

English Communications

2011 Assessment Report



Government
of South Australia

SACE
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ENGLISH COMMUNICATIONS

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-BASED ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Text Analysis

Students again responded well to the variety of challenging texts they studied in this component of the course. Novels, poetry, film and drama were represented equally. In a number of cases students were provided with the opportunity to respond to one of the three tasks as an independent study. More often than not this was completed for the film or novel response. Students benefitted from explicit teaching of text, scaffolding and a choice of tasks when constructing their responses.

Students who revealed Knowledge and Understanding, Application and Communication at the higher levels of the performance standards often demonstrated one of the three analysis criterion in each response. This enabled them to address individual criteria explicitly and in some depth. Moderators noted that An1 the 'analysis of authors' use of conventions of different text types to communicate ideas and influence readers' response' was particularly successful in relation to film responses this year. An2, the 'analysis of connections between the ideas, experiences, values, and beliefs of students, and those explored in texts' was addressed less consistently. Teachers are reminded of the importance of task design in relation to this criterion. Where this was addressed explicitly students performed well. Examples of successful tasks were those which encouraged students to consider where their personal views had been challenged by a particular event in a text or encouraged students to compare their experiences with poems of the same theme.

Student folders provided evidence of a range of response forms which included alternatives to traditional essays. Interviews with the director or author, presentations made as if the student was the director or author, blogs, reviews, creative responses and multimodal texts were evident in a number of cases. In these examples, the use of the selected form to analyse rather than retell was effective. Students are encouraged to incorporate evidence from texts in the form of quotations.

Poetry responses are most successful when the texts are considered as a group of two or more poems in relation to the task as opposed to individual texts. Teachers are reminded that one poem is insufficient and more than four can become unwieldy within the word count or time limit provided. Furthermore, the poetry responses that revealed higher levels of achievement analysed texts with a specific point of

connection such as a similar purpose, theme or the same writer. In a number of cases song lyrics were selected which reduced students' ability to analyse in depth.

In a few cases it was noted that students were required to complete comparative tasks for texts other than poetry. Teachers are reminded that this is not a requirement of the assessment type and therefore disadvantages students. Finally, working in pairs or groups to complete 'shared responses' should be avoided. It is particularly difficult to determine individual student performance when identical transcripts are submitted.

Assessment Type 2: Text Production

This assessment type consists of the composition of three texts which should be produced for three distinct purposes in a range of forms. Teachers are encouraged to consider current information regarding this assessment type in the subject outline in order to ensure students are able to meet the performance standards for Knowledge and Understanding, Application and Communication at the highest levels and, particularly, so that a wide range of language skills and techniques can be employed in a wide variety of texts. Particular emphasis is placed upon the differing purposes of these texts and students who were successful demonstrated their ability to adapt their writing accordingly. The most accomplished text production assessments considered audience and context to enhance the difference in individual pieces.

Therefore, task design is particularly important to offer students the opportunity to reveal a variety of writing styles for the prescribed differing purposes. Problems arose when student folders contained duplicated forms and purposes across the three tasks. For example, students were restricted in demonstrating evidence of performance standards at the higher levels if they completed two recounts and an exposition which observed and communicated a point of view. Furthermore some individual task designs reduced the opportunity for students to demonstrate a repertoire of writing skills. Biographies of famous people as exposition texts and picture books as narratives were among these options again this year.

On the other hand many students revealed a lively engagement when they had been provided with choice and tasks had been designed to suit their interests and strengths as writers. A successful example of this was observed with the topic 'Does education prepare you successfully for life?' Students produced sound texts when they had been taught the language and textual features of the text types they were expected to replicate.

Moderators commented on the success of tasks where visual and sound stimuli had been used by teachers to generate interesting writing. There were also some good examples of descriptive writing and play scripts in student folders. Oral and multimodal forms are increasing as options for text production and some excellent examples were observed during the moderation process.

The supervised written task conducted under test conditions must be completed according to the subject outline and learning area manual guidelines. This is a requirement for only one of the three texts composed. For the most part this task appears to have been completed appropriately. Students are to be made aware of the general requirements in advance, but must not receive topics until the set time and should not have access to the Internet during the completion of the task.

Assessment Type 3: Communication Study

This section of the course comprises two parts: a comparison of two examples of communication chosen from the five provided categories and a practical application. In the majority of cases the changes made to this component of the course were managed successfully. Teachers are reminded to use current criteria for task design and performance standards for assessment. In a few cases tasks had been designed for aspects which were no longer required such as the creation and analysis of a single communication text. In these instances students were disadvantaged by constructing work that could not be considered for assessment.

Advertising and mass-media communication were popular choices for the comparison task. A large number of students compared hard copy, moving image advertisements or magazine covers. Travel, cooking and car programs also remained popular choices. The comparison of texts that have broad differences such as a billboard advertisement for pain relief and a magazine advertisement for lip gloss did not provide students with adequate opportunity to meet the high levels of attainment due to their disparity.

Moderators commented upon sound task design and text selection in the case of the following combinations: Steve Irwin and David Attenborough nature programs, *The Leyland Brothers* and *Getaway* and a 1940s pro-smoking advertisement compared to a 2011 anti-smoking text. In these cases the topic of the texts was shared while one or more of purpose, form, language or context was significantly different.

Some students experienced particular success when task design insisted upon comparison throughout their response. The integration of texts in this way encouraged students to demonstrate evidence of performance standards at the higher levels of achievement. This was not always the case for students who analysed the texts separately and combined them only in the conclusion of their response. The analysis of language in this task was, in some cases, restricted to observing and identifying linguistic features by describing them in a brief manner. Students are encouraged to consider the analysis of language in more depth and detail to reveal their knowledge and understanding of the ways language is deliberately used to make meaning and why authors make the choices they do.

Changes to the course this year meant that students completed one practical application within this component of the course. Some of the eight options were not represented equally in work presented at moderation. This year *writing for publication* and *workplace writing* were popular choices. In all practical application options, students are required to provide evidence of work for the application product and the oral or written reflection according to the specific requirements set out in the subject outline. Formative work, the specifics of which are requested on pages 39-41, should not take precedence over these task requirements and may not be used in determining the overall grade.

Students appeared to engage best with the practical application when they were able to exercise some choice and control in their selected topic and form. In a number of cases moderators commented upon the success of reflections that had been constructed for a specific audience such as the editor of the magazine for which the student had written. The most successful applications treated the written and reflection parts of the task with equal importance.

Teachers are reminded that the practical applications have specific requirements that must be adhered to and that these differ according to each individual option. In a small number of cases students appeared to combine elements of two different applications together or repeated similar information across the two discrete components of the task.

Evidence of oral reflections in the form of transcripts, student notes and printed PowerPoint slides provide moderators with valuable additional evidence in addition to oral presentation recordings. Teacher notes regarding the quality of students' oral presentations without other evidence is insufficient evidence, to assist in the moderation process.

Writing for publication was the most popular choice of the practical applications this year and continues to provide students with the opportunity to produce original and specialist forms of writing. There was variety and diversity in the publications selected and the type and topic of writing. Writing for specific sections of a magazine including editorials, feature articles and short stories proved entertaining and engaging for moderators to read. A small proportion of students also elected to produce texts for digital media such as blogs or websites. Children's books are still a popular option within this category. While some students produced successful texts for younger audiences, others placed too much emphasis upon presentational devices at the expense of language. Oral presentations for *writing for publication* were most successful when they contained comprehensive analysis regarding language choices and decisions together with an explicit understanding of the development process of work to publication standard.

Another popular option was *workplace writing* for which students are required to submit six different types of writing for a specific work-place context. While this appeals to students because of the creative nature of the business they can construct, it can also provide opportunities to demonstrate a repertoire of writing skills because of the variety of texts that can be produced. The most successful of these applications included a range of writing with substantial text. This in turn gave students more opportunity to reflect upon the process of writing and analyse the differences in the context, audience, purpose and language of the texts created. Students who were less successful when completing this application relied too much upon texts without substantial text and duplicated text types within the six pieces of work.

Represented at moderation to a lesser extent were the remaining practical applications of *film-making, interacting, investigating, language, multimedia web authoring and oral language*. When these options were selected they were generally good because the students had genuine interest, skill or expertise in the selected topic for research. Furthermore, the most successful reflections for these application options contained analysis linked explicitly to assessment criteria.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 4: Folio

2011 saw the introduction of the folio as the external assessment component for English Communications. For the 20 credit subject, the folio consisted of two parts; a response to an example of communication and a text production with a writer's statement. For the 10 credit subject, students were required to complete only one of the above. The comments below refer to the 20 credit subject; however, it is possible to extrapolate advice for the 10 credit subject. Generally, markers commented that the folio was completed well and teachers had successfully directed students through the two parts, although the interpretation of the requirements in the subject outline showed some variation.

The most successful folios were those where the student and teacher had a clear reading of the assessment type's requirements and the assessment design criteria that had to be demonstrated. Occasionally, it seemed that students had completed the folio with only the performance standards in mind. It is crucial that the descriptions of each task (see subject outline pp 36 and 41) are the starting point of this assessment type because they provide the specifics the markers look for when marking the folios. It is useful to think of the task descriptions as *what* needs to be done and the performance standards as the tool for measuring *how* the task has been completed. All assessment design criteria except An2 must be evident in the folio.

When parts 1 and 2 of the folio were treated as two discrete parts, the outcome was more successful than when students had attempted to connect the parts through the same genre or style. For example, students who responded to a *Rolling Stone* article in part 1 and then wrote an article for the same magazine for part 2, severely limited their demonstration of Ap4 assessment design criteria, 'production of texts for different contexts, audiences, and purposes'. Such an approach also made it difficult for students to achieve in the A and B bands for KU1-4, An1 and Ap4. Other examples were when students studied poetry, fairy tales or advertising for both parts of the folio. The similarities between the two parts, especially part 1 and the writer's statement in part 2, had a significant impact on student achievement.

Finally, keeping to the 2000 word limit is crucial. Students who exceeded the word count were disadvantaged because markers were instructed to read the first 2000 words only which invariably meant that it was some or all of the writer's statement that was not included in the assessment. Students are asked to record the word count at the end of each part and keep in mind that it is flexible how the 2000 words are divided across the two parts.

Part 1: Response to an Example of Communication

Key phrases in the description of the folio are 'independent study', 'an example of communication', 'expectations of the intended audience', 'language techniques used by the creator(s)', and 'stylistic features and their effect on the reader or listener'. Students and teachers are strongly advised to consider the above requirements when choosing the example of communication and determine the content of their response.

Texts chosen were varied with novels, films, short stories, and other extended written pieces such as articles and speeches providing the greatest scope and opportunity to

be highly analytical. Unfortunately, responding to advertisements or posters that contained limited written language made it difficult to achieve highly against the performance standards. In such cases, students were able to comment on the stylistic features (often repeatedly) of the text but not the language techniques used by the creator to appeal to the audience. Choosing a television series (e.g. *Master Chef* or *Skins*) or more than one text (e.g. two films or several poems) were also problematic because students wrote broadly about the texts rather than focusing on audience, language techniques and stylistic features of 'an example of communication'. Occasionally students chose to respond to a form of communication, for example, editorials or blogs, rather than an individual item within the form. This meant that students could not specifically identify intended audience, language and features of the texts because the field they were covering was too broad, thereby, diminishing the quality of their response. Students are reminded that text titles should be identified.

Plagiarism was most often detected by markers when students wrote film reviews or analyses of famous speeches. It was unfortunate that teachers had not detected plagiarised work at the school before it was presented in the folio. Students and teachers are reminded that choosing a text that has been extensively commented upon on the internet can easily lead to plagiarism and heavy penalties. This statement also applies to text analysis tasks in the school-based assessment section of English Communications.

The level of independence when selecting an example of communication varied across the class batches. The subject outline clearly stipulates that the 'folio must be a product of independent study, but it is appropriate for teachers to advise and support students in choosing an example of communication.' It was evident that some students had been encouraged to consider a wide range of texts and that their selection was based on interest and suitability as guided by the teacher. Students who had chosen unfamiliar and more complex texts rather than ones they were very familiar with tended to produce the better responses. Basing a response on a film or on-line game that was obviously well known by the student produced disappointing results.

It was apparent to markers that the examples of communication selected by students in some classes were primarily determined by the teacher and that the students had very limited choice within the text type. When all students chose from a limited range of poems, advertisements or speeches it was clear that a significant amount of teaching to these texts had occurred and the level of independence was compromised. The problem was further compounded when the responses were heavily scaffolded. Similar format, topic sentences, paragraph structure and use of common terminology were all indications that there had been too much teacher assistance and the task resembled a shared exercise rather than an independent study.

There were many situations where teachers had chosen a particular text type for the class, for example, film or magazine articles or speeches, and students were given the responsibility of choosing a specific example from a very wide base on which to base their response. Such an approach gave teachers the opportunity to teach, in general terms, the language techniques and stylistic features that could be found in the text type without applying them to any example in particular.

Formulating an appropriate question or topic was central to the success of the response. Students whose questions allowed them to discuss the intended audience of the example of communication, language techniques and the stylistic features of

the text on the audience addressed the requirements of the task most directly. When literary texts are the focus of the response, it is accepted that identifying the intended audience can be problematic, but how the text's language and features influence the audience's response is crucial to meeting the performance standards to a high level. Examples of communication that allowed students to discuss audience well were websites, blogs, magazine articles, brochures, newsletters and speeches. Whatever the text selected, it is important that students acknowledge the audience in their response and the way the creator of the text has used language and other stylistic features to influence the audience.

Markers commented that in the better responses students discussed three or four features of the chosen text, supported their observations and ideas with clear and specific evidence and commented on the impact of these features on the audience. Less successful responses repeated information (usually because the example of communication was insufficiently complex), made unsubstantiated comments about techniques used by the creator, and omitted to discuss the intended effect of the techniques on the audience. Students are advised that reviews of any type of text (e.g. film, CD, digital games, music concerts) often lead to descriptive responses rather than analytical ones. Also, when the content of the example of communication is very familiar (e.g. articles on skateboarding or netball), there is a tendency to discuss the subject of the article rather than the language techniques and stylistic features of the example of communication.

Part 2: Text Production with Writer's Statement

The subject outline describes part 2 of the folio as a 'product of independent study' and a 'written text'. Markers commented on some excellent examples of original writing. Conversely, if students created texts that relied heavily on visual information (e.g. advertisements, children's picture books, posters, flyers), the written requirements of the task was evident to a lower level. The text production is not intended to be a response to text (e.g. a film review), but rather a piece that does not rely on knowledge of another text.

The writer's statement had to explain the creative decisions made in the process of writing the piece. Given that 2011 was the first time the writer's statement was part of the course, students did well to produce what was required. Successful students often allowed themselves approximately 350 words to explain decisions about form, the writer's purpose, the intended audience and the effect of the linguistic features they employed. Writer's statements that described what the student had written, editing problems or ideas that were rejected were less successful.

The level of independence demonstrated across most class batches was excellent for this part of the folio. Many teachers felt confident about allowing students to choose from a wide range of text types. Narrative, recounts, persuasive writing and magazine articles all yielded effective pieces of writing. Unfortunately, in some batches it was evident that student choice had been limited (e.g. all students were required to write speeches, poems or fairy tales) and, therefore, could not necessarily demonstrate their best writing skills.

Interestingly, students who had undertaken to write creatively or used a less conventional form could discuss the language techniques they used and how they influenced the audience more eloquently than those students who wrote more conventional pieces. Biographies of celebrities or sportspeople and articles about historical events should be avoided because originality is difficult to demonstrate. Although a few excellent examples of poetry were presented, most of the poetry and

writing for a younger audience tended to be clichéd and simplistic. In their advisory role, teachers should feel comfortable about steering students away from pieces of writing that will not have the level of complexity or sophistication required at this level of study. It was noted that many students used punctuation incorrectly when they included direct speech in their writing which detracted from the overall quality of the piece of writing.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

When presenting materials for marking or moderation, students and teachers are advised of the following points to ensure that work can be read easily and efficiently:

- write the question or topic at the top of each task
- font size should be at least 11 points
- consider an appropriate line spacing
- record word count at the end of each item of work
- remove staples that impede easy reading of the work
- teacher comments, performance standards and marks should not appear on folio pieces
- copies of the texts analysed should not be included in the folio
- student names, school names, teacher names and school numbers should be removed from all folio pieces.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Teachers are reminded that marks submitted to SACE for external and school based assessment types are final decisions on the part of the teacher as opposed to predicted marks. Thus the accuracy of this data is crucial to the correct record of student results.

The inclusion of an approved learning and assessment plan, together with an addendum if necessary, should be included with task sheets to assist in the final moderation process. In the case of missing work, teachers are required to account for the absence by completing the Variations in Materials for the Sample for Final Moderation form found in the English Learning Area Manual for all work omitted for a valid reason. When assessing course components with missing work, teachers are encouraged to match performance standards against evidence in work as opposed to employing a mathematical system of deduction of marks.

Particularly appreciated by moderators were the practical considerations afforded them in the packaging of student materials. Work organised by assessment component and labelled clearly with accurate word counts or time limits assisted the process. Moderators noted that the maximum word count or time limit was overlooked by a number of students and this can result in a breach of rules. Teachers are encouraged to address the SACE Word-count Policy for work prior to submission for moderation. Moderators were further assisted by the submission of additional evidence of oral presentations such as transcripts when submitted together with recordings. Students should ensure that they do not rely solely upon sites such as YouTube for moderators to access work.

A small number of students are reminded to consider the audience who will read their work carefully – within the school, moderation and marking contexts. Work, visual and written, must not be offensive by containing gratuitous sexual or violent material.

At the end of the marking and moderation processes, markers and moderators all commented on how effectively teachers and students had transitioned to the new course.

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