

English as Second Language Studies

2011 Assessment Report



Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE STUDIES

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.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Issue Analysis

There was evidence that students developed a thorough understanding and engaged with significant social issues through the issue analysis. This assessment type presented the greatest challenge in task design and assessment this year. In particular, teachers should pay attention to the balance between content and process in the written and oral tasks; to designing tasks that allow students to achieve at a high standard within the published criteria; and to submitting appropriate materials for moderation.

All of the assessment design criteria are assessed in the issue analysis. A range of specific features can be assessed across the written and oral tasks, so that there may be some specific features addressed more than once, while others are not repeated. The exception is the specific feature on the use of interpersonal language to sustain spoken interaction (C4), under *communication*, which can apply only to an oral task. Overall, the teacher should choose the specific features based on the class context and task. However, it is important to have some variation in the focus of the written and oral tasks so that students can demonstrate different skills for each task.

The most successful tasks were designed so that there was a balance between content and process across the two tasks. In some cases, there was a greater focus on content in the written task, and more focus on the process in the oral task. In the majority of examples, discussion of the content and process were separated – in the written task through separate paragraphs or headings, and in the oral task by direct questions about the content and process. This kind of structure supported students of varying abilities to demonstrate achievement of the performance standards.

For the written task, most texts were in a report format, sometimes with headings, and sometimes using structured topic sentences. This was a more successful approach than other text types, (for example, a formal letter), as it allowed students to address the performance standards quite directly without distractors of additional contextual, structural or linguistic requirements. Those tasks that required students to use in-text referencing and a reference list allowed performance at a higher standard in specific features such as An2 under *analysis*, and Ap1 and Ap4 under *application*.

In the oral component, the most successful discussions were conducted so as to allow students to formulate many of their responses during the course of the discussion. This can

be achieved through the teacher beginning with open questions then pursuing a more specific line of inquiry in response to student answers.

Furthermore, the most successful discussions included questions that explicitly focused on the evaluation of the research process and sources. Although general questions such as, 'Tell me about your research process', enabled well-prepared students to elaborate on the adequacy of research and sources, not all responses provided evidence for a high level of *knowledge and understanding* or *analysis*. Inclusion of more specific questions such as, 'Why did you find those texts less useful?' encouraged students to evaluate rather than just recount their research processes. More successful students used a range of more nuanced, evaluative vocabulary, which should be explicitly introduced and modelled.

There were some examples of this task in which students integrated their discussion of the content and process, outlining information and then explaining how this understanding was developed through research and analysis. This was successful for proficient and confident students, but provided an extra challenge for some students.

In a small number of discussions, students presented extended, rehearsed responses. This type of response does not meet the criteria for a discussion, and in particular limits student achievement in aspects of *application* and *communication*.

Students were engaged with a range of contemporary and relevant topics. One successful approach involved exploring a broad class topic (such as social networking), and allowing students to choose a specific aspect (such as the influence of mobile social networking on study). The shared class topics allowed students to develop a common set of knowledge through collaboration and discussion, while the individual focus allowed students to develop more expert understanding and vocabulary.

In a small number of cases, students analysed the same issue as in their investigation. Although this is not expressly disallowed in the subject outline, repeating a topic does disadvantage students. Choosing different topics allows students to demonstrate a higher standard of understanding, research, and analysis, and can provide evidence of performance in *knowledge and understanding* (KU1, KU4), *analysis* (An2) and *application* (Ap 4).

It is important that tasks are designed so that students can meet the assessment design criteria within the specified word limit for written tasks, or time limit for oral tasks. Overall results may be adjusted where the words or times are excessive.

Recordings (audio or video) of the discussion must be submitted for moderation. Notes or cue cards used by the students are also helpful for moderators.

Assessment Type 2: Text Production

The text production assessment type addresses all four assessment design criteria. The essay task provided an opportunity for students to demonstrate all of the assessment design criteria, while the creative writing task tended to focus on *communication* and *application* as distinct from *analysis*. In addition, some creative tasks also gave students the opportunity to demonstrate understanding of the relationship between contexts and texts, and the structure and language features of a particular text type.

Students were most successful in essay writing when teachers specified a particular type of essay, for example, 'write an exposition essay arguing ...,' or 'write an essay discussing whether ...' Students benefited from explicit modelling and scaffolding of the aspects of that

text type. Questions with multiple parts, such as ‘summarise the film and explain why...’, were difficult for students to address successfully within one cohesive text.

Many tasks focused successfully on issues arising in texts. There were a number of such tasks that used a film or fiction text as the initial stimulus, supported by a small number of additional articles presenting information and opinions about an issue arising in the text. In these tasks, students were better able to analyse and synthesise information, as well as writing in the appropriate genre and register. In tasks where the focus was a single fiction text, there was a tendency for students to include a high proportion of recount in their essay, which limited achievement in *knowledge and understanding*, *analysis* and *application*.

The most successful texts used for the essay were contemporary texts giving up-to-date information about current issues. It is not intended that the text production essay be based on past examination texts, as the content of these texts may now be out of date and no longer factually accurate, or representative of broader issues. Instead, students should have the opportunity to engage with current media, information, and opinion texts. An interesting range of contemporary stimulus texts were chosen, including *Mao’s Last Dancer*, *Bran Nue Dae* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*.

The task design for creative writing was very varied, and a range of successful tasks were undertaken. The most successful creative writing tasks allowed a degree of student choice and creativity in producing an original text, rather than responding to an existing text. This allowed students to present imaginative ideas and perspectives using a range of expressive language.

Students were also able to achieve well when the text type required was clear, for example, a diary or news report. Less well-defined text types, such as reflections, require explicit modelling and scaffolding in order to successfully demonstrate understanding of purpose and audience, and text appropriate language features.

Many creative writing tasks asked students to write a formal letter, with varying degrees of success. Formal letter tasks were more successful when there was clarity about the character of the writer, the context of the letter, and the ideas being expressed. Other genres such as reflections, diary entries, or media reports, give students the opportunity to use different registers, and a greater range of creative or expressive language.

There were some examples of writing alternative endings or additional scenes for stimulus texts. These were most successful when students were scaffolded in elaborating on characters’ reactions, reasons, and interactions between characters, rather than simply recounting events.

A range of stimulus texts was used in creative writing, including youth novels, short stories, films, and poetry. Stronger tasks were based around topics and texts that students could relate to in order to draw inspiration from ideas and characters.

Students should be allowed the opportunity to draft their writing for both text production tasks. Students may be disadvantaged if they are required to write their final piece under examination conditions. However, writing the first draft under supervision can be successful if students are then able to re-draft their work.

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

The investigation addresses all of the assessment design criteria. Overall the investigation tasks were designed to allow achievement across all the criteria, including at the highest level.

The most successful investigations addressed topics that were controversial, contemporary, and locally relevant. The better topics were limited in their scope, perhaps to a local context or a particular group of people. This allowed students to explore the topic in more depth and generate meaningful conclusions. Contemporary topics allowed students to access varied and relevant sources of information and to engage their readers and tutorial participants.

In the more successful investigations, students were able to examine, analyse, and evaluate different opinions about a controversial issue, and draw a solid conclusion. Topics that were not controversial tended to elicit information reports, which did not allow students to demonstrate analysis. However, it should be noted that very provocative topics can be difficult to present appropriately and may alienate readers and tutorial participants.

Teachers should support students in developing and defining appropriate topics. It is also important to consider from the outset the degree to which a student audience can engage with the topic during the tutorial.

The written tasks were generally well-accomplished, demonstrating research, understanding, analysis, structure, and language. Most written presentations used a report structure, organised under headings. The majority of students used in-text referencing and reference lists (as opposed to bibliographies) successfully to demonstrate their understanding of text in context, use of evidence, and recording of ideas.

The reduction in word limit presented a challenge for some teachers. It is important that students complete the tasks within the specified word and time limits, as they are disadvantaged by exceeding these limits. Defining a specific investigation topic, and including the information most essential to developing the thesis can achieve this.

In the investigation, the abstract is intended to be a summary of the content, rather than an explanation of research processes and sources.

There were a variety of tutorial structures that allowed students to successfully demonstrate the performance standards. One successful structure began with a presentation accompanied by a slide show (approximately 4 minutes), followed by a short question and answer session (approximately 1 minute), and then a discussion for the remainder of the allocated time.

Another successful approach for the more proficient students integrated the presentation of information with the discussion, with the presenter asking students to suggest explanations or information, and then filling in gaps in understanding, or offering alternative points of view. This allowed for students to interact throughout the tutorial.

More successful students had practiced their tutorials so that they were very familiar with the content and structure, and had control of the time. However, heavily rehearsed presentations limited the students' success in the performance standards including fluency, interpersonal language, and communication in context.

A number of successful tutorials had students presenting to a small group of four or five students rather than a larger class. This allowed presenters to speak more confidently, and

encouraged all audience members to participate in the discussion, which supported the presenter in actively leading the discussion.

There was some advantage to allowing audience members to prepare some questions in advance in order for tutorials to run efficiently. However, presenters must be able to respond to these questions spontaneously, rather than preparing responses, in order to demonstrate understanding of the topic as well as interpersonal language. Students should also be taught a range of ways to respond appropriately to audience members' contributions, by evaluating or linking to other ideas.

Whatever the format, students benefit from explicit modelling and scaffolding of presentation and discussion techniques, as well as the opportunity to practice the tutorial.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

It is important for teachers to use the learning and assessment plan addendum and 'Variation in Assessment' form to provide information about any changes to tasks or missing pieces of work.

Packaging and presentation of materials is also very important for efficient and accurate moderation. The most accessible evidence included the student work without teacher corrections, a copy of the task sheet used by students, and a copy of performance standards indicating the assessment by the teacher, including comments. Clear evidence of teacher assessment allowed moderators to confirm teacher standards or clearly identify areas where adjustments should be made.

Tasks should be clearly labelled with the assessment type and student's name or SACE registration numbers, *not* with any school based identity numbers. Drafts, student notes, and formative tasks should not be submitted, as they cannot be used for evidence of student achievement.

Oral recordings must be included for both the issue analysis discussion and the investigation tutorial. Video clips have proven to be useful for moderators as they provide additional evidence of *communication*. It is helpful to moderators if recordings begin with a clear statement of the task and the student's name or SACE registration number. In addition, these details should be included in the file name.

Teachers should check the requirements for submission of electronic samples before oral tasks are undertaken, so that appropriate recordings can be made. Teachers should confirm that files work and are audible before submission to the SACE Board. It is more useful to submit a disc for each assessment type containing the work of multiple students, rather than a disc for each student containing both assessment types. Teachers should maintain backup copies of all recordings in case of problems with the files provided to the SACE Board.

It is important for teachers to check the SACE guidelines about helping students draft their work. Excessive drafting may be in contravention of the SACE policy on redrafting and reuse of assessed work. However, students are severely disadvantaged if they do not have the opportunity to draft written work or practice oral tasks. Teachers wishing to conduct some tasks under 'test conditions' may consider having students write rough copies under supervision, and then allow time for drafting.

It is in the best interests of teachers, and the expectation of the SACE Board that where classes have been combined into single assessment groups, teachers work together to

agree on the results for all students in the assessment group before submitting student result sheets to the SACE Board.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The majority of tasks were appropriately designed to support student achievement, and assessment was generally at the appropriate standard. Moderation generally confirmed the assessment standards of teachers. Some grades were adjusted down one or two grade levels, while a few moved up one or two levels. In a small minority of cases, where task design did not allow students to address the assessment design criteria, grades were further reduced.

Teachers are advised to use the exemplars available online to assist with task design and assessment standards. Professional development workshops such as clarifying forums are a good opportunity for teachers to check requirements and standards before assessing student work. The experience gained through moderating is also most valuable for teachers in understanding the assessment standards and seeing varied examples of successful task design.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 4: Examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The examination enabled students to demonstrate the skills they had acquired during the year and allowed them to show achievement against the performance standards. While the responses to the listening exam were generally of a good standard, markers commented on a number of students having difficulty responding to the texts in the written examination. These students showed a limited understanding of what they had read and viewed, and thus their responses did not adequately address the questions.

Section 1: Listening Comprehension

Part A

In this section students were required to demonstrate an understanding of the text and respond in either complete sentences or a few words. Part A of the listening exam focused on the performance standards for *knowledge and understanding* (KU1, KU4) and *communication* (C1, C2). Most students found Part A more challenging than Part B. The students who were more successful carefully read the question and ensured that they understood exactly what it was asking. It was also important to carefully follow the instructions given at the start of the examination that explained which questions must be in complete sentences. It is essential to follow these instructions to receive maximum marks.

Many students struggled labelling the chart for Question 1, and only a few students received full marks for this question. The better responses focused on the key words and were careful to ensure that unnecessary language was excluded. Generally the questions that required exact answers were found to be difficult. Another question that required careful consideration of language in order to answer successfully was Question 3. The better responses showed understanding and were able to communicate the comparison between older and younger Australians.

Successful responses to Questions 2, 3, and 5 used key words from the questions to write the answer in a complete sentence. It was also important that these key words were spelled correctly as simple errors may have caused marks to be lost. Writing concise answers, with relevant supporting details, is essential to achieve maximum marks.

Part B

Students seemed more confident with this section and showed a good understanding of writing in paragraphs of extended prose. Part B of the listening examination focused on the performance standards for *knowledge and understanding* (KU1, KU4), *analysis* (An2) and *communication* (C1, C3). Most students used a topic sentence and showed elaboration with details from the text. However, the more successful students used key words from the question to construct their topic sentences and were careful not to include the answer as part of this sentence. It was still important for students to carefully read the question and focus on the answer in their response. There was also a need for further elaboration with details from the texts.

The better responses for Question 6 focused on the criticisms made of bottled water, and were careful to separate this from information about sport and diet soft drinks. Many students needed to include more detail in their answers to ensure that they received full marks. For example, a criticism of bottled water is that it contributes '60,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually'; however, many students excluded either the amount of gas or that this was an annual occurrence, and thus their discussion lacked evidence.

Responses to Question 7 were generally done well, with a good understanding of organisation and the ability to link different ideas within the paragraphs. The linking of ideas allowed students to demonstrate their understanding and showed synthesis of the information. While the better responses organised the answer into two paragraphs, some students successfully answered the question in one well-organised paragraph. The common ways of organising the answer was: either into a paragraph about advice and another one about warnings; or a paragraph about sports drinks and another one about diet soft drinks. However, there were many other ways of organising this answer to be able to receive full marks. Students who demonstrated a clear distinction between the two types of drinks were more successful.

Section 2: Written Paper

Part A

Part A of the written examination focused on the performance standards for:

Knowledge and Understanding

KU1 *Knowledge and understanding of the ideas, concepts, and issues in the texts.*

This included assessing how the student had demonstrated an understanding of what they had read in the texts, and their understanding of the ideas they were developing in their essay.

KU3 *Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which the essay is composed for specific purposes and audiences.*

This was demonstrated when students structured the essay appropriately including:

- introduction (general statement, clear statement of position, preview of arguments)
- body (several paragraphs with a topic sentence, elaboration/evidence and

- in-text referencing)
- conclusion (re-states position, short summary of argument)
- appropriate and formal academic language.

KU4 *Knowledge and understanding of context-specific or technical vocabulary.*

Students who were able to use technical language relevant to the topic and language appropriate to developing an argument achieved well for this criterion.

Analysis

An2 *Location, recording, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of ideas, information, and opinions from a range of texts.*

High levels of achievement were evident when students found and correctly referenced information, incorporated ideas from different texts into one paragraph, and appropriately paraphrased the information.

Application

Ap1 *Selection and use of information from all texts.*

Ap3 *Use of text-appropriate language features to make meaning.*

Ap4 *Use of evidence from a range of sources to build logical and coherent arguments.*

Communication

C1 *Clarity and coherence, using appropriate vocabulary.*

C2 *Demonstration of grammatical control and complexity.*

C3 *Use of formal and objective language.*

There was a fairly even distribution between responses that explored either the positive or the negative effects of computer games on people's lives. The better essays clearly stated a position in the introduction and focused on this argument throughout the response. However, there were a small number of students who were able to effectively introduce an idea from the opposite position and then refute this using evidence from the text. Overall, most students who attempted this strategy did not do so effectively and the essays often became discussions, and thus the marks were affected.

There was a significant amount of information from the texts, which students were generally able to organise effectively. However, the better responses were able to synthesise this information and paraphrase the evidence to support the argument. The better essays avoided copying slabs of information and were able to link different points from different texts. Some essays listed evidence, which was appropriately organised, but did not convey understanding of the information being used. This approach caused marks to be lost. Also, many essays lacked the required length, which meant candidates were not able to show enough knowledge and understanding of the ideas, concepts and issues from all the texts. To improve in this area there is a need for students to further develop strengths in the skills of location, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The more successful essays showed an ability to find information, ideas, and opinions from all texts and then organise these into paragraphs and also organise them within the paragraphs.

Many students showed a thorough contextual understanding of the topic – computer games – however, responses should not include prior knowledge as evidence to support arguments. The purpose of the written response is not to evaluate prior knowledge, but for students to read, comprehend, and use the information given when writing their response. As the main ideas in the texts were not complex, students were expected to show their skill by

establishing links between ideas and constructing convincing arguments. The most successful essays showed a complex understanding between the different points, within each paragraph, and were often able to establish cause, effect, and progression of ideas.

Successful introductions very briefly introduced a general statement about the topic in one or two sentences. However, many introductions generally explored the topic and often lacked focus. It is also important for the introduction to clearly state the position being taken in the essay and also to briefly preview the arguments. The less successful essays did not identify a clear stance and tried to generally explore the question. Many less successful responses also started arguing in the introduction by exploring the evidence in detail.

Most essays had a clear structure and were able to effectively organise the ideas into paragraphs, under topic sentences. Essays that explored the negative impact were commonly organised into paragraphs exploring disconnection from the real world, health, and addiction. Many of the more successful essays that explored the positive impact of games were organised into paragraphs exploring social interaction, educational benefits, and social improvement. However, there were many other ways to organise the ideas and still achieve full marks.

Planning is an important part of success in the essay. The more successful responses showed careful consideration about essay development, clearly foreshadowing the arguments in the introduction and then exploring them in this order. There was also mostly effective use of transition signals between paragraphs, but within paragraphs transition is an area that many students need to further develop.

There was significant variation in how students used evidence from the texts. The more successful students were able to demonstrate a sound understanding of paraphrasing, where both language and sentence structure were changed. Some students were also able to show the ability to effectively quote information, but in such a short essay information was often over-quoted, with two or three quotes per paragraph. In using information from the texts, students should focus on the evidence and be careful not to narrate the information (e.g. A person named Master Chief says that his girlfriend ...). Those who understood and paraphrased what the experts and others said about computer games scored better in analysis and application.

In-text referencing is another area where many students had difficulties. Correct in-text referencing should use the author's surname and year of publication, when available. Some students also referenced every sentence within a paragraph. The more successful essays presented the evidence, which was then explored and evaluated. It is not necessary to include a reference after every sentence. References should be restricted to significant ideas.

The better essays showed a good understanding of academic language and were able to communicate using formal and objective language. More successful students avoided using the first person, I, and instead effectively used the passive voice. Some of the less successful essays also used a lot of subjective language to explore what 'I think' and what 'I believe'. Other weaknesses were: the use of contractions, and a range of colloquialisms such as 'in a nutshell', 'in short', 'in brief', 'to wrap things up', 'to start off', 'at the end of the day', and 'moving on'. If there are examples of informal or colloquial language in the texts (especially the blogs) students need to understand the academic conventions of the writing task and change such terms into more appropriate formal language. Successful responses were also able to demonstrate complexity of language through more specific word choices like the use of detrimental, instead of bad.

The better conclusions were careful not to repeat the ideas or language from the introduction. Well-constructed conclusions clearly restated the position taken in the essay. They concisely summarised points raised and avoided raising new points. Some of the more successful students also ended with a concluding statement, which again was different from the general statement made in the introduction. Less successful conclusions repeated phrases used earlier and often displayed little attempt to draw the whole essay together; this gave the impression that the conclusion was rushed.

Part B

Part B of the written examination focused on the performance standards for:

Knowledge and Understanding

KU1 *Knowledge and understanding of the ideas, concepts, and issues in the texts.*

This criterion is clear when students respond to the text in a relevant way, demonstrating logical knowledge of the issue and connecting the ideas in each paragraph.

KU3 *Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which texts are composed for specific purposes and audiences.*

This is evident when students use formal language and make word choices appropriate to whose point of view they are writing from, and who they are writing to.

Application

Ap2 *Meaning that is conveyed and exchanged in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.*

Can the ideas be understood?

Is meaning conveyed appropriately for the letter?

Ap3 *Use of text-appropriate language features to make meaning.*

Appropriate language features and conventions should include the writer's address (in Australia or elsewhere), the date (anywhere above the letter), the receiver's address (anywhere above the letter) and the addresses and date to the left or right. As a guide the letter should be set out using paragraphs, with a clear purpose in each, a concluding paragraph with a recommendation, solution, action, or thank you, and either: Yours sincerely (name known) or Yours faithfully (name unknown) as a salutation.

Communication

C1 *Clarity and coherence in written communication, using appropriate vocabulary.*

C2 *Demonstration of grammatical control and complexity.*

C3 *Use of formal and objective language.*

The responses to writing a formal letter of complaint generally showed a good understanding of this genre. Question 9 was more popular than Question 10, and students who chose this question scored higher than those who chose the picture of people collecting rubbish. Many students struggled to show a full understanding of the text, and there were many responses that only focused on a minor detail. For example for Question 9, some students only focused on the movie, and for Question 10 some students only focused on the rubbish. The better students were able to identify the main issue in the text and then develop their letters based on this.

Some students had also overly pre-prepared their responses and the purpose of the letter was not linked to the issue in the texts. Letters that did not respond to the text lost significant marks. Students are reminded that the main point in the letter needs to be drawn from the main point in the text/image.

Generally Question 9 was well answered however, the less successful letters only responded to the coupon and not the information underneath. Students were asked to write a letter of complaint to the manager and those who did not do this did not show a full understanding of the text. Also, many students only copied the address given, but there was an expectation that a full address would be created incorporating this information. The better letters selected the main ideas from the text and developed their letter around these. Weaker responses tried to respond to every point and thus spent most of the letter summarising the coupon. The more successful students had highly creative responses and showed a thorough understanding of the ideas and genre.

Question 10 was much more open but required students to respond to the issue of rubbish and people picking up rubbish. There were a few different interpretations of the river in the background as a creek or a highway, but markers were open to these and it did not affect marks. The more successful answers explored the problem of litter in the community and the need for organised clean-ups. Some students interpreted the picture as an event from the past or something that needed to happen, but both approaches were equally successful. The better letters put the writer into the issue rather than referring to the picture itself.

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