Stage 1 English as an Additional Language

Subject Assessment Report 2016



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Overview

At Stage 1 the English and mathematics subjects and the Personal Learning Plan are moderated. 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. They 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 evidence.

Assessment Type 1: Responding to Texts

Successful Achievement at the C Grade

In this assessment type students read and view a variety of texts, including one literary text ([Suggested text list](https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/web/english-as-an-additional-language/stage-1/support-materials/suggested-text-lists)), to stimulate their creative thinking in both written and oral modes. The subject outline specifies that for a 10-credit subject, students complete one written response to texts (maximum of 600 words) and one oral response to texts (maximum of 5 minutes). It is expected that in responding to texts, students refer to, or directly relate to, the original text/s. Most schools weighted this assessment type at 50%.

At the C standard, students demonstrated appropriate use of language features and conventions when interpreting information, ideas, and opinions in texts for different audiences and purposes. Students wrote and spoke in a generally clear and coherent manner using references from a range of sources to support a point of view. When evidence and examples from texts were specific and interwoven in the responses, students were able to achieve at the C standard (or higher). Moderators noted that the few grammatical errors made did not impede the flow or general meaning of the information, ideas, and opinions expressed in texts.

The most common text types responded to were films, television programs, documentaries, song lyrics, music videos, and short stories. The more successful responses came from contemporary texts that class groups could engage with, in contrast with texts that did not connect with the student cohort or were outside the range of student experience. Examples of texts studied included Anh Do’s *The Happiest Refugee*, Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival*, short stories such as *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson, *Only Ten* by Alan Baillie, *The Scythe* by Ray Bradbury, *Big World* by Tim Winton, *Jewelled Mirror* by Izel Öztürk (from *Paper Boats: An Anthology of Short Stories about Journeys to Australia*), films such as *The Sapphires* and *The Power of One*, and the SBS TV series *Go Back To Where You Came From*. Moderators noted that these texts engaged students in reflection and exploration of themes. Students were able to make connections with their own experiences or develop empathetic responses by, for example, taking on the role of a character in the film/book or exploring the influence the text has had on them. Some of these texts are on the [Suggested text list](https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/web/english-as-an-additional-language/stage-1/support-materials/suggested-text-lists) on the English as an Additional Language minisite. Teachers are encouraged to use this list as a *guide only* but most importantly select texts that will engage their particular student cohort.

For this assessment type, a shared text approach — texts are read/viewed and discussed by the whole class — supported student success.

It was clear that when instructions for tasks were directly related to the performance standards being assessed, students were more likely to demonstrate literacy skills at the C grade or higher. Similarly, when teachers explicitly taught the language features and conventions of different text types and how they were appropriate to different audiences and purposes, students were successful. For example, teaching the language features of a narrative gives students the opportunity to write an alternative ending to a story.

For the oral component of this assessment type, students prepared scripts, videos, PowerPoint presentations, short films, props, and visuals to meet audience expectations. Note that there is a variety of ways in which oral evidence of learning can be demonstrated, such as a presentation to the class, a discussion between the student and the teacher, or an edited self-recorded visual/audio presentation. The more successful oral presentations used close to the maximum time limit of 5 minutes, which gave students more opportunity to meet the performance standards at the C grade or higher. Students were limited in achieving higher grades if their oral presentation was only 2−3 minutes long.

Application of the Performance Standards

The most successful responses were those in which the applied evidence of learning reflected an understanding of the purpose of the text (comprehension), and used language features and conventions (application) developed through classroom deconstruction, modelling, and scaffolding of texts. Where there was a particular audience in mind when constructing the text, students were able to demonstrate effective use of the language and structure of texts.

An understanding of how information is conveyed more clearly by appropriate vocabulary and specific word choice was evident when students used a diverse vocabulary in both written and spoken media. Examples include using words such as ‘emotional’ or ‘frustrated’ instead of ‘sad’ or ‘mad’. This demonstrated successful achievement of the Communication assessment design criterion.

The oral component of this assessment type directly relates to the Communication criterion. Written notes, cue cards, PowerPoint presentations, or transcripts are valuable supports to the recorded oral. However, this evidence on its own is insufficient to support successful achievement at the C grade level or higher. In some instances, only teacher feedback was provided at moderation. This practice is discouraged, as it impedes moderators from being able to site directly students’ evidence of learning.

Task Design

Most schools took advantage of adopting or adapting the tasks described in the set of pre-approved learning and assessment plans available on the subject minisite. This allowed teachers an assessment framework on which to base their first year of teaching and assessing the newly revised Stage 1 English as An Additional Language subject outline.

When developing tasks for this assessment type, it is important for teachers to be clear about the specific features of the assessment design criteria being assessed. In some instances, the focus of assessment was on C1 — ‘Clarity and coherence of written and spoken expression, using appropriate vocabulary’, but C2 — ‘Demonstration of grammatical control and complexity’, which was not being assessed, impacted on the Communication assessment design criterion.

Students being given the opportunity to examine and deconstruct text types before producing their own was a good task design feature. One example was, *‘*After studying the literary devices of characterisation, setting, symbolism, and narrative structure, write an online review of one of the short stories, paying particular attention to the language and conventions of this text type for an “online” audience.’

The more successful responses were derived from tasks that were based on a shared specific text and strategically selected assessment design criteria, and had instructions that clearly communicated what was expected of students. Including too many specific features of the assessment design criteria limited student opportunity to show understanding within 600 words or a 5-minute oral.

Moderators noted a number of interesting, engaging tasks within this assessment type. Innovative tasks included:

* writing a response to Anh Do’s *The Happiest Refugee*, from the point of view of one of Anh’s friends/relatives
* presenting an oral response to the film *The Power of One*, by considering a theme such as believing in yourself, following your dreams, or rising above adversity
* reading Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival* and other migration stories to explore the messages and experiences by making connections to their own experience as an international student in a foreign country.

Providing scaffolding for assessment tasks supported students significantly. For example, providing a structure for reflective writing/speaking outlining what students need to do to produce a discussion or a recording of a documentary. However, in some cases over-scaffolding resulted in almost identical, formulaic responses (e.g. same topic sentences, same supporting information), which limited creativity.

Assessment Type 2: Interactive Study

Successful Achievement at the C Grade

Students completed either an interview or a discussion for this assessment type. To support students, tasks were designed with either the interview or the discussion as a focus for the whole class. The interview tended to be the most popular presented at moderation. Most schools weighted this assessment type at 25%.

As with Assessment Type 1, at the C grade students demonstrated appropriate use of language features and conventions when interpreting information, ideas, and opinions in the written report for the interview or texts studied for the discussion. Students were generally able to write and speak in a clear and coherent manner, quoting information gathered from the interviewee or references from the two or more texts studied to support a point of view. Moderators noted that the few grammatical errors did not impede the flow or general meaning of the information, ideas, and opinions. Students also demonstrated some analysis of their personal, social, and cultural perspectives in interviews and discussions, taking into account their particular audience.

Students tended to interview someone from a culture different from their own or someone who is an expert in a particular field. Students who chose to interview a person relatively unknown to them tended to be more thorough in their preparation and more focused in the interview. Students interviewed, for example, an ex-army serviceperson from the Republic of South Africa, a dad’s friend born in Afghanistan, and a radiologist.

Students presented the interview results in a written report that has two parts: the key findings of the interview and a reflection on the communication skills and strategies (e.g. oral communication skills) used in planning and conducting the interview. Reports at the C grade addressed both parts. Unfortunately some reports omitted the reflection component. While reports are generally written in the passive voice, given that students are required to reflect on their communication skills in planning and conducting the interview, statements in the first person enabled students to achieve at the C grade or higher.

The more successful responses in the discussion were those for which the teacher and/or other students asked open-ended questions that required extended responses and spontaneous use of language. It is important that the student leads the discussion. In some instances evidence at the C grade was limited by over-scaffolded questions and over-scripted discussions. Open-ended questions beginning with, for example, ‘discuss’, ‘explain’, ‘justify’, and ‘what do you think’ supported students to show clear evidence of the assessment design criteria for this assessment type.

Application of the Performance Standards

While students provided evidence of their learning *primarily* in relation to the Communication, Comprehension, and Application assessment design criteria, this doesn’t limit teachers from providing opportunities for students to demonstrate evidence of the Analysis criterion. Tasks provided opportunities for students to analyse when reflecting on the interview held or when discussing ideas, opinions, or perspectives discovered while exploring at least two different texts. This provided some student cohorts with greater confidence to address the Analysis criterion in Assessment Type 3: Language Study, where it is required.

When reflecting on communication skills in the written report, students were able to critique the types of questions they asked in the interview, analyse their use of non-verbal cues, and assess their ability to sustain a conversation. In so doing, they provided evidence of Ap1 —‘Use of language features and conventions for different purposes and audiences’ and An2 — ‘Analysis of ways in which texts are created for specific purposes and audiences’.

Some students appeared uncertain about how to reflect on their communication skills or report on their findings in the interview. Students need guidance to be able to do this successfully. Students must go beyond simply recounting what they did or found out. When students are able to provide justifications for their actions (in both preparing for and carrying out the activity), as well as contemplate how they could have done things differently, they were clearly able to achieve at the C grade or higher against the performance standards. In comprehending structure and language features for the interview (Cp2 — ‘Understanding of the purpose, structure, and language features of texts’), it is important that students clearly understand the purpose of this activity.

Task Design

The subject outline stipulates that the interview must be conducted in English and presented as a written 800-word report. In designing the task for this assessment type, teachers took advantage of adopting and/or adapting exemplar tasks available on the subject minisite. These provided a scaffolded approach for directing students to address specific aspects of the assessment design criteria.

The discussion is a presentation of a maximum of 5 minutes. It provides an opportunity for students to choose an idea, opinion, or perspective that arises in at least two texts. They present, explain, and discuss with their teacher and/or a small group of students the idea, opinion, or perspective they have studied. As the discussion is generated from at least two texts studied, students must reference key parts of the texts in order to address the Application assessment design criterion. As with Assessment Type 1, the more successful discussions used close to the maximum time of 5 minutes. This amount of time gave students more opportunity to meet the performance standards at the C grade or higher. Students were limited in achieving the C grade or higher if their discussion was only 2−3 minutes long.

Assessment Type 3: Language Study

Successful Achievement at the C Grade

At moderation, most schools presented student evidence of learning pending the final assessment task. This final task tended to be the language study. Of those presented, there was a mixture of written and oral evidence of learning weighted at 25%.

This assessment type is designed for students to identify and analyse aspects of language used in one or more texts. Popular examples of the language study analysed the reporting of a global event in a hard copy newspaper, an online news site and/or radio dialogue, or the language used to persuade others in advertisements and famous speeches. Achievement at the C grade or higher was evident with explicit teaching of rhetorical devices used to understand the language and techniques of persuasion.

Students demonstrated appropriate comprehension and interpretation of information, ideas, and opinions expressed in the language study where they understood the general purpose, structure, and language features of the text type studied. Students generally wrote and/or spoke in a clear and coherent manner. Students supported the identifying and analysing of aspects of language used in one or more texts by referring to specific sections of the text/s; for example, specific language in a political speech used to persuade others. Specific references from the range of sources used were interwoven in the students’ responses, and this strategy supported evidence at the C grade or higher. Students used vocabulary appropriate to the source of the language study.

Application of the Performance Standards

Students provided evidence of their learning *primarily* in relation to the Communication, Comprehension, and Analysis assessment design criteria. Some analysis of perspectives in texts, together with some description of ways that texts were created for specific purposes and audiences, supported students to demonstrate learning at the C grade of the performance standards.

PowerPoint presentations were an effective way of supporting oral presentations for this assessment type at the C grade or higher. Students who used cue cards as a *guide* expressed themselves more clearly, confidently, and fluently than did those who *read directly* from the cards. Students should avoid over-use of (presenting too much text on the slide) or over-reliance on (reading directly from the slide or their notes) PowerPoints.

Task Design

Clear structure was noted as a good feature of task design for this assessment type. It assisted students in their understanding of the task requirements and helped them provide evidence at the C grade or higher. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the maximum 800 words or 5 minutes of oral evidence, or the equivalent in multimodal form, to adequately address the assessment design criteria.

One interesting task was the development of a speech on a controversial issue: *‘*Is a nuclear site in SA good for us?’ Students were required to use persuasive language after having been taught rhetorical devices and studying famous speeches such as those by Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. The speech was digitally recorded, so students were required to use voice effectively. Another task required students to study technical language from a variety of media and construct a ‘how to’ video instructing a lay audience in a specialist area, such as how to make sushi or how to treat and bandage a wound. Students provided an accompanying storyboard/script illustrating each step of the process described in their video.

Another interesting language study required students to watch episodes of *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, and *Futurama* and analyse aspects of the language used to critique an aspect of society.

Preparation and Packaging of Student Materials

It is pleasing that student materials were generally packed in accordance with the information sheet — The preparation and packaging of materials for Stage 1 Moderation and that teachers provided a copy of their current approved learning and assessment plan. Variations to tasks stated in the learning and assessment plans were noted on the addendum. In some instances, however, schools sent more samples than were necessary, including more than three C grade samples or A and B samples together with C and D grade evidence. Where C and/or D sets of evidence are prepared and packaged together with sets of evidence prepared and packaged at the A and/or B grades, the A and or/B grades are not moderated.

Teachers are asked to check that all work on discs and other electronic media has successfully been copied and will be accessible to the moderators. In addition, where recordings are submitted for moderation, teachers are asked that they check the quality of the recordings for clarity, as background noise, at times, made it difficult for moderators to hear the student voice. It is important that all electronic media is clearly labelled, and, if the work of more than one student is on a disc or USB drive, that each student is identified by their SACE registration number. One way of ensuring correct identification is to include, in the order in which they appear in the recording, a list of students, their SACE registration numbers, and the name of the assessment type. Teachers should submit work in accordance with the Submission of Electronic Files (document) or Preparation of Non-written Materials and Submission of Electronic Files (video).

Teachers are reminded that a checklist of an oral or feedback notes for an oral are not sufficient evidence on their own to support assessment decisions for tasks, in the absence of the student’s own evidence.

The majority of samples viewed were pending completion of the final task. *Stage 1 Information and Guidelines* give more information about selecting a representative sample for moderation.

General Comments

Teachers are encouraged to access the online clarifying and benchmarking activities on the English as an Additional Language minisite (Stage 1 > Support materials*)* 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.

Moderators noted teachers’ smooth transition to the new subject outline in 2016 and, in the main, this was affirming of their understanding of the new performance standards.

An interesting and effective approach to the study of this subject was a thematic link across the assessment types, in which the set of tasks were interconnected. This helped students engage with the material and develop their literacy skills during the semester, as they were able to demonstrate growth in comprehension and application of their learning. For example, one learning and assessment plan focused on the global issue of wealth and poverty and was assessed through four tasks that involved:

* the writing of a letter from the perspective of a character from Andy Mulligan’s novel *Trash* (Assessment Type 1: Responding to Texts)
* presenting an oral after viewing a clip promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations) and comparing its effectiveness to that of the YouTube clip ‘We are the People’ (Assessment Type 1: Responding to Texts)
* a 5-minute student-led discussion including the use of short video clips, music, and photos to address the question, ‘Can an individual make a difference to world poverty?’ (Assessment Type 2: Interactive Study)
* analysing the language (words and visual) used to persuade people to fund global charitable organisations after watching television, magazine, or internet advertisements and presenting findings in the form of two or three annotated advertisements with an additional commentary summarising their understanding of the persuasive devices (Assessment Type 3: Language Study).

A technique used by some teachers to support students’ understanding of the specific features of the assessment design criteria was to provide students with a couple of guiding questions relevant to the specific feature being assessed in a task. For example, in responding to a text task, students were required to view a film and present an oral response on the topic of emigration from the point of view of a character in the film, addressing specific questions such as:

* Cp1 – ‘Comprehension and interpretation of information, ideas, and opinions in texts’
  + What information is the film presenting?
  + How does the character you have selected influence the events in the film?
* C1 – ‘Clarity and coherence of spoken expression, using appropriate vocabulary’
  + What tenses do I need to use to discuss the issue?
  + How can I use intonation (stress patterns), and is my pronunciation correct?

It was clear that teachers provided detailed feedback to students regarding how their work met the individual specific features of the performance standards for each task. This progressive feedback was instrumental in helping students develop and improve their learning. Teachers, in the main, highlighted the relevant grade descriptors from the performance standards to show students the level of achievement they demonstrated. This gave students an awareness of the skills required to achieve at the higher grades.

Teachers should be mindful to select the most appropriate instructional language when designing tasks. Instructional verbs such as ‘explain’, ‘discuss’, or ‘evaluate’ demand higher levels of comprehension, communication, analysis, and application than, for example, ‘state’ and ‘summarise’ do. The language in the task should allow scope for students to be able to demonstrate their ability at the highest levels of the performance standards. Well-designed tasks take into account entry level questions that allow for C achievement, while also allowing scope for the highest level of achievement.

Teachers are encouraged to support students to reach both maximum word counts and oral lengths to provide them with the scope in which to demonstrate achievement of the performance standards at the C grade or higher.

Assessment at Stage 1 is 100% school assessed; tasks are set and marked by the teacher. Moderation seeks to confirm teacher assessment grades. When confirming assessment decisions, moderators found it extremely helpful where teacher grades and an overall performance standard rubric across the set of evidence were provided on student work.