Stage 1 English

Subject Assessment Report 2014



Stage 1 English

Subject Assessment Report

Overview

At Stage 1, a number of subjects are moderated: the English subjects, the mathematics subjects, and the Personal Learning Plan. For most schools, only the C and D grades are moderated as the C grade represents the minimum grade required for SACE completion.

Stage 1 assessment reports give an overview of how students performed at the C and D grades in their school assessments relative to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outlines. The assessment reports provide information and advice on: teacher engagement and student engagement with the assessment types, including task design; the application of the performance standards in school assessments; and the quality of student performance.

Assessment Type 1: Text Analysis

Successful Achievement at the C Grade

Teachers chose a range of texts that engaged students and matched their abilities. Students successfully demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of issues, analysed language techniques, and discussed the purpose and intended audience of a range of texts. Teachers generally selected a variety of familiar and unfamiliar texts that gave students the opportunity to be successful at the C grade. A novel written in free verse about cyberbullying — *Love, Ghosts and Nose Hair* — elicited some successful responses. Students engaged with the text to make personal connections (An1) and demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of language techniques and conventions (KU2), such as the use of a symbolic ghost to reveal a character’s innermost thoughts. Students were able to discuss the use of first-person narration and the unconventional poetic form to portray an authentic voice and engage the audience’s sympathies, demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the text’s purpose and audience (KU3). *Walking Naked* by Alyssa Brugman used the technique of interweaving poetry into the text; this enabled students to make personal connections and demonstrate knowledge and understanding of complex issues arising in a school setting.

Students engaged with a range of classic and contemporary texts including novels, short stories, plays, films, television shows, digital blogs, advertising, websites, and articles. *To Kill a Mockingbird, Of Mice and Men, Animal Farm, The Club, and* Shakespeare’s playswere among the popular, classic texts chosen for analysis. *The Divine Wind, Bran Nue Day, Shawshank Redemption*, the poetry of Philip Larkin and Sylvia Plath, *The Help, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time, Life of Pi, The Hunger Games,* the *Harry Potter series, Gattaca,* and *The King’s Speech* were among the popular choices of more contemporary texts.

Moderators noted that successful students had been taught how to reference their quotations and supporting evidence so that they could be successful in demonstrating Ap2.They also noted that students needed to be explicitly taught how to take notes and reference secondary sources to avoid plagiarism.

Moderators commented on cases where students had been expected to give close readings that were beyond their comprehension and meant they were unable to achieve to the C standard. On the other hand, students sometimes had to respond to a series of closed, low-level comprehension questions that only invited one-word responses and thus precluded them from demonstrating the highest levels of understanding and analysis. Sometimes the ‘analysis’ criterion seemed to be misunderstood. Some students misunderstood the criterion of ‘analysis’ — thinking that it meant simple comprehension — and did a close reading of texts rather than deconstructing their structural and language features.

Some samples highlighted the need for students to draft and edit their work more thoroughly. In some cases teachers included drafts of student work as well as the summative pieces. Corrections on some of these drafts revealed unacceptable levels of intervention by teachers or others. Teachers are advised to refer to *The Supervision and Verification of Students’ Work* policy for guidance.

Application of the Performance Standards

It was obvious in this year’s student samples that the majority of teachers have consolidated their understanding of the performance standards, thus allowing moderators to confirm their assessment decisions. In addition, samples from teachers in the same school showed consistent grades. However, moderators highlighted the need for teachers to be selective about the specific features of the assessment design criteria when developing tasks for this assessment type. For example, students were sometimes given thematic questions or character analysis tasks that did not explicitly ask them to discuss language techniques and conventions, even though they were being assessed on specific features KU2 and An2. They also noted that in some instances teachers were assessing the same specific features in all tasks for this assessment type.

Task Design

Moderators cited good task design as a critical element in student success for this assessment type because many students at the C level find text analysis challenging. The most effective tasks were well constructed, giving explicit instructions written in language that was ‘student friendly’ but still related to the performance standards. For example, instructions using words like ‘analyse’ rather than’ identify’ or ‘describe’ were more effective in eliciting successful responses.

Accompanying some task sheets were annotated model texts that deconstructed a wide range of language techniques and conventions. The advantage of providing this supporting information separately is that the task sheet is kept simple and presents clear instructions rather than overwhelming students with too much information. Students can then refer to the support document at different stages of the drafting process. Supporting documents gave students an extensive range of specific language to use in their analytical response; for example, technical language for a particular text type. However, moderators stressed the need for students to understand the technical language — rather than just list terms in their responses — so that they were able to discuss and analyse. In poetry analysis, for instance, many students need support to enable them to understand and discuss the effects of different sound devices on the reader such as alliteration, assonance, consonance, sibilants, and onomatopoeia.

Moderators also commented on task design that explicitly provided students with support in structuring their analytical responses, for example using ‘TEEL’ (topic sentence, elaboration, audience effect, and linking back). They also remarked favourably on task design that explicitly directed the use of an appropriate, formal voice in an analytical essay. Lists of evaluative adverbs such as ‘effectively’, ‘powerfully’, ‘disturbingly’, and ‘wryly’ and adjectives such as ‘provocative’, ‘engaging’ and ‘captivating’ were provided to support students in describing the intended effect of a piece of writing or a speech on the audience. Students were also given examples of useful verbs with which to discuss the writer’s purpose, such as ‘provokes’, ‘convinces’, ‘confronts’, ‘challenges’, ‘examines’, ‘explores’, ‘depicts’, ‘portrays’, ‘illustrates’, ‘exposes’, ‘intimates’ or ‘asserts’. This enabled them to successfully achieve KU3. It was also noted that some task sheets included appropriate connectives to help students mount a cohesive and logical argument. For example, when students were analysing and comparing two poems, teachers provided them with examples of comparative connectives such as ‘similarly’, ‘equally’, ‘in the same way’, ‘however’, and ‘on the other hand’.

Teachers are reminded that for students to achieve higher than a C grade, they need to study both familiar and unfamiliar texts. Familiar texts for which adolescents are the targeted audience include teenage novels and short stories that have a well-known social and cultural context. Teenage magazines such as *Sports Illustrated,* *Popular Mechanic, Dirt Rider, Dolly,* and *Seventeen* are also considered familiar texts. Other examples include advertising and personal communications such as email and SMS texting. However, teachers should note that it is still worthwhile to teach the conventions and language features of these texts; sometimes familiar texts with a simple structure can have layers of meaning that lead to more complex analysis. For example, a sticky note on the fridge such as ‘Get Milk!!!’ could be considered a very simple, familiar text but it has the potential for generating deeper analysis. A student could discuss the implications of using the imperative form and three exclamation marks and whether the note could be construed by the intended audience as an impolite command or simply a request expressing urgency. The intended audience and the creator of the text could substantially change the implied meaning of the text, depending on the power and positioning within relationships.

Unfamiliar texts are likely to include most classic texts, newspapers, and texts specifically written for adults or special interest groups such as business magazines like *The Economist* and *Money.*

Moderators commented on the use of alternative responses to the analytical essay, including blogs and interviews. For example, a film analysis in the style of the ABC television show *At the Movies* by Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton was cited as an interesting and innovative alternative. However, this was cautioned with the need to ensure that students were given the maximum time of 5 minutes and were clear about the difference between film review and film analysis; the former being an analysis of character, theme, and/or techniques, and the latter being an evaluation of the film.

Assessment Type 2: Text Production

Successful Achievement at the C Grade

Students are generally familiar with this assessment type and have been explicitly taught the structures and language features of a range of genres including recounts, narratives, expository texts, and explanations. However, teachers should also model and deconstruct more sophisticated texts within these genres, so that students can learn the skills to achieve at the higher grades.

Application of the Performance Standards

Overall, there was consistent interpretation of the performance standards in this assessment type across classes and across schools.

Moderators again commented on the fact that some students were required to demonstrate the assessment design criterion of ‘analysis’ in a text production task. Teachers are advised that text analysis is not appropriate for text production responses. Moderators noted that students who achieved at the C level had difficulty producing both a writer’s statement and an extended piece of prose within 800 words. In a few instances, students were given a 500-word maximum to write a narrative and a 300-word maximum writer’s statement about language techniques. This limited students’ ability to produce a substantial, creative piece of writing. Letters of introduction to the teacher were also viewed as limiting students’ opportunities and are perhaps best suited to an introductory, formative task.

More successful recounts usually looked at the significance of the experience, provided an evaluation of the experience, and considered orientation as an important way to position the reader.

Task Design

Moderators commented favourably on text production tasks that had students complete a piece of captivating, narrative writing based on that of a well-known author or an unpublished author who has submitted work online This practice enabled students to imitate the style and language of the author. Emulating the style and language of a famous, provocative speech gave students the opportunity to present a powerful oral presentation.

Students were provided with a variety of stimulus material, and had choice in topics and often in the mode of presentation. Speeches for special occasions such as an 18th birthday or an acceptance speech were tasks that elicited successful responses because they simulated a real-life event with an authentic purpose and audience. For the creative minds, imaginary scenarios such as an acceptance speech for the Brownlow Medal or the Academy Awards prompted some engaging presentations that successfully achieved specific features C2 and KU3. Moderators noted the innovative use of the online tool ‘Fakebook’, which allows students to create imaginary profile pages. (As well as following the debates and relationships between people, ‘Fakebook’ can be used to chart the plot of a book, the development of a character, and a series of historical events.) Overall, however, moderators commented on the scarcity of tasks involving electronic media.

Moderators felt that, in some instances, free choice narratives and recounts without a context for writing or modelling led to student responses that could only be described as mundane. These involved chronological recounts or storytelling such as ‘hooking up and going to the mall’ or ‘meeting a guy at the bus stop’.

Assessment Type 3: Extended Study

Successful Achievement at the C Grade

Once again, advertising was overwhelmingly the most popular choice for both the connected text study (option 1) and the language study (option 2). For the connected text study, there was still a wide variety of texts chosen by individual students or the teacher. A comparative study between Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and either of the films *Memento* or *Donnie Darko* produced some successful responses. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* directed by Stephen Daldryand thefilm *The Lovely Bones* based on Alice Sebold’s novel, also produced some thought-provoking comparisons about grief and loss. *The World’s Fastest Indian* and *Slumdog Millionaire* were interesting choices for comparison, with the central character of each film the underdog who ‘makes good’ after persevering with his dream. *The Messenger* and the film *Seven Pounds* starring Will Smith also elicited some interesting comparisons as the central characters embark on a journey of redemption by changing the lives of others. *The Pursuit of Happiness* by Gabriele Muccino and Rick Yancy’s *The Fifth Wave was* another comparison chosen*.* The short story or film *Flowers for Algernon* and the film *Awakenings* elicited successful responses*. Tomorrow When the War Began* and *Abduction* were paired to show how individuals react to change. The theme of survival was often used to connect texts. Some students compared popular song lyrics that sometimes conveyed simple and repetitive messages of unrequited love that led to superficial comparisons. Teachers are encouraged to guide students in the selection of texts for comparison. Generally, texts that were more closely linked gave students the opportunity to make more discerning points of comparison and achieve at a higher grade. Teachers should also encourage students to make a deeper comparison than merely comparing the plots and themes.

Students who were given a maximum of three texts to study had greater opportunity to write with some depth and successfully achieve KU2, Ap3, and An2. Moderators observed a few student samples where they were asked to compare 10 different advertisements within the 1000-word maximum, which limited the responses to brief annotations.

Teachers should encourage students to integrate their points of comparison throughout the connected text study, rather than analysing the texts separately.

It was evident that some students used the same text in the text analysis for Assessment Type 1 as they did for the extended study (connected text option) in Assessment Type 3. At times this limited a student’s ability to demonstrate a breath of knowledge, understanding, and analysis across their complete folio of work. It also led to repetition of material. Teachers are encouraged to advise students to use different texts for these assessment types.

Application of the Performance Standards

Teachers generally met the state-wide standard for this assessment type for both the connected text study and the language study. In addition, teachers in the same school showed a greater level of consistency in their assessment this year. Moderators commented on the importance of teachers being selective in their choice of specific features to be assessed when designing tasks. It was also noted that when students choose their own topic or question, teachers should ensure that it has enough scope to meet the specific features to be assessed or this will limit students’ ability to be successful.

None of the school samples submitted for moderation chose the student-negotiated study (option 3) as an option.

Task Design

For the connected texts study, task design was once again seen to be a critical element in student success. More successful task sheets were ones that provided explicit instructions for students directing them to focus on a number of areas. These included exploring the similarities and differences between texts; referring to the connected texts in equal measure; interweaving their analysis of the texts throughout their responses; and going beyond a comparison of the plot and/or theme to include an examination of how the language features and conventions position readers. Similarly to the text analysis for Assessment Type 1, students were more successful when teachers used annotated model texts or support documents that guided students in the deconstruction of their studied texts and supported them in the structure and language features for their own responses.

Students were often given a wide variety of choice for the language study. Popular choices included language used in the workplace, magazines, advertising, and social networking sites, as well as language particular to certain groups or technologies such as skateboarders, SMS messaging, talkback radio, and sports commentary. Students also had the additional choice of negotiating a study of their own. For the language study, task design was critical in directing students to develop a specific focus and go into greater depth rather than making broad, general statements about language use. In addition, explicit direction about appropriate research methods helped students to make relevant observations. For example, students were asked to consider the appropriateness of surveys or interviews to contribute to their findings. Furthermore, students achieved at the higher levels when they were given clear instructions to identify specialised language; to consider the effect of context, purpose, and audience on language choices; and to reflect on the role of language in establishing or maintaining individual or group identity.

Preparation and Packaging of Student Materials

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teacher grades/marks and annotations should be evident on all student work.

Teachers are reminded to select and submit samples according to the instructions outlined in the *Stage 1 Information and Guidelines*, which require a maximum of three sets of evidence representative of each of the available C, C\*, D\*, and D grade levels (an asterisk indicates a borderline result). This means that a maximum of 12 samples per subject are required, irrespective of the number of classes in the school. Some schools provided more than three sets of evidence of each grade level. Schools should note that they need only to provide samples of adjacent grades (e.g. B grade) if no C or D grades are available.

Teachers are reminded to include only final assessment pieces in the package of materials for moderation. Drafts or student notes should not be included; this is something teachers should note particularly for the extended study.

Student evidence in the form of a transcript or recording should be included for oral presentations as well as teacher assessment decisions. Please note that the *Submission of Electronic Files* guidelines now include information regarding the submission of USBs.

Moderators commented on the usefulness of cover sheets and summary sheets to record assessment decisions and to make student identification clear.

General Comments

Teachers are encouraged to access the interactive clarifying activities on the Stage 1 English minisite (Support materials > Clarifying activities)to help them interpret and consistently apply the performance standards to student work. Once teachers submit their assessment decisions on the provided samples of work, annotated versions of the student responses can be downloaded and viewed.

It was pleasing to note a far greater use of the addendum to the learning and assessment plan when teachers made changes to the selection of texts to suit their current cohort of students, or made changes to the mode of presentation for individuals or the class.