

English Communications

2013 Chief Assessor's Report

ENGLISH COMMUNICATIONS

2013 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' 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

Teachers' comprehensive knowledge of the current subject outline and course requirements was identified as fundamental to the sound achievement of students in 2013. Moderators commented favourably on course design in learning and assessment plans that showed careful consideration and selection of appropriate assessment design criteria and choices within assessment types, as this permitted students to engage and demonstrate skills to the best of their ability. Tasks designed with consideration for the full range of performance standards benefited all students.

Teachers are reminded of the importance of ensuring the accuracy of data submitted to the SACE Board before the moderation process. All work must be submitted by students and assessed by teachers before the school assessment results sheet is completed. The results sheet is a record of the results at that time and is not a set of predicted marks. Since there is no opportunity to adjust this assessment decision later, the data should be checked carefully before submission. The school assessment grade calculator (available on the English Communications minisite) can be used to combine the grades for assessment types to determine the school assessment grade. Verification of student work is also required before the moderation process.

Assessment Type 1: Text Analysis

The focus for this section of the course is the shared reading of texts so that students: 'develop a personal and critical understanding of the ideas, values, and beliefs represented in a range of texts. It is also important for students to recognise the connections between their own ideas, experiences, values, and beliefs, and those explored in texts.' It is recommended that texts are chosen on the basis of the needs, abilities, and interests of the class group, and this was evident in most cases. Moderators commented on the success of texts that were selected with consideration of students' interests, engagement, and range of abilities. Many diverse and challenging texts were offered.

Although the subject outline states that one response in this assessment type may be an 'independent study', this was less evident in student samples for moderation than was the case in 2012. Novels, poetry, and film were represented equally, with less evidence of response to dramatic text as performance. However, the success of responses to live performance was commented upon favourably by moderators when offered by teachers. For the most part this assessment type was correctly represented in the choice of four text types; however, teachers are reminded to refer to the subject outline to ensure that text choices and

task design are valid. A small number of students were disadvantaged when this was not complied with. For example, the comparison of a performance of live theatre with a film version of the same text does not fulfil the requirements of the subject outline for this assessment type and does not provide the best opportunity for students to demonstrate evidence of their learning against the assessment design criteria.

Most student work adhered to the requirements of two written responses and one oral response (for a 20-credit subject). Some students chose the option of a multimodal presentation. Students were offered a range of forms from which to choose for their response. Teachers designed alternatives to the traditional analytical essay in order to suit their students' interests and strengths. Moderators considered that forms such as interviews with an author or director, speeches or presentations made as if the student was the director or author, letters, and reviews were successful in enabling students to demonstrate a range of skills in analysis and the conventions of forms.

Moderators observed that some tasks belonged more to text production and did not offer students the opportunity to achieve the high levels of the performance standards for this assessment type. Tasks such as writing as a character or writing an additional scene or chapter do not enable students to demonstrate adequate analytical understanding of text. Students are encouraged to incorporate evidence in the form of quotations, and to avoid retelling events or information from texts at the expense of analysis.

The subject outline states: 'To achieve the learning requirements of this study, students should demonstrate understanding of the structure and language of particular textual forms, and identify the values, attitudes, and beliefs conveyed by these texts.' Students who demonstrated achievement at the highest levels of the performance standards for the knowledge and understanding, application, and communication assessment design criteria had often addressed one of the three specific features of the analysis assessment design criterion in each response for this assessment type. In task design of this kind, students were more likely to address the specific features explicitly and in some depth. Moderators also recorded some disparity in the way in which the analysis criterion was addressed. For example, in some cases An2, 'Analysis of connections between the ideas, experiences, values, and beliefs of students, and those explored in texts', was completely absent from student samples of work, even though learning and assessment plans indicated that it should be evident. In other cases this specific feature had been emphasised at the expense of An1 and An3. All these specific features must be evident in this assessment type.

When An2 was the sole specific feature for the analysis criterion, and text choice and task design had been well considered, students appeared to perform successfully. Successful examples noted by moderators included the tasks 'How are the ideas, values and beliefs presented in the poems of Oodgeroo Noonuccal relevant to your life as an Australian in 2013?', 'How is *Hamlet* relevant to students today?', and 'How does Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* reflect the prejudice evident in the world today?'. Tasks such as these enable students to make connections to issues of human rights, equality, and politics. Such connections enable students to address the specific feature with some depth and complexity.

Poetry responses were most successful when texts were considered as a group of two or more poems rather than as individual texts. Students' success in this task appeared to be most inconsistent because of task design and text choice. It was also noted that more students responded to three poems in 2013. Teachers are reminded that one poem is insufficient and does not fulfil the requirements of the subject outline. The choice and selection of song lyrics should also be carefully considered. This text type reduced the depth of analysis in a number of responses and did not give students the opportunity to achieve at the higher levels of the performance standards. Moderators noted that better engagement

was evident in samples from students who had been able to choose from a range of poems as opposed to being given a recommendation of the same three texts for the class.

A variety of challenging film texts were offered in 2013. Some task design emphasised analysis of character or theme. Teachers are encouraged to consider the 'range of ways in which authors use the conventions of different text types' and 'comprehensive and analytical understanding' when constructing their tasks. Students who achieved at the high levels of the performance standards used evidence from the texts to support their answers and moved beyond 'feature spotting' into comprehensive analysis.

Students benefited from explicit teaching of text, scaffolding, and a choice of tasks when constructing responses. Task design is crucial to student success. Moderators noted the success of student work that had been achieved with the design of a specific supporting analysis checklist by a teacher. This helped students to address the assessment criteria and the performance standards explicitly. The importance of task design in providing students with the opportunity to reach all levels of the performance standards must be considered carefully.

Assessment Type 2: Text Production

For this assessment type, students compose three texts (for a 20-credit subject). One text must be produced as a 90-minute supervised written assessment under test conditions. Students produce the remaining tasks in written, oral, or multimodal form. Teachers and students are reminded of the maximum limit of 1000 words for a written text, 6 minutes for an oral text, or the equivalent for a multimodal text. The three texts should be produced for the three distinct purposes prescribed in the subject outline. Teachers are reminded that the purposes 'To entertain or engage', 'To persuade or communicate a point of view', and 'To communicate observations or information' are important to distinguish in order to give students the opportunity to meet the performance standards for knowledge and understanding, application, and communication at the highest levels. Teachers are also reminded that students are not restricted to the list of suggested forms in the subject outline, which states: 'It is essential that the form students choose should allow the text to achieve its purpose for the intended audience.'

Task design is important in encouraging students to demonstrate understanding of form and diversity in writing skills. Students who were most successful in this section of the course exhibited a variety of writing styles and forms for the different purposes of their texts. Students who were unable to reveal diversity in their choice of form and style were restricted in the demonstration of assessment criteria. For example, students who completed a narrative in the first person, a recount using the same perspective, and a news report were unable to achieve at the high levels of the performance standards, which require a 'range' and 'variety'. Teachers are encouraged to consider task design in this assessment type carefully. Narrative and recount were the most popular choices in 2013. Some students who achieved in the lower bands were challenged to distinguish between the two forms and appeared to lack understanding of 'conventions of style, content, vocabulary, register, and format'. Explicit teaching and scaffolding would help these students to improve their achievement.

Moderators commented on the success of student achievement when there was a variety of task design. There was evidence of successful engagement and interesting responses from students who had been given tasks that offered some choice and that had been designed with the interests and abilities of the cohort in mind. Examples of these tasks included descriptive writing based on a visual stimulus. The originality and success of some digital narratives were also noted during moderation. Topics ranged from 'The Bombing of Darwin' to 'The Cruelty of the Livestock Export Trade'. Recount topics such as 'A Day at the Show' reduced students'

opportunity for achievement, whereas tasks such as 'Recount a Significant Event That Changed You as a Person' allowed more scope for depth of engagement.

The supervised written assessment under test conditions must be completed according to the subject outline requirements. Only one of the three text production tasks is to be completed under test conditions. Although most moderation samples indicated that this task had been completed appropriately, some samples consisted of work completed without the use of a computer. The subject outline states that this task may be word-processed or hand-written; however, moderators considered that handwriting disadvantaged students and increased the likelihood of their achieving at the lower levels of the performance standards. These students would have benefited from the use of spelling-check and grammar-check programs. In a few cases it appeared that students had been given the tasks beforehand or had been offered the opportunity to edit and proofread after completing the exercise. Teachers are reminded that students are to be made aware of the general requirements in advance, but must not receive topics until the set time. Students should complete this task without the help of the teacher, and without the opportunity to draft their writing outside the 90-minute period, and should not have access to the Internet.

Assessment Type 3: Communication Study

This section of the course has two parts: a comparison of two examples of communication chosen from one of the five specified categories and a practical application (which consists of production and reflection). Students are expected to explore and compare the relationship between form, purpose, language, audience, and context by comparing two texts in the first part of this study. In the practical application, students demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a particular aspect of language and communication. Teachers are reminded that the three elements of this assessment type have equal importance. Moderators commented on some cases in which there was disparity between the tasks. It was also problematic to determine evidence of the completion of all tasks from some sample material submitted. For example, in some cases there was no evidence of reflection for the practical applications other than the teacher's grade.

Teachers are asked to ensure that each of the texts chosen for comparison comes from the same category. A few students were disadvantaged when they attempted comparison across two categories. Teachers are also encouraged to consider 'examples of communication' as individual texts. Moderators noted that when students were given the task of exploring a topical issue across media, they were not offered the opportunity to address performance standards explicitly. Mass-media communication was the most popular option for this task, with advertising the second preference. Written comparison was the most popular form of response, but teachers are reminded that students may complete this task as an oral presentation in a maximum of 6 minutes, or as a multimodal presentation of an equivalent length.

Students were successful when the task design for the first part of the study encouraged comparison throughout the response. Students who analysed texts separately and compared them only in some parts of their response did not achieve as well. The synthesis of texts through analysis of the key areas of form, purpose, language, audience, and context provides the best opportunity for the demonstration of performance standards.

Large numbers of students chose to analyse cookery programs. Successful examples of the comparative task included comparison of the Sherlock Holmes series *Elementary* (American) and *Sherlock* (BBC). Another successful task was the comparison of two Motor Accident Commission advertisements from different campaigns, such as 'Matemorphosis' and 'Just Over'. On the other hand moderators also mentioned that similarity in form alone did not

guarantee success. In fact, when this was the only point of connection or comparison, analysis was superficial. As with the other assessment types, task design and text selection can provide the key to success for students. In some cases students were not guided to analyse specific examples of texts. Instead they were directed to the generic form or entire text type, such as email communication, television news reporting, or newspapers in general. In the absence of specific examples of texts to compare, students often resorted to description or retelling without analysis.

In this section of the course, students are expected to demonstrate evidence of their learning in relation to the knowledge and understanding, analysis, application, and communication assessment design criteria. Teachers are reminded that this includes the ability to demonstrate specific feature KU2, 'Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which creators and readers of texts use stylistic features and language techniques to make meaning'. Some students identified features of language by naming them, without considering purpose or effect.

The second task, the practical application, is chosen from the eight applications offered. Each of these tasks is unique and has specific assessment requirements. Each practical application consists of two parts. The individual details of these requirements must be adhered to in order to meet the requirements of the subject outline and to avoid the repetition of information across the response.

In the best examples of practical applications students exercised choice and control in their selected topic and form. This also enabled students to engage well in the reflection part of the task. Students who considered the production and reflection parts of this task with equal importance achieved the most consistent results.

Writing for publication was by far the most popular application from the options offered. Represented to a much lesser extent at moderation were workplace writing, film-making, investigating, language, multimedia web authoring, oral language, and interacting. Moderators noted that when these choices had been made, student samples appeared to reveal a better depth of engagement since it was evident that students had pursued personal interests and strengths.

Writing for publication continues to give students the opportunity to produce original texts and, in the case of the individual selection of specialist publications, the ability to reveal detailed understanding of audience and context in oral reflections. Moderators observed that this was less evident when a single publication or form had been prescribed by the teacher for the entire class to complete. Teachers are reminded that only the final written product is required for this part of the assessment type. Evidence of the choices made in the construction of the text should be evident in the reflection. Research or drafts are not required for submission and are not assessable according to the requirements of the subject outline.

The emphasis on language choices, decisions, and an explicit understanding of the development process of writing to publication standard should be emphasised in the reflection for the writing for publication application. Moderators commented that student reflections overemphasised the process of the application at the expense of analysis. Teachers are encouraged to consider task design that encourages students to address the choices made about language and form in relation to their specific purpose, audience, and context.

The most reliable sources of evidence for moderators to use to confirm assessment of oral reflections are transcripts, student notes, and printed slides, together with recordings.

Teachers' notes or task sheets on the quality of students' oral presentations without other evidence are insufficient for the moderation process.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Teachers are directed to refer to the English Communications minisite for subject operational information, which lists deadlines and the key dates associated with school assessment materials. It also provides information about materials and packaging. As well as student work requested for the nominated sample, an approved learning and assessment plan should be submitted, with an addendum if necessary and, if applicable, a Variations — Moderation Materials form. Moderation is made more efficient when missing work has been correctly accounted for on this form. When work is missing from the nominated sample and no record has been made, moderators consider that the work has not been completed.

Missing work must also be taken into account when grades are awarded for assessment types against the performance standards. Although teachers are required to use the evidence in student responses to allocate the most appropriate grade, a reduction in the number of tasks completed by students is unlikely to constitute a 'wide variety' or 'wide range' and, as a result, students are unable to achieve at the highest levels of the performance standards if assessment types are incomplete. The application of a mathematical system of deduction of marks is not an appropriate method of adjusting achievement since it does not allow for an accurate reflection of the performance standards.

The correct submission and packaging of materials are much appreciated by moderators. Student materials requested in the sample should be packaged according to assessment type and should be clearly labelled. Moderators commented that the 'de-identification' of student samples became problematic when there was no student SACE registration number or student name. Since moderators have access to this information on the electronic school assessment results form, the identification of student samples by name helped to make the most efficient use of moderators' time.

When presenting materials for moderation, teachers are encouraged to ensure that samples submitted are in a format that is accessible during moderation. Evidence of oral presentations submitted as transcripts helped moderators to confirm assessment when provided in conjunction with recordings. The submission of PowerPoint slides as the sole evidence of an oral presentation did not give moderators the same opportunity to confirm assessment decisions. However, the submission of additional materials such as research or drafts is unnecessary. Teachers are reminded to read the subject outline for specific task requirements in assessment types.

Teachers are requested to adhere to the SACE word-count policy or time limit for tasks. In a small number of cases it was clear that students had repeatedly disregarded this requirement. Furthermore, plagiarism remained a concern in a minority of moderation materials submitted. Teachers are advised to authenticate the originality of student work during its progress to avoid submitting plagiarised scripts.

Finally moderators recommend that schools undertake internal moderation whenever possible in order to ensure that marking standards are consistent. This is important for schools with multiple classes in a single assessment group. Schools are asked to consider carefully the benefits of such groupings. Students could be disadvantaged by this decision if teachers have not discussed standards and read student work samples across classes.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 4: Folio

The folio was generally completed well, within the guidelines of the subject outline. The folio gives students the opportunity to demonstrate their skills of text analysis and text production based on items that have been independently chosen.

Given that 'It is not appropriate for students to complete the folio as a shared exercise', it is expected that class bundles of folios will consist of a variety of examples of communication and text types across the two parts of the folio. In most cases it was evident that teachers had provided a supporting role during the completion of the folio, but that the students had ownership of the work, and a personal voice was discernible. In some cases, however, the question of independence was raised as a point of concern by markers and it was these folios that proved the most difficult to mark. This was particularly so when the choice of text in Part 1 was very limited, the response was heavily scaffolded, the text type for Part 2 was chosen for the students, and the writer's statement was also highly prescriptive. In such situations it was difficult to separate the students because the knowledge, interpretation, and ideas expressed were similar. Students were often precluded from the highest marks because their folios did not display the level of versatility and creativity required for the A band.

The most successful folios were those where the student and teacher had a clear understanding of the requirements of the assessment type and the assessment design criteria. When deciding what should be in each part, it is crucial that the descriptions of each task in the subject outline are the starting point because they provide the specific requirements that 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 specific features of the assessment design criteria except An2 must be evident in the folio.

Adherence to the 2000-word limit is crucial. Students who exceeded the word count were disadvantaged because markers were instructed to read only the first 2000 words. Anything over the limit usually meant that part or all of the writer's statement was excluded from the assessment. There is no extra 10% allowance on the word count. Students and teachers are reminded that the way in which the 2000 words are divided across the two parts is not prescribed because the performance standards can be met in a number of ways. A word count at the end of each part is useful for markers. The overall word count should appear on the cover sheet (available on the English Communications minisite).

This year there seemed to be fewer folios where the two parts were connected by either text type or content. Classes or students who took this approach severely limited their demonstration of specific feature Ap4, 'Production of texts for different contexts, audiences, and purposes'. It was also difficult for students to achieve in the A and B bands for specific features KU1–4, An1, and Ap4. For example, students who analysed a crime short story in Part 1, and then wrote a newspaper article or play script about the same event for Part 2, demonstrated very little originality in their text production. When the two parts shared similar language techniques, such as the analysis of an advertisement in Part 1 and a persuasive speech in Part 2, the writer's statement repeated knowledge and understanding of language techniques as in Part 1. Students who demonstrated knowledge and understanding of a 'wide variety of texts' and 'a range of language techniques' were better positioned to meet the A level of the performance standards.

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 of the text, and their effect on the reader or listener'.

Students and teachers are strongly advised to consider these requirements when choosing the example of communication and determining the content of their response.

Texts chosen were varied; novels, films, short stories, and other extended written pieces such as articles provided the greatest scope and opportunity for a highly analytical response. Carefully chosen forms of advertising, that is, those with a considerable amount of written text, were also analysed successfully. It was pleasing to see fewer responses to advertisements or posters that contained limited language because comments dealt (often repeatedly) with the stylistic features of the text but not the language techniques used by the creator to appeal to the audience. The outcome of responses to speeches as a form of communication tended to depend on the speech chosen. Famous speeches, such as Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech, were often an exercise in research rather than the student's own analysis. Furthermore, the possibility of plagiarism was increased when speeches such as these were chosen. Alternatively, speeches delivered in situations familiar to the student (e.g. school functions, current political and social events) were more successful because the student had a better understanding of the audience and purpose. An interesting source of speeches is TED Talks on the Internet which contains numerous short speeches and presentations delivered by a wide range of invited speakers and filmed in front of a live audience. The topics are varied and, most importantly, the 'language techniques used by the creator(s) of the text to appeal to the audience' have not been analysed. Finally, a few students responded to more than one example of communication, such as a television series or more than one advertisement; this encouraged a discussion of ideas explored in the series rather than a focus on audience, language techniques, and stylistic features of 'an example of communication'. Italics should be used to identify titles.

The level of independence evident in the choice of an example of communication varied across the class batches. The subject outline clearly stipulates: '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 choice, as guided by the teacher, was based on interest and suitability. Students who had chosen unfamiliar and more complex texts rather than ones they were very familiar with tended to produce the better responses. Responses based on a favourite film or online game that the student obviously knew well produced disappointing results because the student tended to focus on the content of the text. When students were restricted to an advertisement, a news bulletin, or a persuasive speech, the level of independence was diminished and the responses risked becoming formulaic. Similar topic sentences, paragraph structure, and use of common terminology were all indications that there had been too much assistance from the teacher and the task resembled a shared exercise rather than an independent study.

Formulating an appropriate question or topic generally helped students to stay focused on the task. Students whose questions allowed them to discuss the intended audience for the example of communication, language techniques, and the stylistic features of the text 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 and inappropriate, but the way in which the language and features of the text influence the audience's response is crucial for the student in order to meet the performance standards at a high level. Responses that simply listed and described language techniques and stylistic features without relating them to audience or purpose did not score highly. Students who presented the better responses included 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.

Part 2: Text Production with Writer's Statement

Markers commented on some excellent examples of original writing marked by strong personal voices. There were fewer texts this year that relied mostly on visual information to communicate their message, such as posters and children's picture books. The level of independence demonstrated in this part of the folio was better than in Part 1. 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, a newspaper article, or a newsletter article) and therefore could not demonstrate their writing skills in a form in which they were interested.

The purpose of the writer's statement is to explain the creative decisions made during the writing process. Successful students allowed themselves at least 350 words to explain the writer's purpose, the intended audience, and the effect of the linguistic features used. Some students spent too much time describing the formatting of their writing rather than the language choices that they made. Writer's statements that reiterated what the student had written, editing problems, or ideas that were rejected did not meet the requirements of this part of the folio as outlined in the subject outline.

Students who wrote creatively could discuss more eloquently the language techniques they used, and how they intended to influence the audience, than could those students who wrote autobiographical pieces or discussions about issues that mattered greatly to them. The writer's statements of the latter type tended to focus on content rather than on language decisions that students had made in the production process. Biographies of celebrities or sportspeople and articles about historical events should be avoided because originality is difficult to demonstrate and they are essentially research exercises. In their advisory role, teachers should feel confident about directing students away from pieces of writing that will not have the level of complexity or sophistication required for them to achieve at the highest levels.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

When presenting materials for marking or moderation, students and teachers should note the following points:

- The question or topic should be written at the top of each task.
- Font size should be at least 11 points.
- Line spacing should be at least 1.15.
- Word count should be recorded at the end of each item of work.
- Any staples that impede easy reading of the work should be removed.
- Teachers' comments, performance standards, and marks should not appear on folio pieces.
- Copies of the texts analysed should not be included in the folio.
- Students' names, school names/numbers, and teachers' names should be removed from all folio pieces.

English Communications
Chief Assessor