purpose to its audience, referring to at least two aesthetic decisions. (6 marks)
- Q15.** (Using the two marks *botanica* and *PULSE*.) Analyse how **type** has been used differently in each mark to support two different aesthetics. (4 marks)
- Q16.** Choose any one of the four original design examples in this subtopic — the RIVERLIGHT poster, the *botanica* mark, the *PULSE* mark or the BOUGH carton. Analyse how the designer has combined **at least two** design elements with **one** design principle to create a unified aesthetic and communicate to the intended audience. (6 marks)

Answers

Q1. (a) Warm, inviting/festive evening. (b) Colour (or type/tone/shape). (c) See solutions. **Q2.** (a) Primary = title *RIVERLIGHT*; secondary = *NIGHT MARKET*; tertiary = date & venue. (b) Top-to-bottom. **Q3.** (a) *botanica* = calm/natural; *PULSE* = bold/energetic. (b) See solutions. **Q4.** Element = a component (e.g. colour); principle = how elements are arranged (e.g. contrast); Gestalt = how the mind groups what it sees (e.g. proximity of the lanterns). **Q5.** Shape = 2D; form = 3D. The poster uses **shape** (it is a flat, two-dimensional design). **Q6.** See solutions. **Q7–Q16.** See fully-worked solutions.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. (a) A warm, inviting evening (festive/celebratory) aesthetic. (b) Colour. (c) The warm amber of the lanterns and ripple sits against the cool, dark-teal ground; because warm hues advance against a cool field, the amber appears to glow, recreating lantern-light at dusk and building the warm evening feeling (2 marks: element linked to the named aesthetic by a clear mechanism).

Q2. (a) Primary = the title *RIVERLIGHT* (largest, highest tonal contrast); secondary = *NIGHT MARKET* (smaller, letter-spaced); tertiary = the date and venue line (smallest). (b) The strong scale and tonal contrast of the title captures the eye first; the reader then steps down to the secondary event type and finally to the tertiary date and venue — a clear top-to-bottom visual path created by decreasing scale and contrast.

Q3. (a) *botanica* — calm, natural. *PULSE* — bold, energetic. (b) *botanica*: the **element of colour** (muted green) is gentle and low-contrast, so the eye rests, supporting the calm, natural aesthetic; (accept the rounded **shape** or the **serif type**). *PULSE*: the **element of shape** (angular triangles) creates diagonal movement and, with the saturated hue, high energy, supporting the bold aesthetic (2 marks each: element named + how it builds that aesthetic).

Q4. A design **element** is a basic component of visual language — e.g. the **colour** of the lanterns. A design **principle** is a convention for arranging elements — e.g. the **contrast** between warm and cool. A **Gestalt** principle describes how the mind organises what it sees — e.g. the **proximity** of the three lanterns at the upper right, which sit close together and are therefore read as one cluster rather than as separate marks.

Q5. **Shape** is a two-dimensional enclosed area; **form** is three-dimensional (having depth). The *RIVERLIGHT* poster is a flat, printed design, so it uses **shape**, not form.

Q6. Contrast — warm amber against cool teal, and large light title against the dark ground — makes the key information and the lantern motif stand out immediately. This lets a passer-by grasp the event name and festive character at a glance, communicating the poster’s promotional purpose quickly and clearly (3 marks: contrast identified + effect on legibility/focus + link to purpose).

Q7. The *BOUGH* carton has a fresh, natural, wholesome aesthetic. The designer uses the **element of colour** with the **principle of contrast**: a leaf-green top band and green accents sit against a white lower field, while a red apple provides a complementary accent. The green–white combination reads as clean and natural, and the red apple contrasts to become the focal point, together communicating fresh, natural fruit juice (4 marks: aesthetic named; element + principle; mechanism; link to product).

Q8. The aesthetic is fresh and natural/wholesome. This is appropriate because the product’s purpose is to sell a healthy, cold-pressed juice: the green palette, the simple apple motif and the “100% / no added sugar” cues signal natural, unprocessed content to a health-conscious shopper, so the look supports the selling purpose.

Q9. The hierarchy is effective. The brand name *BOUGH* is primary (largest, reversed white on the green band) so it is seen first; the apple motif and *cold-pressed apple* descriptor are secondary, telling the shopper what the product is; the “100%/no added sugar” badge is tertiary, confirming a claim. On a shelf a shopper reads brand → product → claim in a logical order. A limitation is that the flavour — the word *apple* — is ranked below the brand name and set at well under half its size, so at shelf distance a shopper can see whose juice it is before they can see which variety it is, even though the variety is what they are choosing between. Overall the hierarchy communicates the essentials quickly, so it is used effectively (strength + limitation + judgement).

Q10. The designer uses green as the dominant hue — the top band, the leaf and the badge — against a white ground, to signal nature, freshness and health, drawing on the common association of green with plants and “natural” products;

the red of the apple both identifies the flavour and, as a complementary accent, makes the fruit the focal point. Colour therefore communicates the product's fresh, natural qualities (3 marks).

Q11. (Model, using proximity; accept similarity or figure-ground, correctly analysed.) The designer has used the Gestalt principle of **proximity**. The apple motif, the italic *cold-pressed* line and the bold *apple* line are stacked close together with only small gaps between them, while a much wider gap separates that group from the badge and the *no added sugar* line at the base. The mind therefore organises the front of the carton into two units — a product-name group and a claim group — instead of five separate items, so a shopper scanning a shelf takes in “cold-pressed apple” as one idea and the health claim as another. That grouping supports the *fresh, natural, wholesome* aesthetic: because the information falls into two tidy blocks, the wide space between them reads as deliberate calm rather than emptiness, and an uncluttered, unhurried front of pack is exactly what signals a simple, unprocessed product (4 marks: a Gestalt principle named correctly — not a design principle — the grouping it produces described from the example, and its contribution to the named aesthetic explained).

Q12. Both designs use colour and contrast to build an aesthetic suited to their audience, but to different ends. The RIVERLIGHT poster pairs **colour** (warm amber) with **contrast** (against cool teal) for a *warm, festive evening* aesthetic aimed at a social, night-event audience. The BOUGH carton pairs **colour** (green) with **contrast** (green/white plus a red focal accent) for a *fresh, natural* aesthetic aimed at a health-conscious shopper. The poster uses dark, atmospheric tones to create mood, whereas the carton uses light, clean tones to signal purity — showing how the same element and principle are directed toward opposite characters (6 marks: element + principle in each, congruent two-sided comparison, similarity and difference).

Q13. The carton is **symmetrically balanced**: the brand name, the apple, the two lines of product type and the badge are all centred on a single vertical axis, so the visual weight either side of that axis is equal. Symmetry is the most stable and orderly arrangement available to a designer, so the front of the pack looks settled and unfussy rather than dynamic or busy. That stability supports the *fresh, natural, wholesome* aesthetic and the product's selling purpose: an even, orderly face reads as honest and straightforward, which is the quality a shopper choosing a “100% / no added sugar” juice is looking for (3 marks: balance identified as symmetrical with evidence + how it works + link to the named aesthetic).

Q14. The visual language communicates the selling purpose effectively. First, the green palette and apple motif (colour + imagery) immediately signal “natural apple juice”, matching the product to a health-conscious audience. Second, the clear hierarchy (brand → product → claim) lets a shopper absorb the essentials in the seconds they spend scanning a shelf. A limitation is that the visual language is almost entirely conventional: a green band, a simple round fruit and a percentage badge are the standard signals of the whole juice category, so while the carton communicates “natural” reliably, little apart from the wordmark itself distinguishes it from the packs beside it. Overall, because each decision reinforces the fresh, natural message for its audience, the visual language communicates the purpose effectively (6 marks: two+ decisions analysed, audience/purpose link, a limitation, an overall judgement).

Q15. In *botanica* the type is a lower-case **italic serif**; the serifs and the soft, slanted letterforms feel traditional and hand-made, and lower case keeps the mark quiet, supporting the calm, natural aesthetic. In *PULSE* the type is an upper-case **heavy sans-serif** set tightly; the bold weight and capitals feel loud and modern, supporting the energetic aesthetic. The same element — type — is thus used in opposite ways (serif/italic/lower case vs sans-serif/heavy/capitals) to build two different aesthetics (4 marks: type in each + how each supports its aesthetic + the contrast drawn out).

Q16. (Model, using the RIVERLIGHT poster.) The poster combines **colour** and **type** with the principle of **contrast** to create a unified *warm, festive evening* aesthetic. Warm amber (colour) against cool teal, and a large light title (type) against the dark ground, both use tonal and temperature **contrast**, so the two elements pull in the same direction: the amber glows like lantern-light while the title reads instantly. Because the colour and typographic choices share the same contrast logic, the design feels unified rather than busy, and it communicates a celebratory night event to a young, social audience (6 marks: two elements + one principle, shown working together toward a single named aesthetic and the audience).

Theory

In 8A you learned to **name an aesthetic** and show how design elements and principles create it. This subtopic asks the question the examination always asks next: *why that aesthetic?* Under Unit 3 Area of Study 2 you must be able to analyse **the relationships between aesthetic decisions and the purposes, contexts and audiences or users of design examples**, and describe **the role of visual language in communicating ideas and information**.

Aesthetic decisions are never free choices. Every one of them is an answer to something — to what the design has to *do*, to *where and when* it will be met, and to *who* will meet it. Analysis at Unit 3 level means showing that answer.

The role of visual language. The Study Design defines visual language as *a system of communication where ideas and information are conveyed to audiences through visual means*. Designers combine **pictorial**, **symbolic** and **typographic** elements to influence how people experience or interact with places, systems and things. Its role is therefore not decoration: it is to carry meaning, direct attention and shape behaviour, often faster than words can.

Component of visual language	What it does	Example
Pictorial — imagery, illustration, photography	shows the thing itself; builds mood and association	a drawn beetle on a nature guide
Symbolic — symbols, pictograms, colour coding, logos	stands for an idea; works without reading	a cross meaning “pharmacy”
Typographic — letterforms, weight, case, spacing	names, ranks and instructs	a heavy capitalised wordmark

Purpose is what a design is *for*. State it with a verb: to **inform, identify, promote, guide or direct, persuade, instruct, entertain, sell or warn**. A design often has a primary purpose and a secondary one.

Context is *the environment or circumstances in which a design is created, used or viewed*. When you describe context, cover the things that actually change a designer’s decisions:

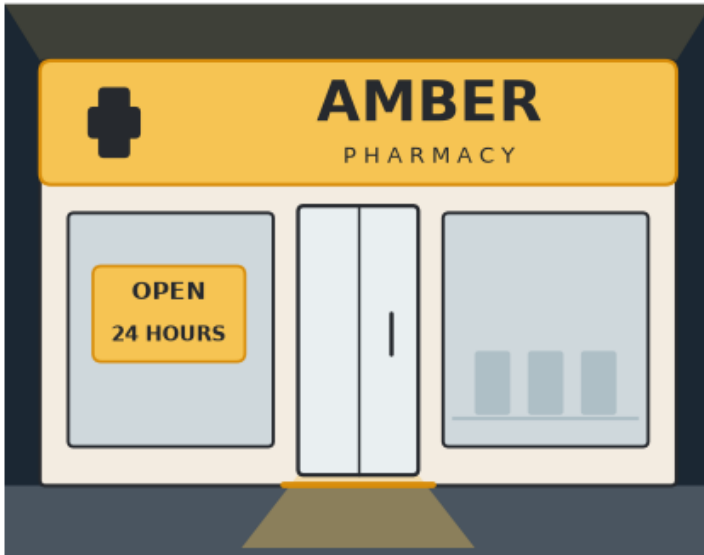
- **where** — indoors or outdoors, a shelf, a street, a car park, a screen, a hand
- **when and under what light** — day or night, artificial light, glare, weather
- **at what distance and for how long** — 15 metres for two seconds, or 300 mm for two minutes
- **in what state** — the viewer moving or still, hurried or relaxed, wet or gloved hands
- **among what else** — competing signage, other products, a cluttered feed
- **the social, cultural and historical setting** — the community it serves and the time it was made in.

Audience or users. An **audience** receives or views a design; **users** interact with, operate or handle it. Describe them with **demographic** characteristics (age, gender, location, occupation, income, education, family status, cultural background) and **psychographic** characteristics (values, attitudes, interests, lifestyle, aspirations, behaviours). Characteristics are *who they are* — they are not the same as *needs* (what the design must give them), and they are not the same as the *state* a viewer happens to be in when they meet the design (hurried, stressed, gloved), which belongs to **context**.

The analytical move. A full response to an 8B-style question is a four-link chain:

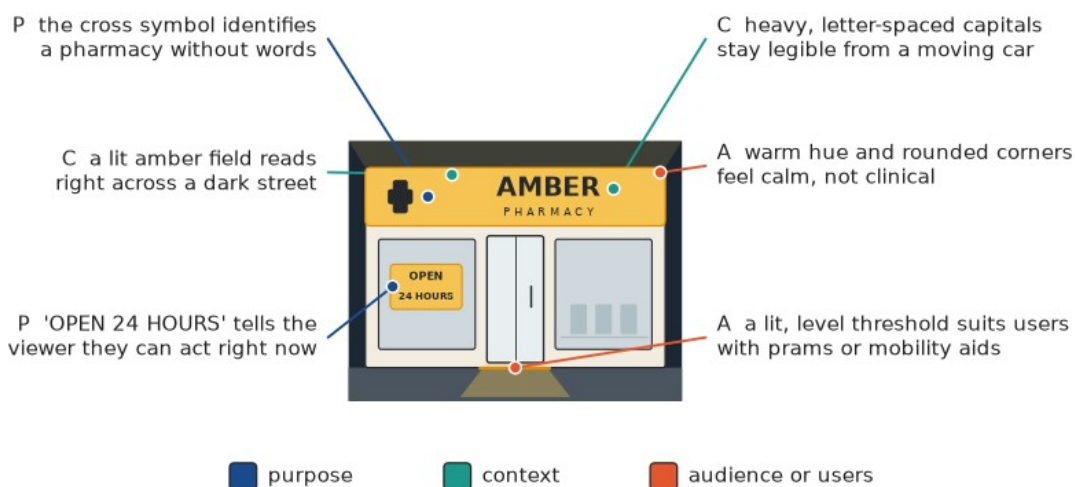
1. **Name the aesthetic decision** — the design element and the design principle applied.
2. **Name the driver precisely** — the purpose, the context, or the audience/user characteristic.
3. **Explain the mechanism** — how that choice works visually.
4. **State the communication outcome** — what the audience or user therefore does, feels or understands.

A reliable sentence stem: “*Because [context or audience fact], the designer chose [element + principle], which [mechanism], so that [audience] [outcome] — meeting the purpose of [purpose].*”



Consider the original shopfront above for a fictional 24-hour pharmacy, **AMBER**. Its **purpose** is to identify the business, direct people to the door, and make clear it is open at any hour. Its **context** is a suburban high street at night: it is the only lit shopfront in a dark strip, and it is read from about 20 metres, briefly, often from a passing car and often in poor weather. Its **audience and users** are people who are unwell and the people caring for them — parents with a sick child, night-shift workers, older residents — who value a health service they can rely on at any hour, and who meet the shopfront hurried and stressed by the situation that brought them out, then physically use the door. The resulting aesthetic is *warm, calm and reassuring, yet highly legible* — deliberately not cold or clinical.

AMBER — every aesthetic decision answers a driver

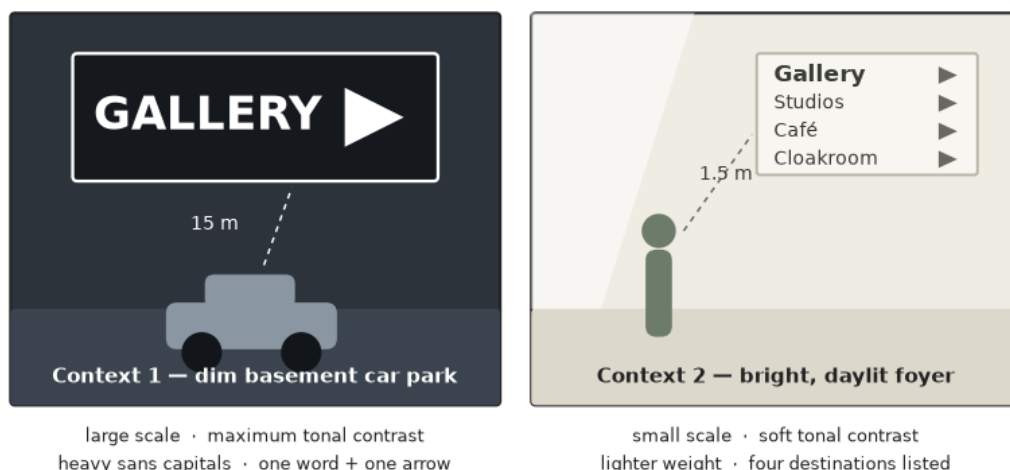


The annotated breakdown shows each decision tied to its driver. Notice that no decision is explained by taste alone: the amber field answers the dark street, the heavy letter-spaced capitals answer the viewing distance and speed, the cross answers the purpose, and the warm hue and level threshold answer the audience and users.

Context is not presentation format. This is the single most-penalised confusion in this part of the course. “It is a sign”, “it is a poster”, “it is an app” describes the **presentation format** — the form the solution takes. The **context** is the setting and circumstances in which that solution is created, used or viewed. The pair of signs below makes the difference visible: the purpose is identical (direct visitors to the gallery) and the presentation format is identical (a wall-mounted directional sign), yet the two contexts force opposite aesthetic decisions.

WREN CENTRE — one directional sign, two contexts

same purpose (direct visitors to the gallery) and same presentation format (a wall-mounted sign)



In the dim basement car park the sign is read at about 15 metres by someone driving, so the designer has used a large **scale**, maximum tonal **contrast** (white reversed out of near-black), a heavy sans-serif in capitals, and reduced the message to one word and one arrow. In the bright, daylit foyer the same information is read at about 1.5 metres by someone standing still, so the designer has used a small scale, a soft tonal pairing (charcoal on pale stone), a lighter weight in mixed case, and has been able to list four destinations. Same purpose, same format, different context, different aesthetic.

Watch-out — context is not the presentation format. Assessors report that students describe the format (“it is on a kit”, “it is a poster”) instead of the setting or circumstances of use. Write context as *where*, *when*, *under what light*, *at what distance*, *in what state*, *among what else*.

Watch-out — state the purpose as a verb. “The purpose is a shopfront sign” is a format, not a purpose. “To identify the pharmacy and signal that it is open at any hour” is a purpose.

Watch-out — characteristics are not needs. “Families with primary-aged children who are curious about nature” is a characteristic. “The guide must be readable by a beginner reader” is a need. Answer the term the question actually uses.

Watch-out — visual language is more than a list. Naming “colour and contrast” is not describing the *role* of visual language. Show how pictorial, symbolic and typographic choices convey ideas and information and influence what the audience does.

Watch-out — the influence lands on the designer. Purpose, context and audience influence the **designer’s decisions** (colour, scale, weight, material, layout), not “the need for the design”. The five factors (economic, technological, cultural, environmental, social) are a separate set of influences, treated in Chapter 9.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Analyse how the context of the AMBER shopfront has influenced two aesthetic decisions. (4 marks)

Working	Comment
Context: AMBER sits on a suburban high street at night, is the only lit shopfront in a dark strip, and is read from roughly 20 m for a second or two, often from a passing car.	Open by stating the CONTEXT as setting and circumstances — where, when, at what distance, in what state. Naming the format (“a shopfront sign”) earns nothing.
Decision 1 — colour and contrast: the designer has lit a broad amber fascia against a dark street, so the sign is the brightest, warmest thing in the field of view and is seen before it is read.	Link one decision to the context by a MECHANISM, not by assertion.

Working	Comment
Decision 2 — type and scale: the wordmark is set in heavy, letter-spaced sans-serif capitals at large scale, which hold their shape at 20 m and at speed, when fine or lightweight letterforms would blur.	A second, genuinely different decision (element + how it is handled), again tied to the same contextual facts.
Together these produce a <i>warm, calm but highly legible</i> aesthetic that lets a driver locate the pharmacy at night in a single glance.	Close by naming the aesthetic and stating the communication outcome for the viewer in that context.

Example 2 — scaffolded

Discuss the role of visual language in communicating the purpose of the AMBER shopfront to its audience. (4 marks)

Working	Comment
Purpose: to identify the business as a pharmacy, direct people to the entrance, and make clear it is open at any hour.	“Discuss” requires you to identify AND explain how it is used, so anchor the purpose first, as a verb.
Symbolic: the charcoal cross is a conventional health symbol; it communicates “pharmacy” instantly and without reading, so it works for a viewer at distance, at speed, or with limited English.	Name the component of visual language, then say what idea it conveys and why that suits the audience.
Typographic: the heavy capital wordmark ranks the business name as primary, while the letter-spaced <i>PHARMACY</i> line and the <i>OPEN 24 HOURS</i> panel form the secondary layer that carries the time-critical information.	Show hierarchy — the layers, not just the biggest thing. This is where responses that stop at “the type is bold” lose marks.
Overall, visual language does the communicating faster than words could: the audience recognises the service, reads the name and learns it is open, in that order, in about two seconds.	Finish with the role — meaning carried and behaviour shaped — tied to the audience.

Example 3 — unscaffolded

Explain how the characteristics of AMBER’s audience and users may have influenced two of the designer’s decisions. (4 marks)

AMBER’s audience is people who are unwell and those caring for them — parents with a sick child, night-shift workers and older residents — who value a health service they can rely on at any hour and want a problem dealt with straight away rather than left until morning, and who then become **users** when they walk through the door. Because this audience is dealing with illness and wants reassurance rather than clinical formality, the designer has chosen a warm amber hue and generously rounded corners on the fascia and the *OPEN 24 HOURS* panel; warm hues and soft corners read as welcoming rather than institutional, so the shopfront feels reassuring rather than clinical at a moment when reassurance matters. Because those users include people pushing prams and people with mobility aids, the designer has kept the threshold level and lit, and has placed the entry centrally between two glazed bays, so the way in is obvious and physically easy from the footpath. In both cases an audience or user characteristic has driven a specific aesthetic decision rather than a general preference.

Example 4 — unscaffolded

Compare how context has shaped the aesthetic decisions in the two WREN CENTRE directional signs. (6 marks)

Both WREN CENTRE signs share the same purpose — to direct visitors to the gallery — and the same presentation format, a wall-mounted directional sign, so the differences between them are driven almost entirely by **context**. Both therefore use the same elements (type, shape, tone) and the same principle (hierarchy) to rank a destination above an arrow, and both keep the message to what a visitor needs at that point in the building.

The car-park sign is read at about 15 metres, in low artificial light, by someone driving. In response the designer has used a large **scale**, maximum tonal **contrast** — white reversed out of near-black — a heavy sans-serif in capitals, and

a single word with a single arrow, producing a *bold, utilitarian* aesthetic that survives distance, movement and gloom. The foyer sign is read at about 1.5 metres, in daylight, by someone standing still. Here the designer has reduced the scale, softened the tonal contrast to charcoal on pale stone, used a lighter weight in mixed case, and listed four destinations, producing a *quiet, refined* aesthetic that suits a calm interior and rewards a longer look.

The comparison shows that context, not format, sets the level of contrast, the scale and the amount of information a design can carry: the same communication need, met in two settings, produces two legitimately different aesthetics.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Using the AMBER shopfront: (a) State the purpose of the design. (1 mark) (b) Explain how one design element supports that purpose. (2 marks) (c) Explain how the overall aesthetic reinforces the same purpose. (2 marks)

Q2. Using the AMBER shopfront: (a) Describe the role of visual language in communicating ideas and information. (1 mark) (b) Identify one pictorial or symbolic element and one typographic element in the design. (2 marks) (c) Explain how the design's visual language influences a viewer's **behaviour**, not only their understanding. (2 marks)

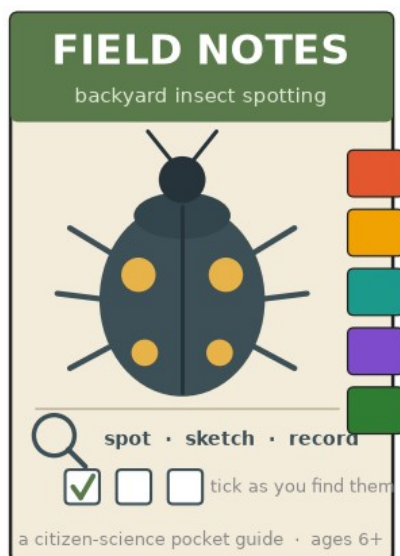
Q3. Using the AMBER shopfront: (a) Identify one demographic and one psychographic characteristic of its audience. (2 marks) (b) Explain how one of those characteristics may have influenced the inclusion and prominence of the *OPEN 24 HOURS* panel. (2 marks) (c) Distinguish between an audience *characteristic* and an audience *need*. (2 marks)

Q4. Referring to the two WREN CENTRE signs: (a) Identify one design decision that is the **same** in both signs. (1 mark) (b) Explain why that decision is unaffected by the change in context. (2 marks) (c) Explain why the presentation format alone cannot account for the differences between the two signs. (2 marks)

Q5. Distinguish between the **purpose** and the **context** of a design example, giving one example of each from the AMBER shopfront. (4 marks)

Q6. Referring to the WREN CENTRE foyer sign: (a) Distinguish between an audience and users. (2 marks) (b) Explain how the fact that a visitor stops in front of this sign, rather than passing it at speed, shaped one aesthetic decision. (2 marks) (c) Identify one feature of the foyer context that is absent from the car-park context. (1 mark)

Unscaffolded



Questions 7–17 refer to the *FIELD NOTES* pocket guide shown above, unless otherwise stated. *FIELD NOTES* is a printed pocket guide issued by a citizen-science programme; families are asked to find, sketch and report the insects they see in backyards and local parks.

Q7. Analyse how two aesthetic decisions in the *FIELD NOTES* guide respond to its purpose. (4 marks)

- Q8.** Describe the context in which FIELD NOTES is used, and explain how that context has shaped two of the designer's decisions. *(4 marks)*
- Q9.** FIELD NOTES must reach two very different readers within the same audience: a beginner reader and the adult beside them. Discuss how the design communicates to both. *(4 marks)*
- Q10.** Name the aesthetic of the FIELD NOTES guide and evaluate how appropriate it is for the programme's purpose and audience. *(6 marks)*
- Q11.** Explain how one demographic characteristic and one psychographic characteristic of the audience may have influenced two different design decisions. *(4 marks)*
- Q12.** Compare how **context** has influenced the aesthetic decisions in the AMBER shopfront and in the FIELD NOTES guide. *(6 marks)*
- Q13.** Explain how the designer has used **pictorial**, **symbolic** and **typographic** elements of visual language in FIELD NOTES, and state what each contributes to the communication. *(6 marks)*
- Q14.** A student writes: "The context of FIELD NOTES is that it is a small printed booklet." Explain why this is not a description of context, and write a corrected statement of the context. *(3 marks)*
- Q15.** Evaluate the effectiveness of the visual language of FIELD NOTES in communicating its instructions to a child user. *(6 marks)*
- Q16.** The programme wants to move the FIELD NOTES content onto a weather-exposed interpretive panel mounted at the entrance to a park. Explain two aesthetic decisions the designer would need to change, and why, given the new context. *(4 marks)*
- Q17.** Compare the audiences or users of the AMBER shopfront and the FIELD NOTES guide, and explain how each has shaped one typographic decision. *(4 marks)*
- Q18.** Choose **one** of the three design examples in this subtopic. Analyse the relationship between its aesthetic decisions and its **purpose**, **context** and **audience or users**. *(8 marks)*

Answers

Q1. (a) To identify the pharmacy, direct people to the entrance and signal that it is open at any hour. (b)–(c) See solutions. **Q2.** (a) To convey ideas and information to an audience through visual means. (b) Symbolic = the cross; typographic = the *AMBER* wordmark (accept the *OPEN 24 HOURS* panel). (c) See solutions. **Q3.** (a) e.g. demographic = local residents of all ages, including carers of young children and night-shift workers; psychographic = they value a health service they can rely on at any hour and prefer to deal with a health problem straight away rather than wait until morning. (b)–(c) See solutions. **Q4.** (a) e.g. ranking a destination name above a directional arrow (hierarchy); using type + an arrow rather than imagery. (b)–(c) See solutions. **Q5.** Purpose = what the design is for (to direct people to a pharmacy that is open at any hour); context = where, when and in what circumstances it is created, used or viewed (a dark high street at night, read at 20 m from a moving car). **Q6.** (a) An audience receives or views; users interact with, operate or handle. (b)–(c) See solutions. **Q7–Q18.** See fully-worked solutions.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. (a) To identify the business as a pharmacy, direct people to its entrance, and communicate that it is open at any hour. (b) The **element of colour**: a broad, warm amber field is the brightest thing on a dark street, so the shopfront is located before it is read, which is exactly what a viewer looking for a late-night pharmacy needs (2 marks: *element named + mechanism tied to the purpose*). (c) The overall aesthetic is *warm, calm and reassuring, yet highly legible*. Because the audience is unwell or worried, an aesthetic that feels welcoming rather than clinical encourages them to approach, while the high legibility ensures the identifying and directing purpose is still met at a glance (2 marks).

Q2. (a) Visual language is a system of communication in which ideas and information are conveyed to audiences through visual means; its role is to carry meaning, direct attention and influence behaviour. (b) Symbolic element = the charcoal cross; typographic element = the heavy capitalised *AMBER* wordmark (accept the letter-spaced *PHARMACY* line or the *OPEN 24 HOURS* panel). (c) Visual language does not only tell the viewer what the business is; it changes what they do. The lit amber fascia and the *OPEN 24 HOURS* panel remove the doubt that stops a person approaching a shop late at night, and the lit, level threshold makes the way in obvious, so a viewer who might otherwise drive on instead stops and enters. This is the role of visual language described in the Study Design — influencing how people experience or interact with places, systems and things (2 marks: *a behavioural outcome identified and traced to specific visual choices*).

Q3. (a) Demographic — local residents of all ages, including parents with young children, older people and night-shift workers. Psychographic — this audience values certainty and reliability in a health service and holds the attitude that a health problem should be dealt with straight away rather than left until morning; many also keep hours outside the standard working day. Note that *anxious* or *in a hurry* describes the state a viewer happens to be in at the moment of viewing, which belongs to **context**, not to audience psychographics. (b) Take the psychographic characteristic that this audience will act on a health problem immediately rather than wait for morning. Because they therefore set out at unpredictable hours and cannot afford a wasted trip, the single question they most need answered is whether the pharmacy is open. The designer has therefore given *OPEN 24 HOURS* its own illuminated amber panel in the window rather than burying it in small print, ranking it as the clear secondary layer of the hierarchy so it is read immediately after the name (2 marks: *characteristic → a specific decision about the panel → effect*). (c) A **characteristic** describes who the audience *is* — for example, “carers of young children, often travelling at night”. A **need** describes what the design must *do for* them — for example, “must be identifiable from a moving car in the dark”. Characteristics are evidence; needs are requirements (2 marks).

Q4. (a) Any one of: the use of **hierarchy** to rank a destination name above a directional arrow; the use of type plus an arrow rather than imagery; keeping the message to what a visitor needs at that point in the building. (b) That decision follows from the **purpose**, not the context. Both signs exist to direct a visitor to the gallery, and directing always requires the same two pieces of information — *what* the destination is and *which way* it lies — ranked in that order. Because the purpose is unchanged between the car park and the foyer, the decision that answers the purpose is unchanged too (2 marks: *the decision correctly attributed to purpose + why context does not alter it*). (c) The two signs share their presentation format exactly — both are wall-mounted directional signs — so the format is a constant and cannot explain a difference. What varies is the **context**: a dim basement car park read at 15 metres from a moving car, against a bright daylight foyer read at 1.5 metres by someone standing still. It is the change in viewing distance, lighting and viewer state that forces the change in scale, tonal contrast, weight and quantity of information (2 marks: *format identified as the constant + context identified as the variable*).

Q5. Purpose is what the design is for, expressed as a verb — for AMBER, to identify a pharmacy, direct people to its entrance and signal that it is open at any hour. **Context** is the environment or circumstances in which the design is created, used or viewed — for AMBER, a dark suburban high street at night, where the shopfront is the only lit frontage and is read for a second or two from about 20 metres, often from a passing car and in poor weather. The purpose stays the same wherever the pharmacy is; the context is what changes the decisions made to achieve it (4 marks: both defined, both exemplified from the design example).

Q6. (a) An **audience** receives or views a design — it is largely one-way. **Users** interact with, operate or handle it, so their physical and cognitive experience of using it must be designed for. The WREN CENTRE visitors are users: they act on the sign to move through the building. (b) Because a visitor in the foyer stops in front of the sign and reads it standing still, the designer has been able to list four destinations rather than one, and to set them at a small **scale** in a lighter weight and mixed case: a stationary reader at close range has the time and the viewing conditions to scan a short list and choose the line that applies to them, where a driver at speed could take in only a single word (2 marks). (c) Any one of: daylight rather than dim artificial light; a viewing distance of about 1.5 metres rather than 15 metres; a quiet, calm interior that permits fine detail and four destinations rather than one.

Q7. The purpose of FIELD NOTES is to instruct and inform — to help families identify insects, and to prompt them to sketch and report what they find. First, the designer has made a single large pictorial beetle the dominant element on the cover, using **scale** and **figure-ground** so that the subject of the guide is unmistakable before a word is read; a user knows immediately that this booklet is about insects. Second, the instruction line *spot, sketch, record*, set in bold lower case beside a magnifier symbol, states the three actions the programme wants, so the guide teaches its own use. Both decisions serve an instructional purpose rather than a decorative one (4 marks: two distinct decisions, each with element/principle, mechanism and link to purpose).

Q8. FIELD NOTES is used outdoors, in backyards and local parks, in bright daylight, held in one hand — often a child's hand — by a user who crouches still to look, moves on between plants, and frequently has dirty or wet fingers; it is opened and closed many times in a session, and at each stop the user can hold it close and study a page for as long as they need. In response the designer has used a warm, low-glare sand ground rather than bright white, which reduces reflection in direct sun and keeps the illustration readable outdoors. The designer has also added colour-coded index tabs that project beyond the page edge, so a user returning to the guide can jump straight to the section they want one-handed, without needing to read a contents page or turn pages carefully (4 marks: context described as setting and circumstances of use + two decisions explained from it).

Q9. The guide is built so that each reader can take what they need from a different layer of the same cover. For the **beginner reader**, meaning is carried without text: the large beetle, the magnifier symbol, the projecting colour tabs and the tick boxes all state the subject, the way in and the expected action visually, so a six-year-old can use the guide before they can read it, and the rounded forms and warm spots make it feel like an invitation rather than a test. For the **accompanying adult**, meaning is carried by the typographic hierarchy: the bold *FIELD NOTES* wordmark, the descriptive *backyard insect spotting* line and the *spot, sketch, record* instruction let a parent confirm what the guide is and what the programme expects in a couple of seconds, so they can supervise without taking over. The design therefore addresses one audience at two reading levels at once, which is what a family-facing citizen-science guide requires (4 marks: both readers identified, distinct visual evidence for each, and the reason the split matters).

Q10. The aesthetic is *warm, friendly and natural* — an approachable, hand-made “naturalist's notebook” character. It is highly appropriate for the purpose and audience. The warm sand ground, the leaf-green band and the rounded, simplified beetle avoid the cold, technical look of a scientific key, so a primary-aged child feels invited to open the guide rather than tested by it, which serves a programme that depends on volunteers choosing to take part. The tick boxes and bold instruction line carry that friendliness into behaviour by making participation feel like a game. A limitation is that the same softness reduces precision: a simplified, stylised insect is easier to like but harder to match against a real specimen than an accurate scientific illustration would be, so identification accuracy — which matters for citizen-science data — may suffer. **Overall**, because participation is the programme's first hurdle, the warm and friendly aesthetic is the right choice, provided the interior pages carry more accurate imagery (6 marks: aesthetic named, strengths tied to purpose and audience, a limitation, an overall judgement).

Q11. A **demographic** characteristic is that the primary users are children of roughly six to eleven, with a parent alongside. Because beginner readers cannot rely on text, the designer has used large, simplified pictorial and symbolic cues — the beetle, the magnifier, the tabs — so meaning is available without reading. A **psychographic** characteristic is that these families are curious, outdoors-oriented and want to feel they are contributing to something real. Because

of this, the designer has included tick boxes and the line *spot, sketch, record*, which turn the guide into a record of the family's own work and reward continued participation (4 marks: one of each characteristic, correctly labelled, each linked to a distinct decision).

Q12. In both examples the context has driven the level of contrast, the scale and the amount of detail the design can carry, but the contexts pull in opposite directions. AMBER is viewed at night, from about 20 metres, by a moving viewer, so the designer used a lit amber field, maximum tonal contrast against a dark street and heavy letter-spaced capitals, and reduced the message to a name, a symbol and an opening claim. FIELD NOTES is used outdoors in bright daylight at arm's length by a stationary, crouching user, so the designer used a low-glare warm ground rather than a luminous one, smaller type, and far more detail — a full illustration, tabs, tick boxes and an instruction line — because the user has time and proximity to absorb it. The similarity is that each designer read the viewing distance, lighting and viewer state first and set the aesthetic from them; the difference is that distance and speed forced AMBER toward reduction and boldness, while proximity and dwell time allowed FIELD NOTES richness and warmth (6 marks: congruent two-sided comparison, context stated correctly for each, both similarity and difference).

Q13. Pictorial: the large stylised beetle occupies the centre of the cover; it identifies the subject of the guide instantly and, through its rounded body and warm spots, sets a friendly rather than scientific tone. **Symbolic:** the five colour-coded index tabs stand for the sections of the guide, the magnifier stands for the act of looking closely, and the tick boxes stand for progress; all three convey structure and expected action without words, which matters for a beginner reader. **Typographic:** the heavy *FIELD NOTES* wordmark names the guide and sits at the top of a clear hierarchy; the lighter *backyard insect spotting* line specifies the content; the bold *spot, sketch, record* line instructs. Together the three components let the guide be understood at three levels — what it is about, how it is organised, and what to do with it (6 marks: all three components identified in the example, each with a stated contribution).

Q14. “A small printed booklet” names the **presentation format** — the physical form the solution takes — not the context. **Context** is the environment or circumstances in which a design is created, used or viewed. A corrected statement: *FIELD NOTES is used outdoors in backyards and local parks, in bright daylight, held one-handed by a crouching child with a parent nearby, often with dirty or wet hands, and opened and closed repeatedly as insects are found.* The format would stay the same if the guide were used indoors at a desk, but the context — and therefore the aesthetic decisions — would change (3 marks: error identified, context correctly defined, a corrected statement supplied).

Q15. The visual language is largely effective for a child user. The three-part instruction line is reinforced by the magnifier symbol and the tick boxes, so the required actions are shown as well as stated, and a beginner reader can infer them from the symbols alone. The colour-coded tabs give a non-verbal navigation system that a child can operate one-handed, and the strong figure-ground of the beetle against the plain ground means the subject is never in doubt. There are limitations. The instruction line is set in a bold but small size and relies on the words *sketch* and *record*, which a six-year-old may not read or understand, and there is no pictorial cue for sketching or recording to match the magnifier for spotting. The tick boxes also appear without a label large enough for a child to connect them to the instruction. **Overall**, the guide communicates its subject and its navigation to a child very effectively, and its instructions only partly so; adding a pencil symbol beside *sketch* would close the gap (6 marks: strengths and limitations, evidence from the example, an overall judgement referenced to the child user).

Q16. On a weather-exposed interpretive panel at a park entrance, the design is read standing, from one to three metres, by several people at once, in full sun and rain, and it can no longer be handled. First, the designer would need to increase the **scale** of the type and of the beetle and raise the tonal **contrast**, because the panel is read from further away and in glare, where the current small-format hierarchy would fail. Second, the interactive devices — the projecting index tabs and the tick boxes — would have to be replaced, because nobody can turn a tab or mark a box on a fixed outdoor panel; the content would need to be reorganised into a single flat layout with the sections shown at once, keeping the colour coding as the organising cue (4 marks: new context stated, two decisions changed, each justified by the new context).

Q17. AMBER's audience is a broad, undefined public — anyone who is unwell and anyone caring for them — spanning every age group, including many older residents whose sight is no longer sharp and people who read little English; they become users at the doorway. FIELD NOTES' users are a narrow, defined group — primary-aged children of about six to eleven, each with a parent alongside — who are curious and outdoors-oriented. Because AMBER's typography has to work across that whole range of visual ability and reading confidence, the designer has set the wordmark in a heavy sans-serif in generously letter-spaced capitals at large scale: every letter is a large, simple,

well-separated shape, so the name resolves for a viewer with reduced acuity and can be recognised as a shape rather than decoded as a word. Because FIELD NOTES' users include beginner readers, its typography is smaller but set in a friendly, generously spaced sans-serif in mixed case rather than capitals — the ascenders and descenders of lower case give a six-year-old the word shapes they are taught to read by — with the *spot, sketch, record* line bolded so the accompanying adult can find the required action at a glance. Both audiences therefore drive the type decision, but one is driven by the spread of visual ability in an undefined public and the other by reading level within a family group (4 marks: congruent comparison of the audiences + one typographic decision explained for each).

Q18. (Model, using the AMBER shopfront.) AMBER's **purpose** is to identify the business as a pharmacy, direct people to its entrance and signal that it is open at any hour. Its **context** is a suburban high street at night, where it is the only lit frontage in a dark strip and is read for a second or two from about 20 metres, often from a passing car and in poor weather, and by a viewer who is hurried and under stress. Its **audience and users** are people who are unwell and those caring for them — parents with a sick child, night-shift workers, older residents — who value a health service they can rely on at any hour and who want reassurance as much as supply, and who then physically use the doorway. The aesthetic that results is *warm, calm and reassuring, yet highly legible*.

Each aesthetic decision answers one of those three drivers. Answering the **context**, the designer has used the **element of colour** with the **principle of contrast**: a broad, lit amber fascia against a dark street makes the shopfront the brightest and warmest thing in view, so it is located before it is read. Also answering the context, the **element of type** is handled at large **scale** in heavy, letter-spaced capitals, which hold their shape at 20 metres and at speed where a lighter or condensed face would blur. Answering the **purpose**, the charcoal cross is a conventional symbol read instantly and without language, and the *OPEN 24 HOURS* panel is placed as a clear secondary layer of the **hierarchy**, so the viewer learns what the business is, then that they can act on it now. Answering the **audience and users**, the warm amber hue and the rounded corners of the fascia and panel replace the cool, clinical palette common in healthcare, so the frontage reassures rather than intimidates an audience that wants care as much as supply; and the level, lit threshold between two glazed bays makes the entry obvious and physically easy for a user with a pram or a mobility aid.

Because purpose, context and audience all point the same way — be found fast, be understood without reading, and feel safe — the decisions reinforce rather than compete with one another, and the design communicates its message in the two seconds its context allows (8 marks: purpose, context and audience/users each stated correctly and each linked to specific element and principle choices, with mechanisms and a named aesthetic).

Chapter 8 Design analysis — 8C Conceptions of good design

Theory

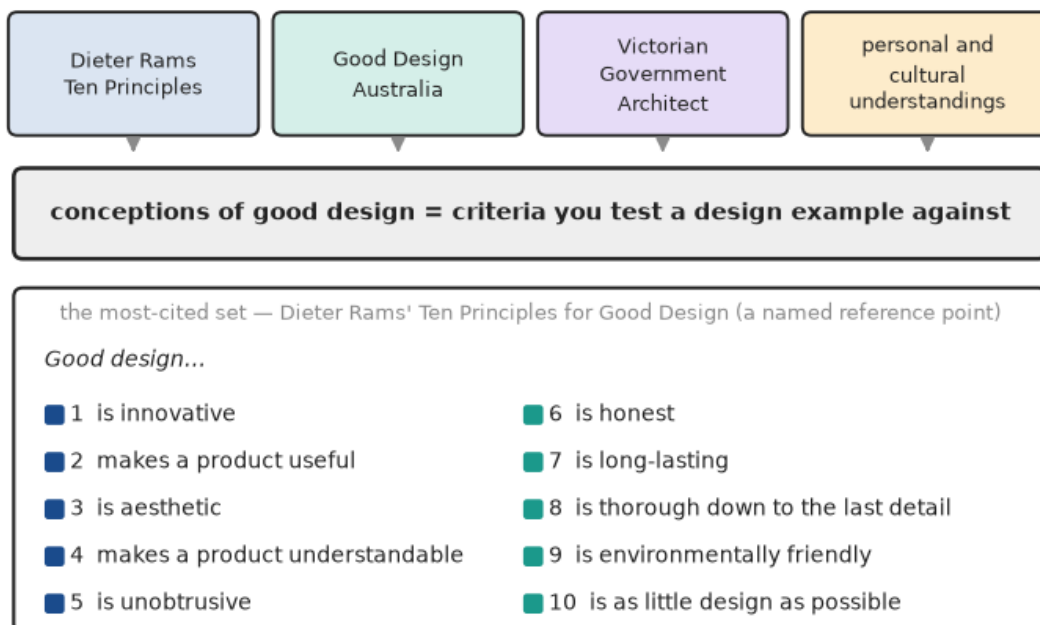
A **conception of good design** is a criterion you can test a design example against. The Study Design is direct about what these criteria are like: notions of good design are **personal, contextual and political**. There is no single test that settles the question of whether something is good. You are expected to draw on both **universal** and **culturally specific** understandings, together with your own experience of designs that have served you well, to formulate your own conceptions — and then to use those conceptions as criteria to guide your practice and to evaluate the work of others.

That last step is the examinable skill: **use conceptions of good design to evaluate design examples**. In Section A this appears as questions such as “Describe how the purpose of your selected design example reflects conceptions of good design”, “Evaluate how the context of your selected design example reflects conceptions of good design” and “Evaluate how the designer has drawn on conceptions of good design to meet audience or user needs.”

Where conceptions come from. References to good design usually travel with best-practice guidelines, policies, principles of practice and the criteria of design competitions. The Study Design names three you can cite by name:

- **Dieter Rams’ Ten Principles for Good Design** — set out in the 1970s by a German industrial designer, and by far the most frequently cited set in examination responses.
- **Good Design Australia’s Good Design Award** — an Australian design awards program. The criteria an awards program publishes for its entrants are a statement of what that organisation counts as good design, which is why the Study Design lists competition criteria as a source.
- **the Good Design series published by the Victorian Government Architect** — which sets out what good design means for public buildings, places and infrastructure in Victoria.

To these you add **personal conceptions** formed from your own experience, and **culturally specific conceptions** — for example, understandings held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about connection to Country, custodianship and benefit to community, which may rank a design’s relationship to place above its novelty.

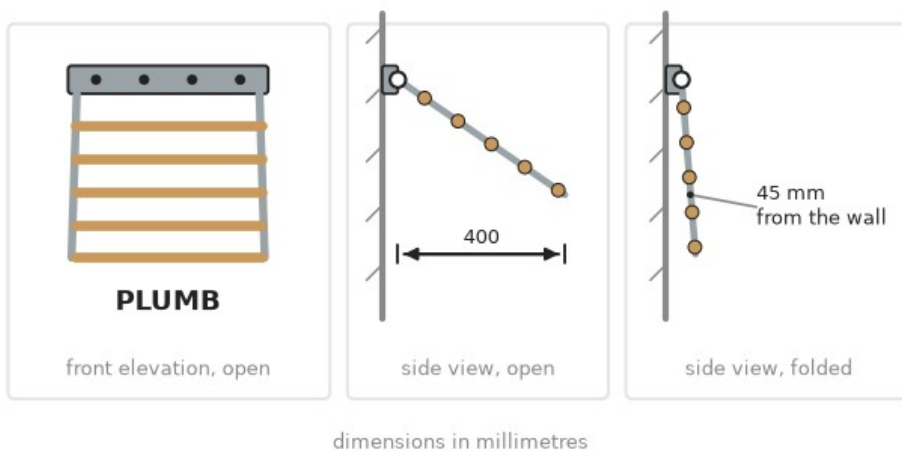


Conceptions are not the same in every field or every context. ‘Good design is unobtrusive’ means one thing for an **Object** (a rack that folds out of the way), another for an **Environment** (a structure that does not block sightlines or light) and another again for an **Interactive experience** (an app that does not interrupt the user with unnecessary notifications). Before applying a conception, ask what it would actually look like in this field, for this purpose, in this context.

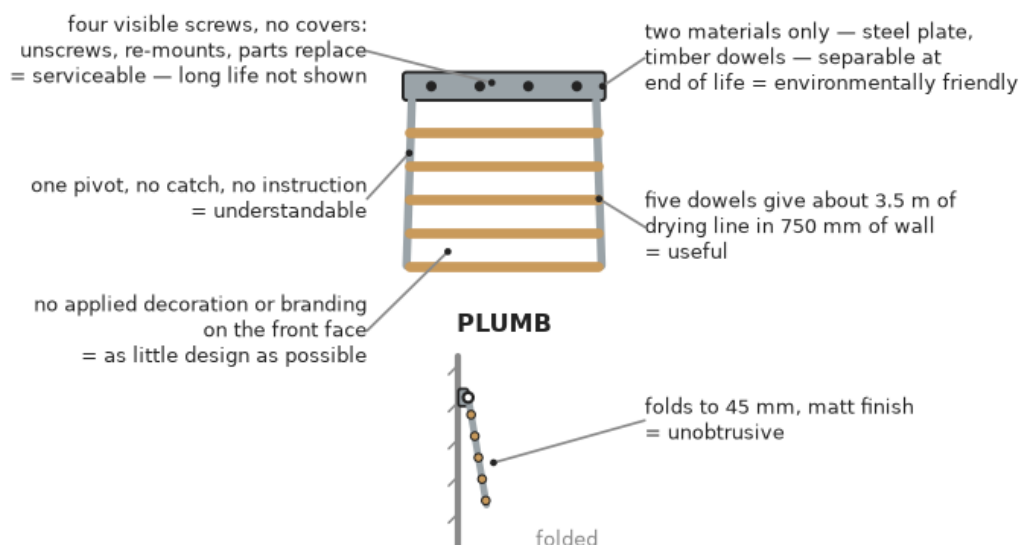
The evaluative move. A response that earns full marks does four things, in this order:

1. **Anchor the evaluation.** State the design's **purpose** (specifically — what it is for), its **context** (the setting and circumstances in which it is created, used or viewed) or the **audience or user need** — whichever the question names.
2. **Name two or three specific conceptions**, in the framework's own words, and say whose they are (e.g. "Dieter Rams' principle that good design is unobtrusive").
3. **Point to evidence** you can actually see in the design example.
4. **Judge.** State how well, or how completely, the conception is met — including where it is met only partly.
Two or three conceptions treated deeply beats a list of eight.

The design example — PLUMB. Below is an original design example from the field of **Objects**: a wall-mounted folding drying rack. Its purpose is to let people in small dwellings without an outdoor line dry a full load of washing indoors, without a floor-standing airer taking up living space. Its context is a rented apartment laundry or balcony, used several times a week, in a home where floor area is scarce.



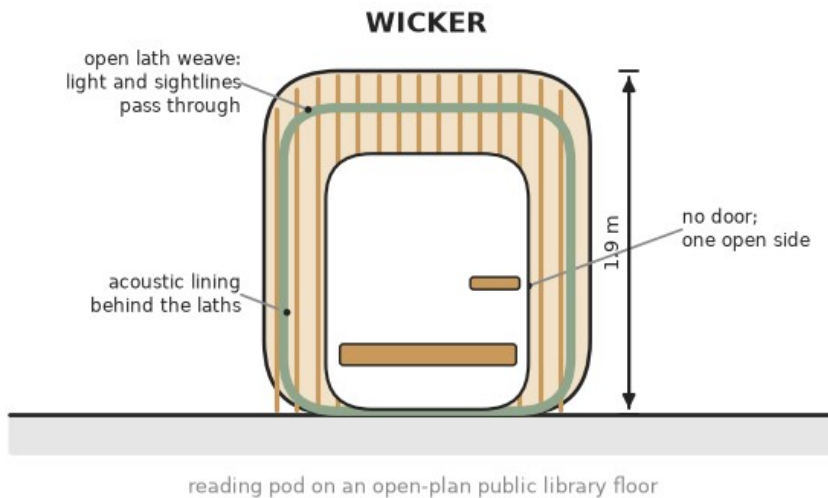
Reading the example against named conceptions gives you evidence-backed claims rather than impressions. Note what the annotated breakdown does **not** claim.



not evidenced here — how long the finish lasts, what it cost, whether the timber is certified
never claim what the design example cannot show

When conceptions conflict. Because notions of good design are personal, contextual and political, two legitimate conceptions can pull against each other, and a good evaluation says so. WICKER is an original design example from

the field of **Environments**: a freestanding reading pod of woven timber laths on a steel frame, installed on the open ground floor of a busy public library. Its purpose is to give one or two readers a quieter, semi-private place to read or study inside a noisy shared room.



WICKER is strong against ‘good design makes a product useful’ — the acoustic lining and the enclosure do what the open room cannot — and against ‘good design is unobtrusive’, since the pod stands only 1.9 m high, is finished in natural timber and lets light and staff sightlines through its open weave. But those same decisions work against ‘good design makes a product understandable’: a pod that recedes into the room is harder for a first-time visitor to find, and the open weave means a passer-by must look closely to see whether it is occupied. There is a political question in it too — one reader occupies a structure that displaces seating for four in a public space. Naming that tension, and then making a judgement, is exactly what “evaluate” asks for.

Watch-out — state the purpose or context first, and state it specifically. “The purpose reflects the good design conception” earns nothing. Write the purpose as a sentence — “the purpose of PLUMB is to dry a full load of washing indoors in a home with no outdoor line” — then link it.

Watch-out — context is not presentation format. Context is the setting and circumstances in which a design is created, used or viewed (a rented apartment, an open-plan library floor, an exposed beach). Saying the design “is on a phone screen” or “is shown as a front and side view” describes the format, not the context, and scores nothing.

Watch-out — evidence, not assumption. Do not claim durability, low cost, sustainable sourcing or long life unless the design example shows it. Assessors specifically penalise conceptions asserted on assumption. If you cannot see it, do not claim it.

Watch-out — two or three conceptions, deeply. Listing six principles with a sentence each reads as a list, not an evaluation. Choose the two or three the example genuinely evidences and develop each one.

Watch-out — use the framework’s words accurately. ‘Good design is as little design as possible’ does not fit a heavily detailed, decorated design; ‘good design is honest’ is about not overstating what a design can do, not about being plain. Misapplied terminology loses the mark even when the observation is sound.

Watch-out — evaluate, do not describe. “Evaluate” needs a judgement, and a complete judgement names a limitation as well as a strength. Where the question names the audience or user, the judgement must reach them — the most common fault in this question type is discussing the principles well and never mentioning the user.

Watch-out — a conception is a criterion, not a preference. “It looks modern and I would use it” is taste. A conception is a stated criterion, attributed to a source (or reasoned from your own practice), that can be tested against evidence.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Describe how the purpose of the PLUMB drying rack reflects conceptions of good design. (4 marks)

Working	Comment
Purpose: PLUMB is designed to dry a full load of washing indoors, in a small dwelling that has no outdoor line and no floor space for a standing airer.	Begin with a single clear sentence naming the specific purpose. Vague purposes (“to be useful”) are the most common cause of low marks in this question type.
This purpose is reflected in Rams’ principle that good design makes a product useful : five dowels carry about 3.5 m of drying line across only 750 mm of wall, so the rack does the whole job in the space available.	Name the conception in the framework’s own words, then give the evidence from the example that shows it.
The purpose also reflects ‘good design is unobtrusive’ : the rack folds to 45 mm from the wall and carries no decoration or branding on the front face, so when it is not in use it gives the room back to the household.	A second conception, again evidenced. Two or three developed conceptions score better than a list.
Because the design is intended for a home where space is scarce, being useful when open and unobtrusive when closed is precisely what its purpose demands.	Close by linking purpose and conceptions together — do not describe them in separate paragraphs.

Example 2 — scaffolded

Evaluate how the context in which WICKER is used reflects conceptions of good design. (4 marks)

Working	Comment
Context: WICKER sits on the open ground floor of a busy public library — a shared, noisy, well-lit room used at the same time by students, parents with young children and older readers, and supervised by staff who need to see across it.	Context = the setting and circumstances of use. Describe the room and who is in it; do not describe the drawing or the presentation format.
That context makes ‘good design is unobtrusive’ the demanding criterion, and the design meets it: the pod is only 1.9 m high and its open lath weave lets light and staff sightlines pass straight through, so it does not darken or divide the floor.	Choose the conception the context makes important, then evidence it. This is the link most responses fail to make.
It also meets ‘good design makes a product useful’ in this context: the acoustic lining behind the laths and the single open side reduce noise without a door, giving the quiet the open room cannot.	A second conception tied to the same context.
A limitation is that the same recessive treatment weakens ‘good design makes a product understandable’ — a first-time visitor may not identify the pod as available seating, and the open weave makes occupancy hard to read at a glance. Overall , the context is served well: in a shared public room, not intruding matters more than announcing itself.	Evaluation = strength + limitation + an overall judgement, decided by the context.

Example 3 — unscaffolded

Evaluate how the designer of PLUMB has drawn on conceptions of good design to meet audience or user needs. (8 marks)

The user of PLUMB is a person living in a small rented dwelling with no outdoor clothes line, who needs to dry a full load of washing indoors, several times a week, without surrendering living space or making permanent alterations to a rented wall.

The designer has drawn first on Dieter Rams' principle that **good design makes a product useful**. Five hardwood dowels give about 3.5 m of drying line across 750 mm of wall, and the arms project 400 mm when open — enough capacity for a full load in a space that could not hold a standing airer. The user's central need is met directly.

Second, the designer has drawn on '**good design is unobtrusive**'. The rack folds to 45 mm from the wall, is finished matt, and carries no decoration or branding on the face the household sees every day. This matters because the design lives in a room the user also lives in; a rack that could not disappear would fail the user even if it dried the washing.

Third, the design reflects '**good design makes a product understandable**'. There is one pivot, no catch and no instruction: the single obvious action is to swing the arms down. A user can operate it with an armful of wet washing, and a new tenant can work it out without being shown.

There are limits to how far the designer has gone. The exposed screw heads and plain matt steel plate read as utilitarian, so '**good design is aesthetic**' is met only partly in a living space; and the dowel spacing is fixed, so a user with long garments is less well served than one drying towels and shirts. It would also be wrong to claim the design is **long-lasting** on the strength of its appearance alone — what can be evidenced is that the dowels and fixings are individually replaceable and the whole rack unscrews for re-mounting, which supports serviceability rather than proving longevity.

Overall, the designer has drawn on conceptions of good design effectively for this user. The combination of usefulness when open, unobtrusiveness when closed, and immediate understandability resolves the central tension of the user's situation — needing a large drying area in a home with no space to spare — and the aesthetic and adjustability limitations are minor by comparison.

Example 4 — unscaffolded

Two conceptions of good design pull in opposite directions in WICKER. Discuss this tension and make a judgement about whether WICKER can be considered good design. (6 marks)

The tension in WICKER is between '**good design is unobtrusive**' and '**good design makes a product understandable**'. The designer has held the pod to 1.9 m so that it stops well short of the ceiling and the floor still reads as one room, has used an open lath weave that light and staff sightlines pass through, and has finished it in natural timber that sits quietly against the library's shelving. Judged against unobtrusiveness, these are strong decisions: the pod adds a facility to the floor without dividing or darkening it. Judged against understandability, the same decisions cost something. There is no door, no signage and no change in level, so a first-time visitor may not read the pod as something they are permitted to use, and because the weave is open but not transparent, occupancy has to be checked by approaching.

The tension is not a fault in the analysis but a real design trade-off, and it shows why the Study Design describes notions of good design as personal, contextual and political: a librarian protecting sightlines and a first-time visitor looking for somewhere to sit would weight these two conceptions differently, and a decision about who gets to occupy a shared public floor is a political one.

On balance, WICKER can be considered good design in its context. In a shared, supervised public room, unobtrusiveness and usefulness — the acoustic lining and enclosure deliver quiet the open room cannot — are the conceptions that matter most, and both are clearly evidenced. The understandability weakness is real but is the cheapest to remedy, since it could be addressed by signage or a simple occupancy indicator without disturbing any of the decisions that make the pod succeed.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Using the PLUMB drying rack: (a) Identify the intended user of PLUMB. (1 mark) (b) State one need that user has. (1 mark) (c) Explain how one named conception of good design, evidenced in the design, meets that need. (2 marks)

Q2. Conceptions of good design and where they come from: (a) Name two named sources of conceptions of good design other than Dieter Rams' Ten Principles. (2 marks) (b) Explain what it means to say that notions of good design are "personal, contextual and political". (3 marks)

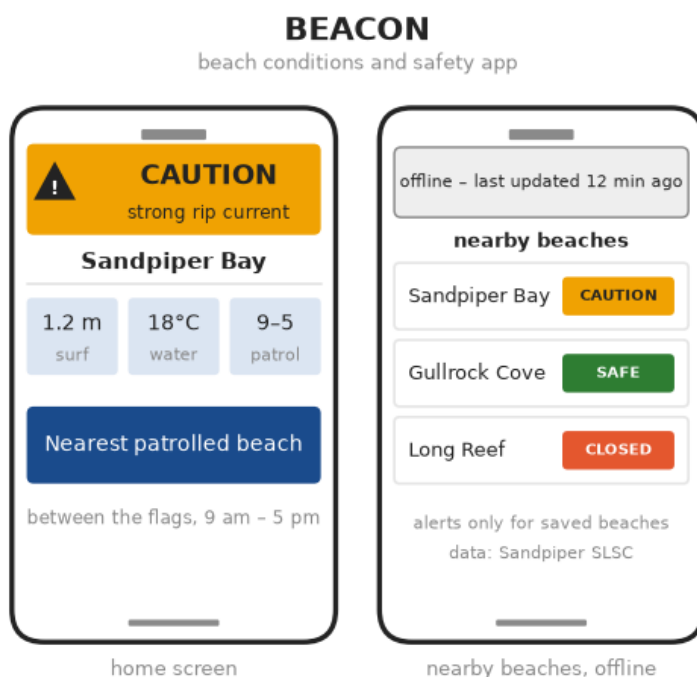
Q3. Context: (a) Define **context** as it is used when analysing a design example. (1 mark) (b) Describe the context in which PLUMB is used. (2 marks) (c) Explain why the statement “PLUMB is presented as a front elevation and two side views” is not a statement of context. (1 mark)

Q4. Evidence: (a) Identify one conception of good design that could **not** be supported by the evidence visible in the PLUMB drawings, and explain why. (2 marks) (b) Identify one conception that **can** be supported, and state the evidence. (2 marks)

Q5. The same conception across two fields: (a) Explain what ‘good design makes a product understandable’ looks like in the field of **Objects**, using PLUMB as evidence. (2 marks) (b) Explain what the same conception would look like in the field of **Interactive experiences**. (2 marks)

Q6. Weighing the evidence for one conception: (a) Explain how ‘good design is environmentally friendly’ is evidenced in PLUMB. (2 marks) (b) Explain how far the same conception is evidenced in WICKER. (2 marks) (c) State which of the two claims is better supported by evidence, and why. (2 marks)

Un scaffolded



Questions 7–13 refer to the BEACON beach conditions and safety app shown above, unless otherwise stated. BEACON is used outdoors at the beach, in bright sun and often with wet or sandy hands, by beachgoers including families and visitors unfamiliar with the coast. Its data is supplied by the local surf life saving club.

Q7. Describe how the purpose of BEACON reflects conceptions of good design. (4 marks)

Q8. Evaluate how the context in which BEACON is used reflects conceptions of good design. (4 marks)

Q9. Evaluate how the designer of BEACON has drawn on conceptions of good design to meet user needs. (8 marks)

Q10. The Study Design describes notions of good design as personal, contextual and **political**. Discuss how the designer’s decisions in BEACON distribute benefit between different groups of users, and make a judgement about whether BEACON can be considered good design for the users it serves least well. (6 marks)

Q11. Discuss how the conception ‘good design is honest’ could be applied when evaluating BEACON. (4 marks)

Q12. ‘Good design is as little design as possible.’ Evaluate whether this conception has been appropriately applied in BEACON. (4 marks)

Q13. A student writes: “BEACON is good design because it looks modern and I would use it.” Explain two ways this response fails to use conceptions of good design, then rewrite it as a response that would score. (4 marks)

Q14. Compare PLUMB and BEACON against the conception ‘good design makes a product useful’, referring to evidence in each. (6 marks)

Q15. Explain how a **culturally specific** conception of good design could change the way WICKER is evaluated. (4 marks)

Q16. Formulate **one** conception of good design of your own that does not appear in Dieter Rams’ Ten Principles, and justify it with reference to one of the three design examples in this subtopic. (3 marks)

Q17. Choose **one** of the three design examples in this subtopic. Evaluate the extent to which it can be considered good design, referring to at least **three** conceptions and to the design’s purpose, context and audience or users. (8 marks)

Answers

Q1. (a) A person living in a small rented dwelling with no outdoor clothes line. (b) To dry a full load of washing indoors without losing living space. (c) See solutions. **Q2.** (a) Good Design Australia's Good Design Award; the Good Design series by the Victorian Government Architect (accept design-competition criteria, best-practice guidelines/policies). (b) See solutions. **Q3.** (a) The setting and circumstances in which a design is created, used or viewed. (b) A small rented apartment laundry or balcony, no outdoor line, used several times a week, little floor space. (c) It describes the presentation format, not the setting or circumstances of use. **Q4.** (a) E.g. 'long-lasting' — nothing in the drawings shows how the finish or timber will wear. (b) E.g. 'unobtrusive' — it folds to 45 mm from the wall. **Q5.** (a) One pivot, no catch, no instructions — the single action is self-evident. (b) Plain language, one primary action per screen, status shown by word plus icon plus colour rather than colour alone. **Q6.** (a) Two materials only, separable and individually replaceable. (b) Timber laths that can be replaced individually; no other visible evidence. (c) PLUMB — see solutions. **Q7–Q17.** See fully-worked solutions.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. (a) The user is a person living in a **small rented dwelling with no outdoor clothes line**. (b) They need to **dry a full load of washing indoors without giving up living space** (accept: without making permanent alterations to a rented wall). (c) The design meets that need through Rams' principle that **good design makes a product useful**: five dowels provide about 3.5 m of drying line across only 750 mm of wall and project 400 mm when open, so a full load can be dried in a space that could not take a standing ailer (*2 marks: conception named + evidence from the example linked to the stated need*).

Q2. (a) Any two of: **Good Design Australia's Good Design Award; the Good Design series published by the Victorian Government Architect**; the published **criteria of international design competitions; best-practice design guidelines, policies and principles of practice**. (b) **Personal** — conceptions are formed from an individual's own experience of designs that have served them, so two designers may hold different criteria and both be defensible. **Contextual** — what counts as good depends on the field, the purpose and the setting; 'unobtrusive' means something different in an apartment, a public library and a beachside app. **Political** — judgements about good design distribute benefit and cost between people, so they involve questions of whose needs a design serves and who is excluded (*3 marks: one for each of personal, contextual and political, each explained*).

Q3. (a) **Context** is the **setting and circumstances in which a design is created, used or viewed**. (b) PLUMB is used in a **small rented apartment laundry or on a balcony**, in a home with no outdoor clothes line and little spare floor area; it is used **several times a week**, indoors, and is seen by the household every day whether or not it is in use. (c) It describes the **presentation format** — the drawings used to show the design — rather than the setting or circumstances in which the rack is used. Assessors treat presentation format as a common substitution for context and award no marks for it.

Q4. (a) **'Good design is long-lasting'** cannot be supported: the drawings show the form and the fixings but say nothing about how the matt finish or the timber will wear, how the rack behaves under load over years, or how it has been tested. Claiming it would be an assumption rather than an evaluation. (*Accept 'environmentally friendly' argued as sourcing/certification, or 'thorough down to the last detail' argued as manufacturing quality, if the reasoning is the same.*) (b) **'Good design is unobtrusive'** can be supported: the side view shows the rack folding to **45 mm from the wall**, and the front elevation shows no applied decoration or branding on the visible face.

Q5. (a) In **Objects**, understandable means the product tells the user how to use it through its form. PLUMB has **one pivot, no catch and no instruction label**, so the single available action — swinging the arms down — is self-evident, and a user can operate it one-handed while holding wet washing. (b) In **Interactive experiences**, the same conception is met through the interface rather than the form: **plain language, one primary action per screen**, consistent navigation, and status communicated by **word, icon and colour together** rather than colour alone, so a first-time user knows what they are looking at and what to do next without instruction (*2 + 2 marks: the conception translated into the visual language of each field, with an example*).

Q6. (a) In PLUMB the conception is evidenced by **material choice and serviceability**: the rack uses **two materials only** — a steel plate and timber dowels — which can be **separated at end of life**, and the dowels and screws are **individually replaceable**, so a single damaged part does not send the whole product to landfill. (b) In WICKER the evidence is **thinner**: the timber laths are individually replaceable, which supports repair, but nothing in the example

shows the source of the timber, the steel frame's recycled content or how the pod would be disposed of. (c) **PLUMB** is the better-supported claim, because its evidence is visible in the design itself — two separable materials, exposed replaceable fixings — whereas the **WICKER** claim rests largely on an assumption about materials that the example does not show (2 marks: judgement + the reason expressed in terms of what the evidence can and cannot show).

Q7. The purpose of **BEACON** is to tell a beachgoer, in seconds and **before they enter the water**, whether conditions at the beach they are standing on are safe, and where the nearest patrolled beach is. That purpose reflects '**good design makes a product useful**': the home screen answers the single question the user has with one status band — **CAUTION**, strong rip current — supported by only three facts (surf height, water temperature, patrol hours), so nothing competes with the safety message. It also reflects '**good design makes a product understandable**': the status is carried by a **word, a warning icon and a colour together**, not by colour alone, and the one large primary button says plainly what it does — "Nearest patrolled beach". Because the purpose is to change a decision in the moments before someone swims, being immediately useful and immediately understandable is exactly what that purpose requires (4 marks: specific purpose stated; two conceptions named; evidence from the example; purpose and conceptions linked, not described separately).

Q8. **BEACON** is used **outdoors on a beach** — in bright sun and glare, on sand, often with wet or sandy hands, sometimes where mobile reception is poor, and by visitors who may not know the coast. That context makes '**good design makes a product understandable**' critical, and the design meets it: large, high-contrast type, a single dominant status band and one primary action can be read at arm's length in glare and operated one-handed. The context also makes '**good design is honest**' important, and it is well met: the second screen states plainly that the app is **offline and last updated 12 minutes ago**, and names the surf life saving club that supplies the data, so the user can weigh how much to trust what they are reading rather than being given false certainty. A limitation is that honesty about staleness does not remove the risk — in a fast-changing surf, 12-minute-old information may still mislead a user who does not appreciate how quickly conditions change. **Overall**, the design responds well to its context: the decisions that matter most in glare, wet hands and poor reception have been made deliberately (4 marks: context correctly described as setting/circumstances; relevant conceptions linked to that context; evidence; judgement including a limitation).

Q9. The users of **BEACON** are beachgoers — families, and visitors unfamiliar with this stretch of coast — who need to know, quickly and reliably, whether it is safe to swim here and, if it is not, where they should go instead.

The designer has drawn first on '**good design makes a product useful**'. The home screen is built around the one decision the user is making: a single status band states **CAUTION** and names the hazard (strong rip current), three tiles give only the facts that bear on that decision, and a single large button leads to the nearest patrolled beach. Nothing on the screen serves a purpose other than the user's need.

Second, the designer has drawn on '**good design makes a product understandable**'. Status is communicated redundantly — the word **CAUTION**, a warning triangle and an amber field — so a user who cannot distinguish the colour, or who is reading in glare, still receives the message. The list screen repeats the same three status words for nearby beaches, so the vocabulary the user learns on one screen works on the next.

Third, the design reflects '**good design is honest**'. It shows the age of its data and names its source rather than presenting conditions as certain, and there is no advertising dressed up as content competing with the safety information. For a design whose whole value depends on being believed, this directly serves the user.

The design is also **unobtrusive** in the limited sense the example evidences: alerts are sent only for beaches the user has saved, so the app does not train users to dismiss its notifications.

There are limits. A visitor unfamiliar with Australian beaches may not know what "patrolled" or "between the flags" means, so a user need the app identifies is not fully met by the language it uses. And while the offline banner is honest, the app cannot deliver current information without reception, which is the situation in which a remote-beach user most needs it. It would also be unsupported to call the design **long-lasting** on this evidence; nothing shown tells us how the interface will hold up as devices and expectations change.

Overall, the designer has drawn on conceptions of good design effectively to meet user needs. Usefulness, understandability and honesty are all clearly evidenced and all point at the same user decision, which is what makes the design coherent; the shortfalls concern users at the edges of the audience rather than the central need (8 marks:

user need stated; three or more conceptions named and evidenced; limitations; an overall judgement referred back to the user).

Q10. To call notions of good design **political** is to recognise that a design decision settles whose needs are served first, so people standing in different positions can judge the same decision differently. Several of BEACON's decisions distribute benefit unevenly.

Alerts are sent only for beaches the user has saved. That decision protects the regular local, who has a home beach and has already set it up, far better than the visitor who arrives somewhere new and has saved nothing — and the visitor is the user with least local knowledge of the water. **The status data comes from the local surf life saving club.** That decision ties the app's usefulness to beaches a volunteer club already patrols and reports on, so a swimmer at an unpatrolled beach — arguably the most exposed user of all — receives the least from the design. **The interface is written in short, unexplained terms** such as “patrolled” and “between the flags”. That decision buys the reduction that makes the home screen readable in glare, but it serves a user who already knows Australian beach conventions at the expense of the visitor the app most needs to reach.

None of these is a fault the designer could simply have avoided: safety data has to come from somewhere, and explaining every term would cost the clarity that makes the screen work in sun and with wet hands. That is exactly what makes the judgement political rather than technical — a benefit given to one group is taken from another, and reasonable people weigh the trade differently.

Overall, BEACON can still be considered good design, because the users it serves least well are not abandoned by it: the offline banner tells them the reading is stale rather than letting them act on it as though it were current, and the single largest action on the screen sends them to a patrolled beach. A judgement the other way — that a safety app which works best for people who already know the coast has aimed its design effort at the wrong users — is also defensible, provided it is argued from the same evidence (6 marks: *‘political’ explained as the distribution of benefit and cost between users, not as party politics; at least two decisions identified with evidence from the example; a judgement that names who is served least well and reasons from the evidence.*)

Q11. ‘Good design is honest’ means a design does not promise more than it can deliver or make a product seem more capable or valuable than it is. Applied to BEACON, the conception is well met in two respects. The offline banner states that the information is **not live and is 12 minutes old**, so the app does not present stale conditions as current; and the footer **names the surf life saving club as the data source**, so the user can judge the authority behind the status rather than trusting an anonymous reading. There is also no advertising or sponsored content presented as safety information. The conception could be pressed further, however: a status of CAUTION with no indication of how confident that reading is, or how quickly a rip can form, still invites more certainty than the data supports. Honesty in this design is therefore genuinely evidenced but incomplete (4 marks: *the conception explained; at least two pieces of evidence; a discussion that extends beyond restating the principle*).

Q12. The conception has been applied appropriately. ‘Good design is as little design as possible’ asks the designer to remove everything that does not serve the design's core purpose, and BEACON's home screen carries only a status band, three data tiles and one action — there is no decorative imagery, no photography and no secondary navigation competing with the safety message. Because the purpose is a decision made in seconds, reduction here is functional rather than stylistic, which is what the principle actually asks for. The limitation is that reduction has been taken far enough to cost some users: terms such as “patrolled” and “between the flags” are left unexplained, so for a visitor unfamiliar with Australian beaches a small amount of additional design would improve the outcome. **Overall,** the conception is appropriately and accurately applied — with the caution that “as little design as possible” means as little as possible **while still communicating**, not simply as little as possible (4 marks: *conception explained accurately; evidence; a judgement; recognition of the limit*).

Q13. The response fails in two ways. First, “it looks modern” is a **statement of taste, not a conception of good design** — it names no criterion, cites no framework or reasoning, and cannot be tested against the example. Second, “I would use it” substitutes the writer's preference for the **audience or user need**; the question asks how the design serves its users, not whether the student likes it. Neither claim is supported by any evidence from the design example.

A response that would score: “BEACON reflects Dieter Rams' principle that **good design makes a product understandable**. The status of the beach is carried by a word (CAUTION), a warning icon and a colour together, and the single largest button states its action in plain language, so a beachgoer who has never used the app can read the

water conditions and find a patrolled beach without instruction — which is what a user standing on the sand for the first time needs” (4 marks: two distinct faults explained + a rewrite that names a conception, cites evidence and reaches the user).

Q14. Both designs meet ‘good design makes a product useful’ by being built around a single user need, but they evidence it in different ways.

Similarity. In each, the designer has matched capacity to the situation. PLUMB delivers about 3.5 m of drying line from 750 mm of wall and 400 mm of projection, which is enough for a full load in a dwelling that cannot hold an airer. BEACON delivers one status, three supporting facts and one action, which is enough to make a swim-or-don’t decision in the seconds a user has. In both, nothing present fails to serve the core task.

Difference. Usefulness in PLUMB is **physical and continuous** — it is evidenced in dimensions, capacity and the fold that returns the room to the household, and the rack is equally useful on the day it is installed and a year later. Usefulness in BEACON is **informational and conditional** — it depends on data that is current and on reception, so the design’s usefulness can fail without anything about the design itself changing, which is why the offline notice exists. A further difference is where the limitation sits: PLUMB is less useful to a user drying long garments because the dowel spacing is fixed, whereas BEACON is less useful to a user who does not know what “patrolled” means.

Overall, both satisfy the conception, but PLUMB’s usefulness is demonstrated in the artefact itself while BEACON’s depends on conditions outside it (6 marks: congruent two-sided comparison, similarity and difference, evidence from both examples).

Q15. A culturally specific conception of good design draws its criteria from a community’s own values rather than from a universal list. Evaluated through conceptions held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the questions asked of WICKER would change. Rather than asking whether the pod is unobtrusive, the evaluation might ask whether it strengthens **connection to Country and to community** — and a structure designed to separate one reader from everyone else could be judged less good than one supporting shared gathering, however well resolved it is. It would also ask about **custodianship**: whether the timber was sourced with care for the place it came from, and whether the design will still serve the community in a generation. If any pattern, motif or knowledge belonging to a community were used in the laths, the evaluation would ask whether the community was consulted, credited and paid — an **ethical** obligation set out in frameworks such as the Australian Indigenous Design Charter, not a legal one. The same pod could therefore be judged strong against one set of conceptions and weak against another, which is precisely what the Study Design means by notions of good design being personal, contextual and political (4 marks: what a culturally specific conception is; at least two criteria that would change; applied to the example).

Q16. (Model — other conceptions are acceptable if stated as a testable criterion and justified from the example.) **My conception: good design can be repaired by the person who owns it.** Rams’ list values durability and thoroughness but says nothing about who is permitted to maintain a design, and in a period when most products are replaced rather than mended this seems to me a criterion worth adding. **PLUMB** meets it: the screws are exposed rather than covered, and each dowel is an individually replaceable part, so a household can replace one split dowel with a hand tool instead of discarding the rack. That keeps the product in use for longer and keeps the decision in the owner’s hands, which is the outcome the criterion is aiming at (3 marks: a conception stated as a criterion, not a preference; a reason it is worth holding; justified with evidence from a named example).

Q17. (Model, using BEACON.) The **purpose** of BEACON is to tell a beachgoer whether it is safe to swim at this beach and where the nearest patrolled beach is, in the moments before they enter the water. Its **context** is outdoor use in glare, on sand, with wet hands and sometimes without reception. Its **users** are beachgoers, including families and visitors unfamiliar with this coast.

Judged against ‘good design makes a product useful’, the design is strong: the home screen carries one status, three supporting facts and one action, all of which bear on the single decision the user is making.

Judged against ‘good design makes a product understandable’, it is also strong, and the context makes this the decisive criterion: status is carried by word, icon and colour together, type is large and high-contrast for glare, and touch targets are big enough for wet hands. The same status vocabulary is reused on the nearby-beaches screen, so what the user learns once keeps working.

Judged against ‘**good design is honest**’, the design does something many would omit: it states that its data is offline and 12 minutes old and names the club that supplies it, rather than presenting a confident reading it cannot guarantee.

The limitations are real but narrower. The plain-language commitment stops short of explaining “patrolled” and “between the flags”, so the visitors the app most needs to reach may still be unsure what to do. And a design whose value depends on current data cannot fully serve a user at a beach with no reception, however honestly it reports that fact.

Overall, BEACON can be considered good design to a high degree. Its purpose, context and users all demand the same qualities — immediate usefulness, immediate understandability and trustworthiness — and the designer’s decisions deliver all three with evidence visible in the design itself. The shortfalls concern users at the edge of the audience and conditions outside the designer’s control, not the central case *(8 marks: purpose, context and users each stated; three or more conceptions named and evidenced; limitations; an overall judgement.)*

Topic Test 3 — Fields, professional practice and design analysis

VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN Topic test — Chapters 6–8

Reading time: 5 minutes • Writing time: 45 minutes • Total 40 marks

Structure of test

Section	Number of questions	Number of questions to be answered	Number of marks
A	4	4	24
B	3	3	16
		Total	40

- Students are permitted to bring into the test room: pens, pencils, highlighters, erasers, sharpeners, rulers, a protractor, set squares, aids for curve sketching, and coloured pencils, fineliner pens (0.6 mm or less), compasses, and circle and ellipse templates.
- Students are NOT permitted to bring into the test room: any technology, notes of any kind, blank sheets of paper and/or correction fluid/tape.
- A **Resource Sheet** is provided on the following page.
- All written responses must be in English.

Instructions

- Write your responses in the spaces provided in this book.
- Drawings must be completed in the spaces provided.
- All questions must be answered.

This test covers Chapter 6 (fields of design practice), Chapter 7 (professional design practice) and Chapter 8 (design analysis, aesthetics and conceptions of good design).

This topic test mirrors the structure, timing and materials of the VCAA examination. It is an original ClassBasics paper; no VCAA question is reproduced.

Topic Test 3 — Resource Sheet

Use these two design examples to answer Section A. Each is an original ClassBasics artifact created for this paper.

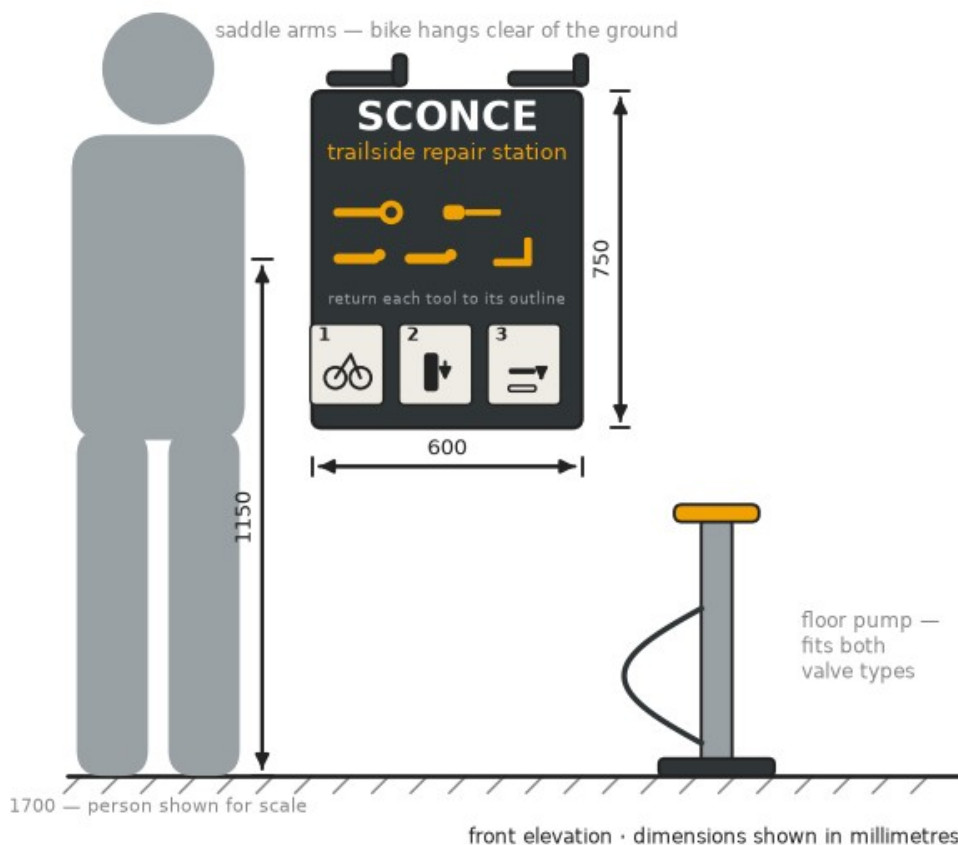
Design example 1 — Messages



HOLLOW — exhibition poster and identity, Yarrowee Regional Museum, 2026.

HOLLOW is a touring exhibition about the animals that live in tree hollows. The poster is printed at A2 and displayed outdoors on station platforms and indoors in libraries and on school noticeboards, where it is read from about two metres and competes with other notices. The same identity carries a DL flyer and the exhibition wall panels. The exhibition is aimed at families with primary-school-aged children and at school groups; entry is free.

Design example 2 — Objects



SCONCE — trailside bicycle repair station, Yarrowee Rail Trail, 2026.

SCONCE is bolted to the brick wall of the shelter at the rail-trail trailhead. Riders use it outdoors in all weather, often wearing gloves and often in a hurry. The back plate and arms are powder-coated steel, the pictogram panel is moulded recycled polymer, and the five tools are tethered on steel cables. The shire's maintenance crew services the station once a season and can replace any single tool, or the whole pictogram panel, without removing the plate from the wall.

Section A

Instructions for Section A: Answer all questions in the spaces provided. In Questions 1, 2 and 4, tick the box of the ONE design example you have chosen and refer to it throughout your response. You may choose a different design example in a different question. Question 3 is answered from your own study and has no design example to tick.

Question 1 (4 marks)

Tick the design example you have chosen:

☐ **HOLLOW** — Messages ☐ **SCONCE** — Objects

a. Name one design outcome, other than the one shown, that is typical of the field of design practice of the design example you have chosen. 1 mark

b. Describe how **two** characteristics of the visual language of that field have been used in the design example. 3 marks

Question 2 (6 marks)

Tick the design example you have chosen:

☐ **HOLLOW** — Messages ☐ **SCONCE** — Objects

a. For the design example you have chosen:

i. State its purpose.

1 mark

ii. Name its aesthetic.

1 mark

b. Analyse how **one design element** and **one design principle** have been used to create that aesthetic and to communicate to the audience or users.

4 marks

Question 3 (6 marks)

*This question is answered from your own study this year. It does not refer to the Resource Sheet and it has no design example to tick. A **contemporary designer** is one practising from 2000 onwards, within visual communication design.*

a. Name **two contemporary designers or design practices** whose work you have studied this year, and state the field of design practice each works in.

2 marks

b. Compare how each of those two designers has engaged a **specialist** when resolving a design problem. Your response must include at least one **similarity** and at least one **difference**.

4 marks

Question 4 (8 marks)

Tick the design example you have chosen:

[] **HOLLOW** — Messages [] **SCONCE** — Objects

Evaluate how the **purpose** and the **context** of the design example you have chosen reflect conceptions of good design. In your response, refer to at least **two** named conceptions and to evidence in the design example.

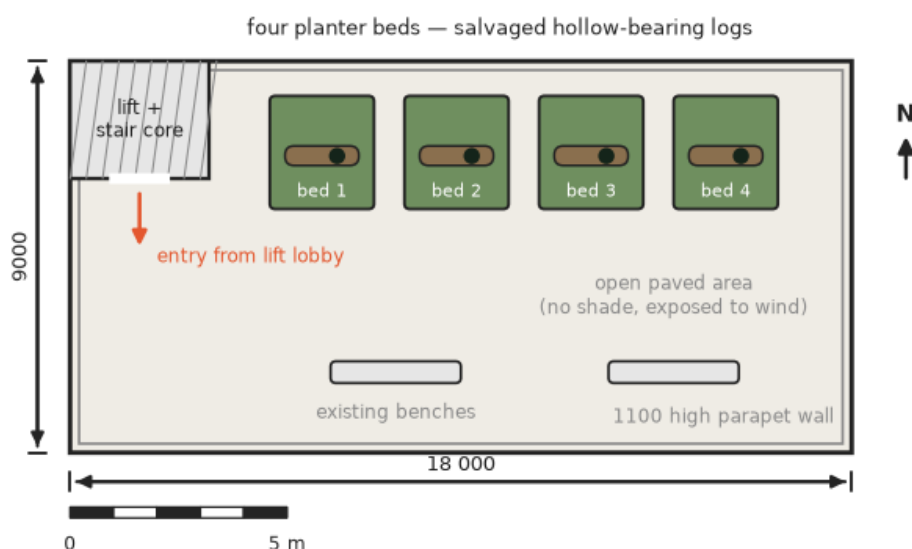
8 marks

Section B

Instructions for Section B: Answer all questions in the spaces provided. You may use any of the drawing methods and media permitted in this test.

The design problem

Yarrowee Regional Museum is taking the HOLLOW exhibition outdoors. **PARAPET**, the museum's new rooftop terrace, opens in spring. It already holds four planter beds containing salvaged hollow-bearing logs, and the plan below shows what is on the terrace now. The museum wants visitors on the terrace to understand what a tree hollow is and which animals depend on one — the same communication need the HOLLOW poster serves, delivered in a **different field of design practice**.



PARAPET — the museum's rooftop terrace as it exists. Plan; refer to the scale bar.

Design criteria

The design solution must:

- communicate what a tree hollow is, and which animals depend on one, to families with primary-school-aged children
- work outdoors on an exposed rooftop, in bright daylight and in weather
- be usable by visitors across a wide range of ages and abilities
- be recognisably part of the HOLLOW identity shown on the Resource Sheet

Choose ONE field of design practice. You may **not** choose Messages, because the HOLLOW poster already serves that field.

[] **Objects** — an object visitors pick up, open or use on the terrace

[] **Environments** — the layout of the terrace itself as an outdoor exhibition space

[] **Interactive experiences** — a screen-based guide used by visitors while they are on the terrace

Tick your chosen field above and use it for ALL of Section B.

Question 5 (4 marks)

Discover

a. Identify one communication decision the designer of the HOLLOW poster has made, and explain how you will carry that decision across into your chosen field. 2 marks

b. Describe **two characteristics** of the audience or users of your solution. 2 marks

Question 6 (6 marks)

Define and Develop

a. Write **two design criteria** of your own, in addition to those given in the design problem, that your solution must meet. 2 marks

b. Produce **two distinct development drawings** for your solution. Label each one. Draw in the space below. 4 marks

Question 7 (6 marks)

Deliver

a. Develop ONE of your ideas into a resolved solution, using a drawing method appropriate to your chosen field: **planometric or isometric** for Objects, **one- or two-point perspective** for Environments, or **sized screens** for Interactive experiences. Annotate your drawing to name one design element and one design principle you have applied. Draw in the space below. 4 marks

b. Using a **named convergent thinking strategy**, evaluate your resolved solution against **one** of the design criteria given in the design problem. 2 marks

Topic Test 3 — Answers and marking guide

Marking guide

Question	Marks	What is being assessed
1a	1	Names a design outcome typical of the field, not the outcome already shown
1b	3	Two characteristics of that field's visual language, each located in the example
2a i	1	The purpose stated specifically, in the study's terms
2a ii	1	A specific named aesthetic
2b	4	One element + one principle, the mechanism, and the link to the named aesthetic and the audience
3a	2	Two designers practising from 2000 onwards, within visual communication design, with fields named
3b	4	A genuine specialist for each + a congruent comparison giving a similarity AND a difference
4	8	Purpose and context stated; two or more named conceptions evidenced; a limitation; an overall judgement
5a	2	A specific communication decision read from HOLLOW + how it transfers to the chosen field
5b	2	Two audience or user CHARACTERISTICS (not needs, not constraints)
6a	2	Two further criteria, each written as a testable statement about the solution
6b	4	Two genuinely distinct development drawings, labelled and readable
7a	4	A resolved drawing in a field-appropriate method, with one element and one principle annotated
7b	2	A named convergent strategy applied point by point to one stated criterion

Section A totals 24 marks; Section B totals 16 marks; the test totals 40 marks.

Marking latitude. Section A questions 1, 2 and 4 may each be answered from either design example, and a student may change example between questions. Model responses are given for both. Question 3 is answered from the student's own study, so no single response is correct; the model shows the shape and the depth a full-mark answer needs. In Section B the model works one field through in full (Interactive experiences); an equally creditworthy response in Objects or Environments is described at Question 7.

Question 1

a. (*HOLLOW — Messages.*) Any one design outcome from the field other than a poster: a **brand identity or brand strategy**, **wayfinding**, an **advertising or social media campaign**, **visual merchandising**, a **publication**, **signage**, an **illustration**, other **printed collateral**, or **packaging**. (1 mark — only the first outcome named is marked. Do not credit “a poster”, which is the outcome shown, or a named field.)

(*SCONCE — Objects.*) Any one of: **products and packaging**, **furniture**, **fittings and homewares**, **transport**, **appliances**, **tools and machinery**, **costumes**, **toys**, **devices and displays**.

b. (*HOLLOW.*) Designers of messages combine **pictorial**, **symbolic** and **typographic** components. Two are used clearly here.

The **pictorial** component is the flat silhouette of a hollow-dwelling animal sitting in the lit opening of the trunk. It depicts something recognisable, so a child who cannot yet read the sub-heading still understands that an animal lives inside the tree — the poster’s whole idea is delivered by the image before a word is read.

The **typographic** component is a three-level hierarchy: *HOLLOW* is primary at the largest scale and the highest tonal contrast, *WHO LIVES IN A TREE?* is secondary, letter-spaced and smaller, and the tertiary level carries the reading matter — the italic sentence about the sixty animals and, at the foot, the date, entry and access line. The reader therefore takes the exhibition name, then its subject, then the detail, in that order.

(3 marks: 1 for each characteristic correctly named as a component of the visual language of Messages and located in the example, 1 for explaining what it contributes to the communication. The **symbolic** component — the pale disc with a lit opening used as the museum’s exhibition mark, repeated on the flyer and wall panels — is equally acceptable.)

(*SCONCE.*) Any two of the field’s characteristics, each located in the example: **form** — a flat plate with two projecting arms above it, which reads immediately as something a bike hangs from; **materials, texture and finish** — powder-coated steel and moulded recycled polymer, which read as hard-wearing, outdoor and civic rather than domestic; **affordances** — the tool silhouettes tell a rider where each tool goes without an instruction, and the arms tell them where the bike goes; **applied graphics** — the numbered pictogram panel sets out the sequence hang, pump, then return; or **proportion and scale** — the station is proportioned against the body, mounted at 1150 mm to the centre of the plate and drawn against a 1700 mm figure.

Question 2

a. i. (*HOLLOW.*) To **inform** — to tell families and school groups what a tree hollow is and which native animals depend on one — and, secondarily, to **promote** a free exhibition about them. (Accept either purpose, or both, provided it is stated with a verb and argued from this poster. A restatement of the subject — “it is about tree hollows” — and a taste judgement — “to look good” — earn nothing.)

(*SCONCE.*) To let a rider make a minor repair or adjustment at the trailhead, using tools they have not carried, so that a small mechanical fault does not end the ride.

a. ii. (*HOLLOW.*) A **warm, quiet, night-time (nocturnal) natural** aesthetic. (Accept “still/calm and natural” or similar, provided it is specific.)

(*SCONCE.*) A **robust, utilitarian, civic** aesthetic. (Accept “industrial”, “hard-wearing”, “no-nonsense”.)

(1 mark each. “It has a nice aesthetic” or “a modern aesthetic” is not specific and earns nothing.)

b. (*Model — HOLLOW.*) The designer uses the **element of colour** with the **principle of figure–ground**. A single warm amber — the light inside the hollow — is set against a deep, desaturated eucalypt-green field. That amber is the sheet’s only accent colour, and the opening is by far the largest area of it: the rule under the title, the letter-spaced secondary line and the museum mark are the same amber, but each is a thin or a small mark beside the opening. Because a warm hue advances against a cool, dark ground, the opening separates from the field the instant the poster is seen, and the dark ground is read as the space *around* the light rather than as a competing shape. That is exactly the experience of noticing a lit hollow in a tree at dusk, so the pairing builds the warm, quiet, night-time aesthetic rather than merely decorating the sheet. For the audience — a family passing a noticeboard at about two metres — it means the one idea the exhibition is about, that something lives inside the tree, is communicated before the title is read.

(4 marks: 1 — one design element named and evidenced; 1 — one design principle named and evidenced; 1 — the mechanism explained, not just “it stands out”; 1 — the choices tied to the named aesthetic AND to the audience or purpose. Accept any element and principle correctly justified from the example: type with hierarchy, or shape with contrast, are equally creditworthy.)

(Model — *SCONCE*.) The designer uses the **element of colour** with the **principle of figure–ground**. Five amber tool silhouettes sit on a charcoal plate; the only other amber on the plate is the sub-heading, and the only other amber on the sheet is the handle of the pump standing beside it. The tools therefore read as figure against a deliberately flat, dark ground, and — because each silhouette is the shape of the tool that belongs on it — a rider can see from several metres away which tool is missing and where it goes back. The restricted palette and the plain rectangular plate carry no decoration at all, which is what makes the aesthetic *utilitarian and civic*: the object looks like equipment, not furniture, which is what a rider in a hurry, in the weather, needs to recognise it as.

Question 3

Because this question is answered from each student’s own study, there is no single correct response. The model below is written about two designers described by their practice rather than named, so that no candidate is advantaged; in the test you must write about the real designers, the real design examples and the real specialists you have studied this year.

a. (Model.) **Designer 1** — an events and exhibition designer practising since 2006, working in **Environments**. The design example is a demountable pavilion for a regional food festival. **Designer 2** — a product designer practising since 2012, working in **Objects**. The design example is a drinking fountain and bottle filler for council parks.

(2 marks: 1 each for a designer who is genuinely **contemporary** — practising from 2000 onwards — and who works **within visual communication design**, with the field named as Messages, Objects, Environments or Interactive experiences. Studios and design practices are acceptable as well as named individuals. A fine artist, a photographer, a film-maker, a craftsperson or an architect whose work is not presented as visual communication design earns nothing here, however well described, and neither does “a graphic designer” or “an industrial designer” — a design type* is not a practice, so there is no project, client or specialist attached to it to compare.)*

b. (Model.) **A similarity: why each specialist was engaged at all.** Both designers went outside their own knowledge at the point where the design could not be resolved from the studio, and in both the relationship ran in two directions — the designer supplied the intent and the drawings, the specialist returned evidence, and the exchange changed something that can be seen in the finished design. Designer 1 engaged a **technical textiles engineer**, who holds knowledge the designer does not: how a coated mesh behaves in tension, and how long its coating survives ultraviolet exposure outdoors. Designer 2 engaged a **hydraulic services engineer**, who holds knowledge of flow rates, backflow prevention and the outlet heights a public drinking fountain has to meet.

A difference: what the specialist’s knowledge did to the design. For Designer 1 it *opened* a possibility. The engineer’s tension figures let the designer delete the roof frame altogether and carry the canopy in the fabric itself — a form the designer could not have specified alone, and the one decision the pavilion is now recognised by. For Designer 2 it *closed one off*. The engineer’s data ruled out the low, shallow spout the designer had drawn, because it could not be kept clear of standing water, and set both the outlet height and the shroud around it; the designer then worked that required geometry back into the form so that it reads as intended rather than as a correction.

(4 marks: 1 — a genuine specialist identified for each designer, with the specialist knowledge each contributes stated; 1 — at least one substantiated **similarity**; 1 — at least one substantiated **difference**; 1 — the comparison is **congruent**, comparing the same aspect of practice across both designers rather than describing them one after the other. Two separate accounts with no comparison between them cannot exceed 2 marks. A **specialist** contributes specialist knowledge: an engineer, a typographer, a printer, a fabricator, a materials or exhibition specialist, an accessibility consultant, a developer, an ecologist. A **client**, an **audience member**, a **stakeholder**, a **sponsor**, a **celebrity** or a **general tradesperson** is not a specialist and earns nothing.)

Question 4

(Model — *HOLLOW*.) The **purpose** of the HOLLOW poster is to tell families and school groups what a tree hollow is and which native animals depend on one, and to bring them to a free exhibition about it. Its **context** is display

outdoors on station platforms and indoors on library and school noticeboards: it is read from about two metres, in a few seconds, by people who did not set out to read it, alongside other notices competing for the same glance.

Judged against **‘good design makes a product understandable’**, the poster is strong, and this is the conception its context makes decisive. The single idea — an animal inside a lit opening in a tree — is carried by the image, so a child who cannot yet read the type still understands what the exhibition is about. The amber and the green are also far apart in tone as well as in hue, so a viewer with reduced colour vision still reads a light shape on a dark field even if the two hues collapse together. The three typographic levels then deliver the name, the subject and the detail in a fixed order, and the line at the foot answers the two questions a family will actually have: what it costs, and whether they can get in with a pram.

Judged against **‘good design is as little design as possible’**, the poster is also strong. There is one image, one identity mark, one accent colour, one rule and five short pieces of type; nothing decorative competes for the two seconds the design has. Reduction here is functional rather than stylistic, which is what the principle actually asks for: at two metres, every additional element would cost legibility.

There are limits. The claim that “sixty native animals need a hollow” is not sourced anywhere on the sheet, which puts some pressure on **‘good design is honest’** — the poster asks to be believed without showing why it should be. The practical information is also held at the very bottom of the hierarchy: the dates, the price and the access note are compressed into one line at the foot, set at one size and separated only by mid-dots, so a family looking for one of the three has to read all three — and on the crowded noticeboard this poster is described as competing with, the foot of a sheet is the part most likely to be covered by the next notice pinned over it. The conception the poster meets so completely for the exhibition’s *idea* is therefore met only in part for the information a visitor has to act on. It would be unsupported to call the poster **long-lasting** or **environmentally friendly**: nothing visible tells us anything about the stock, the inks or how the printed sheets are disposed of, and claiming it would be an assumption rather than an evaluation.

Overall, the purpose and the context both demand the same quality — that a passer-by understand the whole idea at a glance — and the designer’s decisions deliver it with evidence visible on the sheet. Judged as a poster that has to work in seconds, on a crowded noticeboard, for an audience that includes children, HOLLOW reflects conceptions of good design to a high degree; the shortfalls concern what the poster claims rather than how it communicates.

(*Model — SCONCE, in brief.*) The **purpose** is to let a rider make a minor repair at the trailhead with tools they did not carry. The **context** is an unstaffed outdoor site, used in all weather, often with gloved hands and in a hurry, and serviced only once a season. **‘Good design makes a product useful’** is met directly: five tools and a pump covering the common trailside faults are held at the point where a rider discovers the fault, and the arms hold the bike clear of the ground so both hands are free. **‘Good design makes a product understandable’** is met by the shadow board and the numbered pictogram panel — hang, pump, return — so the sequence is legible to a first-time user without language. **‘Good design is thorough down to the last detail’** is supported by the evidence that any single tool, or the whole panel, can be replaced without removing the plate, which is what makes a once-a-season service regime workable. The limitations are real: the pictograms that carry the sequence are the smallest marks on the plate and sit at its foot, below the tools, so the instructions a first-time user most needs are the last thing the eye reaches rather than the first; nothing on the plate states what the station does **not** carry, so a rider can count on help — a chain tool, a spare tube — that is not there, which is where **‘good design is honest’** is only partly met; and nothing tells a rider who to notify when a tool is missing, which weakens the station in exactly the situation a once-a-season service interval makes likely. **Overall**, for an unstaffed trailhead the design reflects conceptions of good design well: its purpose and its context both demand an object that works without anyone present to explain or supervise it, and the shadow board, the pictogram sequence and the replaceable parts all serve that. What it does not yet do is tell the rider the truth about its own limits.

(8 marks: 2 — the purpose AND the context each stated specifically, with context understood as the setting and circumstances of use, not the presentation format; 3 — at least two conceptions named in the framework’s own words and evidenced from the design example; 2 — a limitation, or a conception met only in part, argued from evidence rather than asserted; 1 — an overall judgement that reaches the audience or users. Any conceptions are acceptable — Dieter Rams’ Ten Principles, Good Design Australia’s award criteria, the Victorian Government Architect’s Good Design series, or a defensible personal or culturally specific conception — provided they are used as criteria and tested against evidence. Deduct for conceptions asserted on assumption, in particular durability, long life or sustainable sourcing where the example shows none, and for taste statements such as “it looks modern”.)

Question 5

a. (Model — Interactive experiences.) The decision I will carry across is the poster's use of a **single lit area on an otherwise dark, quiet field**: one amber is the sheet's only accent colour and the opening is much the largest area of it, so the eye reaches the opening first and everything else is read afterwards. In a screen-based guide used on an exposed rooftop, the same decision solves a different problem — in bright daylight a screen full of competing colour becomes unreadable, so I will give each screen one amber card carrying the single thing the visitor wants (which log they are standing at) on a deep, quiet ground, and let everything else recede. The visual language changes from print to screen, but the decision — one lit thing, everything else quiet — transfers intact.

(2 marks: 1 — a specific communication decision read from the poster, not a general observation such as “it uses colour”; 1 — how that decision is translated into the visual language of the chosen field. Accept for Objects: repeating the dark opening with a warm lit interior as the aperture of a handled object. Accept for Environments: making a single lit or amber threshold the one bright event in an otherwise restrained terrace.)

b. (Model.) **Characteristic 1 — they are families with primary-school-aged children.** The adult is reading on behalf of a child and is being interrupted while they do it, so no part of the experience can depend on reading a paragraph without a break. **Characteristic 2 — they are first-time, short-stay visitors.** Most will be on the terrace once, for ten minutes, at the end of a museum visit, so they arrive with no learned vocabulary for the space and will not invest time in learning a navigation system before they get anything back.

(2 marks: 1 each. A characteristic describes what the audience or users are like — demographic or psychographic. Do not credit **needs** (“they need to learn about hollows”), **constraints** (“the museum has a small budget”), or a restatement of the design criteria. This is the most frequently penalised confusion in Section B.)

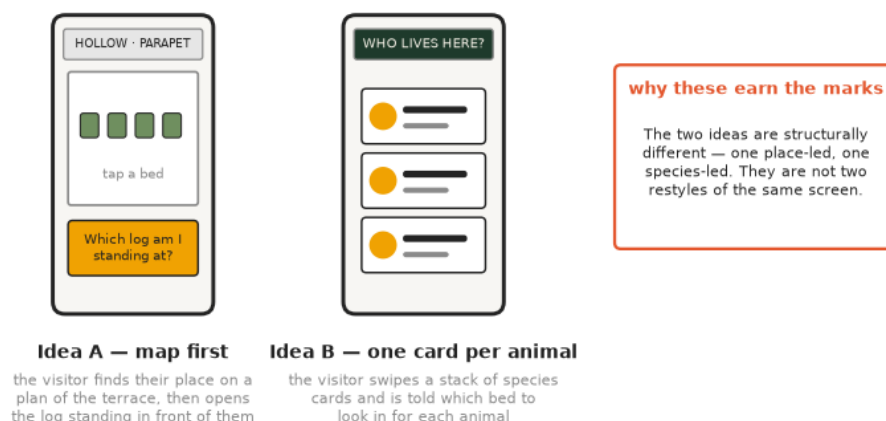
Question 6

a. (Model.) **Criterion 1:** a visitor must be able to get from standing at any planter bed to the information about that bed in no more than two actions. **Criterion 2:** the solution must be maintainable by museum staff without a specialist, because the terrace is unstaffed and is serviced with the rest of the building.

(2 marks: 1 each for a criterion written as a testable statement about the solution — something a finished design could be checked against. Do not credit restatements of the four criteria already given, statements about the design process rather than the solution, or aspirations such as “it must look good”.)

b. (Model — Interactive experiences.)

Model — Question 6b: two DISTINCT development drawings (Interactive experiences)

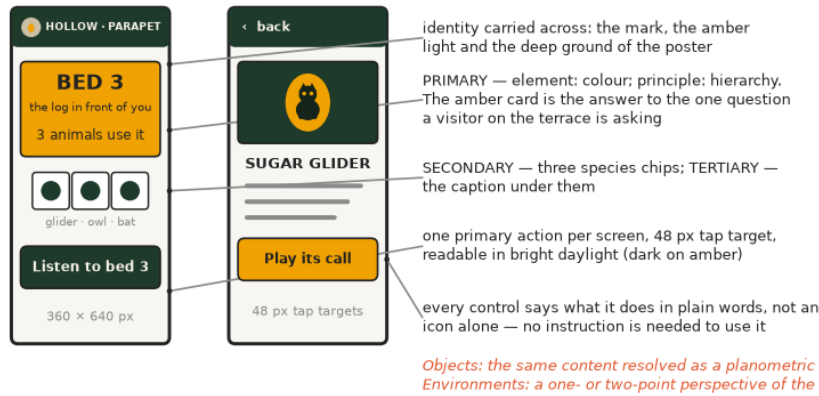


(4 marks: 2 — the two ideas are genuinely **distinct**, taking structurally different approaches to the problem rather than restyling one idea twice (here, one place-led and one species-led); 1 — each is drawn clearly enough to be read and is labelled; 1 — both respond to the stated design problem and sit in the field the student ticked. Two variations of the same layout, or two ideas from different fields, cannot earn the first two marks.)

Question 7

a. (Model — Interactive experiences, resolved as sized screens.)

Model — Question 7a: resolved solution, sized screens (Interactive experiences)



The resolved solution states its screen size (360 × 640 px), sets both screens on the same grid, and uses one primary action per screen at a 48 px tap target. The annotation names the **element of colour** and the **principle of hierarchy**, and points at where each is applied: the amber card is the primary layer and the answer to the question a visitor standing on the terrace is asking; the three species chips are secondary; the caption beneath them is tertiary.

(4 marks: 1 — a drawing method appropriate to the chosen field, used correctly — sized screens with the dimensions stated for Interactive experiences, **planometric or isometric** with measurements true along the axes for Objects, **one- or two-point perspective** with a horizon line and vanishing point(s) for Environments; 1 — the drawing is genuinely more **resolved** than the development drawing it came from, through detail, type, colour, materials or states; 1 — one design **element** named and shown where it is applied; 1 — one design **principle** named and shown where it is applied. Annotation that describes the idea in general, without pointing at the drawing, does not earn the element and principle marks.)

Equally creditworthy responses in the other two fields. In **Objects**, the same content resolved as a **planometric or isometric** drawing of a handled object — for example a weather-proof interpretive box mounted at each bed, with a dark aperture, a lit interior and a lid a child can lift — annotated for form, materials and an affordance, and dimensioned against the body. In **Environments**, a **one- or two-point perspective** of the terrace showing the entry threshold, the circulation route past the four beds and the seating, annotated for enclosure, sightlines and human scale, with figures drawn in for scale. The marks sit in the same places: correct method, genuine resolution, and one element and one principle annotated on the drawing.

b. (Model — PMI applied to the criterion “must be usable by visitors across a wide range of ages and abilities”.)

Plus: every control is a 48 px target labelled in plain words rather than an icon alone, and status is carried by word and shape as well as colour, so a young child, an older visitor or a visitor with reduced colour vision can operate it without instruction. **Minus:** the whole experience depends on the visitor having a charged phone, which excludes anyone without one — a real exclusion on a terrace whose other content is a set of logs in planter beds. **Interesting:** the audio control could serve a visitor who cannot read the screen in glare, but only if they can reach the content without the map screen. **Decision:** the criterion is met only in part, so I will add a large printed number to each planter bed, letting a visitor start from the log in front of them and reducing the phone from the only route to one of two.

(2 marks: 1 — a named convergent or critical-thinking strategy — PMI, SWOT, an evaluation matrix, forced ranking — actually applied, not merely named; 1 — applied point by point to ONE of the criteria stated in the design problem, and closing with a decision. A general opinion about the solution, or an evaluation against a criterion the student invented in Question 6a rather than one given in the design problem, does not earn the second mark.)