

English as Second Language Studies

2013 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE STUDIES

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

Assessment Type 1: Issue Analysis

All the assessment design criteria are addressed in this assessment type. Both the written and oral components provide a particularly good opportunity to assess specific features An1 and An2 through students' explicit analysis and evaluation of their issue, research processes, and texts. The oral discussion task is a key opportunity for students to demonstrate spoken interaction (C4).

There was generally an appropriate balance between content and process in the oral and written components of the issue analysis this year. Focus on the validity, relevance, and reliability of sources allows for high achievement in aspects of the knowledge and understanding and analysis assessment design criteria, and is a valuable inclusion in addition to the evaluation of interesting findings or the process of research.

The most successful written responses used a factual genre, such as an information report, or a structured response with headings. Straightforward factual text types, as opposed to creative texts such as narratives or letters, allowed students to demonstrate higher performance in the analysis and application assessment design criteria.

Task design in the issue analysis, particularly the oral component, can have a significant impact on student achievement. The oral component of this assessment type is an interactive discussion with the teacher, in which students give unrehearsed responses to the teacher's questions. In the most successful examples, the interaction between teacher and student is genuine, with the student formulating and producing answers on the spot. It is generally the teacher's role to provide direction and focus in the discussion, and to ensure a balance between the discussion of content and process. Successful questioning by the teacher responds to and follows on from the student's replies, and the direction of the discussion is therefore likely to be different for each student. This type of genuine interaction and spontaneous production of responses allows students to achieve well in specific features KU3, Ap3, and C4.

Students may use notes to support their recall of facts and details in the discussion, but should not read prepared speeches or statements. Some student discussions were identical to written responses. This should be avoided as it does not provide sufficient evidence of understanding of the topic or evaluation of the research process and sources, and this can disadvantage students in all the assessment design criteria.

In the most successful written and oral responses, particularly those that related to the analysis and application assessment design criteria, students gave detailed and relevant responses, substantiated with reference to one or more sources of information. Responses that relied on personal experience and unconsidered opinion did not achieve well against the performance standards.

As a text study, the issue analysis requires students to use more than one text, so that they can demonstrate analysis and application. However, a large number of texts are not required, and may not be practicable because of the word and time limits of the task. Generally, students demonstrated a high standard of achievement when referring to between two and five sources of information. In some successful examples of tasks, the teacher provided two or three shared sources for the class, and students found one or two extra sources of their own.

Students were most successful in this assessment type when the issue chosen was one with which they already had some connection. This allowed students to discuss and respond with detail and confidence, addressing more complex aspects of the issue, rather than struggling with basic concepts and terminology. Good choices include contemporary and local issues, issues with which students have some experience, or issues that students have encountered through the media or their studies.

Assessment Type 2: Text Production

A very broad range of topics and texts are available to teachers for the text production essay and creative writing tasks. The most successful choices connected in some way with the experiences, interests, or aspirations of students. Some examples of films used include *Billy Elliot*, *The Blind Side*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Erin Brockovich*, *Looking for Alibrandi*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Both essay and creative writing tasks based on these texts addressed issues such as social exclusion, discrimination, disadvantage, social and individual change, relationships, and role models. Texts from past examinations should not be used as sources for school-assessed tasks, as the information in them is produced for examination purposes.

The most successful essays focused on controversial or complex social issues, which allowed for the development of argument or discussion of different points of view. Such topics, combined with a clear essay structure and focused paragraphs, allowed students to demonstrate their achievement across the assessment design criteria. Essays that focused on reporting or recounting historical or scientific information may have supported students to demonstrate some aspects of communication, but did not support strong achievement in knowledge and understanding or analysis. Some students may also be more prone to plagiarism when addressing informational topics.

For the creative task, a range of interesting text types were produced, including formal letters, personal letters, reflections, and narratives. Tasks in which students took on the persona of a character were often successful and demonstrated students' understanding of, and connection to, the stimulus text and context.

Commentaries and reflections on the writing process or texts are not required for this assessment type, and the entire word count should be allocated to the essay or creative writing piece itself.

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

As with other assessment types, topic choice influenced the success of students in both the written and oral (tutorial) investigation tasks. Many students had clearly engaged successfully with topics that were contemporary, local, and relevant to their experience. Students with relevant and focused topics demonstrated knowledge and understanding, analysis, and application to a high level, and engaged the audience in their tutorials. It is important that students are supported to choose topics that differ from those used for the other assessment types, so that they can demonstrate the development of knowledge and understanding.

The most successful written investigation presentations had a clear structure and purpose. Teachers should be aware that the use of overly complex systems of headings can detract from the coherence and fluency of the text. The first-person voice should be used with caution in the written component of the investigation, particularly if specific feature C3 (formal and objective language) is being assessed. Teachers may choose to specify on their task sheets whether or not a first-person voice is an acceptable feature for their students.

The abstract in this task should be a summary of the key content of the investigation, as with academic abstracts. It is not appropriate for the abstract to include a reflection on the process of the investigation, or an evaluation of sources used. The abstract should be attached to the written presentation and have a clearly indicated title. The 200-word limit is in addition to the 1000-word written presentation for the investigation.

The tutorial should be distinct from the written presentation. Many students successfully demonstrated understanding of the different purpose, text features, and communication techniques of a tutorial in comparison with a written report. Tutorials do not need to address the entire scope of the investigation, and many successful tasks focused on one aspect or point of view arising from the research. Tutorials in which students read all or part of their written presentation aloud do not demonstrate sustained achievement in the performance standards, particularly in relation to context or communication (for example, KU3, An1, Ap2, Ap3, C4).

The oral task for the investigation is a tutorial as distinct from a presentation with questions and answers. This requires the student to lead the audience in a discussion of the topic. In doing so, students demonstrate purposeful interaction that includes seeking input from the audience and responding to their contributions. Successful students show understanding, analysis, and evaluation by recasting audience contributions and linking them back to the key ideas of the tutorial. Tutorials with successful discussions can achieve a high standard in specific features such as KU2, KU3, Ap2, Ap3, and C4.

Discussions can be led in different ways. One successful model is for the student to present an overview of the issue, and then lead a discussion session, asking controversial questions of the audience in order to elicit different points of view. Presenters who then evaluate, justify, question, or compare audience opinions can demonstrate aspects of the application and communication assessment design criteria in particular. Another approach is for confident presenters to ask for audience input at different points during their tutorial and to address opinions and questions that arise.

The use of graphic or visual elements in the tutorial was a successful way of supporting students of all abilities to engage and communicate with their audience.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 4: Examination

Approximately 1677 students were enrolled in English as Second Language Studies in 2013. The examination required students to demonstrate a range of skills and allowed them to show achievement against the performance standards. Most students managed their time and successfully completed the examination. The listening comprehension also allowed students to achieve across the grade range and responses were generally of a good standard. However, because of the greater range of skills required for the written examination, a greater range of abilities was also revealed. Students were generally familiar with the topics and thus most demonstrated good understanding; however, there needs to be a continued focus on academic and argumentative language.

Section 1: Listening Comprehension

Part A

Part A of the listening comprehension was generally completed to a high standard, with students finding it easier than Part B. Most students achieved a good result. The responses for this section required students to demonstrate an understanding of the text through short answers and two multiple-choice questions. Part A of the listening comprehension focused on specific features KU1 and KU4 (knowledge and understanding), and C1 and C2 (communication). The more successful students carefully read and followed the instructions at the beginning of the paper about full-sentence responses. These students also made sure to spell keywords correctly in their answers. With a topic such as cyber-bullying, where students are familiar with a number of the ideas being explored, it is important that they use only information from the texts, and no outside knowledge, in their responses.

Question 1 was answered well, with marks generally being lost if students did not answer in full sentence form or if the key verb was unrecognisable. The answer that examiners were after was 'Cyber-bullying is harassing others through technology'; however, a range of other responses captured this meaning and students were not penalised for giving alternative answers.

Most students answered Questions 2(a) and (b) successfully; only a few lost marks because of incorrect responses. Questions 3 and 4 were also completed to a high standard, with most students able to hear and use the required information. Students needed to use a number of points in order to achieve all marks, and there were also some variations to these responses that the examiners accepted.

The following effects of cyber-bullying were sought in answers to Question 3:

- depression, stress
- loss of self-confidence
- causing students to change schools
- being cut off from the year group — isolated
- poor attendance at school.

In answer to Question 4, students can help to stop cyber-bullying in the following ways:

- Don't respond.
- Report abuse to a teacher/lecturer.
- Support each other.
- Do not put up with such behaviour.

Question 5 was generally completed well. However, as it required some depth in the points explored, some students lost marks for lack of detail. Students also lost marks in Question 5 if they did not answer in sentence form, or if meaning was lost. The markers were after the following points, with some variations allowed:

- Remember that the Internet is accessed by millions of people, not just your friends and family. / You can't trust everyone online.
- Never share your Internet passwords. / Only share passwords with parents.
- Never meet anyone face-to-face whom you only know online.
- Talk to your parents about what you do online.

Questions 1, 4, and 5 were required to be completed in full sentences; however, it was not necessary to connect the different sentences. The successful students were also careful when spelling keywords.

Part B

As Part B requires students to answer with extended responses, students generally find it more difficult than Part A. Part B focused on performance standards for the knowledge and understanding (KU1, KU4), analysis (An2), and communication (C1, C3) assessment design criteria. The questions in this part revealed a greater range of abilities as students are required to demonstrate understanding of the information heard and then synthesise it to structure their responses. The successful students in Part B used only information from the texts and carefully structured their responses to show an understanding of the information heard.

Question 6 was generally done well by most students. The better responses elaborated on the definition of cybercrime by giving the four different types. Some students found Question 7 more difficult as they needed to demonstrate the change in cybercrime over time. In order to receive full marks, students also needed to include details of the numbers and years explored. Although a range of responses were allowed, a number of students did not include enough detail.

Question 8 required a much more extended response than the previous questions. It required students to demonstrate understanding of the information and then logically structure their answers. As the text suggested potential paragraphing, most students were able to organise their responses in a few paragraphs. Students who gave the better responses showed careful consideration about how to link the ideas and took care not to repeat information. In order to receive full marks, students were expected to find ten different points, which were awarded 5 marks. The other 3 marks came from paragraph organisation and logical development, as well as spelling and grammar.

Section 2: Written Paper

Part A

Part A of the written examination focused on the following specific features of the assessment design criteria:

Knowledge and Understanding

- KU1 Knowledge and understanding of the ideas, concepts, and issues in texts.
- Does the work show that students have understood what they have read?
 - Do they understand the ideas they are using in their essays?
- KU3 Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which [the essay is] composed for specific purposes and audiences.
- Does the essay demonstrate an appropriate structure?
 - Introduction (general statement, clear statement of position, preview of arguments)
 - Body (topic sentence, elaboration/evidence, with in-text referencing)
 - Conclusion (restates position, short summary of argument, general statement)
 - Is there demonstration of an understanding of academic language?
- KU4 Knowledge and understanding of context-specific or technical vocabulary.
- Is language use relevant to the topic? (technical language)
 - Is the language relevant to this type of essay? (argumentative language)

Analysis

- An2 Location, recording, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of ideas, information, and opinions from a range of texts.
- Is there evidence of finding and correctly referencing information?
 - Is there evidence of joining ideas from different texts into one argument?
 - Is there evidence of the ability to paraphrase the information?

Application

- Ap1 Selection and use of information from [all texts].
- Ap3 Use of text-appropriate language features to make meaning.
- Ap4 Use of evidence from a range of sources to build logical and coherent texts or arguments.
- Is there evidence of the development of ideas?
 - Is there evidence of connection between paragraphs?
 - Is there evidence of connection between ideas and sentences within paragraphs?

Communication

- C1 Clarity and coherence... using appropriate vocabulary.
- C2 Demonstration of grammatical control and complexity.
- C3 Use of formal and objective language.

Both sides of the argument were fairly evenly explored. The markers were also pleased to see a general improvement in a number of areas that have been difficult for students in previous years. In particular, most students were able to find a range of evidence from the different texts and there was often a noticeable attempt at paraphrasing and use of this evidence in responses.

Students who wrote the better essays were careful to follow the instructions at the beginning of the paper and argued *either* for or against the question. These students clearly stated their position in the introduction and focused on this argument throughout the essay. Students who attempted to explore both sides of the argument were often unable to demonstrate a clear stance; their essays also tended to lack depth and did not allow students to show adequate understanding of the texts.

The question was generally clearly understood and students were able to use the three texts to find evidence. However, students need to make sure that they relate the information to the question. Sometimes essays became dissertations on the good or bad qualities of sports stars, rather than arguments for whether or not they were good role models. The successful students used the information to argue a case. There were also some students who used their own knowledge of this topic and made very little use of the required texts. Students are reminded that only evidence provided in the examination can be used to support the arguments. When outside evidence was used, grades were affected.

Having only three texts this year made them more accessible to students. This meant that most essays demonstrated a depth of understanding of the issue. Most students were also able to structure their responses and demonstrate logical organisation. To argue the positives about sports stars being good role models, most students organised their essays into three paragraphs under the topics: Inspiration (worthy of emulating), Encourage Healthy Living / (promotion of health), and Personal Qualities. Students who argued the negative side generally used: Deception (let their fans down), Model Bad Behaviours (unsporting conduct), and Unrealistic Goals (unachievable goals). However, students also organised their essays in a number of other ways.

Student responses demonstrated a growing understanding of referencing and the use of evidence. Most students demonstrated some understanding of the required referencing conventions. The better essays used a consistent referencing approach throughout, with the Harvard author–date system usually being used correctly. Some students referred only to Text 1, 2, or 3 and lost marks. Students who wrote the better essays were also careful not to over-reference. Some students overused referencing and referenced every sentence. When general points are being explored, referencing is unnecessary and is often an indication of copying. There were also instances of heavy referencing in the introduction and conclusion. Although this is not necessarily incorrect, students should not be exploring evidence and going into detail in these paragraphs, which should not therefore need referencing.

The use of academic language is an area that needs continued focus. A difficult aspect of the essay is to synthesise the information and objectively present it in an argumentative essay. The better essays showed that the students had a good understanding of academic language and were able to communicate using formal and objective language. The more successful students avoided using the first person, and instead used the passive voice effectively. Some of the less successful students used a lot of subjective language to explore what ‘I think’ and what ‘I believe’. There were also instances where ideas were explored through a range of metaphors and similes — a very informal approach.

A number of markers came across problems with handwriting. There is a range of acceptable handwriting styles, but if students do not clearly form each character, some words become unreadable. Grades were affected in some cases where handwriting was extremely poor and often unreadable. Students are reminded that, even under the time constraints of an examination, they need to be careful and write neatly.

Part B

Part B of the written examination focused on the following specific features of the assessment design criteria:

Knowledge and Understanding

- KU1 Knowledge and understanding of the ideas, concepts, and issues in texts.
- Do they respond to the text?
 - How much understanding do they show about the issue?
 - Do the ideas logically develop?
 - Do they show a connection between the ideas in each paragraph?
- KU3 Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which texts are composed for specific purposes and audiences.
- Have they used formal language?
 - Do their word choices fit who they are and who they are writing to?

Application

- Ap2 Meaning that is conveyed and exchanged in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.
- Can the ideas be understood?
 - Is meaning conveyed appropriately for the letter?
- Ap3 Use of text-appropriate language features to make meaning.
- Have they followed the correct conventions?
Writer's address: in Australia or elsewhere, anywhere above the letter
Date: anywhere above the letter
Recipient's address: addresses and date to the left or right

Dear Mr X,

Paragraphs (clear purpose in each)

Concluding paragraph (recommendation/solution/action/thank you, etc.)

Yours sincerely (name known)

Yours faithfully (name not known)

Name written

Name written

Communication

- C1 Clarity and coherence in written ... communication, using appropriate vocabulary.
- Are the sentences connected?
 - Are the paragraphs connected?
 - Do they express their ideas clearly?
- C2 Demonstration of grammatical control and complexity.
- C3 Use of formal and objective language.

The topics for the formal letters this year were approached well, with some creative and thoughtful letters being produced. The better letters used passionate and heartfelt language in a formal way to convey the writer's opinions. Students with the stronger letters tended to respond to Question 10, whereas students responding to Question 11 found it more difficult to convey a depth of understanding about the issue. Question 10 also seemed to allow a greater range of responses, with students being able to personalise the information. The better responses moved away from the source information and did not simply repeat or copy the original text.

The structure for the letter was generally understood well. The better letters clearly conveyed the purpose in the opening paragraph and logically developed this idea in the subsequent paragraphs. These students also had a clear concluding paragraph that obviously brought their ideas to a close. Although there was some variation in acceptable address and date formats, students needed to follow certain conventions. For example, students needed to show understanding about address information and layout. Dates should not be abbreviated. Problems in these areas did not necessarily cause students to lose marks, but they could contribute to the overall grading of the letter.

Question 10 drew a range of responses and approaches. Most students successfully personalised this information and the better letters developed passionate arguments in defence of the student's own language and culture. However, some weaker responses either attempted to paraphrase the information or repeated it, with little direct connection to the text. Students need to use the information provided to develop a letter in response to some of the ideas given in the texts. If students tried to respond to too many points, their letters often became a list or repetition of the original text. The markers are looking for students to develop their ideas and to have a clear reason for writing the letter.

Responses to Question 11 were more limited in range than were those to Question 10. Many of the responses to the image focused on suggestions to improve volunteering, with little connection to any of the points in the picture. The better letters used two or three of the ideas and developed a story that connected them. These students then developed a letter with a clear purpose, with this story as the background. They were also very careful in their selection of audience and followed the appropriate tone throughout their letter.

Communication in the letters was generally clear. The better letters conveyed emotional language in a formal way with consideration of the audience. Students who took an offended stance at the texts needed to be careful to maintain a formal and polite tone. It is not appropriate to demand an action and students need to try not to be too direct.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Most materials were packaged appropriately for moderation this year. Careful attention to materials submission can make it easier for moderators to confirm teachers' assessment decisions.

There is access to only a limited number of Windows computers during moderation, so it is important that electronic materials follow the guidelines for submission, as detailed on the English as Second Language Studies minisite. The file types specified should be adhered to, and files created on non-Windows computers may require specific formatting. It is also important to label files clearly with the student's SACE registration number and the name of the assessment task. A printed index of files will be helpful for moderators if the work of multiple students is included on one disc.

Clear recordings of oral tasks help moderators to identify evidence to support teachers' assessment decisions. For audio and video recordings, discs and USBs should be double-checked to ensure that files will open and recordings are audible. In some cases, background noise can interfere with recordings, and it is advisable for teachers to take precautions against this at the time of recording.

Electronic copies of written materials may be submitted, but printed copies must also be included in the moderation package. Materials not specified in the subject outline, such as folios of research, drafts, or other work, should not be submitted.

Information on SACE Board forms is important for moderators and must be included in moderation packages when required. Approved learning and assessment plans and addenda allow moderators to ensure they are moderating against the appropriate specific features. The Variations — Moderation Materials form is necessary when student work is missing for any reason, when adjustments have been made to grades, or when a student's work is different from the tasks in the assessment plan. All these forms provide information that supports the assessment decisions of teachers. Similarly, task sheets and marking sheets showing the teacher's comments and marks against performance standards help moderators in understanding teachers' assessment decisions.

Student work should be labelled clearly, using SACE registration numbers or student names as they appear on the SACE results sheets. School ID numbers or nicknames (such as unofficial Anglicised names) should not be used.

Across all the assessment types, it is important to adhere closely to the specified time and word limits for assessment, as only evidence within these limits can be used to confirm assessment decisions. Longer tasks can disadvantage students as evidence falling outside the limits cannot be considered. Likewise, shorter tasks may limit the evidence students provide for their achievement.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Student materials submitted for moderation this year showed a range of engaging tasks, topics, and texts. Assessment decisions were largely confirmed, demonstrating that teachers are assessing according to the standard. Teachers are encouraged to revisit the subject outline each year when writing or revising tasks, and to consider the range of ways in which task design can support student achievement.

When classes are combined into single assessment groups, it is important to conduct internal moderation so that student results for the entire assessment group are of a consistent standard. In addition, when teachers have the opportunity to do so, it is valuable to conduct moderation with other teachers of English as Second Language Studies in order to clarify aspects of the course and the assessment standard. This can be particularly valuable when there is only one teacher of the subject in the school.

Teachers are encouraged to make use of SACE Board clarifying forums, exemplars of student work on the English as Second Language Studies minisite, as well as professional learning offered by hub groups and professional associations. These activities and resources support teachers to design tasks and apply assessment standards for the benefit of their students. Participation in moderation or marking also gives teachers invaluable experience in applying assessment standards. Moderators and markers can gain insight into the variety of ways in which the curriculum is successfully interpreted and applied.

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