

How to Use a Sketchbook



All areas of creative practice

How to Use a Sketchbook



Right: Rebecca Sugar

The Fear

Sketchbooks should be a space that artists can express themselves. Where work can go very wrong, ideas can be refined and great breakthroughs in the creative process can take place. Though a lot of sketchbooks might get seen by others and even occasionally displayed in exhibitions your sketchbook should first and foremost be a private space where you can develop your creative ideas.



Commit to using sketchbooks can be a difficult task. Often, students will assume that the first idea that pops into their head is the idea they should go with. Often resulting in under developed and rushed project outcomes. Using a sketchbook to test out ideas is central to artistic growth.

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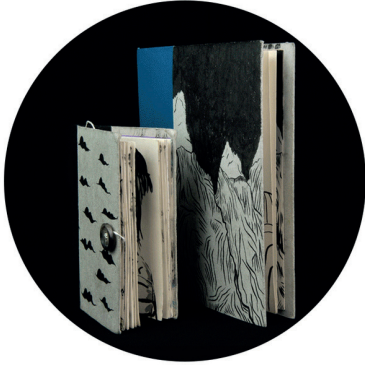
Right: J.M.W Turner

Too often the fear of ‘other’ people looking at ‘bad’ work in a sketchbook will mean pages are ripped out and whole books are simply abandoned. It is very important that young artists challenge this compulsion to make everything as good as it can be and embrace the ugly in a sketchbook.

Let’s look at a few approaches that can be adopted when using your sketchbook!



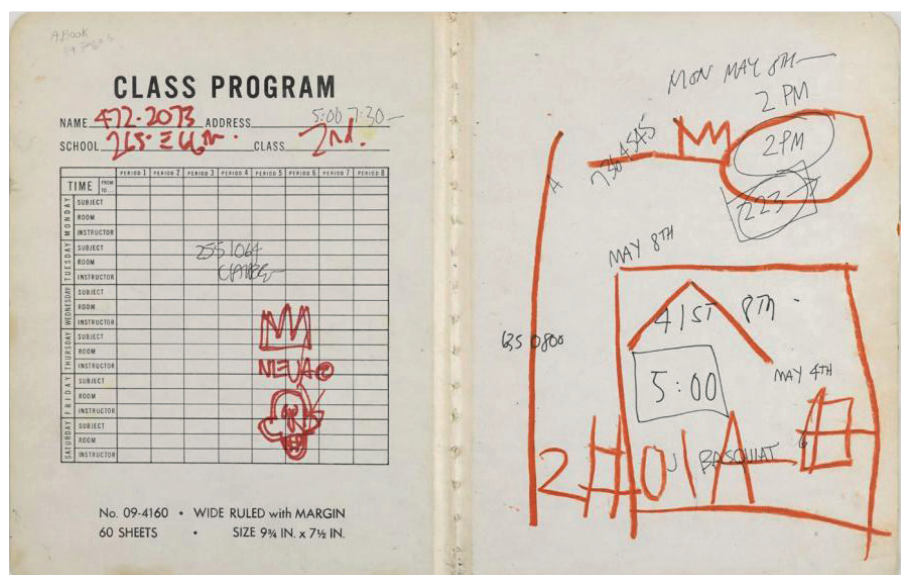
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Right: Jean Michel Basquiat

Embrace the Ugly

Let's start by dispelling the myth that sketchbooks must be beautiful. It goes against the very nature of sketchbooks!



Some Tips

- Stop seeing your sketchbook as a museum piece. Reality check- though it might end up in a gallery that might take some time. For now, assume no one will see it.
- The more you use your sketchbook, the more you will improve and the better your sketchbooks will look. It's the oldest truism about art. The more you do, the better you get!

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Right: Rebecca Sugar

- Deliberately make a mess in your sketchbook! Get some paints and fill a page with random colour!
- Don't show everyone your sketchbook. If you are anxious about what other people think then only show your teacher.

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Right: Louise Bourgeois

When you are stuck, make!

A lot of the time we get stuck with creative projects. We try to put pencil to paper and we can't think of how to move forward. When we experience times like these the sketchbook becomes a real asset.



Some Tips

- Doodle like you did when you were in school. We've all done it, when we were in a class that we didn't find interesting we would start to draw. Do the same in your sketchbook. Make patterns or random faces. Draw the first thing that comes to your mind.
- Use your environment as inspiration. You could draw a plant, chair or even the pattern on the curtains.
- Close your mind and draw the first thing that comes into your imagination. Often finding inspiration can be as easy as letting your subconscious take over.



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Below: Anselm Kiefer



Sketchbooks, but not as we know it

Sketchbooks should be spaces where you let loose. There are no rules on what you should include in a sketchbook. Sometimes it helps to see your sketchbook as an archive of lots of weird and wonderful stuff.

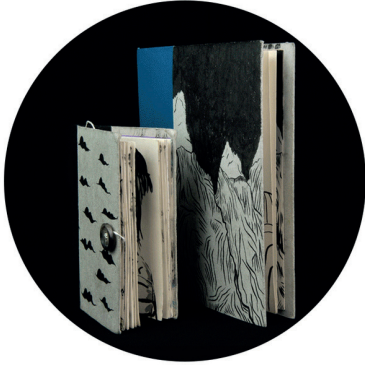
Some Tips

Create simple pockets by gluing three corners of a piece of paper into your sketchbook and fill it with interesting things you find on a walk. They can be used in future work or as visual inspiration.

Think of your sketchbook as something sculptural. We normally think of sketchbooks containing 2D work but a lot of artists will add all manner of things. Why not think of including small sculptures, found material or fabrics in your pages?

Why not learn how to make your own sketchbooks instead of buying them all the time? It's really easy! There are loads of videos of how to do it online.

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Right: Jean Jullien

Visual Diaries

Sketchbooks don't always have to contain school work. They should also include personal projects. It's important to do personal work as it shows that you are motivated to continue making art work outside of school.

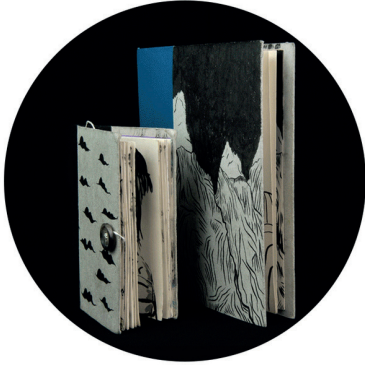


Some Tips

- At the end of everyday try and summarise how your day has gone through a single image.
- You could turn your week into a comic? You could illustrate conversations you have had during the week or places you have been.
- If you are anxious about drawing yourself or people you know when why not turn them into characters instead of life like people?



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Below: Oliver O'Keeffe



Sketch booking as therapy

It has become more important now than ever to take care of your own mental health. Making art can really help distract the mind, diverting it away from the things that are causing us anxiety and worry. So, with this in mind why not use your sketchbook as therapy.

Some Tips

- Try and visualise what is causing you to worry? Dig deep and see what images come to mind. You might even find you feel better after.
- Draw aimlessly. Let the mind take over. Get loads of different materials and create different abstract gestures and marks.
- Fill your sketchbook with your ambitions. Try and visualise what would make you happy in the future and try and create a series of works inspired by this. That way your sketchbook can act as a reminder of what you are working towards in life.

However you choose to use a sketchbook have fun with it!

Ravensbourne Outreach tutors and students have produced a new series of online projects and courses to help you stay creative at home

If you'd like to find out more please visit our website makeit.ravensbourne.ac.uk or email us at outreach@rave.ac.uk

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