

Photographing & presenting work online

When taking photographs of your work the aim is to give as much information and context as is useful and necessary for someone who has not seen it. The following guidelines have been put together for photographing with your cell phone camera.

GENERAL

Photographs should document your artwork, recording information with as much accuracy and detail as possible. It may be useful to take a photograph of the artwork in context so that the size of the artwork is shown. If it's a small work, place a known object i.e. matchbox or a pencil next to the artwork to show scale. Consider taking additional photographs of details of the work so the person viewing it can see texture/brushmark/line/materiality or surface detail.

If you have managed to set up a space at home and are sticking your reference material on the walls, then take some images of the walls. Photograph the pages of your sketchbook where your ideas are developing. All this helps to get a broader idea of what is catching your attention and how you are thinking.

COMPOSITION

When composing your photograph look around the edges of the camera screen to make sure you have everything you want in the picture. Also look for distracting objects behind the artwork and move them out of the picture if you can. If you can't move an object you may be able to use a piece of fabric as a backdrop to remove visual 'clutter'. None of these suggestions may be possible. Do the best you can with your particular situation.

When photographing a flat artwork such as a painting try to hold the camera parallel to the artwork to avoid converging lines. Look to see if the top and bottom of your artwork are the same length on the camera screen. Most cell phone cameras have wide angle lenses so there will be some curved distortion.

Be aware of reflections of yourself and camera when photographing artworks that are reflective. Sometimes it is possible to shift the camera slightly to the side to avoid reflections but if you are photographing a rectangular flat object this would create converging lines, so you may have some reflection in your photograph.

FOCUS

To ensure focus is on the artwork, touch the screen in the middle of the artwork to focus on that area. If, for example, you are photographing a painting that fills the screen, the camera will automatically focus on the painting. If it does not focus, touch the screen in the area that is of most interest. When photographing 3 dimensional objects you may take a number of photographs from different points of view but still pay attention to what is sharp, in focus, in the photograph.

SENDING PHOTOGRAPHS

Before you send the photographs, you can edit them in your phone camera software adjusting it only for brightness, contrast and saturation, but please don't use filters. You may crop images to remove any unnecessary visual information.

Always try to make your file as small (while retaining detail) as possible for emailing and other online purposes. Your files of 2 dimensional images should not be more than 1 or 2MB or you will clog up the portfolio submissions inbox and your images will be data expensive to send.

If you learn to take good images of your work it will not only be useful for your application but will also be useful for you as a professional artist, as artists are often asked to submit images of their work for applications or competitions or exhibitions. If you get this right now it will help you later.

You do not need a fancy camera as most smart phones have decent cameras:

[Photograph your work with an iPhone](#) (many of the tips here can be adapted to other smart phones)

[How to photograph art with an iPhone](#)

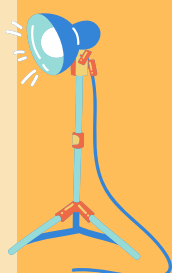
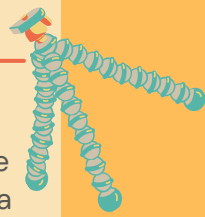
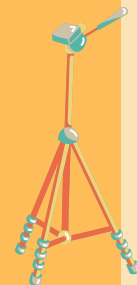
[Photographing your art like a professional](#)

TECHNICAL TIPS

Steady your camera — blurry and out-of-focus shots will not aid the admissions committee in accurately assessing what you are presenting. Use a home-made tripod if necessary for a steady shot — a bag of sand, a pillow, or prop your camera/phone on something as you take the image. Often photographs look in focus and sharp when viewed on your cell phone screen. Zoom in to enlarge the picture and check for sharpness. The more light you have, the less need to steady the camera, so sometimes it is just easier to take the art work outside to photograph than to struggle with poor lighting inside.

LIGHT

Indirect daylight works well for photographing your artwork. If the artwork is small enough to move, take it outside and put it in the shade to photograph against a plain surface, such as a wall. The artwork must be in complete shade - Dappled or semi shade will be visually confusing. Or photograph the artwork anytime outside on a cloudy day. Or in the morning immediately before the sun comes up and hits the artwork, or immediately after the sun has gone down. Even photographing the artwork in full sunlight is preferable to photographing it inside, although direct sunlight tends to flatten it and cause shadows if there is any "dimensionality" or texture on the surface. If you do photograph in full sunlight make sure that your shadow or the camera's shadow does not fall onto the artwork.



PHOTOGRAPHING INSIDE

If you need to photograph inside examine the light situation. Avoid photographing the work with a window or light in the background as the camera's light meter will adjust for this and make the room darker in the photograph. Avoid too much shadow – it will make the image grainy.



If possible, when photographing inside use natural daylight coming through a window or door to light your artwork. This will capture the colours of the artwork most accurately.

WHITE BALANCE

If you have to photograph with artificial light be aware that different light sources can produce a colour cast on your photographs. Fluorescent overhead lighting produces a green cast and the ordinary light bulb (tungsten) produces a yellow cast. If this happens scroll through your camera settings and see if you can change the white balance to match the lighting source. This might not be necessary as most cell phone cameras have an automatic white balance setting that will correct the colour of the light

SITUATIONS THAT NEED SPECIAL ATTENTION (DRAWINGS)

When photographing flat artwork that are mostly white such as a line drawing you may need to adjust the exposure. The light meter in your camera will average the light out to middle grey – a tone half way between black and white. When photographing a black line drawing on white paper your photograph may look like the white paper is grey. Correct this by adjusting the lightness and darkness when you photograph it, or afterwards in one of the apps.



VIDEO

Only use video if movement is part of the work, or if you are taking a contextualising shot of a 3-D work and need to give the committee an overview of the work. Video only what is necessary to understand the work. Long tracking shots of incidental studio material as you walk over to the work are not that useful and use a lot of data. Keep videos short and succinct. Plan your video taking the lighting and composition discussed here into account.



REMEMBER TO:

- Apply online to UCT. Portfolio submission is only one step of the application process!
- Check deadlines for submission
- Ensure that your portfolio is formatted and named correctly
- Check that your final document is readable on both Mac and PC

All queries related to portfolios and the application process must be directed to:
admissions.fineart@uct.ac.za

