

Australian History
2009 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Society and Environment Learning Area



SACE
Board of SA

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

2009 ASSESSMENT REPORT

GENERAL COMMENTS

Although there were slightly fewer candidates in Australian History in 2009, the level of achievement remained about the same overall. Most students were well prepared to deal effectively with the different elements of the examination paper and competently used the different elements to demonstrate a variety of historical skills.

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More successful students demonstrated specific knowledge of names, dates, and statistics, as well as factors relating to change over time, and were prepared to discuss the implications of their knowledge in the terms dictated by the question. No students answered inappropriate combinations of questions.

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All markers were pleased to see a good proportion of examination essays that used an effective structure and an impressive sustained analysis of appropriate content knowledge, well supported by pertinent examples. Where these essays addressed the question asked, they achieved very high marks. Many students showed a tendency to 'compare and contrast' in a generic way or tell everything they knew about a particular topic rather than review their knowledge in response to the questions in front of them. The examination questions were written with the intention of providing students with the opportunity to demonstrate their historical strengths: their command of historical content knowledge, their ability to apply the skills of synthesis and analysis, and their capacity to make historical judgments. Broad, non-specific responses did not pick up this opportunity and, consequently, some students did not achieve at the highest level they might have.

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Students should be encouraged to use some of the examination time to plan their essays based on a thorough analysis of the question, supported by the definition of terms. The most successful students used their analysis of the question to write a tightly structured introduction that defined the terms and indicated the thrust of their argument and the conclusions it would come to. This practice might have helped students whose essays tended to drift.

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It was encouraging to see students using tight examples and quotations to support their arguments in essays and sources analysis. To get the maximum impact from these quotations, students must explain and analyse their relevance. Quotations do not speak for themselves; they are simply evidence embedded in an argument. It was particularly disappointing to see several occurrences of the same example or quotation across a range of papers.

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Students picked up the comparisons eagerly and nearly all made a relevant response. The better comparative essays triumphed over the difficulties of historical comparison, presenting more than a simple chronological narrative of two examples and avoiding the temptation to deal in absolutes. Many depth essays also showed an enthusiastic response that indicated students had enjoyed the opportunity to follow their own interests. Stronger essays had clearly used the interest to generate innovative ways of directing the inquiry, whereas weaker essays had either followed a well-trodden path, or had relied too much on self-referential evidence.

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Overall, the responses to the sources analysis were very good, with the mean score being the second highest achieved for any question. Nearly all students responded

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directly to the questions, adhered closely to the sources, demonstrated effective historical skills, and used the marks scheme as an indication of the relative length and, therefore, complexity of their responses. The papers showed a tendency to deal with this part first or second. Although this is an effective tactic if it earns the highest individual question score (which it did in most cases) and serves to settle the writer, there was evidence that some students might have spent a disproportionate amount of time on this part.

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The individual history essays were very impressive and moderators frequently remarked on their strengths. The most effective essays were those structured by an invigorating question. Where questions were in passive voice, multi-part, not clearly stated, did not invite a reasoned historical argument, or did not ask a question amenable to historical inquiry, the essay suffered. The strongest essays used appropriate evidence, derived from credible sources, which they interrogated within the essay and cited consistently. There are guidelines relating to all these matters on the SACE Board website. A word about images: in these days of readily accessible web-based pictures and easy-to-use word processing programs, students are sorely tempted to illustrate their work. Many of these pictures did not help the essay. Captions that indicate their contribution to the argument of the essay must always accompany pictures. The pictures' contribution should be so significant that the text of the essay discusses them. If they are merely decorative, they should be saved for the title page, if that, and not be allowed to interrupt the flow of an argument. It goes without saying that pictures used as sources must be cited like any other source.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 3: EXAMINATION

Part 1: Comparative Study

Topic 1: Contact and Resistance: Indigenous Australians and the Colonial Experience, 1788 to the Present

1. This question was very popular, appearing in nearly a third of the papers. The answers tended to come from rich case studies of many different Indigenous groups, including the Lardil, Nyari, Nyungar, Pitjantjatjara, Narrindjeri, and Peoples of the Fortescue River Region. Most papers were able to give a good description of the impact of living in diverse environments. The few students who attempted to account for the similarities that have developed achieved the higher marks. Some students offered a simple 'compare and contrast' response, consequently earning less marks.
2. This question required students to show how first contact affected both Indigenous and settler groups. It contains the implication that each group did interpret the actions of the other and that those interpretations were often wrong. Students seemed to find it difficult to express the 'needs' of the group involved and to concentrate on the 'first contact' element of the question.
3. The most successful responses were able to identify particular government policies or policy thrusts and analyse them for motive and outcome, measuring both of these against the question criteria 'well-intentioned' and 'disastrous.' Poor responses did not take advantage of the comparative element of questions in this section and relied on emotional outburst rather than historical analysis of policies such as protection and assimilation. The recent interventionist policies were particularly prone to superficial treatment.

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Topic 2: The Bush Experience and Survival on the Land: Agriculture, Pastoralism, and Mining, 1788 to the Present

4. Most students interpreted 'struggle' as simply life being 'hard' or 'difficult', and therefore missed the implication of the question. The strongest responses argued with the support of specific case studies while the weaker relied on very general references to farming or mining being hard in Australia, with no differentiation between colonies/states/regions, time periods or specific activities. Stronger essays engaged with the idea that different groups (women, men, children, Indigenous groups, different migrant groups, and different age groups) struggled in different ways.
5. There were no responses to this question.
6. This was not a popular question but it drew some very good responses that argued strongly from a rich bank of creative works, both literary and visual.

Topic 3: Australia's Foreign Policy, 1890 to the Present

7. ~~Students~~ generally did not answer this question well. ~~Successful students~~ focused on economics, especially on trade or the lure of trade, but many of them found it difficult to mount a comparative argument. ~~Less successful students~~ simply asserted that economic factors did not shape Australia's foreign policy and then went on to write an essay about fear, communism, or loyalty.
8. This was another very popular question, attempted by nearly a third of the ~~students~~. The strongest responses focused on the question, linked events with developments, and were able to compare the relative impact of events that happened overseas with events that happened in Australia, such as the Bombing of Darwin, the Petrov Affair, or the Vietnam Moratorium Movements. Examiners noted an extensive use of quotations to support sustained, rich arguments. Again, the ~~less successful~~ students wrote about elements such as fear, communism, loyalty, and isolation, rather than events, in developing foreign policy.
9. ~~The most successful students~~ addressed Australian identity before (or as part of) mounting their argument and took command of the comparative aspect required. Most students had difficulty pinning down the concept of identity and seemed uncomfortable with the idea of changes in Australian identity, offering very little historical evidence.

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Topic 4: Searching for Ideal Societies and Nations, c. 1880 to 1914, and 1966 to the Present

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10. There were no responses to this question.
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12. There were no responses to this question.

Topic 5: The Unwanted, the Seekers, and the Achievers: Migration to Australia, 1830 to the Present

13. Successful students strongly identified 'demographic characteristics' such as age, gender, marital status, education, health, or skill level, and supported their argument with specific examples from their case studies, typically the Chinese and Germans at different periods and Italians and Greeks.

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14. Again, the most successful students argued from specific case study material and firmly related their responses to the question. Less successful students did not engage in the comparative element required and did not directly deal with the idea of 'early' as opposed to general experiences. Please note that 'Asians,' 'Arabs,' and 'Whites' are not racial groups and descriptors or categories such as these must be avoided.

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15. The best responses dealt well with the analysis of the two factors, drawing appropriately on specific examples. Several weak responses disagreed with the proposition and supported their opinion, not by measured historical argument, but with a lengthy but unexamined narrative about ethnic food and festivals. Note that the concept of 'social' is not restricted to culture but could include the various ways in which migrant groups impact on the societies that receive them.

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Topic 6: Living in Australia, 1788 to the Present

16. There were no responses to this question.
17. This was not a popular question and, in the main, produced weak responses. All students agreed that sport did dominate, but most did not explain why. Most took a gender-specific approach, mentioning only the male-dominated forms of football. Stronger answers might have connected changes in leisure and entertainment to social, political, and economic changes.
18. There were no responses to this question.

Part 2: Depth Study

Topic 7: Women in Australia: Myths, Experiences, Roles, and Influences, 1788 to the Present

19. Stronger responses considered a wide range of technology, — medical, transport, and workplace, for example, — while the weaker answers stayed in the domestic realm, arguing that domestic appliances benefited all women, at all times, and with equal impact. These undifferentiated responses scored poorly while some very good marks went to students who were able to argue that access to beneficial technology might depend on things such as financial status, place of residence, and ethnic background.

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20. There were no responses to this question.

21. This was not a popular question. The more successful students were able to present specific examples in their arguments.

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Topic 8: Remembering Australia in Wartime: Experiences and Myths, 1880 to the Present

22. This was one of the most popular questions, **which was** attempted by about one-quarter of all **students**. The stronger responses gained command over the concept of 'loyalty to nation' while, at the same time, successfully arguing that motivation came from other factors. This was a clear case where defining terms and establishing **an** approach in the introduction would have helped **to** control the essay argument. Many responses, similar to those in Questions 7 and 8, simply asserted that loyalty to nation was not a motivating factor and proceeded to write an answer on fear, communism, isolation, **etc.** Most responses dealt with the Vietnam War.

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23. This was another quite popular question that drew some very good responses. Successful students argued from a perspective of detailed knowledge of some individual war memorials and their design symbolism and community meaning, **(fewer students had detailed knowledge of commemorative ceremonies, relying mainly on dates and general narratives of what happens)**. They were able to point to the ways in which memorials might be **naïve, sentimental, exclusionary of some experiences, or promoters of a particular perspective**, and to the ways in which the meanings of memorials change over time. **Less successful students** had trouble with the word 'simplistic'. Some interpreted it as a version of 'simple' in an architectural or design sense and responded on that basis.

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24. There were some interesting responses, **treading distinctly individual lines**, even though most **students** argued, again, only from the perspective of the Vietnam War. This prompted less well-prepared students to argue that all people were affected equally and that all participated in the anti-war movement. The **most successful students** rigorously differentiated their groups and talked about their highly individual experiences of war and conflict to argue that the effects are not felt equally.

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Topic 9: The Lucky Country? Prosperity, Depression, and Recession, 1850 to the Present

25. This question drew very few responses. The lack of supporting evidence undermined most of them.

26. This was the most popular question **on** the topic and produced some very good responses in which students presented extensive essays that covered the 1890s and the 1930s and then looked at the Hawke, Keating, and Rudd government policies. It is interesting that the Howard government was overlooked. The weaker answers did not consider the ideas of 'responses' and 'policies' and, while most concentrated on the Great Depression, many dealt with the recent Global Financial Crisis in a very superficial ahistorical way. **Although** it is possible to study the history of recent, or even contemporary, events, we cannot call it historical study if it does not use the accepted methods of historical analysis.

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27. This question drew some confused responses **that** did not adequately distinguish between government and non-government or between agencies and community groups and could not give sustained analysis of any.

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Topic 10: The Radical Experiment: A Social, Political, Economic, and Cultural History of South Australia, 1836 to the Present

28. The question produced some very good responses that drew on some very detailed knowledge of the Wakefield Plan and its radical elements, and then went on to analyse other radical innovations in the development of South Australia. Some of these were the predictable Kingston, Dunstan, Playford innovations, but some, such as the discussion of Goyder's work, were pleasingly individual.

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29. There were very few responses to this question.

30. The degree of success with this question related directly to the degree of detail brought to bear. Most responses dealt well with climate, especially drought, but, of course, environmental factors go beyond this. The lie of the land that dominated transport opportunities, the microclimates that favour particular industries, the naturally occurring wealth such as whales, fish, firewood, and minerals, all could have been used to enrich responses to this question.

Topic 11: Experiencing the Northern Territory: A Social, Political, Economic, and Cultural History of the Northern Territory, 1824 to the Present

31. The few responses to this question were of a high standard.

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32. There were very few responses to this question.

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33. There were very few responses but this question was the most popular for the topic.

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Part 3: Sources Analysis

(a) Most students found opinions easily. The more successful students supported their answers with quotations. Some students misinterpreted the citation of the first source, attributing the opinions to C. Butler.

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(b) Again, students almost invariably dealt with this part effectively. An interesting, but small, group of students misread the question's word 'objections' and used 'objectives' instead, consequently losing marks.

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(c) Historical usefulness seemed to be a topic that most students were prepared to deal with, but most did not go beyond the point that this source indicated a contemporary opinion and, perhaps, that it contained two views. Very few students approached the nuances of the source, for example, that the way Cockburn set up the opposition as radical and violent was, in fact, not giving another perspective but was actually portraying opposition as irrational.

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(d) Most students were able to see that all three sources agreed the tramline was not a good idea, albeit for different reasons, and gave two or three examples of support or lack of support. Some made their arguments very clear, writing some version of 'the similarities are...' and 'the differences are...' rather than simply retelling material from the sources.

- (e) This produced interesting responses where students were clearly thinking on their feet. Most were clear that letters to editors were problematic because they contained only one person's opinion and contained unreliable facts, some supporting their assertions with quotations from the letters. More successful students went beyond this, discussing editorial policy and the ways that historians might use letters to the editor. Deleted: candidate Deleted: Better responses
- (f) Successful responses here used *all* the sources, as required, and did not simply paraphrase the sources, but actually explained how certain matters presented problems to the government. Some students used a very effective technique: they looked at each source individually, expressing it in terms of a problem for the government to solve, and then finished with a summary of the problems, which referred to overarching problems such as planning laws or public confidence. Deleted: -

Chief Assessor
Australian History