2021 Research Project A and B Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the 2021 assessment cycle, gives 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, and the quality of student performance.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Both Research Project A and B assess Assessment Type 1: Folio according to the same standard with identical assessment design criteria and performance standards. Student evidence of learning in Research Project A or a Research Project B class should be assessed identically.

The more successful responses commonly:

* provided balanced evidence against all the specific features, presenting an authentic snapshot of the research undertaken and the research processes used in order to come to a resolution to the research question
* focused on research questions that were succinct, resolvable and facilitated exploration of various complex perspectives, refined in response to the research process
* planned and justified the selection of research methodologies and processes on the basis that they would resolve the research question, and increase the validity and reliability of the research as a whole
* showed a nuanced understanding of the complex ethical issues specific to their research question beyond simplistic, generic ethical considerations such as plagiarism and confidentiality
* were aware of their own possible biases as a researcher and specifically planned to manage the impact of these biases on their research processes
* utilised a broad range of primary and secondary information giving comprehensive coverage to all aspects of their question by analysing and exploring diverse sources of knowledge, ideas and perspectives
* explored the validity, reliability, credibility and currency of sources rationalising their significance in resolving the research question
* demonstrated the development and growth of knowledge and skills in several ways, including exploring ideas through extended reflections, development of interview questions that had been annotated and revealed growth of subject knowledge or documentation of experimentation through graphs, tables, photographic evidence, or conceptual diagrams
* provided explicit evidence of the development of the research across the 10 pages, revealing the emergence of key findings as they occurred, and reflecting on the validity and reliability of their conclusions utilising cross-referencing and synthesising information from multiple sources
* clearly identified new and specific knowledge and skills related to the disciplines in which the research was undertaken and or the research direction of contemporary experts
* evaluated the success of their findings by obtaining feedback, which they reflected on, thereby providing evidence that there had been growth in their knowledge and skill development
* made explicit links between their chosen capability and the research undertaken; the capability was constantly referred to across the evidence presented and became an intrinsic component of shaping the intention and direction of the research
* clearly showed both an ‘understanding’ and a ‘development’ of their chosen capability or capabilities with explicit evidence and examples of their development. The sophisticated development of one, or a maximum of two capabilities was characteristic of a more successful folio

The less successful responses commonly:

* focused on questions with limited inquiry depth requiring descriptive rather than analytical answers
* demonstrated a limited generic understanding of research ethics and or generated questions that were ethically inappropriate, focusing on unsafe situations, abuse/trauma, dangerous experimentation, etc.
* limited question refinement to a recount of why topics were changed due to difficulties rather than focusing on evolving research
* provided limited evidence of planning other than a superficial and incomplete lotus diagram, brainstorm or planner that was generic and repetitive.
* recounted generic processes rather than exploring, designing, and justifying all aspects of the research processes used, showing an awareness of what research methodologies were being engaged with and why
* provided many secondary source analyses (often taking up 8 of the 10 pages) which were commonly completed on a template that did not allow the student to show how the research was unfolding and developing
* included large sections of material (beyond useful planning evidence) which was theoretical or speculative, such as sets of interview questions for interviews that were never undertaken or questions and answers for a survey where the results were negligible
* used the concepts of validity, reliability and bias interchangeably with no real evidence of understanding of the terminology
* discussed sources in isolation, summarising information or providing simplistic annotations, indicative of gathering information and omitting analytical thinking
* addressed the chosen capability/capabilities only in the proposal or provided limited simplistic statements with little real evidence of growth in awareness of the nature of the capability and its contribution to the development of the research
* attempted to address multiple capabilities at a shallow or generic level with little relevance to topic or questions posed.

Assessment Type 2: Research Outcome

Both Research Project A and B assess the Assessment Type 2: Research Outcome, according to the same standard with identical assessment design criteria and performance standards. However, it is to be noted that the maximum word limit for Assessment Type 2: Research Outcome in Research Project A is 1500 words whereas if written, the maximum word limit for Assessment Type 2: Research Outcome in Research Project B is 2000 words (10 minutes and 12 minutes, respectively, for an oral presentation, with equivalents for multimodal forms).

The more successful responses commonly:

* effectively prioritised and drew out meaning from the findings which were more prominent in the research rather than providing a superficial recount of all findings identified in the folio
* clearly identified an appropriate audience to target in relation to the research question and used language/format appropriate for the audience
* where a physical object or product was created, understood the product/substantiation relationship and the need to elaborate on how its creation was connected to research methods and results at each stage of development, including dynamic methods of referencing these sources through multimedia or visual techniques
* where a written answer to a question was created, emphasised the key ideas so that these logically built to a wholistic emphasis or argument
* clearly articulated each key finding and then weighed evidence from a range of sources and perspectives, which supported the assertion of the prominence of the finding to their answer
* understood that every claim, argument or opinion put forward needed to be substantiated (supported or justified) with credible evidence from a range of research or other authoritative sources
* made a careful curation of evidence to substantiate their key findings and exhibited discernment in the selection of sources, where highly targeted and relevant sources of information were used
* used graphs, tables, images, etc. and referred to these visual elements thereby making these elements an additional layer to the level of substantiation
* meaningfully engaged with their research and, with their own voice, came to a resolution to the question
* used a consistent, clear, recognised referencing system throughout (and this included multimodal presentations where students utilised pop-ups or verbally articulated where they had gained the information within the content of their presentation)
* provided a well delineated conclusion that linked back clearly to the question, revealing the implications of the answer to their question with complexity and nuance
* identified the deeper significance of the Outcome by putting it in a broader context or by exploring how the question resolution provided a solution to an issue or contributed to the understanding of an important or unique phenomenon.

The less successful responses commonly:

* provided a collection of information or a series of facts and recount (summary of information) rather than a synthesis of the material
* provided personal opinions regarding the research question rather than evidence based on sources
* demonstrated only a partial resolution to the research question (without acknowledging this) by including material that did not address the question
* confused synthesis with a restating of identified information or facts without identifying any relationships, ideas or significance
* restricted the capacity to provide insightful key findings by selecting a poor choice for the mode of their presentation
* poorly organised their findings which led to a confusing and poorly structured Research Outcome
* included images and data that were not referred to (and in some cases not relevant) and therefore did not support or enhance the line of argument and/or validity of the research
* provided little to no substantiation (and this included multimodal forms of outcomes)
* relied too heavily on the same few sources used continuously throughout the outcome
* contained inadequate referencing of a source at the end of a paragraph or page without discussion about the context or relevance of the source material or its author
* where a physical product had been produced, substantiation of its development and the research conducted to create it was not clearly articulated; more often implied than overt.

Assessment Type 3: Review (Research Project A only)

The Research Project A Assessment Type 3: Review is distinctly different from the Research Project B Assessment Type 3: Evaluation which has its own distinct performance standards. Students are significantly disadvantaged by preparing material for the RPB Evaluation and submitting it as an RPA Review. While both versions of the Research Project may be taught in the same classroom, it is important for teachers and students to be aware of the different requirements for the external task and prepare their work in accordance with their enrolment.

The Review must begin with a Summary of 150 words. The purpose of the summary is to allow the marker to gain an overview of the student’s project, which provides useful context for the material to follow. Following the Summary, students produce a maximum 1500 word (or equivalent) Review of their knowledge and skills, decisions and actions and the quality of their Outcome.

The more successful responses commonly:

* prepared their work following the requirements of the RPA Review using headings related directly to the specific features being assessed and allocating equal word count (or equivalent) to each R1 R2 and R3 feature
* explicitly outlined the ways in which key knowledge relating to their chosen topic had grown and developed throughout their project and illustrated this with appropriate examples
* highlighted theoretical and/or practical skills associated with the discipline they were working in and clearly explained how these skills were attained and developed through the course, connecting these skills clearly to the development of the research question and their success in conducting their research
* clearly outlined the specific actions that they took when faced with challenges and/or opportunities; briefly outline the challenge and/or opportunity, and stated the decision made in response focusing on how their decisions influenced the resolution of their question through examining its impact on their research development illustrating this with clear, relevant examples
* went beyond challenges that may have been experienced by all students (such as COVID, time management, availability of sources, workload, and so on) and focused on those specific to their project, methodologies and or ethical considerations of their specific question
* focused on reviewing the quality of the Outcome, such as use of sources, lack of bias, use of specific terminology or information, rather than the process of making it
* utilised a range of vocabulary including varied qualifiers in their reflection on the quality of the Outcome realistically emphasising both its strengths and omissions
* discussed the relevance and significance of their findings in light of what they set out to do, articulating the features that influenced the overall value of their Outcome, including the extent to which the question had been answered
* used paragraphs to good effect allowing them to organise their information logically and to communicate ideas accurately and coherently
* made use of the drafting and editing process to ensure effective communication
* were explicit with authentic examples and not repetitive.

The less successful responses commonly:

* did not address R1, or did so only in a fleeting manner, as they instead presented material directed at E1 - evaluating the usefulness of the research processes used specific to the research question (which is part of the Research Project B Evaluation task)
* limited their active word count by directly addressing the development of the capabilities which is not assessed
* recounted their research project in chronological order in its entirety rather than reviewing skills and knowledge, analysing key actions and judging the quality of the Outcome as an answer to a question
* did not balance the word-count across the three specific features of R1, R2 and R3, often addressing specific feature R1 (review of knowledge and skills) extensively and giving only cursory treatment to R2 and R3 or omitting completely
* focused mainly on the development of practical skills which were only loosely connected to the research topic or focused entirely on superficial and often generic research skills only
* included generalised sentences which contained no detail or specific examples of the knowledge and skills under review e.g. “My knowledge and skills grew as I did my research project and this helped me come up with many important key findings”
* recounted the challenges and/or opportunities themselves in detail, rather than the decisions made, actions taken and impact of these actions
* focused on the COVID situation, time management, difficulty in deciding on a focus for the project and sourcing information and experts not replying to emails rather than managing the challenges of research and knowledge development
* discussed the quality of their Outcome in terms of it being finished and meeting a word count, rather than in terms of what key findings it contained and how well it addressed the question
* used very informal language or acronyms without explanation that obscured meaning

Assessment Type 3: Evaluation (Research Project B only)

The Research Project B Assessment Type 3: Evaluation is distinctly different from the Research Project A Assessment Type 3: Review which has its own distinct performance standards. While both versions of the Research Project may be taught in the same classroom, it is important for teachers and students to be aware of the different requirements for the external task and prepare their work in accordance with their enrolment.

The Evaluation must begin with a Summary of 150 words. The purpose of the summary is to allow the marker to gain an overview of the student’s project, which provides useful context for the material to follow. Following the Summary, students produce a maximum 1500 word Evaluation of the quality of their research processes, decisions, actions and Outcome.

The more successful responses commonly:

* balanced the 1500 maximum word count evenly across E1, E2 and E3 specific features
* in the E1 section, evaluated a specific selection of two or three research processes with in-depth judgement statements, providing explicit examples of resources engaged with as part of the research processes to illustrate usefulness or limitations
* linked the success of the research process directly to the student’s research question and its specific nuances, framing evaluation of the strengths and limitations of process(es) without being contradictory
* accurately used research terminology (i.e. validity, credibility, reliability) to evaluate the use of processes without interchanging terms inappropriately or stacking them together without discrimination
* applied a range of qualifiers to rank their usefulness and limitations, such as ‘most useful’, ‘most reliable’, ‘less effective’, ‘pertinent’, ‘critical’, etc. with examples that related directly to their own question
* in the E2 section, made the decisions the central focus of discussion and identified this in the topic sentence, providing a brief summary of the challenge or opportunity without distracting from decisions and actions that followed
* provided specific evaluation of how the decision impacted upon the breadth and/or depth of the research and the quality (validity and or reliability) of the data or information it produced and/or the resolution of the question
* in the E3 section, explicitly evaluated the success of the Research Outcome by explaining how well the question was resolved, providing evidence to support this judgment
* clearly outlined the features which impacted on the quality of the Research Outcome including aspects such as: quality of the sources used, originality of the findings, forms of substantiation used, suitability of the findings for the intended audience, depth and breadth of the research, range of perspectives included, clarity of the findings, effect of the credibility, validity or reliability of source material, conciseness of the argument and resolution of the question
* had a balanced understanding of the usefulness of their Research Outcome and balanced judgements on its quality
* organised information clearly into sections or paragraphs and made good use of proofreading strategies.

The less successful responses commonly:

* did not balance the word-count across the three specific features of E1, E2 and E3, often addressing specific feature E1 (Evaluation of the research processes used, specific to the research question) extensively and giving only cursory treatment to E2 and E3 or omitting completely
* in the E1 section, recounted the research processes in chronological order with few judgements or any evaluative discussion
* discussed irrelevant processes such as planning or basic actions (i.e. highlighting sources)
* did not provide specific examples of resources accessed within processes and their value
* featured broad statements about generalised processes such as ‘using the Internet’
* used terms such as ‘validity’, ‘reliability’, ‘bias’, and ‘credibility’ interchangeably, or misused these terms
* misunderstood research methodologies and provided inaccurate, or incorrect assessments (i.e. citing all government resources as being without bias)
* made judgments on research processes without providing supporting evidence
* mentioned how the research process enhanced the development of the capability (which is not an assessable feature in this assessment type)
* in the E2 section, focused on the challenge or opportunity, instead of the decision
* recounted a series of decisions, without evaluating their significance or the impact that it had upon the broader research outcomes
* discussed general hardships (time management, loss of data, motivation, shyness) rather than challenges pertaining to the generation of data
* in the E2 section, overly focused on the value of the research Outcome to themselves or made generalisations about its usefulness that were overstated
* focused on the design or format of the Research Outcome, rather than the quality of their resolution to the research question
* focused on the Research Project as a whole, recapping research processes without explaining how the Outcome was impacted
* repeated content across paragraphs
* used conversational or incomplete writing styles without adequate proofreading.