

Photobook Proforma

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Knowledge and Understanding Skills: 20%

Guidance specific to task (from the brief):

Your evaluation should show clear understanding of the history, function, practical development and production of the photobook through a range of critically understood examples. The analysis of these will highlight the functions and strategies employed by the photographer and your interpretation of their communication of meaning through the publication.

Using examples (3 max), explore your understanding of the history, function and practical development of the photobook. Your analysis should highlight the strategies used by the artist/photographer to communicate their message. Include visuals (500 – 1000 words)

The photobook is a mix of photography, literature, and visual art that's evolved over the last hundred years into a powerful way to tell stories. Unlike single photos or gallery exhibitions, photobooks give artists more control, they can decide the order of images, how fast or slow the viewer experiences them, and how each image connects to the next. It's a more intimate, personal experience. In this piece, I'll look at three important photobooks that represent key moments in the history and growth of the medium: Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958), and Laia Abril's *On Abortion* (2018).

Walker Evans – *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941)

This photobook came out of the Great Depression. Evans had been hired by *Fortune* magazine in 1936 to document the lives of poor tenant farmers in the American South, but the story was never published there. Instead, Evans teamed up with writer James Agee to create a book that combined photos and writing in a unique, powerful way.

Evans's images are quiet and formal, with a documentary style. He used a large-format camera and natural light, capturing people in their homes, often with a kind of stillness that feels respectful and honest. The photos come before the text in the book, which forces the viewer to first sit with the faces, places, and lives of the people without any explanation or context.

Laia Abril – *On Abortion* (2018)

Laia Abril's *On Abortion* is part of her larger series called *A History of Misogyny*, and it takes on one of the most urgent global issues today: reproductive rights. The book explores the consequences of making abortion illegal or hard to access, and it's both heartbreaking and eye-opening.

Unlike Evans or Frank, Abril mixes many different types of content: photographs, written testimonies, historical documents, infographics, and even objects. The layout is very clean and clinical, almost like a medical or legal file, which gives the book a serious, investigative feel.

What makes Abril's approach stand out is that she doesn't just show the women affected, she shows the systems that control them. One page might feature a portrait of someone who died from an unsafe abortion, while the next shows the tool that was used or a government form tied to her case. It's raw and real.

This isn't just a story, it's a statement. Abril uses the photobook to make an argument, calling attention to injustice and pushing the viewer to think critically. It's a clear example of how photobooks can be a powerful form of visual activism.

Robert Frank – *The Americans* (1958)

Published first in France, then in the U.S. with an intro by Jack Kerouac, Robert Frank's *The Americans* is a groundbreaking book that shows a very different side of 1950s America. Frank was an outsider a Swiss photographer and that perspective helped him see things most Americans might have missed or taken for granted.

The book is made up of 83 photos, arranged to feel like a road trip across the country. As you go through it, you move from big cities to small towns, seeing people from different races, classes, and backgrounds. Frank's style is very different from Evans's his photos are often blurry, oddly cropped, or taken at strange angles. But that's the point. He wanted to capture the feeling of life, the uncertainty, the loneliness, the contradictions of the American experience.

A single image might say a lot: an American flag might stand for freedom or something darker. A diner might look like a happy place or a lonely one. The ambiguity is part of what makes the book so powerful. Frank's way of sequencing the images feels more like poetry than journalism, and it changed the way people thought about photobooks from factual documentation to personal, emotional storytelling.

Cognitive and Intellectual Skills: 30%
Guidance specific to task (from the brief): Your research report should critically analyse the theories and concepts explored in your photobook, as well as the techniques it employs. Focus on developing a reasoned and informed debate rather than simply describing the work. Your analysis should lead to clear, valid conclusions, considering the form of the book, the reading experience it creates.

Avoiding description, critically analyse the theme/ context you explore within your photobook. Your critical analysis should demonstrate your cognitive and intellectual skills in how you have understood the subject and made work as a response to it. Consider how the form of your book communicates meaning in relation to the subject of exploration. (500 -1000 words)

In this photobook, I explore the theme of mental deterioration and obsession, framed through a character driven narrative presented as a kind of visual diary. Rather than directly representing mental illness through stereotypes or overly literal imagery, the book works more as a fictional artifact, a handmade object that feels like it was created by the character himself. The aim was not to show his story from the outside, but to present the viewer with the physical remnants of his inner world, as if they had stumbled upon his private creation.

This approach came from a deeper conceptual decision to immerse the viewer in the character's psyche rather than have them look at him from a clinical or detached perspective. From the start, I was more interested in how a person like this might express themselves visually and physically, than in simply telling a story about them. This led to a more experiential, less didactic approach. The book does not explain the character's condition, it lets you feel it through its form, materials, and structure.

The physical form of the book became central to this strategy. Early on, I questioned the materials I was using such as glossy PhotoJet paper and clean digital printing and realised they contradicted the core concept. A person spiralling into obsession or instability likely would not have access to professional tools. Switching to watercolour paper allowed for a rawer, more fragile finish. The way the paper reacts to ink, how it ages, and how it slightly warps over time gives the object a life of its own. It becomes less a photobook and more a physical diary, tangible evidence of a disturbed but methodical mind.

Similarly, I rejected standard binding methods in favour of a custom hand stitched approach. The stitching is slightly uneven, imperfect by design. This imperfection is not a flaw but a deliberate communication of the character's emotional state. A book that is too polished would break the illusion. The rougher form makes the work feel human, unstable, and deeply personal, an extension of the character rather than a distanced narrative about him.

From an editorial perspective, I initially included text directly on images to drive the story, but this strategy felt imposed and unnatural. The more I considered the world of the character, the more I realised that such text would not exist in this context. Replacing it with a letter and envelope allowed for a more believable and immersive way of introducing narrative. This small tactile device serves as an entry point into the character's world without breaking the form or tone of the book. It feels like something that belongs in the story, not something added onto it.

Choosing which images to include was another intellectual challenge. With a large archive to pull from, I had to let go of images I liked for aesthetic reasons in favour of those that served the narrative progression. I sequenced the book chronologically, reinforcing the idea of a timeline. But more importantly, I focused on how images interacted across the spread, how one would set up the next emotionally or thematically. The aim was to create visual tension and rhythm, rather than simply follow events.

Practical Skills: 40%

Guidance specific to task (from the brief):

Present your book professionally, carefully considering how you deploy methods, technical processes. Your methods should synthesize the form of your book and the context/meaning of your subject. Your book should demonstrate proficiency, selection in editing and flair. The decisions you make should be as product of significant research into book production and design. Within your evaluation, ensure to provide examples of book dummies to show the developments in your practical

processes. These decisions should be as product of significant book design planning including alternative idea generation.

Evaluate the methods and technical processes you have employed in the making of this body of practice. Explain your process for making your book, consider how editing/ design/ typography and format speak to the subject matter you have explored. Provide examples of the book dummies you have created over the past semester to show developments in your practical processes. (800 – 1500 words)

At the start of the planning process, my priority was to define what the content of my photobook would include not just in terms of the photographs themselves, but how they would function together as a complete narrative. I decided on a chronological timeline structure, one that would follow the journey of the central character from his early days through to his final moments. The idea was to reflect a kind of visual life arc, like chapters in a personal history. This helped create a sense of progression and emotional build-up throughout the book.

Once the content was settled, my attention turned to the physical form of the photobook. I originally planned to print on high-quality A4 PhotoJet paper, which would have given a polished, clean, and professional look. But I stopped and questioned that choice. If this book was supposedly made by the character himself someone mentally unstable, possibly paranoid or deteriorating over time would he really has access to expensive, glossy materials? Would the final product look refined, or would it reflect the instability of his mind?

This line of thinking pushed me to change course. I ended up choosing rugged, textured watercolour paper, which introduced a completely different tactile and visual quality. The prints absorbed into the paper differently slightly faded, slightly rough and over time, the pages naturally began to curl and wear, almost like something left behind or hidden away. That quality wasn't just a happy accident it became a key part of how the book conveyed fragility and decay.

The binding followed a similar logic. I initially investigated standard, neat binding options, but again, that felt too clean. I imagined the character stitching it together himself, by hand, in secret, without access to proper tools or materials. I went with a custom, slightly messy stitch, intentionally imperfect. The looseness and slight asymmetry in the binding worked in favour of the concept it added realism, and helped reinforce the idea that the book was more of a personal, obsessive artifact than a polished product.

During the first few iterations of the book, I was experimenting heavily with how to tell the story. At one point, I placed text directly over the images, thinking it would help clarify the narrative. But something about it didn't sit right. It felt too artificial almost

as if I was trying to force a voice onto the visuals instead of letting the images speak for themselves.

I stepped back and asked: if this character had really created this book, how would their thoughts or story be communicated? Would there be floating captions or digital-looking fonts overlaying everything? Probably not. That realisation led me to a much better solution: I introduced a letter and envelope into the book as a narrative tool. This small change made a huge difference. Not only did it feel more authentic, it grounded the story in the world I was building. It added a personal touch almost like the reader was uncovering something private, something they weren't meant to see.

The next challenge was probably the most difficult: editing down the huge volume of images I had collected and shot. There were dozens of potential photos, and choosing the right ones meant letting go of some that I was really attached to. I forced myself to be strict and focused, prioritising clarity of narrative over variety of visuals.

I eventually settled on a chronological order, in line with the concept of tracking the character's descent or evolution over time. I paid close attention to how the images would interact on a two-page spread, making sure each pair had some kind of connection whether in tone, composition, or emotional weight. I didn't want the viewer to just flip through mindlessly; I wanted the sequence to have rhythm, tension, and contrast, building an emotional thread that runs throughout.

In the end, the choices I made in form, editing, and layout weren't just aesthetic they were driven by the character's world, and by the logic of the narrative I wanted to build. The book isn't meant to be perfect. It's meant to feel real, flawed, and deeply personal just like the character who might have made it.

Transferable Skills for Life and Professional Practice 10%

Guidance specific to task (from the brief):

Your photobook should meet industry standards in design, development, and production. Plan your workflow according to your chosen publication method to ensure timely completion. Active participation in sessions is essential for sharing your work, engaging in discussions, and demonstrating both employability skills and a strong grasp of the module content. Your evaluation should reflect on your learning throughout the process and highlight the transferable skills you have developed.

Evaluate what you have learnt throughout the process of making your photobook. Pay particular attention to the transferable skills you have developed. (500-1000 words)

In conclusion Through the development of this photobook, I have come to understand that the process is not just about presenting images but about building an entire world through form, material, and structure. What began as a project about a fictional character and his descent into obsession evolved into something much deeper—a study of how the photobook can act as both a vessel for narrative and an emotional object.

One of the most important lessons I learned was that the physical qualities of a book matter as much as the images inside it. My initial instinct was to print on clean, high-quality paper, but that choice felt disconnected from the story I was telling. I asked myself: would this character, someone mentally unravelling, really have access to those materials? Probably not. That shift in thinking led me to choose watercolour paper, which offered a more fragile, aged quality that aligned with the idea of a deteriorating mind. The imperfections in texture, the way the paper absorbs ink and even begins to curl, all became part of the storytelling.

I also rethought how narrative could be delivered. I moved away from placing text directly on images because it disrupted the authenticity of the piece. Instead, I introduced a letter and envelope into the book, which felt truer to the world I was building. That simple shift changed the tone completely and gave the viewer a more intimate connection to the character.

The process of editing and sequencing taught me how restraint and intention shape meaning. Choosing images that worked together across spreads, thinking about emotional pacing, and letting go of photos that didn't serve the narrative were all part of understanding how to communicate more with less. It wasn't about showcasing every good image it was about creating a rhythm and a sense of deterioration that matched the arc of the story.

Ultimately, this project showed me that a photobook can be far more than a printed portfolio or a product to be sold. It can be a deeply personal, tactile object that tells a story through its materials, its flaws, and its structure. The photobook became a

space where I could blur the line between fiction and reality, and in doing so, communicate something that felt honest, raw, and real.

