

Community Studies

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
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COMMUNITY STUDIES

2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessor's 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: Contract of Work

A well-written contract was the basis of successful students' performance. Higher outcomes were achieved where contracts in the early stages provided details of planning and organisation, underpinned by constructive scaffolding. Most teachers evidently allocated time to working with students to develop the contract, paying close attention to the performance standards for each component. This provided students with a clear direction to fulfil the learning requirements. Similarly, well-structured contracts broke down large, complex tasks into smaller, achievable components. Student work subsequently reflected a greater strength in connecting capabilities, literacy and numeracy to their contracts.

Evidence was also seen that teachers were using the exemplars and support materials available on the SACE website (www.sace.sa.edu.au) to support and structure student learning.

The selection of a capability was particularly strong where students chose one or at most two main capabilities rather than several. Consequently, students made more detailed and insightful ongoing reference to the chosen capabilities throughout the investigation.

Many teachers used the steps of the contract to sign off tasks as students completed the logical progressions of the individual components. This also provided an ongoing assessment of the students fulfilling their contract requirements. Similarly, it was clear that detailed, well-developed contracts also contributed to comprehensive, reflective records of evidence.

The range of community activities students chose to investigate again broadened this year. Students who selected a personal interest community activity gained much from the experience, with many spending additional time exploring the community activity beyond the required hours. These better contracts emphasised students' personal interests and unique nature. Innovative community activities this year included:

- creating 'talking books' for teenagers
- securing government grants and then completing projects for the community
- making bears or a flag

- the intricacies of investigating the purchase of a car
- translating brochures and pamphlets to create a more inclusive and engaged multi-cultural community
- teaching traditional dance, film and culture to non-traditional groups
- yarn bombing
- saving and retraining animals.

The best community activities engaged and, in many cases, benefited the wider community.

It was also evident students understood that their contracts could be modified in response to changing circumstances throughout the year. The modifications were well documented, reasons clearly outlined, and equivalent tasks substituted. For example, when a group of dancers was unavailable to perform at a fund-raising concert in aid of the Cancer Council, the student approached and substituted a local band. Therefore, using this revision of the contract as a tool allowed the student to reflect and adapt, showing their growth as a learner.

Highly successful students made early contact with their nominated community contact, maintained regular contact, and sought and acted on feedback received. Students who reflected on this feedback clearly documented their learning. Evidence of 'proactive interaction' was necessary for students to achieve at the highest level. Students were often strongly motivated when an interested community contact complimented their work. In several instances, students had designed a specific feedback form including tick-box sections for some criteria as well as space for a short comment. This was a useful tool for efficiently collecting evidence and was therefore a firm record of evidence.

This year, it was noted that more students used technology, particularly email, to interact with the community contact, rather than exclusively meeting the community contact in person.

It is important to reinforce that the community contact cannot be a student's teacher or family member. Rather, it should be a person from the wider community with an interest or expertise in the student's nominated activity.

Some particularly effective records of evidence included an account of the student's achievements, often including well-annotated photographs, a reflection and evaluation of that student's progress, and analysis. This was followed with ideas for improvement, including action plans or suggested solutions to solve problems that arose. The entries also linked other aspects of the research, including suggestions or advice that the nominated community contact offered.

Where a student did not report their achievements against their individual goals, there was no opportunity to demonstrate appropriate levels of communication, interaction, and reflection. This distinctly disadvantaged some students.

Teachers of successful students gave ongoing, regular written feedback. Their comments assisted the students in focusing, and ensured all elements of the contract were completed.

Most students presented to their class, to a nominated group of interested peers, or at an expo-type event. Evidence of a student's preparation for the presentation must be included in the folio. This may include an invitation to the audience, palm notes for

a speech, and screenshots of a PowerPoint presentation. Personal feedback from the audience was almost entirely in a written format. Higher performing students logically invited their community contact to their presentation.

Successful students provided ongoing evidence of their involvement in the wider community through their record of evidence, well-annotated photographs, and clear documentation of their communication with their nominated community contact. This ongoing feedback is an essential component of the fulfilment of the contract. It is, however, a separate component from the final presentation feedback.

The omission of evidence in the folio of completed tasks outlined in the contract prevented some students from achieving at the higher levels against the performance standards. All elements of the contract need to be completed to ensure that students achieve at the highest possible level.

The annotation of downloads and research is essential to show the student's learning; simply submitting many downloads does not explicitly demonstrate learning. Successful students frequently summarised their research, noted which aspects would be useful for their own investigation, and explained how this information would be used. Subsequently, frequent references to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills and the chosen capability or capabilities were a feature of the responses of successful students. Likewise, literacy and numeracy need to be explicitly demonstrated.

Student-created products are becoming increasingly professional, reflecting an increased use of available technologies and often including online resources.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 2: Reflection

Well-written reflections that clearly demonstrated students' personal growth and development of skills were produced by students who had also provided well-structured contracts of work. By clearly articulating how they would develop evidence of literacy and numeracy skills and the capability or capabilities, students were well placed to reflect on their learning and newly acquired skills. This quality of reflection clearly detailed students' community activity and the process required to complete it to a high standard. This provided evidence of learning that occurred as a result of students' new experiences and wider community involvement.

Students who integrated a specific written or numeracy task into the development of their community project often covered literacy and numeracy well (for example, by estimating the length of fabric, cutting technique, and comparable costing needed to produce a formal dress, or by writing a family history after interviewing relatives).

Students who focused on one or two main capabilities, instead of trying to integrate evidence of useful and meaningful learning of all five capabilities, often met the capabilities to a more consistent standard. This was particularly difficult to achieve in a 10-credit contract word-limit.

Community feedback from mentors with whom a student had developed a good rapport was particularly useful. Drawing fully on the advice, students reflected on their subsequent learning and skills acquisition.

Students who had clear contracts (in a 10- or 20-credit subject) that accounted for 60 or 120 hours of detailed learning were able to produce work of a higher calibre. They were also able to clearly differentiate between recount and a reflection. However, non-specific contracts often led to poor reflections.

Teachers equipped their students for success using their very good understanding of the performance standards, and were able to provide structure for their students while the students were writing the reflections. Some students did not maximise their performance because their reflection questions did not adequately address the specific features of the assessment design criteria, especially R2 and R3, on the value of their learning to themselves and to the community. Similarly, students frequently overlooked the need to refer to the chosen capability, restricting themselves to a recount style of writing that was less likely to meet the requirements.

While most reflections were written, some students submitted multimodal work. The most effective multimodal work was clearly audible and visible; it also used common software programs. For assessment processes, hard copies were provided to support the students' learning.

The limit of 500 words (10-credit subject) or 1000 words (20-credit subject) provided the opportunity for students to reflect on their community activity and its value to the community, and on their literacy and numeracy and selected capabilities. Students who exceeded these limits disadvantaged themselves. It was evident that the 20-credit subject gave students great scope to write in depth and provide supporting evidence of their learning.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Folios submitted for moderation must be clearly labelled. Well-organised folios, including clear divisions for each section of work, enable moderators to readily locate supporting evidence.

The original contract and final feedback from the community contact should be included in the folio. A photocopy of the contract is required for the externally assessed reflection.

The different dates for collection of the reflection and then the folios worked well this year.

Most students included the correct SACE number and stated their word count (for written material) or a time length (for multimodal submissions).

Teachers are reminded to examine carefully the grade bands for the performance standards, and to check supporting exemplars from the website so that they can ensure the accurate allocation of grades to students. A few schools nominated students with varying levels of work for the same grade band, which may have caused grade band changes to some students' work, through the sampling process.

A teacher may nominate a student for an Outstanding Achievement (merit) award. This band recognises student work of a significantly higher overall standard than the 'A' grade level. A selection of students' work from 2012 will be posted on the SACE website (www.sace.sa.edu.au) as useful exemplars of the different grade bands.

For all aspects of both the school and externally assessed components, teachers and students are encouraged to access the scaffolding suggestions, exemplars of the work required, and forms, available on the Community Studies minisite. This year, the Assessment Group Program Planner in particular was generally completed with good detail outlining the teacher's cohort and method of delivery of the subject, and demonstrating teachers' astute awareness of the needs of students, resulting in a program relevant to the students. This put in context the 'challenging and achievable individual goal' requirements of the performance standards.

An individual folio should contain student work for only one contract.

Teachers of students submitting work in a multimodal format are reminded to check the submitted formats to ensure that the work has been saved correctly and is in a common software format.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Material Used in Another Subject

Students are able to use work in their Community Studies program from another SACE subject in which they were not experiencing success. However, a student who wishes to do this needs to link their original learning to the new community activity they undertake. For example, a student who exits Stage 2 Physical Education can link their skills acquisition to a new investigation of the requirements to become a soccer umpire, putting these new skills into practice by officiating at soccer matches and creating a handbook for other first-time referees.

It was obvious that the earlier a student enrolled in Community Studies, the greater their opportunity to be successful in this subject. Work in folios has to fulfil all the requirements of a detailed contract, record of evidence, presentation to the community, and feedback from a nominated expert, and students who enrolled later often required very significant structure to support them and ensure that they fulfilled the community involvement requirement.

Evidence of work from previous subjects related to the contract needs to be explicitly presented.

Students sometimes did not appear to have individualised their Work in the Community contracts. These contracts were generic and offered very little evidence of students' participation in the development of the content. This code was again the most popular choice this year, with more than 23% of students electing it, while Health, Recreation and the Community attracted almost 20%, and Arts in the Community 15%. More than 87% of students chose 20-credit codes, continuing the trend of the past few years.

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