

Glasgow School of Art Course Specification
Course Title: Design Research Methods



Image: GSA Archives & Collections, Alan McAteer

Please note that this course specification is correct on the date of publication but may be subject to amendment prior to the start of the 2025-26 Academic Year.

| Course Code | HECOS Code | Academic Session |
|-------------|------------|------------------|
| | | 2025-26 |

| Course Title | Design Research Methods |
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| Course Contact | Dr Emma Pearce |

| Credits | 20 |
|-------------|---------------------|
| SCQF Level | 11 |
| When Taught | Stage 1, Semester 1 |

| Associated Programmes | MDes Communication Design MDes Graphic Design, Illustration, Photography MDes Interior Design MDes Fashion & Textiles MSc Product Design Engineering |
|-----------------------|--|
| Lead School | Design |
| Other Schools | n/a |
| Date of Approval | PACAAG August 2025 |

| Course Introduction |
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| <p>This course takes the position that research does not start with a blank page, rather, it is an exploration proceeding from the review of existing experiences and expertise which may be supplemented using archival, material, spatial, theoretical and other research frameworks and methods.</p> <p>The course grounds practice-based, qualitative research in close observation of objects, habits, places and people. The course supports students in using that close observation as a platform for exploring new ways of thinking and doing in their studio disciplines in a way that is broadly (auto)ethnographic, privileging methods of research that are sensory, materially aware, historically informed, culturally sensitive, applied to everyday life, and creatively enriching.</p> <p>The course seeks to raise awareness of the principles of design justice and encourages students to evaluate these in relation to the demands of both personal and contemporary professional practice. As a result, the course emphasises how developing critical self-awareness in relation to the demands of specific disciplines is the basis for questioning assumptions, positions and biases.</p> <p>Observation – of people, places, things, behaviours, and beyond - is a practice deeply embedded in the notion of what an art school is and has been. The course encourages students to change the pace at which they observe things and the level of attention they pay to their own experience of life. The course takes slowness as a principal framework that calls on us to work carefully, attentively and considerately in order to conceive of more responsible, sustainable personal and professional practices at local and global levels.</p> |

Course Aims

The aims of this course are to:

1. introduce students to a range of qualitative research methods that may be used to progress creative practice and projects
2. provide students with a rigorous understanding of research ethics as relevant to their research/practice
3. enable students to critically position themselves and their lived experiences as a route to engagement with broader cultural, social and professional contexts
4. familiarise students with a range of digital and physical resources that might be employed in research

The course aims to provide students across the spectrum of taught postgraduate programmes within the School of Design with a grounding in a range of qualitative research methods that may typically be used to progress creative practice and projects. Underpinning this general aim is a conviction that research is a critical exploration of personal position that proceeds directly from appraisal of existing experiences and knowledge.

The course does not privilege specific ways of thinking about research; rather, it encourages students to define fields of enquiry and/or formulate research questions through practical and critical engagement with senses, people, places, processes, materials, objects, histories, fictions, contexts, cultures, professions, and established bodies of knowledge. Central to this ethos, the course requires students to develop an ethical awareness of the impact that their research methods and potential projects might have if pursued. To this extent, the course makes use of, and continually revises, contemporary examples and theories that represent a progressive, socially responsible understanding of design.

The course aims to equip students with an introduction to digital research as well as research conducted in person in order that they might confidently and clearly present and discuss the ideas informing studio projects on the basis of evidence collated from primary and secondary sources.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

1. document and discuss research experiences using a range of appropriate means, materials and methods
2. evaluate and adapt methods in order to ethically develop and progress projects and practices
3. generate critical perspectives on relevant fields of enquiry through contextual research
4. demonstrate the ability to articulate research outcomes by employing clear vocabularies in written, visual and oral presentations

5. collate and evaluate primary and secondary sources in order to manage information effectively

Indicative Content

This course will introduce students to content that responds to contemporary thinking in creative practice as the basis for research in design. The specific course content is reviewed and updated annually, including elements that vary according to the demands of each participating studio discipline.

Indicative themes include:

- autoethnography
- slow design
- 'mundane methods': using everyday and sensory experiences in research
- object and material analysis, including archival research
- storytelling & fictioning
- design justice
- research ethics

Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

The delivery of this course is shared between lectures, engagement with online resources/course content, field/site visits and group tutorials.

A range of learning and teaching methods are used to support students to engage in an explorative approach to learning. These include:

- lectures
- group tutorials and peer learning
- independent research and reading, including engagement with course readings
- field and site visits led by studio discipline tutors
- presentations and writing

| Indicative Contact Hours | Notional Learning Hours |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 20 | 200 |

Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods

Students are supported in their learning through a range of activities with staff and peers, such as reviews and group tutorials offering ongoing formative feedback as they progress through the course. Formative feedback supports students in developing and refining their work towards submission for summative assessment.

Formative feedback offers students the opportunity to present the progress of their work to staff and or peers in discipline-specific group tutorials. Students present individual scripted and illustrated visual presentation outlining their plans for summative assessment. Students receive verbal feedback to support the development and refinement of their work towards submission for summative assessment, supported by peer-to-peer note-taking, discussion, and feedback.

Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

Summative assessment is designed to support students to review, collate, and communicate work produced in response to the assessment brief and learning and teaching activities associated with the course.

For summative assessment, students submit a written script/text integrating visual material. The script/text should describe, discuss and interpret selected design research methods with reference to personal practice and concurrent and/or future studio projects (indicative word count: 2000 words).

Submissions will be assessed and moderated in line with the Code of Assessment, which outlines reassessment opportunities where a student has not passed the course.

| Description of Summative Assessment Method | Weight % | Submission week |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|
| Students are required to submit a written script/text integrating visual material. The script/text should describe, discuss and interpret selected design research methods with reference to personal practice and concurrent and/or future studio projects (indicative word count: 2000 words) | 100% | 12 |

Exchange/Study Abroad

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| Can this course be taken by Exchange/Study Abroad students? | No |
| Are all the students on the course taught wholly by distance learning? | No |
| Does this course represent a work placement or a year of study abroad? | No |
| Is this course collaborative with any other institutions? | No |
| If yes, then please provide the names of the other teaching institutions | |

Reading and On-line Resources

The course indicative reading and online resource list is accessible via [Resource Lists](#). This list will be reviewed and updated annually to reflect course content and subject developments. Tutors and peers will provide further recommendations appropriate to student's chosen area of research and focus.