Section Seven — Project Advice

Tips on Getting Started

This section's got all the stuff people don't do that the exam boards get really annoyed about. Read this before you start your project to make sure you keep those markers happy.

Step 1 — Get your Idea

You can get ideas from different places — for example, your teacher might:
1) tell you exactly what your task is.
2) give you a range of tasks to choose from.
3) leave the project choice completely up to you.

Don't choose anything Too Easy or Too Boring

Choose a project that will:
1) stretch you and let you demonstrate just how good you are. If the project's too easy, or contains little scope for design, then you'll lose valuable marks.
2) be interesting and challenging enough to keep you motivated. Coursework's a long old process, and you need to stay committed.
3) give you the opportunity to produce a wide range of research, and demonstrate your ICT skills.
4) allow for a variety of solutions, resulting in a project which can be completed before the deadline (and this includes allowing time for testing and evaluation).

The Design Brief — Give Loads of Detail

1) Your idea needs to have "real commercial potential".
2) You need to describe exactly what you're trying to do.
3) Explain all the factors you need to consider — things like price, weight, market trends, etc.

Say Why your Research is Relevant

1) DON'T just blank bits of paper in your research folder without any explanation.
2) DON'T just copy and paste stuff from the Internet either.
3) DO write notes on every piece of research to say why it's relevant, how it changed your thinking or how it backed up your existing ideas.
4) DO refer back to the research section throughout the project — that helps to show you've used your research.

This is all you need to do:

- Print or photocopy the relevant stuff.
- Highlight the really useful bits.
- Write brief notes saying where you found it...
- ...what you found out...
- ...and what effect it's had on your project.

Remarks — your research analysis will contain all the conclusions from research. But these notes will help you write that research analysis, and will also help the examiner understand why you made your decisions.
**Tips on Development**

If you’re smart you’ll keep planning and evaluating throughout your project. If you’re a buffoon you’ll do a bit at the start, then forget about it and get a bad mark for your project.

**You Need a Wide Range of Ideas — Be Creative**

1. There’s more than one way to skin a cat.
2. Consider plenty of different ways to solve the problem.
3. Don’t just come up with one good idea and stick with it. You’ll only be sure it’s the best if you’ve thought about other ways of doing it.
4. The examiners do really get annoyed about this one — so get those creative juices flowing.

**Developing your Ideas — Try Out a Few Alternatives**

1. The same goes for developing ideas as for creating them.
2. There’s still more than one way to skin a cat.
3. Once you’ve got the idea, there are still plenty of ways to turn that into an ace product.

**Do Loads of Planning — and Not Just at the Start**

Planning is for life, not just for... um... the start of your project. These are the things you should do:

**OVERALL PROJECT PLAN AT THE START:**

1. To help you focus on the task.
2. To make sure you know what stage you should have reached at any time — this way, if you fall behind schedule, you’ll know about it as soon as possible, and can do something about it.
3. To allow enough time for all the different stages of the design process — including testing, evaluation, and writing up your project.

Remember to include testing and evaluating in your time plan — it’s all too easy to forget them...

**PLAN YOUR RESEARCH:**

Work out what research you need to do, and how long you’re going to allow yourself for each bit (e.g. questionnaires, disassembling a competing product, and so on).

**DON’T GET BOGGED DOWN:**

When you’re generating proposals or developing your product, don’t spend too long working on one little aspect of the product. There’s a lot to do — so try to keep your project moving forward.

**I have a cunning plan...**

OK, repeat after me: “I will allow time for testing in my time plan. I will allow time for testing in my time plan. I will allow time for testing in my time plan...”

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**Tips on Evaluation**

Evaluation means examining and judging your work (and you have to do this as part of your project — it’s not just something for the examiner to do). If your product doesn’t work, but you explain why, you can still get good marks.

**Test and Evaluate your Product Throughout the Project**

I quote:

“To be achieving the highest marks in this section, candidates must show that they have used a clear and objective testing strategy.”

That’s from one of the Chief Examiners’ Reports.
(In other words, it’s important.)

**Don’t Wait until you’re Finished to Evaluate your Work**

1. Like any designer, it’s a good idea to be thinking about evaluation from the moment you start working on your design brief.
2. Make notes on your designs and developments as you go along, explaining what was good and bad about each one.
3. When you’re writing up your final evaluation, you can also think about whether you’d do anything differently if you were starting again. It’s okay if you made some bad decisions during your project — everyone does. But you can get marks if you explain why they were bad decisions, and what you wish you’d done instead.

**Check your Brief and Specification**

You need to evaluate your product fully. Use these guidelines:

1. Compare your final product to your brief and specification. Does your product satisfy all the conditions it’s supposed to? If not, why not?
2. Try to get a likely user (or an expert in this kind of product, maybe) to trial your product and give their honest opinions. This will give you a realistic view of whether it’s fit for its purpose — e.g. does it do what it’s meant to? And if it does, how well? They may also be able to give you ideas for improvements.
3. It’s also dead important to think about things you could have done better, such as...

1. Time implications — did you spend too much time in one area, or rush to finish?
2. Practical work — were you completely satisfied with the quality of your final product?
3. Would you approach aspects of your design and development work in a different way?

**Never forget to check your briefs...**

Everyone makes mistakes (well, everyone except me, obviously). More specifically, everyone makes mistakes in their D & T projects. So don’t worry too much when it happens to you. Just explain what went wrong and how you’d avoid it in the future. You can get marks for that.
**Tips on Presentation**

It’s no use doing a stinking project if your presentation’s naif. You’ve put a lot of time and effort into your project (probably) so it would be a shame for you to mess it up at the last stage.

**IT REALLY IS WORTH PUTTING IN THOSE FEW EXTRA HOURS.**

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**The Finished Product — Good Photographs are Ace**

Your evaluation should be clearly presented and easy to read.

1) Include an introduction to give a bit of background information — e.g. how you came to think of the project.

2) Always take photos of any non-permanent work or intermediate stages in making the product. You can use either a normal or a digital camera and then either glue in the print or place the digital image into a word-processed document — whatever suits.

3) Use a mixture of media to present your project. It’s always good to show off how nifty you are with CAD or that desktop publishing program, but don’t forget about old-fashioned words to explain what you did, and sketches and prototypes to show how you did it.

4) Split up your evaluation into different sections to make it easy to read. Give each section a clear heading.

5) Think about how it fits together — your project needs to work as a whole. It should flow seamlessly from one bit to the next — don’t just shove loads of separate bits in with no clue as to how they fit together.

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**Vocabulary — use the Right Technical Terms**

**BIG, FANCY WORDS:**

1) Do yourself a favour — learn all the technical terms.
2) And how to spell them.
3) And don’t worry if you sound posh.
4) Using the right technical terms impresses the examiners. They say so in their reports.

**GRAMMAR, SPELLING, PUNCTUATION:**

1) Treat your project like an English essay.
2) Get your spellings right. Double-check any words you often get wrong.
3) Remember to use full stops and capital letters and write in proper sentences.
4) Short sentences make your work clearer. Long sentences, with loads of commas, can often get very confusing, because it’s easy, once you get to the end of the sentence, to forget what you were reading right at the start.
5) Structure your work in paragraphs — a new paragraph for a new topic.

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**Santa cheats at presentation — he uses elves...**

Of course your project has to look nice. I mean, what would you rather read... a beautifully presented folder of work, or something scribbled down on the back of a mucky paper towel...