



National
Qualifications
2026

2026 Photography

Higher

Question Paper Finalised Marking Instructions

These marking instructions have been prepared by examination teams for use by Qualifications Scotland appointed markers when marking external course assessments.

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General marking principles for Higher Photography

Always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates' responses.

- (a) Always use positive marking. This means candidates accumulate marks for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; marks are not deducted for errors or omissions.
- (b) If a candidate response does not seem to be covered by either the principles or detailed marking instructions, and you are uncertain how to assess it, you must seek guidance from your team leader.
- (c) Consider the extent to which the candidate's response:
 - answers the specifics of the question
 - demonstrates knowledge and understanding of photography.
- (d) In Section 2 full marks are available whether responses are provided in continuous prose, linked statements or a series of developed points.
- (e) Do not award marks for mere descriptive comment. To gain marks, candidates must develop and justify their points. Only award marks for a valid response to the question asked. For example, in response to questions that ask candidates to:
 - **identify** – they must give the name required (for example a specific camera control, technique, effect)
 - **explain** – they must apply their knowledge and understanding of light and image formation, camera controls, image-making techniques and their effects to relate **cause** and **effect** and/or make relationships between things clear
 - **discuss** – they must apply their knowledge and understanding of image-making techniques, and their effects, to communicate ideas and information about the photographer's technical and creative decisions; they must draw valid conclusions and give explanations supported by **justification**.
- (f) To gain full marks, candidates must respond to all aspects of the question.
- (g) Do not award marks for repetition of points that the candidate has not developed further in any way.

Marking instructions for each question

SECTION 1 – MULTIPLE CHOICE

If a candidate has selected more than one option in response to a question, do not award a mark.

Do not award a mark if it is unclear which option the candidate has selected.

Question			Expected response	Max mark	Additional guidance
1.			1/300	1	
2.			S-curve	1	
3.			Increased depth of field/reduced exposure	1	
4.			Increase sharpness	1	
5.			Cloudy	1	
6.			Hard lighting	1	
7.			Tripod/slow/wide angle	1	
8.			Reflects at the angle of incidence	1	
9.			Exposure	1	
10.			Light level	1	

SECTION 2 – ANALYSIS

Question			Expected response	Max mark	Additional guidance
11.	(a)		Leading line The shadows cast from the window create leading lines that draw the viewer's attention to the figure sitting on the chair. The row of chairs creates a leading line. This takes the viewer's attention from the edge of the image towards the figure. Rule of thirds The traveller is placed on the left-hand axis of the rule of thirds. This draws the viewer's eye towards the left. Viewpoint The photographer has taken this image from an elevated viewpoint. This makes the seated figure appear smaller. The photographer has taken this image from a high viewpoint. This allows the viewer to see the patterns on the airport floor.	2	Award 1 mark for the correct identification of a specific compositional technique. Award 1 mark for a correct explanation. The column on the left outlines examples of what would gain a mark. In order to gain a mark, candidates must refer to the image in question. Any other valid explanation relating to the use of an appropriate compositional technique.
	(b)		Complimentary colours of red and green are used on the carpet/seats to create a vibrant/visually striking image. The three red seats in amongst the green ones create a colour contrast and stand out. The repetition of shadows on the floor creates a pattern that makes it feel busy. The linear pattern created by the shadows on the ground draws the viewer's eye towards the figure sitting on the chairs making them a point of interest. The grid-like pattern looks like prison bars making the figure appear stuck/trapped in the airport.	2	Award a maximum of 2 marks. Award maximum 1 mark for a correct explanation of colour. Award maximum 1 mark for a correct explanation of pattern. The column on the left outlines examples of what would gain a mark. In order to gain a mark, candidates must refer to the image in question. Any other valid explanations relating to the use of colour and pattern.

Question		Expected response	Max mark	Additional guidance
	(c)	Aperture A small aperture/high f-number could have been used allowing the viewer to clearly see the figure is the only one in the room. A small aperture/high f-number might have been used allowing the viewer to see all the chairs and pattern in focus. Shutter Speed A fast shutter speed could have been selected to freeze the movement of the person eating. A fast shutter speed could have been used to compensate for the bright light coming the window from the right-hand side. ISO A low ISO may have been used to ensure the image is correctly exposed due to the bright light coming in from the window at the right-hand side. A high ISO could have been selected due to the use of a fast shutter speed and narrow aperture to freeze the motion of the man avoiding under exposure. White Balance A tungsten white balance setting has been used to cancel the warm colour cast of the sun setting outside the airport windows. Landscape Pre-set Mode The photographer may have chosen landscape preset mode which uses a large depth of field/low f-number, so the whole waiting area is in focus.	3	Award 1 mark for each correct identification and explanation of each different camera control, up to a maximum of 3 marks. In order to gain a mark, candidates must refer to the image in question. The column on the left outlines examples of what would gain a mark. Any other valid explanations relating to camera controls.

Question		Expected response	Max mark	Additional guidance
	(d)	The figure is on their own amongst the empty chairs/empty room, creating a lonely/quiet atmosphere. The rows of empty seats around the figure create an eerie atmosphere/emphasises the figure's loneliness. The green hue across the image, on the chairs/carpet/tables, create a sickly/uncomfortable mood. The long shadows from the airport windows create an atmosphere of morning/evening calmness. Lines on the ground are like those on a running track, conveying the rush and manic atmosphere of the airport. The figure is unaware of the photographer taking their image, creating a creepy atmosphere.	3	Award 1 mark for each correct explanation of how the photographer has used subject matter to create mood and atmosphere, up to a maximum of 3 marks. The column on the left outlines examples of what would gain a mark. In order to gain a mark, candidates must refer to the image in question. Any other valid explanations relating to how the photographer has used subject matter to create mood and atmosphere.

Question			Expected response	Max mark	Additional guidance
12.			A small aperture/large f-number could have been selected as the books in the foreground and the landscape behind are in focus. This emphasises the story created within the scene. A small aperture/large f-number is used as all the books are in focus. This allows the viewer to see the endless number of books/endless stories. There is no digital noise suggesting a low ISO could have been used to create the image. This ensures the girl and books are clearly visible, representing a clear memory from childhood. A fast shutter speed has been used to freeze the movement of the flying books. This creates a surreal/fantasy/magical scene. A fast shutter speed has been used to freeze the motion of the child turning the page in the book, implying they are actively reading. The photographer has used a wide-angle lens to capture the scale of the bookcases. This emphasises the title of the image giving the impression of endless stories. The photographer would have chosen a tungsten white balance setting to cancel the warmth of the lamp light. This ensures that the pages of the book appear white/the child's skin tone looks realistic. The photographer has used post-production to edit this image and make it look realistic. The sky/background is not from the same scene as the bookcases, making it look surreal. The large chair is enveloping the small child. This contrast in scale gives the impression they are safe and secure in their imaginary world.	10	Award 1 mark for each justified point discussing the photographer's consideration of technical and creative factors, up to a maximum of 10 marks. Responses must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of image-making techniques and their effects with valid justification. The column on the left outlines examples of points which would gain marks. In order to gain a mark, candidates must refer to the image in question. Any other valid justified points discussing the photographer's consideration of technical and creative decisions. Candidates may interpret this image as a real scene or that it has been created using post-production tools.

Question			Expected response	Max mark	Additional guidance
			The bright blue chair contrasts against the darker surrounding books. This draws the viewer's eye to the child in the centre making them a point of interest. The photographer has created an imaginary location with the stacks of books and a sky in place of a ceiling, transporting the viewer into the child's fantasy world. The darker edges frame the warm tones in the centre of the scene. This makes the middle seem cosy/protected from the outside world. The repeated white tone of the t-shirt along with the white pages of the open books on the floor creates a central focus in the middle of the image, drawing our eye to the child. The photographer has surrounded the child in the chair with warm light and books surrounding the child. This creates a feeling of a cosy atmosphere. The subject matter of the open books/multiple books shows that the child is reading multiple books at once. Suggesting sense of wonder/curiosity. The photographer has placed subject matter of open books closer to the child, whereas closed books are further away. This suggest that the child will continue to read/learn for a long time. The child is surrounded by children's books, whereas the more grown-up books are further away. This creates a comforting/familiar atmosphere for the child. The flying/floating books create a magical atmosphere, bringing to life the story that the child is reading in their book.		

Question			Expected response	Max mark	Additional guidance
			The are warm colours highlighting the girl which contrast the cooler colours that surround them. This emphasises the warm, cosy atmosphere around the child is reading. The leading line of the lamp stand draws your eye up to the sky and down to toward the book pages, as if the viewer is diving into the story with the child.		

[END OF MARKING INSTRUCTIONS]