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Women’s Studies

2015 Chief Assessor’s Report

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## 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.

For the most part, the standard of work across the assessment types was sound and a varied and interesting range of topics and issues were covered. The most popular area studied was, ‘Representations of women in cultural texts’’ and the texts studied included: popular novels, films, advertising, web-based materials, magazines, lyrics, music genres, video clips, and works from a visual arts medium. The analysis was often insightful and analytical, as it was clear students related and connected with the texts chosen.

The design of tasks is extremely important and must allow students to achieve the specific features being assessed and to the A level. The appropriate use of scaffolds and glossaries can help cater for various student abilities. Best-practice task design allows for analysis and evaluation, not simply description or recount. Word-count issues were a concern across assessment types. Students and teachers must be aware of the SACE word-count policy and not exceed it. The word-count should be stated on the task and students should add word-counts to their work. Words over the limit are not assessable.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Text Analysis

A diverse range of tasks of appropriate standard were evident this year. Analysis of a group of different films was once again very popular, with print media, lyrics, fairy tales and art also analysed by many students. *Real women have curves*, *Mad Max, Fury Road* and *North Country* were new texts studied well this year. The tasks in which students could compare and contrast the representations of women across times, contexts and places, allowed opportunities for students to perform at the highest level of the performance standards. One innovative task that used an analysis of a number of images from various centuries, along with images from the 21st century, allowed students to discuss the changing roles and representations of women and gender construction within various societies, contexts and times.

The design of tasks that required close analysis of specific short texts on issues affecting women, such as virginity tests and female genital mutilation, were most effective in allowing students to achieve at a high level as they were able to analyse the construction of gender, gender relations and power explicitly within the context of the texts.

Text analysis tasks on films and music clips were generally well structured and offered opportunities for students to engage with the texts and show diversity.

Teachers should consider whether one longer task or two shorter tasks best suits their students. Many students achieved high grades writing 1200-1500 words and those who completed the one task were often able to go into more depth in the analysis of the text/texts.

Assessment Type 2: Essay

The essay again appeared to be the most challenging assessment type for students. This was often due to the fact some task sheets did not specify that it was a persuasive essay and not a discursive one, and consequently students did not write persuasively. The task sheet should clearly indicate that students argue a point of view as students in the lower grade bands often wrote a narrative rather than a persuasive essay. Social and cultural practices were the most popular issues and allowed students to engage with their subject matter.

The majority of students used clear communication and appropriate forms, and acknowledged their sources. Word counts should be displayed.

Assessment Type 3: Folio

It was pleasing to see teachers negotiating individual topics with students. Tasks ranged from oral presentations on global issues to critiques of a range of advertisements to an examination of children’s toys. They included multimedia presentations, newspaper articles, analysis of advertisements, reports on excursions, short-answer questions on articles, monologues and biographical speeches of women. Some of the interesting tasks that clearly engaged the students were collaborative work using a Podcast on ‘Women and Work’, film making and writing and analysing poetry.

The most common area of difficulty in this assessment type was the demonstration of specific feature IE2, evaluation of strategies for empowerment. Students need to evaluate strategies for empowerment by analysing strategies and actions, and successes or failures, instead of simply stating what they were. Where students do not write at length it can be harder to show detailed and astute analysis. It is important that teachers clearly indicate the specific features on the task sheet.

It is advised to assess all three tasks against the performance standards once completed, to derive an overall grade level for the set of tasks in the folio.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 4: Issues Analysis

Most investigations were well-written and referenced, with detailed bibliographies and/or reference lists. Students chose a wide range of engaging and confronting issues to explore and analyse. There was less cultural deconstruction and more analytical discussion of women in different cultures and women in different occupations, including the defence and police forces. However, students still need to be reminded to deepen the level of analysis through the use of feminist frameworks.

It is hard to achieve at high levels in the investigations criterion if only a recount is presented. For example, a discussion of ‘Orange is the New Black’ requires not just telling the story of the women in prison but also an analysis through a gender lens.

It was good to see students conducting research such as emailing female politicians for their views in order to analyse the positioning of women in politics. There were innovative and imaginative topics such as, ‘Tattooing- a form of subversion or resistance to patriarchal notions of beauty?’ The topic of transgender women opens up a new dialogue- living as a woman as opposed to a man. A few students wrote very insightful essays on this topic.

The wording of the question is vital in eliciting analytical investigations. For example, “What were the achievements of the suffragettes in the First Wave of Feminism?” leads to description rather than analysis. The framing of the focus of the analysis should relate to gender. Good examples are:

‘The practice of FGM and labiaplasty disempower women in many ways and show that patriarchal control of women’s sexuality knows no boundaries. Discuss’. Or

‘The restrictions on contraception in Sudanese communities deprive women of ownership over their bodies. Discuss.’

It is important to stress that it is the level of investigation and gender analysis which differentiates students in the allocation of grades. An excellent example of this was the deconstruction of Tony Abbott’s words in terms of women and the deconstruction of femininity. The honed downed text allowed for a close analytical study of misogyny. Close investigation of a text allows the students to really come to terms with what is involved in gender analysis and to illustrate their understanding of the construction of gender.

There was also more evidence of students reading some of the important feminist texts, which gives the students a deeper understanding of gender and the struggle for equality.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

Materials requested for moderation should be clearly labelled. The assessment type, assignment task sheet, word-count, and name and/or SACE registration should be included. If special provisions are used, then these should be well documented on the Variations — Moderation Materials form. School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. It is very helpful to the moderators, who are looking to confirm grades, if teacher grades are evident on all student school assessment work.

Teachers and students are reminded that student names and school names should not be present on the issues analysis task for external assessment.

## General Comments

Overall, the standard of work displayed by students and the variety of topics and issues studied were pleasing. Most assessment types were well written, coherent, and fluent. It should be reinforced to students that they must take a gendered analytical approach, rather than a narrative one and to use the language of gender insightfully.

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