Women’s Studies

2014 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.

Women’s Studies saw a slight increase in student numbers this year. Overall, the standard of work across the assessment types was very good and a wide range of topics and issues were covered. The majority of students incorporated the language of gender into their work and demonstrated a sound understanding of gender construction across time, cultures, and contexts.

It must be noted again that the design of tasks is extremely important and must allow students to achieve the specific features being assessed at all levels including the A level. As in previous years, this was a concern across assessment types, in particular the essay. Tasks should be appropriately scaffolded to cater for various student abilities. Best-practice task design allowed for analysis and evaluation, not just description.

Some of the specific features of the assessment design criteria (namely IE2 of investigation and evaluation, and GA3 of gender analysis), were commonly marked at a generous level or misinterpreted. Formative work and the drafting process assist students to understand what is required and to meet the performance standards at a higher level.

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 must be stated on the task and students should add word-counts to their work. Words over the limit cannot be included in the assessment of a task.

## School Assessment

**Assessment Type 1: Text Analysis**

A varied range of challenging and appropriate tasks were set by teachers. An analysis of a group of different films was again the most popular text type, while print media, lyrics, fairy tales, art, anime, and video games were also analysed by many students. An analysis of gender bias and stereotyping was generally covered in depth, but students must also focus on a range or diversity of women to gain the higher grades. Text analysis tasks on films and music clips were mostly well structured and offered opportunities for students to engage with the texts and show diversity. Students must establish a link between their general observations and specific parts of the text which lead to their conclusions. The tasks that allowed students a wide range of choice and also allowed them to negotiate format and medium were generally well done, as the students engaged readily with their chosen texts. The construction of gender and an analysis of gender relations and power explicitly within the context of the texts studied allowed students to reach an A across the performance standards.

Please note, for the second year now, students can choose to do two 1000-word responses or one 2000-word response.

**Assessment Type 2: Essay**

The essay appeared to be the most challenging assessment type for students. Wide variation in the quality of students’ written essays was evident. Students in the lower grade bands wrote a narrative rather than a persuasive essay. At times this was due to the tasks, which did not support an argumentative piece or where the student did not construct a question that required this style. Again, a focused question, which gives scope for analysis and strong viewpoints, allows students to meet the performance standards more easily at an A level.

Social and cultural practices were the most popular issues and allowed students to connect with their topic.

The majority of students used clear communication and appropriate forms, and acknowledged their sources.

**Assessment Type 3: Folio**

Diverse tasks and various aspects of women’s issues across a range of time, contexts, and cultures were investigated in the folio. This catered for a wide range of student interests and differentiation allowed for success of students. It was clear that students were personally challenged and engaged by issues involving women in different cultures and societies.

Again, many students struggled with the 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.

Tasks were varied and included multimedia presentations, newspaper articles, analyses of advertisements, reports on excursions, short-answer questions on articles, and biographical speeches of women.

Again, it is advised to assess all three tasks against the performance standards once completed to derive an overall grade level for the folio.

## External Assessment

**Assessment Type 4: Issues Analysis**

Many students were able to produce well-written and referenced work for the issues analysis, with detailed bibliographies and/or reference lists. Students chose a wide range of interesting and challenging issues to explore and analyse, and in particular many students chose cultural text studies. Transformers, *Game of Thrones*, hip hop, metal music, bullying of gamers, and comic culture studies revealed an engagement with the texts of our culture and its misogyny.

The standard of the issues analysis was very mixed and again at times seemed to reflect teacher skill in directing and supporting students as they developed a framework for the analysis. As a result, there were some excellent examples and some poor ones.

Many students demonstrated a need for direction in how to analyse in terms of gender. A good question can give this direction so that the student is directed away from generalisations. Whatever cultural text is being analysed, the student must get really close to it and analyse particular examples. A number of students wrote in very general terms without using the language of gender analysis. Students who established a link between their observations, and what was in the text, that led to their conclusions received higher grades. The best cultural text studies were able to do this and often the question framed the analysis.

The wording of the question is of absolute importance in eliciting analytical investigations. For example, in the question ‘Why, when live-action superhero films present a female protagonist, are they often sexist?’, the ‘why’ makes the task difficult as the student would need to address the concept of sexism and what a non-sexist protagonist would look like, but the student is not necessarily being directed towards this. A better framing of the question could be: ‘How does the presentation of the construction of gender, gender power, and gender relations in live-action superhero films disempower women?’

The question ‘Why are women with Down syndrome who have babies often vilified for doing so?’ raises a most important issue, but the question does not allow for analysis in terms of gender. A better question might be: ‘What is it in our contemporary construction of femininity that makes some people question whether a woman with Down syndrome should have a baby?’

When students use quotes referring to gender, they need to deconstruct the quote in terms of what it reveals about gender and how it relates to their issues analysis. The quote must not just be stated but supported with analysis, and this analysis was often missing when students were deconstructing song lyrics or reality television shows.

It is important to stress that it is the level of investigation which differentiates students in the allocation of grades. The depth of research and investigation of diversity will be reflected in the overall grade.

Few students referred to contemporary or historical feminist theory. There are seminal texts in this area and students should be directed towards these works to help deepen their understanding of gender analysis and the development of various feminist theories.

It is important that teachers note changes in the specific features relevant to assessment types, as again some students addressed specific features (GA3, identification of ways of effecting change to address gender bias, and IE2, evaluation of strategies for empowerment) that have not been required for this assessment type for several years. The required specific features are listed in the Women’s Studies subject operational information.

## 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 must be clearly labelled. The assessment type, assignment task sheet, word-count, and name and/or SACE registration must be included. If special provisions are used, then these must be explicit and 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 showed empathy and understanding of a diverse range of women’s experiences across time, cultures, and contexts. Although many examples across all assessment types were well written, coherent, and fluent, an analytical approach rather than a narrative one resulted in the performance standards being achieved at a much higher grade.

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