

Geography

2011 Assessment Report



Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

GEOGRAPHY

2011 ASSESSMENT REPORT

OVERVIEW

Assessment 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.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The assessment types reflected the learning scope of the course and student performance was judged against the assessment design criteria using the performance standards for each assessment type.

The fieldwork report provided opportunities for students to use a range of fieldwork techniques in order to investigate an issue, or test a hypothesis of their choosing. The most successful students developed a clearly expressed focus for their inquiry, and employed a range of techniques to collect substantial data. This allowed for a detailed analysis and comprehensive report, which led to sound evaluation of findings and methods.

The inquiry gave students the opportunity to investigate and research an aspect of the option topic of interest to them. The guidelines directed students to use a variety of geographical skills to analyse their chosen issue. The most successful students developed a clearly-worded question that was framed around a specific issue with a spatial dimension, and also included sufficient secondary data to allow for effective analysis.

The fieldwork and inquiry must be selected from two different option topics. If a negotiated topic is selected, approval should be sought from the appropriate SACE Board Officer. Please refer to the relevant section of the SACE website for information regarding the guidelines.

The examination was deemed to be challenging but not exclusionary, with a broad range of marks, and questions that covered the course. It was aimed at an appropriate standard for students completing Year 12 Geography.

SCHOOL-BASED ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Fieldwork

This year a number of students produced outstanding work that demonstrated the performance standards at the highest levels of achievement. The better responses demonstrated comprehensive geographical knowledge and understanding of fieldwork. Students were able to select and apply a range of relevant geographical and fieldwork skills in completing their reports. Excellent survey design, utilising highly relevant questions, was evident in the better responses. At times, however, the relevance of some survey questions to the fieldwork topic was unclear. Students

would benefit from further teacher guidance in developing survey questions to obtain meaningful data. A range of highly effective mapping techniques was evident including the effective use of overlays. Hand-drawn and GIS-generated maps, as well as aerial photographs, were well integrated in a number of fieldwork reports. A good range of relevant fieldwork techniques was identified at moderation, and this was especially evident in the better responses. There was significant evidence to suggest that many students are highly skilled at using a range of information and communication technologies (ICT), however, the evaluation of fieldwork is an area that some students could improve on by considering the strengths and weaknesses of their technique when applying their chosen geographical and fieldwork skills. Many students demonstrated a high degree of skill in utilising a range of techniques to manipulate, integrate, and present the information gathered, including titles, annotations, sourcing data, and in-text referencing. The best responses demonstrated perceptive analysis of both spatial patterns and processes. These students went beyond description of the results and considered why the results had been obtained. A number of students attempted to analyse the complex interactions and interdependence of people and the natural environment, on a local scale, to varying degrees of success.

The wording of the guiding question or hypothesis can significantly influence the ability of students to successfully address the performance standards at the highest levels. Almost all student responses were in report form as required by the subject outline. The best responses were well planned and organised, and the students' reports considered the spatial and temporal nature of their chosen topic. Small, local scale topics tended to be completed successfully.

A wide range of option topics were chosen which represented the best possible opportunities for developing, selecting, and applying a range of geographical and fieldwork skills. Outstanding fieldwork was completed when students considered both the temporal and spatial nature of the topic. The inventiveness of students in developing their own fieldwork techniques to match the particular needs of their topic is to be commended.

Very few students exceeded the word count. Students successfully used a range of strategies to stay within the word count.

The moderation panel identified some areas that teachers might focus on in order to assist their students to perform at all levels of the performance standards including the highest level. These include:

- making fieldwork data (primary data) the central focus – secondary data should not be the focus of the fieldwork
- ensuring the fieldwork has an appropriate geographical context
- considering how manipulation of GIS could add to the geographical context
- using a range of fieldwork methods to enable more comprehensive analysis, with each fieldwork method being evaluated
- carefully designing surveys
- avoiding simple description of data – a range of techniques can be used to enhance the presentation of the data
- careful structuring of the report
- using a statistically significant sample size in the fieldwork
- avoiding drawing conclusions that are not supported by the results obtained
- demonstrating the effective use of a range of relevant geographical terminology
- making relevant and justified recommendations, given their results.

Assessment Type 2: Inquiry

Students were able to select, apply, and evaluate a variety of geographical skills and technologies in their inquiry. The best inquiries were effectively structured by using the 'suggested structure' in the subject outline and performance standards. Most students should be commended for the highly integrated nature of their inquiries and use of a range of technologies and forms (tables, pictures, mind maps, three circle diagrams, and flow charts). The best responses demonstrated a range of methods of communication to present information, enabling students to illustrate the interdependent nature of the issue.

Analysis of spatial patterns and processes related to geographical issues was evident in most students' work. The highly complex nature of the interactions of people and the natural environment in a local, national, and global context was evident in the better responses. Most students effectively evaluated the environmental, social, political and/or economic implications of responses to geographical issues by using a variety of methods including text, tables, flowcharts and mind maps.

Many students demonstrated strong research skills and a high level of referencing. The best inquiries included perceptive analysis and evaluation of the conflicting demands and diverse values, views, and perceptions related to their chosen geographical issue. A number of students skilfully evaluated the relevance, bias, accuracy, and usefulness of various sources. These students often sought conflicting opinions to contrast the viewpoints of experts.

Few students provided in-depth reflection on sustainability when examining geographical issues. An implied, not explicit, understanding of sustainability was evident in most students' inquiries. A number of students omitted to discuss any aspect of sustainability and that did not assist them to achieve at the highest level.

The best inquiries tended to be framed around a question that had a spatial aspect. Issues structured around an appropriate question enabled students to achieve at the highest levels. A number of formats were utilised by students in the presentation of this assessment type although the most commonly used format was the report. There were fewer broadsheets, and these were variable in standard; there were very few digital slide presentations.

Students are to be commended for selecting a wide range of controversial geographical issues including Nuclear Energy, Ecotourism and Impact of Climate Change on Malaria.

Almost all students met the required word count. Students successfully used a range of strategies to keep within the word limit by including flow charts, pictures, graphs and mind maps.

The moderation panel identified some areas that teachers might focus on in order to assist their students to perform at all levels of the performance standards including the highest level. These include:

- choosing a topic with a geographical focus from the options topics, not the core
- seeking approval from the SACE Board for negotiated topics
- developing and adapting individual maps for the intended purpose and avoiding maps that are cluttered or unclear
- including succinct analysis rather than description

- using a range of forms of communication in addition to text
- avoiding topics that are too general
- developing a structure related to the performance standards
- ensuring the impact of the issue can be considered at local, national, and global levels
- using recent and highly relevant sources
- structuring the inquiry, as detailed in the subject outline
- using rich geographical terminology
- including an accurate and detailed bibliography following the conventional format.

Assessment Type 3: Folio

This year, students produced outstanding work that met the performance standards at the highest level. The best student responses demonstrated comprehensive geographical knowledge and understanding across the range of assessment tasks in the folio, and the tasks were rich in relevant geographical terminology. Many students were able to successfully select, apply, and evaluate a variety of geographical skills and technologies in their folio. A number of responses were well-integrated using a range of technologies and forms (tables, pictures, mind maps, three circle diagrams, and flow charts). The best responses tended to occur where the teacher had structured the tasks around the assessment design criteria and the performance standards.

Analysis of spatial patterns and processes related to geographical issues was evident in student work by the use of a range of maps, tables, annotations, and charts. The better responses demonstrated an outstanding range of relevant information in various forms. The highly complex nature of the interactions of people and the natural environment in a local and/or national and/or global context was evident in the best responses. When required, many students effectively evaluated the environmental, social, political and/or economic implications of responses to geographical issues using a variety of methods including text, tables, flowcharts and mind maps. The best responses demonstrated perceptive analysis and evaluation of conflicting demands and diverse values, views, and perceptions. Moderators noted that also in this assessment type there was not generally a clear focus on sustainability when exploring geographical issues although an inferred understanding of sustainability was evident in most students' folios.

When tasks were designed specifically to address the assessment design criteria success was more likely. Some teachers limited the number of specific features of the assessment design criteria in the design of their assessment tasks to enable students to achieve at the highest level while adhering to the word count limit. Assessments in the folio should relate directly to the topics in the core. Some of the assessment tasks presented in the folio were too simplistic to enable students to achieve at the highest levels.

There was a broad range of assessment tasks developed by teachers. The Ecological Footprints assessment task was commonly used and Migration, Population Pyramids, and Population Sustainability were common topics. A range of water-related topics was also presented as evidence in the folio.

Teachers are encouraged to carefully consider the type of assessment tasks presented for the folio. The nature of the task is significant in enabling students to

meet the prescribed word count. Examinations or tests with a number of extended responses made it difficult for students to stay within the word limit.

The moderation panel identified some areas that teachers might focus on in order to assist their students perform at all levels of the performance standards including the highest level. These include:

- limiting the number of specific features of the assessment design criteria to be addressed in each task. Assessment tasks that require students to satisfy many specific features make it difficult for students to succeed at the highest level
- avoiding large and complex tests with a number of extended responses which can make it more difficult to stay within the word count
- submitting scripts for PowerPoint presentations to assist moderators to understand the teachers' assessment decisions
- designing tasks with a clear geographical focus
- considering that 'exam' or 'test' style assessments appeared to significantly disadvantage some students
- considering that the nature of the questions in some assessment tasks (e.g. mapping tests), did not allow students to demonstrate analysis and application, as identified in the learning and assessment plan.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 4: Examination

The external source materials consisted of one double page of approximately A2 size. Side one contained a map of Robertson, South Africa, global locational information, and a key; while side two contained a range of information about the Nile Basin. The size of these extra materials was chosen to make them accessible to all students, and not too unwieldy. The questions in the examination booklet required the students to carefully consider this extra source material as well as use a variety of different stimulus materials including graphs, maps, tables and images that related to areas of the core topic. It appeared that most of the students were able to access and understand the range of resources; however, teachers need to emphasise to their students the need to read instructions carefully and to spend time considering the various stimulus materials.

Questions varied in complexity with some requiring recall of key knowledge, and others requiring application of skills and demonstration of deeper understanding, synthesis, and analysis. Students were expected to be able to apply their conceptual knowledge to unfamiliar material, and many were able to do this with varying levels of success. The examination paper was designed to show the relationship between all the elements of the core – population, development, resources, and water. Many of the questions focused on the connections between two or more of these elements. One of the extended questions (Question 17) clearly required the students to be able to sort a range of information related to water, development, and population, and to draw justified conclusions.

The examination was deemed to be of appropriate complexity to assess the students' performance against the assessment design criteria of *knowledge and understanding* and *analysis*. The setting panel felt that the elements that make up the core are very integrated and interdependent. Therefore, there was an attempt to integrate the topics of the core across the whole examination to reduce the impression of

'sections' relating to separate parts of the core. The range of short-answer questions offered the opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and ideas. The extended answers allowed them to make connections between the case studies and examples covered by their course and the material of the core. The language used in the examination allowed the entire student cohort access to the questions.

The more successful students read the instructions carefully, focused on the relevant stimulus material, considered the number of marks available and wrote in plain English. Most students attempted all parts of the paper and there was little evidence to suggest that they were under time pressure. The two more extended-style questions (Questions 17 and 24), were attempted by most students.

The first section of the paper assessed a range of mapping skills. It was surprising to see that about 50% of the students only scored around half marks for answers in this section. Teachers are advised to explicitly teach the full range of mapping and spatial skills as shown in the subject outline to ensure that students are fully prepared for this section of the paper.

Questions 8 and 9 required students to understand the connections between processes at work in the water cycle, and spatial variations at ground level. The most successful answers showed that the students had read the questions carefully and had examined the stimulus material in detail.

In Question 10 many students misread the instructions in part (b) or did not understand the term 'abiotic' despite it being explained in brackets. Some students referred to the biotic environment, or listed two similar ways that dung beetles benefit the abiotic environment, rather than two distinctly different ways.

Questions 11-16 focused on the connection between water, resources, development and population. They were completed with varying success. The best answers showed that the student had read the question carefully and looked for the command terms or key instructions. Careful consideration of the marks available was also an important element in success.

For Question 17 the most successful answers were able to focus on the inequality of the current Nile Basin situation, the relevance of a large rural population, along with the increase in population, areas to be irrigated, and poverty. Students were successful at selecting supporting evidence from the broadsheet, but some just re-wrote the key points. A few students appeared to be unprepared to answer this type of question, and teachers are advised to offer their students practice in constructing a more extended answer. Markers noted that the most successful answers were well-organised and used paragraphs to break up responses into relevant topics. In addition these students made clear reference to the stimulus materials. Students are advised to read this type of question carefully, and to break it down into the key instructions. Briefly planning an answer before writing in the examination booklet would assist in developing a more organised and coherent response. Where a question clearly asks for supporting evidence for the resources provided, students are advised to use them as fully as possible. The primary focus of this question was the students' ability to synthesise a range of geographical information and data and use it to develop an argument in support of one point of view. Simply regurgitating key data or describing the situation does not fulfil this aim.

Question 19 focused on students' knowledge of demography, and responses showed a sound level of understanding of the key elements.

Question 22 required evaluation as well as a brief description of a policy. Few students read this question carefully enough and did not evaluate their choice of policy. The best answers were clearly written and showed that the student had read the question carefully.

Question 23(a) was well done, and most students were able to identify the key differences between the two countries shown. However part (b) was poorly done with many students filling all the boxes with A or B and showing a lack of understanding of the demographic transition model.

Question 24, the most successful students read the question carefully and used the structure to guide their answers. There was evidence of some confusion about the difference between forced and voluntary migration. The strongest answers were able to clearly explain what a forced migration is and show the reasons for some of this kind of migration. In addition, examples were well chosen and demonstrated a range of impacts of these migrations for the host countries. More successful students showed evidence of some planning of their answer; they were guided by the question structure and wrote in clear and concise language.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

When packaging materials for marking or moderation teachers are advised of the following points to ensure that work can be read easily and efficiently:

- clearly mark on the learning and assessment plan any changes or adjustments made during the year, by using the addendum
- clearly record the student's number onto the materials
- sort materials by student and carefully label
- include the learning and assessment plan and SACE paperwork
- include marking schemes and/or assessment guides for the folio tasks with the student work to assist moderators to understand teachers' assessment decisions
- include cover sheets for the fieldwork that clearly identify the option topic
- do not include appendices containing completed surveys etc
- ensure that the correct assessment design criteria are addressed in each assessment type and that they match the evidence in the samples provided for moderation.

Schools are also advised to give their students practice in answering examination-style questions of varying design, under timed conditions.

Chief Assessor
Geography