

**2008
School-assessed
Coursework
Report**

**English EN01: Unit 3
English EN01: Unit 4**

UNIT 3

This report is provided for the first year of implementation of this study and is based on the coursework audit and VCAA statistical data.

Coursework reports are published for both English EN01 and ESL EN09.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The evidence presented in the audit clearly indicated that schools generally designed assessment tasks that provided appropriate opportunities for students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to achieve the three outcomes. The design of tasks also provided students with opportunities to demonstrate high levels of performance.

With a few exceptions, the tasks as presented to students were clearly described, without providing undue assistance. There was variation in how tasks were described: some were detailed and expansive, while others were presented very concisely.

All tasks seen in the audit assess student achievement in the outcomes, but many did not invite the broad range of possible responses. For example, there are opportunities in Outcome 2 for personal and imaginative writing that could allow students a wider range of possibilities for demonstrating their achievement of the knowledge and skills in this outcome. Greater recognition of the broad range of task options could enrich the learning experiences for students.

In the sample reviewed for the coursework audit, assessment criteria given to students were mostly consistent with the elements suggested in the VCAA performance descriptors. Some exemplary examples of criteria sheets and assessment sheets were provided. Many criteria sheets were neatly formatted and easy for students to read; some were simply photocopies of the performance descriptors from the assessment handbook.

Some schools provided only the criteria or performance descriptors to students, while others included explicit advice on how criteria might be met, for example, on the features of oral presentations.

Assessment information for students: Using the performance descriptors to assess student responses enables teachers to mark holistically, making ‘on balance’ judgments about level of student achievement in the elements of the outcome. Adapting the descriptors into a well-presented assessment sheet enables students to see clearly what they have to do to succeed in the task. In most tasks where adapted assessment sheets were given to students, teachers used a scale to indicate level of achievement rather than specific marks/weightings.

Moderation: Schools with more than one class of students enrolled in English must have moderation procedures in place. These include: teacher discussion of assessment criteria/performance descriptors, benchmarking and cross-marking.

Assessment task requirements and conditions: Well-presented assessment task cover-sheets provided students with clearly and concisely worded instructions. They included all necessary information: topics, timing, special requirements (e.g. for an oral presentation), materials allowed in, and how responses were to be assessed.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 3

Outcome 1

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse, either orally or in writing, how a selected text constructs meaning, conveys ideas and values, and is open to a range of interpretations.

Task type options

A response to a selected text, either orally or in writing.

Area of Study 1, **Reading and Responding**, focuses on the reading of a range of literary texts to develop critical and supported responses.

The tasks set by schools in the audit sample were very similar, requiring students to respond in writing, and to present an analytical response. In all cases, the topics for the school-assessed tasks closely matched the model of the end-of-year examination. These topics followed the format used in past examinations or the sample examination issued for the new study design. Most schools provided students with a choice of two or three topics.

Perhaps because the examination-type topics had been used as the model for the task, the nature of the topics set by schools did reflect the key knowledge and skills in the study design. All tasks seen provided students with opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the ideas, values and construction of the text, and allowed them scope for a range of interpretations to the topic. However, teachers also need to give explicit advice about using the topic to address the key knowledge and skills.

Most topics were designed to enable students to demonstrate all elements of the outcome. Most showed awareness that the outcomes in Unit 3 and Unit 4 are different, although some would have limited student responses in this respect.

All tasks, except the task set by one school, required a written response, and all tasks asked for analytic responses to the topics. However, it is interesting to note that one school took up the option of responding orally, rather than in writing. At this school, students were offered a choice between a group or an individual oral presentation. Suggestions for the oral presentations on the text *Romulus my Father* were listed. For group presentations, these suggestions included: a role play of key characters and an interviewer; an imaginary interview with an immigrant; and an exploration of Romulus's or Raimond's point of view in a hypothetical event. For individual presentations students were offered a range of options, including a commentary on one or more key passages, a dramatic monologue, and an anecdotal story or philosophic discussion. This example is of interest in that it provides evidence of recognition of the possibilities inherent in the availability of the option to respond orally in order to demonstrate achievement of this outcome.

Practices for conducting the task included: giving students the topics beforehand; not allowing students to complete their essay at home; not allowing drafts to be corrected by teachers. All schools ran the assessment task under examination conditions, allowing

students to have dictionaries with them, as in the final examination. Many schools allowed students to bring their copy of the text and/or pre-prepared notes. One school had asked students to provide a statement of intention for the essay, which is not a requirement for this outcome.

Assessment

Almost all schools used either the suggested performance descriptors in the assessment handbook, or adapted an assessment sheet from the descriptors. A few schools unfortunately used criteria from the previous study.

In the material submitted for audit, a number of schools simply reproduced the descriptors from the handbook. A few used assessment sheets from commercial publications.

Most schools had used the assessment handbook performance descriptors in some form to assess student responses. Using the descriptors enabled teachers to mark holistically, making ‘on balance’ judgments about level of student achievement in the elements of the outcome. Adapting the descriptors into a well-presented assessment sheet enabled students to see clearly what they had to do to succeed in the task. In most tasks where an adapted assessment sheet was given to students, teachers used a scale to indicate level of achievement rather than specific marks or weightings.

Outcome 2

On completion of this unit the student should be able to draw on ideas and/or arguments suggested by a chosen Context to create written texts for a specified audience and purpose; and to discuss and analyse in writing their decisions about form, purpose, language, audience and context.

Task type options

At least one sustained written text created for a specific audience and context.

or

Three to five shorter texts created for a specific audience/s and context/s.

In Area of Study 2, *Creating and presenting*, key knowledge and skills focus on writing informed by reading and exploration of the selected Context.

Teachers chose different options for the completion of the assessment task in this new area of study. Some specified that a sustained written text was required, whilst others specified that students were to complete several short texts. A number offered students a choice. When short texts were specified, the expectation was most commonly for three shorter texts. Frequently teachers specified a word length for each of the short texts. Where short texts were offered, the writing was often timetabled at intervals over two terms. There was evidence that some schools had encouraged students to maintain ‘context’ or writing journals to record and collect ideas and supplementary material.

An interesting example of a task involving a set of short texts was where the specifications for the short pieces provided students with the opportunity to write for a range of audiences and purposes. In one case, for the *Imaginative Landscape* context, three pieces formed a sequence moving from personal through expository, to imaginative writing. The first piece was a description of a known landscape in 400 words, the second piece was a 500-word expository or persuasive piece drawing on ideas from the set texts, and the third piece, again 500 words, was imaginative writing exploring ideas from the text. Another example involved a personal piece, a response to a quote and prompt, and an essay in response to a prompt. For the *Encountering Conflict* Context, one school focused the task on *The Line*, with the first piece in a set being a biographical sketch of an older family member.

These examples illustrate approaches to assessment tasks that highlighted the focus of this area of study on exploring the relationship between purpose, audience, form and language in writing, and reflecting on the ideas and arguments suggested by texts. These tasks also exposed students to the different writing styles available in the examination, as well as providing scope for students to further develop their understanding of the chosen Context.

The kinds of prompts and tasks provided in the sample examination paper formed the basis of the assessment tasks set by some schools. There were some examples of 'scaffolded' questions or prompts. In other cases, students were given one prompt but then provided with a variety of possible approaches for their response.

Advice to students about the requirement for the written explanation varied across schools; some asked for 50 words, others for 100 or 200 words. Most schools made it clear in their assessment task instructions that the written explanation needed to include reference to student decisions regarding form, purpose, language, audience and context. A few schools provided no evidence of students being required to provide a written explanation of their writing.

The written explanation was variously described by schools: statement of intention, student intentions, the explanation, reflective commentary (which is what Literature students are required to write for one outcome). Some of these variations have possibly come from textbooks and other resource material on the market, but use of the common term 'Written Explanation' is recommended.

Some schools had modelled the tasks for the *Creating and Presenting* outcome directly on Section B of the examination, while other schools demonstrated that there is a range of interesting ways in which to tackle this outcome. There were effective examples of tasks that showed recognition that student appreciation and development of ideas can occur through imaginative writing as well as expository and persuasive writing.

The evidence seen suggested that teachers have been developing a variety of approaches to designing tasks to assess Outcome 2, but that the different approaches provided students with opportunities to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to achieve the outcome.

This area of study is about students' writing, informed by ideas from their reading. Giving students the opportunity to practise a variety of styles of writing (for example, personal, narrative, imaginative, persuasive) and a variety of forms (for example, story, article, letter, script, essay) enables them to write to their strengths. Where students are not offered options for writing in the School-assessed Coursework for different forms, purposes, and audiences, the possibilities for demonstrating the whole range of knowledge and skills in Outcome 2 is restricted, and may limit the variety of approaches to writing which students are able to take in the examination.

The area of study provides a way for students to generate ideas for their writing. A range of ways to develop and deepen students' thinking should be explored; for example, use of information and communications technology tools for thinking, excursions, group work and comparative study of ideas in the two selected texts and in other texts.

Written Explanation: Schools are encouraged to use the terminology of the study design, for example, 'written explanation' or 'written explanation of decisions'. Assessment of the students' achievement in this outcome includes their explanation of how they developed ideas in their writing. The sample pieces on the VCAA website provided models; teachers could also provide models of written explanations for their students.

Assessment

As with Outcome 1, schools used either the suggested performance descriptors in the assessment handbook, or adapted an assessment sheet from the descriptors, using a scale such as ‘high’, ‘medium’, ‘low’ to enable holistic assessment.

Outcome 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse the use of language in texts that present a point of view on an issue currently debated in the Australian media, and to construct, orally or in writing, a sustained and reasoned point of view on the selected issue.

Task type options

Writing which analyses the use of language in three or more persuasive texts that debate a current issue in the Australian media.

or

A sustained and reasoned point of view on the selected issue in written or oral form.

Area of Study 3, *Using language to persuade*, focuses on analysis and comparison of the use of language in texts that debate topical issues in the Australian media, and on constructing a sustained and reasoned point of view.

The School-assessed Coursework involves two tasks: analysis of the use of language in three or more persuasive texts, and the presentation of a point of view on the selected issue in written or oral form. With one exception, schools were using the second task to meet the requirement that one outcome in Unit 3 must be assessed orally.

Analysis of the use of language

Most schools provided unseen media texts for students. Some provided a selection of texts but usually specified the three texts to be analysed. A few schools provided only two texts for analysis, whereas the task specifies ‘three or more’. There was limited evidence of students being able to choose their own issue or media texts for analysis. Most schools had recognised the reference in the study design to ‘the ways in which verbal and non-verbal (including visual) language of these texts is used to persuade readers’, and had included a visual text amongst the three set for analysis. Most, recognising the study design’s emphasis on constructing a sustained argument, included an extended text such as a feature article or commentary.

A wide range of topical issues was reported in the audit material, including:

- the apology to Indigenous people
- teachers’ pay
- binge drinking and alcopops
- bay dredging
- the proposed Werribee Zoo theme park
- child abuse
- skin cancer the pros and cons of solariums
- plastic bags.

Topics were usually expressed as a question, enabling exploration of the argument as well as exploration of how language was used and texts constructed. Tasks were clearly described, and closely aligned to the study design.

Most schools used at least three media texts in assessing the key knowledge and skills in this outcome, and provided opportunities for comparing use of verbal (written) and visual language.

Point of view

Only one of the audited schools asked students to complete this task in written form. Most schools allowed students to select their own issue for the point of view, teachers having interpreted 'point of view ... on the selected issue' to mean an issue selected by the student. There was only one where students were asked to base their point of view on the same issue explored in the language analysis task. In several cases, the school specified the issue for the point of view.

Most schools set a time limit or timeframe for the oral presentation, but there was quite a variation here. Many suggested 5–10 minutes as was the requirement in the former study design, but some were as short as 3 minutes, which perhaps limited the extent to which students would be able to demonstrate their capacity to present the 'a sustained and reasoned point of view' required for this component of Outcome 3.

Most students were given the opportunity to use support such as Microsoft PowerPoint, overheads or other visual material. Only one school provided the instruction that the oral presentation was to be completed as a group activity.

Some schools indicated on the audit cover sheets that oral presentations were moderated through strategies such as other English teachers sitting in on student presentations, or re-timetabling of a day for multiple-class oral presentations.

Assessment

As with Outcome 2, schools used either the suggested performance descriptors in the assessment handbook, or adapted an assessment sheet from the descriptors, using a scale such as 'high', 'medium', 'low' to enable holistic assessment.

Assessment of Task 2 with a well-presented assessment sheet enhanced clarity for students, as a clear indication was given of what was expected in an orally presented sustained argument.

UNIT 4

This report is provided for the first year of implementation of this study and is based on the coursework audit for Unit 4. Coursework reports are published for English EN01 and ESL EN09.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The assessment tasks and criteria provided by schools for the audit showed that generally, in designing the School-assessed Coursework tasks, schools have been careful to provide appropriate opportunities for students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required in the two outcomes for Unit 4. The design of the tasks also provided students with opportunities to demonstrate a range of levels of performance, including high levels.

Some task descriptions provided to students were very brief, others were quite detailed. Those that were very brief offered little support for students, although they may have been supplemented by verbal discussions in classrooms. A few schools did not provide all the required documentation, for example marking scheme, or task descriptions.

The task for Outcome 1 followed the style of analytical/expository task that has been used for some years, and there was little variation across schools. However, perhaps because teachers are exploring the possibilities in a new area of study, there was a greater variety of tasks set for Outcome 2, although not all schools took up options suggested in the study design.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 4 Coursework

Area of Study 1: Reading and responding

Outcome 1

In this area of study the outcome is that students will *develop and justify a detailed interpretation of a selected text*.

Assessment task

The assessment task specifies an extended written interpretation of one selected text. This is matched by the examination task where students are required to write a response to a text from the English/ESL Text List 1.

Given the close similarity between the coursework assessment task and the examination task, the tasks provided by schools were all closely aligned with the examination task. In all cases a choice of topics on the selected text/s was provided for students, as happens in the examination. Most schools required that students complete this task in an allocated time, under test conditions. Many topics were taken from past examination papers, and all followed the style of topic set in the examination.

Although they provided a choice of topics, both topics set by some schools were focused on the same aspect, for example character-focused questions. The examination provides a range of question types, including questions that ask about understanding of character, ideas and themes and questions that ask about the structures and features that authors use to construct meaning. In the examination, for each text, students have a choice question types. The range of question types is intended to draw on the full range of key knowledge for this outcome.

It is suggested that schools should model the Reading and Responding questions they set for students on the end-of-year examination style, by providing a choice between different kinds of questions for each text. This approach would create increased opportunities for students to demonstrate different aspects of the key knowledge and skills for this outcome.

Assessment

Most schools assessed the task with a marking scheme adapted from the VCAA performance descriptors in the assessment handbook. A number used assessment sheets from commercial publications. Successful marking schemes allowed schools to show students how they would be assessed, and then to assess the complexity and range of knowledge and skills in the outcome.

Area of Study 2: Creating and presenting

Outcome 2

In this area of study the outcome is that students will *draw on ideas and arguments suggested by a chosen Context to create written texts for a specified audience and purpose; and to discuss and analyse in writing their decisions about form, purpose, language, audience and context*.

Outcome 2

Assessment task

The study design provides the following options for the assessment task for this outcome:

- at least one sustained written text created for a specific audience and context, with a written explanation of decisions about form, purpose, language, audience and context

or

- three to five shorter texts, created for a specific audience/s and context/s, with a written explanation of decisions about form, purpose, language, audience and context.

The examination invites students to respond to the unseen material (prompt) in ‘an expository, persuasive or imaginative piece of writing’. Schools picked this up in designing assessment tasks, and many schools allowed students a choice between imaginative, expository and persuasive writing. Many provided the choice, but did not specifically design the task to generate one of the three kinds of writing. In one case, a school had designed a particular task offering a choice from an extended list of imaginative topics directly arising from the selected text. More schools set the single sustained written text rather than the shorter texts option.

Some tasks were framed as text responses, but others were more varied. One school set up a sequence beginning with a short personal piece related to the Context, followed by another short piece on an aspect of the Context, with a third piece requiring a more text-based exploration of the ideas in a prompt. Examples such as this indicate the possibilities for using the shorter texts option as a way of encouraging students to explore the Context from different perspectives.

The *written explanation* is an integral part of this task. In a few cases, there was no evidence of this component of the outcome requirement in the task description provided by the school.

The study design refers specifically to a ‘written explanation of decisions about form, purpose, language, audience and context’. The written explanation helps to focus the task on the ‘creating and presenting’ aspects of this area of study. This component of the task draws on key knowledge that is to be developed in completing this unit:

- *the relationship between purpose, form, language and audience in arrange of print, non-print and multimodal text types....*
- *metalanguage to discuss and analyse their own and others’ creative choices.*

It also draws on key skills such as being able to:

- *analyse the relationship between purpose, form, and audience in a range of text types, with close attention to authors’ choices of structures and features,*
- *use appropriate metalanguage to discuss and analyse their own and others’ authorial choices.*

In some cases, this written explanation was referred to as a ‘statement of intention’. This usage echoes earlier courses, and in the context of the current course, it is preferable to use the current terminology. The term ‘written explanation’ suggests the need for reflection, explaining what was done in the course of writing, rather than setting out what was ‘intended’. Some schools asked students to write the ‘statement of intention’ before they tackled the actual writing. This suggested a planning tool, rather than a reflective process utilising the knowledge and skills in the area of study regarding understanding and explaining ‘choices’.

Schools are advised that it is appropriate, and helpful to students, if the terminology of ‘written explanation’ is used. Some of the available text books do not use the exact terminology of the study design. Other outdated terminology noted included reference to a ‘folio piece’ to describe the sustained written text, or shorter texts, required for Outcome 2.

Assessment

Most schools assessed Outcome 2 with a marking scheme adapted from the VCAA performance descriptors in the assessment handbook (which include presentation of the

written explanation). A number used assessment sheets from commercial publications. Most assessment sheets seen in the audit allowed schools to assess the complexity and range of knowledge and skills in the outcome.