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## What does the Art and Design National Curriculum say about sketchbooks?

In the National Curriculum (England), sketchbooks are only mentioned in Key Stage 2. The guidance states that children should 'create sketchbooks to record their observations and use them to review and revisit ideas.' This doesn't mean they are exclusive to Key Stage 2 and many schools use them in all key stages.

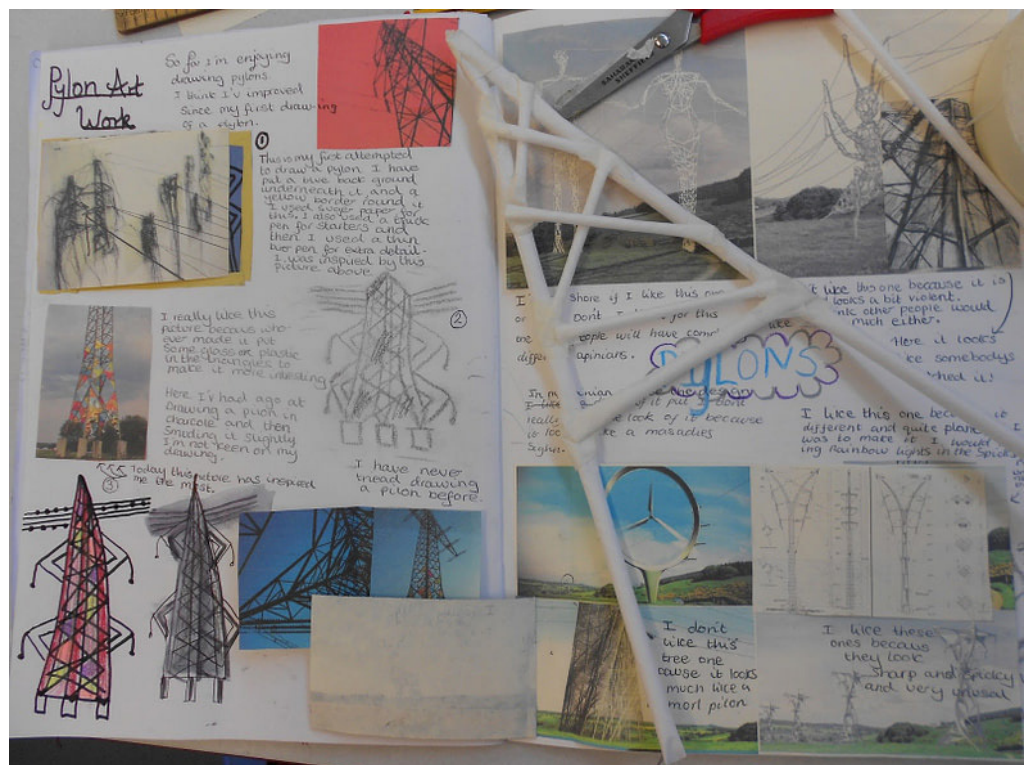
## What do Ofsted say about Sketchbooks?

Ofsted inspectors are likely to be interested in progression of skills when it comes to art, and sketchbooks are a useful way of demonstrating progression of art skills in all forms from Reception to Year 6 in an easy-to-capture way, as well as clearly highlighting the long term plan you are following as a school.

## What is a sketchbook?

Although sketchbooks record the thinking process which often leads to art outcomes, the sketchbook itself becomes an art form. Sketchbooks can be used for many other things aside from sketching, including:

- ▶ drawings or notes
- ▶ etchings
- ▶ key words
- ▶ pieces of fabric or material
- ▶ found objects
- ▶ colours
- ▶ photos
- ▶ texts
- ▶ rubbings
- ▶ annotations
- ▶ ephemera and other visual references



Some schools call them 'visual diaries' or 'ideas books'.

Drawing is usually the main content of these books and has purpose if used for perception, for invention, for communication and for action. The sketchbook is very important for this and it is also a place where children can record their ideas, their thinking, their evaluations, their experimentation, as well as their individuality.

Don't treat the sketchbook in the same way that you treat an exercise book. If you are marking sketchbooks, feedback should be in response to the creative activities of drawing, putting down ideas and carrying out design work rather than writing. Sketchbooks should be respected as a child's personal thinking space, so avoid writing over their work if you need to mark in this way. You could write on separate paper that you stick in as a flap over their work.

Sketchbooks should be exciting to look at, touch and feel, and are central to good practice. As the work is predominantly visual, there are no right or wrong answers. In this subject, children do learn from mistakes and those should be valued as part of the working process. Don't be tempted to mark in red or green pen, although they should be encouraged to share their ideas and work with other children if they feel comfortable doing so.

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In the Kapow Primary [art and design scheme of work](#), the upper Key Stage 2 lesson '[Introduction to sketchbooks](#)' shows how a sketchbook is a must for all artists to record their ideas, inspiration and a place to practise and refine their skills. In all the other lessons, designing and sketching can all be recorded via the book, as seen in all Key Stage 1 lessons on the [formal elements](#) and the lesson on [drawing: experimenting with media](#).





In Key Stage 2, using the sketchbook would support lessons like [drawing: still life](#) as pupils could explore the shapes of objects and compositions and techniques in their books before starting a final outcome. Brief notes and annotations support these experiments and also prepare young people for the transition to secondary school where the use of sketchbooks is a key part of the curriculum.

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In the world of art, craft and design, drawings are a starting point for making. Look at the sketches of Henry Moore (sculptor), Frank Gehry (architect), Zandra Rhodes (textiles/fashion), and Frida Kahlo's (painter) diaries for inspiration.

Sketchbooks develop critical thinking skills and are very important in tracking progress and the development of both thinking and ideas, and the mastery of techniques. We can often learn much more about a child's progress in art through looking at their pages than we can with an isolated final outcome.

Teachers could also keep sketchbooks, alongside their pupils', perhaps where they store their examples or where they have modelled techniques. Children love to see their teacher using a book in the same way that they do.

Let children create very personal books. You might want to point out a spelling mistake but don't get the red pen out and if you want to leave comments, do it with a post it note and not by invading their space with your writing. For the children, sketchbooks should be fun and enjoyable, free and individual, bursting with visual goodness and prompts, and literally a visual diary of ideas and experimentation.

