

**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 Academic Year.

Course Code	HECOS Code	Academic Session
		2026-2027

Course Title	Design Research Methods
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 MDes Silversmithing and Jewellery BA / MDes Silversmithing and Jewellery (Integrated Masters)
Lead School	Design
Other Schools	n/a
Date of Approval	PACAAG April 2026

Course Introduction
<p>This 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 aim is a conviction that research is an opportunity for critical exploration in relation to individual design practise.</p> <p>The course supports students in using close observation as a platform for exploring new ways of thinking and doing in their studio disciplines. 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. As such, the course 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, and established bodies of knowledge. Central to this ethos, the course requires students to develop an ethical awareness of the impact of their research methods, as well as raise awareness of the principles of design justice.</p> <p>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 further takes slowness and close looking 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> <p>The course further 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.</p>

Course Aims

The aims of this course are to:

1. introduce students to a range of design research methods, and digital and physical resources that may be used to progress creative practice and projects
2. develop students understanding and ability to apply research ethics as relevant to their research and creative practice
3. enable students to critically analyse and position their research and their creative practise within broader cultural, social and professional contexts
4. support students to effectively communicate and present complex research methods, processes and outcomes with critical insight, employing written and visual methods

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

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

1. document and critically analyse objects, elements and/or artefacts using a range of appropriate methods, materials and resources
2. critically evaluate, adapt, and justify the selection and application of design research methods, demonstrating ethically informed approaches relevant to their projects and practices
3. collate, synthesise and critically assess primary and secondary sources to generate informed, original perspectives that position their research and creative practice within broader cultural, social and professional contexts
4. communicate complex research processes and outcomes with clarity, employing appropriate written and visual methods

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:

- accessing primary and secondary resources in libraries and archives
- planning research effectively
- relating design history and theory research to studio practise
- research grounded in personal identities, autoethnography, and the everyday
- material culture and object-based methods

- design justice and research ethics
- positionality and reflexivity
- sustainable methods and practices
- slow design methods
- sensory methods

Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

This course will be delivered through a range of online and in-person learning and teaching methods in order to support students in engaging in an accessible and exploratory approach to learning. These include:

- lectures
- group discussions and peer learning seminars
- assessment workshops
- independent research and reading, including engagement with course readings
- independent and virtual visits to Glasgow-based museums and archives

Independent learning will be supported and developed through guided activities and digital learning resources made available on the course Canvas site. All lectures will be recorded and made available with captions on Canvas after delivery.

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, including discussion and peer-to-peer notetaking, offering ongoing formative feedback as they progress through the course.

A formative submission point is scheduled mid-way through the course offering students the opportunity to present the progress of their work to staff within discipline specific groups. At this point, students also submit a Preliminary Ethical Self-Assessment for staff review. Students receive feedback to support the development and refinement of their work towards submission for summative assessment.

Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

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

Students submit a critical written text (approx. 2000 words) with supporting visual documentation (approx. 5-10 images), presenting a case study of an object, element, or artefact situated within a Glasgow context. The submission must demonstrate critical analysis and the selection,

application, and ethical use of appropriate research methods and resources, employing clear and effective written and visual communication in relation to the student's research and creative practice.

All submissions must be uploaded to Canvas.

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 submit a critical written text (approx. 2000 words) with supporting visual documentation (approx. 5-10 images), presenting a case study of an object, element, or artefact situated within a Glasgow context. The submission must demonstrate critical analysis and the selection, application, and ethical use of appropriate research methods and resources, employing clear and effective written and visual communication in relation to the student's research and creative practice.	100%	12

Exchange/Study Abroad

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.