

# Coursework commentary

## 2018–2019

### CO1112 Creative computing I: image, sound and motion

#### Coursework assignment 1

##### Introduction

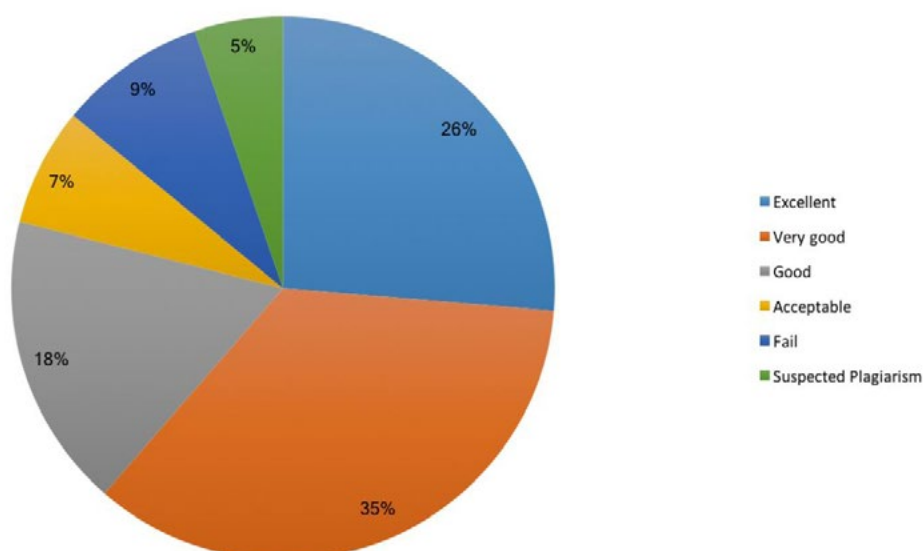
This coursework assignment provided an opportunity to practise research and writing in an academic context, to explore the theory and practice of typography (particularly in digital works), and to develop your practical skills in building a creative artefact in *Processing* based upon typography-related concepts.

##### General remarks

The overall performance on this coursework was good, with 51 per cent of submissions being graded as *Excellent* or *Very Good* (that is, grades A and B), and a further 18 per cent graded *Good* (grade C). 7 per cent were graded as *Acceptable*, and 9 per cent received a *Fail* grade. Those who failed generally did so because they had not completed every part of the coursework. Unfortunately, 5 per cent were classified as suspected plagiarism, meaning that significant sections of their submission had been copied from other sources without appropriate use of citation, referencing and quotation marks to make it clear that the text or code was not the student's original work. While this problem came up in only a small number of submissions, it was nevertheless disappointing to see, given that the coursework included specific instructions about citation and referencing, and provided a link to *How to avoid plagiarism* advice on the VLE that includes a great deal of further information and resources relating to these issues. It is highly recommended that all students read the information provided there before attempting their coursework assignments.

See 2018–2019 cohort mark distribution for CO1112 CW1 below:

**CO1112 CW1 Cohort mark distribution 2018-19**



## Comments on specific questions

### Part A

When marking an essay like this, the examiners are looking at the **content** of what you have written, at the **structure** of the essay, and at the proper use of **citation and referencing**.

Taking each of these in turn, the **content** should be based upon factual knowledge you have learned from reading appropriate literature, coupled with your own attempt to make sense of what you have read elsewhere and to introduce some of your own ideas based upon what you have read.

For a topic with such a visual component, it makes sense to **include diagrams** to illustrate what you are talking about. This sounds fairly obvious, although a surprising number of essays were purely text with no illustrations. A few of the most outstanding essays included *Processing* code that the student had written to illustrate their answer, along with its output. Another feature seen in some of the best essays was a comparison and discussion of fonts used on several major websites.

In contrast, some of the weaker essays used information that was quite out of date (for example, talking about typical screen resolutions of 100dpi) – be careful of this when researching topics where the technology is under rapid development. Other common problems included using technical terms without properly explaining what they are and/or using them inappropriately (e.g. using the words **typeface** and **font** interchangeably, whereas they actually have distinct definitions). More generally, some answers did not specifically address what was asked for in the question. For example, some discussed general issues facing typesetters rather than focusing specifically on issues relating to the choice between serif and sans serif fonts, and others were weak on discussing issues specifically relating to **digital** aspects of typography.

Regarding **structure**, a common weakness was that many essays read as just a random list of facts recounted from a variety of different sources, with no coherent flow or structure. To address this, you should think about the main point(s) you want to make in your essay: start by saying what these are (namely your essay should have a clear introduction section), and try to link everything you say together so that the ideas in the essay flow naturally from one idea to the next. End the essay with a clear conclusion, where you summarise the overall ‘take-home message’ from what you have written.

Regarding citation and referencing, most students made a good attempt at citation and referencing of the sources they discussed. However, a common problem was to include a reference list at the end of the essay, but not to use in-text citations. A citation – e.g. (Taylor, 2018) – is used in the main body of the essay at the point where you are talking about a particular source, and refers to a corresponding entry in the reference list where full publication details of that source are provided. Both citation and referencing are required to let the reader know when you are referring to someone else’s work, and exactly what it is.

A related issue is the use of quotations from other sources. If you quote text from another source, you must make it clear what text has been quoted. The usual way to do this is to use **quotation marks** around the quoted text. Of course, citation and referencing are also required here, to indicate exactly where the quoted text has come from. Try to avoid the over-use of long quotes from other sources, as this can harm the flow of your essay.

In general, citations and referencing should be used whenever you make an assertion or state a fact in your essay, to show where you have got that information from. You should also use citation and referencing when using a diagram or figure taken from somewhere else (e.g. from a book or a website). Many of the submitted essays did not do this. Also think carefully about the reliability of the sources you cite – many essays relied exclusively on websites for their information. It is always preferable to cite peer-reviewed sources (e.g. academic papers), or books published by reputable publishers, where possible, as these are much less likely to contain factual errors.

## Part B

The quality of work submitted for Part B was quite mixed. Some students came up with very imaginative ways to integrate ideas relating to kerning or glyphs into a game, animation or other creative artefact. The most successful submissions used these ideas in a way that made sense in the overall artefact and was an integral part of its design, rather than being something that felt like it was just tagged on to the sketch for no reason. On the other hand, some students submitted programs which didn't seem to have anything whatsoever to do with typography.

In addition to the idea behind the artefact and the degree to which it had been successfully implemented, the examiners were also looking for neat, well-structured and well-commented code. Many students submitted code with inconsistent indentation and spacing. This makes the code hard to read and makes it harder to spot certain bugs. The *Processing* IDE actually includes a tool that automatically indents your code consistently (look under *Edit* → *Auto Format* in the IDE), and we encourage students to make use of this.

Code readability is also enhanced by using meaningful names for variables and functions, and by adding comments to explain non-trivial aspects of the program. Some students who submitted longer programs also split their code over a number of different source files (e.g. one source file for each class definition), and this can also help to improve readability by keeping individual files at a manageable size.

## Part C

This part asked students to write a critical evaluation of the work they produced in Part B. Most students made a good attempt at this. For those who received lower marks, some of the common weaknesses included a failure to explain the motivation and ideas behind the artefact that they created. Another common failure was a lack of detailed discussion of what the student thought about the end result: Were they happy with it?; Were there parts that they felt could have been improved? Finally, some students did not discuss challenges faced when developing the code, which was another aspect that was specifically asked for in the question. For students who failed to achieve what they had hoped for in Part B, Part C was a good opportunity to gain marks for describing the problems they encountered, and how they tried to overcome them – even if those attempts were unsuccessful.