

Community Studies

2011 Assessment Report



Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

COMMUNITY STUDIES

2011 ASSESSMENT REPORT

OVERVIEW

Assessment reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Contract of Work

Development of Contract

Detailed contract development was crucial to address the planning and organisation assessment design criteria. The contract needed to demonstrate evidence of how students planned, organised, and intended to complete their community activity. Where students built on and extended their knowledge, interest, or involvement in an activity — rather than just reporting on something that they would have done or been involved in — the personal growth and challenge to the students were evident, allowing them to achieve more highly in the performance standards.

Consequently, the better contracts were detailed, logical, and broken into smaller 'sub-tasks' that gave a comprehensive time-line structure for students for each lesson, week, and term. Similarly, clear and meticulous descriptions of existing knowledge and skills, including literacy and numeracy, gave a thorough background for students to plan ahead for the development of their new knowledge and skills. Clarity about how evidence was to be provided and the individuality of contracts needed to be clearly stated. Therefore, well-constructed and scaffolded contracts were reflected in higher student outcomes.

The capabilities chosen as a focus by students were spread across all five capabilities specified in the subject outline. Where students acknowledged that a number of these capabilities would be present in their investigation but then carefully decided which would be the major one or ones, they were able to refine and focus their activity in depth.

Many students updated or modified their contracts as work progressed, improving and detailing the tasks as their investigation advanced. Other students clearly documented necessary changes to their contracts, the reasons for these, and any necessary alterations to their record of evidence.

A small number of contracts were submitted unsigned and with limited response from the nominated community contact. Where students enrolled for 20 credits which equated to 120 hours of student work, this needed to be evidenced in the contract and folio.

It should also be noted that, in conversions from another subject, already completed work in the previous subject should be clearly included in the contract and as evidence in the folio. Omitting these steps disadvantaged some students, as insufficient evidence was submitted to meet performance standards.

Folio

Students compiled a structured record of evidence to document and reflect on the completion of their community activity. This evidence took many forms, with the importance of this record-keeping being in the detail provided. Students who adopted a methodical approach were able to tender a more comprehensive and complete record of evidence in a diverse range of areas, including consistent and regular contact with their community contact, as well as ongoing personal reflection, ensuring that the final presentation was of a more reflective and analytical level.

As a community-based subject, the expectation was for students to seek information and feedback from outside the confines of their school. The Internet is just one of the vast sources of information available and, although easily accessed, students needed to carefully select material, clearly showing how and why that information was relevant to their chosen activity. The more diverse the resources used — including experts, surveys of other people, specialist shops, newspaper articles, books, and magazines — the more comprehensive, detailed, informative, and perceptive the selection of sources was for students. Student research that was annotated and showed explicit learning and reflection was commended. Similarly, students who explicitly identified capabilities and showed how literacy and numeracy skills were enhanced, were more successful.

Presentation

Most students presented their report, findings, or product from their community activity to an appropriate community audience which was generally school-based or class-based. The better presentations also, where possible, included the nominated community contact. Most students invited feedback from their community audience, usually in written form.

The majority of students chose to conduct their presentations in oral form, with photos, captions, and PowerPoint deliveries to verify their activity.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 2: Reflection

This year, for the first time students studying Stage 2 Community Studies had some of their work externally marked. This was Assessment Type 2: Reflection, which has a 30% weighting and which required students to evaluate and reflect on the contract, any feedback received, and the learning undertaken during the process.

Well-written and clearly structured contracts of learning resulted in students producing well-developed reflections, which demonstrated clear examples of personal growth and explained how both literacy and numeracy skills had been developed. Most students addressed the skills and capabilities as required and some

students provided good evidence of newly acquired skills and learning relevant to the capabilities. Non-specific contracts often resulted in poor reflections.

Some teachers utilised the reflection questions from the subject outline to successfully provide a starting point for their students to develop their reflective writing skills. Students who achieved higher grades clearly demonstrated the difference between a recount and a reflection.

Teachers who developed a structure or questions that addressed the relevant assessment design criteria specifically provided students with the best opportunities for success.

Students who choose to present their external reflection in a non-written form need to ensure that their multimodal work or oral presentation shows evidence of reflection on the learning, how the student acted to any feedback received from the community contact(s), and the value of the activity to themselves and others, rather than just a description of the activity.

The limit of 500 words for a 10-credit subject made it particularly necessary for students to be precise and clear when producing their reflection, allowing them to address their selected capabilities within the word-limit.

Reflection on the value of the community activity to others was not deeply investigated or addressed by some students.

Many teachers delivered and structured their programs of learning to allow students to completely understand the full educational value of involvement within the community as a learning medium and therefore allow the student to reflect upon their role as a citizen within the community.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

In general, the assessment group program planner clearly showed that teachers were aware of their students' needs and carefully developed programs relevant to their students. Most teachers were able to provide specific details for each student, giving a clear insight into the basis for each contract.

With the two separate processes occurring (moderation and marking), all students have been assessed against the Stage 2 learning requirements and assessment design criteria. This is the first year that students were required to submit Assessment Type 1: Contract of Work for moderation, and Assessment Type 2: Reflection for external marking. Consequently, correct packaging of student work was essential. While most school assessment and external assessment were presented according to SACE guidelines by including the student's contract, and the assessment group program planner, concerns were raised with the presentation of some students' work. For example, a small number of reflections included teacher grades and comments, or did not include a student's SACE registration number and either a specific word-count or time-limit for multimodal work. Some student responses did not address the specific features being assessed (R2, R3).

School assessment evidence of learning with clearly identified divisions for each section provided a logical ordered sequence that assisted students to collate, organise, and present their materials, as well as supporting efficient moderation.

Teachers reported that the online procedural information for packaging helped to ensure that the work from each individual class was correctly packaged according to SACE specifications. Similarly, teachers who attended one of the many clarifying forums held during the year reported being better equipped to prepare and de-identify external assessment material as required.

GENERAL COMMENTS

2011 was both an exciting and challenging new era for education in South Australia with the SACE extending to Stage 2 subjects. The new curriculum allowed students undertaking Community Studies the possibility of selecting a community activity from 10 areas of study with a program being either a 10-credit subject (60 hours) or a 20-credit subject (120 hours). The most popular areas of study were Work and the Community, and Health, Recreation and the Community, with a total of almost 43% of students choosing these two areas.

A major change for Community Studies this year was the use of grades for assessment and reporting. This allows students to attain a result that reflects the quality of their work more specifically than the previous non-graded Satisfactory Achievement (SA). The flexibility of the subject continues to offer students the opportunity to provide in-depth evidence of their investigation and learning in a wide range of areas of community-based activities. Students showed great initiative, clearly demonstrating their interests and learning through their projects.

The second major change was in making contract development part of the assessment process to be totally 'owned' and developed in detail by the student in class. A further variation within the contract this year was an emphasis on students selecting a relevant capability or capabilities and identifying how literacy and numeracy were integral to their investigation. Across the 20 codes, 80% of students elected the 20-credit option. For the external assessment, this gave students the opportunity for a 1000-word response, providing the vehicle for a more analytical reflection and insightful consideration of the performance standards — in particular, including supporting evidence of reflection on the value of the community activity to the student and others.

Some of the best folios submitted were by students who had worked individually rather than as a member of a group. It was evident that these students had selected their own investigation based on personal interest and a willingness to extend their knowledge and understanding, fully utilising the expertise and support of the community outside the classroom. With a group project, a student's individual role, responsibilities, and personal response needed to be clearly documented and differentiated.

A small number of students neglected to undertake major elements of Community Studies, such as selecting a capability to develop or undertaking a community presentation. Consequently, they were unable to successfully meet all the features of the performance standards.

Conversions to Community Studies were difficult decisions for students, schools, and parents to make, but in the best interests of a student not requiring an ATAR, the earlier this move was made, the greater the opportunity for that student to achieve well. It is essential that the specific requirements of Community Studies are met, as these are quite different from the subject the student is exiting from. Not all conversions took into consideration work that students had undertaken in their

previous subject and the requirements of Community Studies. Several detailed exemplars of conversion contracts are posted on the SACE website, showing how students could make the link between the subject work already completed, the community activity, and the new chosen area of study.

Where teachers and students were familiar with the Community Studies subject outline, students were confident and well prepared to provide evidence of learning relative to the performance standards. The most successful students were generally those whose teachers had carefully provided structure for students' activities.

The Community Studies pages on the SACE website provide a wealth of information, exemplars, and student handouts which can be used to guide and help students to plan and implement a successful learning program.

Chief Assessor
Community Studies