

2008
School-assessed
Coursework
Report

English as a Second Language (ESL) EN09: Unit 3
English as a Second Language (ESL) EN09: Unit 3

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.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The material submitted for audit should be each of the assessment tasks, as given to the students in Unit 3, that is, the information which enabled students to do each task. It should include the task requirements, the conditions under which the task was to be done and the dates when the task would be undertaken. This enables an assessment of whether the task was consistent with the VCAA Guidelines and whether it would enable the students to demonstrate (at all levels, including the highest) the key knowledge and skills associated with achieving the outcome. Most schools provided this information but in some cases the material submitted was insufficient for students to have completed the task. Many submissions had at least one piece of vital information missing. The submitted material showed considerable variety in tasks and approaches used to assess the coursework.

Not all School-assessed Tasks for ESL are equally weighted. Most schools were aware of this but care needs to be taken where tasks are set in common with English students to ensure that the different task and assessment provisions for ESL are used.

The design of the tasks generally provided the opportunity for students to demonstrate high levels of performance. In some cases, teachers had used sample examination questions rather than design assessment tasks.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 3

Outcome 1

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

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

The assessment handbook invited teachers to develop their own conditions for the task and there was significant variety. Some allowed the use of the text, a page of notes, or an annotated text. Others expected strict examination conditions (in one sitting and with no access to such resources) even though the assessment handbook discourages this approach.

Only one school in the audit group chose the oral option in this task. It provided students with an interesting list of options for individual or pair work tasks. These choices gave plenty of scope for demonstrating the key knowledge and skills integral to this outcome.

Most schools set an examination-type essay task under conditions appropriate for coursework assessment. Generally, students would have been able to demonstrate the key knowledge and skills through these tasks if the focus of teaching and learning activities had been on these skills. It is disappointing that some resorted to using a past examination question, or one from the sample paper. Not only are these predictable but the questions were set for writing done in examination conditions.

In the first year of a new course teachers are understandably conservative in setting these tasks. They may be more willing in the future to depart from tasks which are just 'examination preparation'. Teachers are encouraged to explore the potential to provide more variety in the setting of this task.

Assessment

The assessment approach is new in several ways this year. In the previous study's assessment guide, criteria were listed and weighted. The new assessment handbook provides descriptors of typical performance within a given mark range. Teachers may use these descriptors to design an assessment sheet, but the descriptors encourage teachers to mark holistically.

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/weightings.

There was one excellent example of an assessment sheet which provided for global marking and reflected the discriminators in the descriptors without introducing weightings for different criteria.

Outcome 2

Draw on ideas and/or arguments suggested by a chosen Context to recreate 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.

Greater variety was demonstrated in setting tasks for this outcome. About half the schools audited chose the shorter texts, one school left the choice to students and one asked for a research task with a sustained response. Tasks set as examination questions do not invite the type of writing which this area of study encourages. In many cases the task was confined to 'expository, imaginative, persuasive' writing but not always in response to a prompt. Some tasks were clearly exploring the possibilities opened up by this section of the study design while others limited their expectations to tasks which could be seen as practising 'examination-style writing'.

The length of responses and the conditions under which they were done were generally consistent with the advice in the assessment handbook. Some had clearly been informed by

use of the course support materials provided for each Context on the VCAA website. Teachers are encouraged to make these materials their starting point for teaching and learning activities for the Context and to explore the opportunity to design School-assessed Tasks which expect something other than an examination-type essay response. As for Outcome 1, the use of prompts from the sample examination paper was disappointing for the reasons stated.

A significant number of schools provided the same task for English and ESL students. However, ESL students are not required to provide a written explanation of their authorial choices. For ESL students it is expected that discussions about these aspects of writing will form part of students' preparation to write and that their writing will then reflect this preparation process. ESL students are required to study only one selected text for this outcome and may draw on other material.

Assessment

Comments made in relation to Outcome 1 also apply here. It is suggested that performance descriptors can be adapted in an assessment sheet, and used to support global marking.

Outcome 3

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

A sustained and reasoned point of view on the selected issue that demonstrates the persuasive use of language. This may be in written or oral form.

Most schools in the audit group chose to meet the oral requirement through this task. Generally, the conditions set for the task were consistent with the assessment handbook guidelines and would enable students to demonstrate the key knowledge and skills. Only one school did not appear to be aware that students were required to complete either Outcome 1 or Outcome 3 in oral form.

Assessment

In many cases the only information provided about assessment was a photocopy of the descriptors from the assessment handbook. These provide for the task to be in either oral or written form and in some cases no attempt had been made to adapt them for an oral response even though this was the task set. In all but one case students were dealing with a set issue and a significant variety of topics appear to have been covered.

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 for English as a Second Language (ESL) EN09.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The work submitted for audit should be the task as given to the students; that is, the information which enabled students to do the task. It should include the task requirements, the conditions under which the task was to be done and the dates when the task would be undertaken. This enables an assessment of whether the task was consistent with the VCAA guidelines and whether it would enable the students to demonstrate the key knowledge and skills associated with achieving the outcome. Most schools provided this information but in some cases the material submitted was clearly insufficient for students to complete the task.

There was considerable variety in the conditions under which the tasks were done but very little variety in the tasks themselves.

In Unit 4 the School-assessed Coursework tasks for ESL are equally weighted. Schools were aware of this. Care needs to be taken where tasks are set in common with English students to ensure that the different task and assessment provisions for ESL are used. The tasks observed in this audit were designed to be accessible for all students as well as providing the opportunity for students to demonstrate high levels of performance.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 4 Coursework

Outcome 1

Develop and justify a detailed interpretation of a text.

Task type options

- **an extended written interpretation of one selected text**

The assessment handbook invited teachers to develop their own conditions for the task and there was significant variety. Some allowed the use of the text, a page of notes, or an annotated text. Others expected strict examination conditions (in one sitting and with no access to such resources) even though the assessment handbook discourages this approach.

Most schools set an examination-type essay task under appropriate conditions. Generally students would have been able to demonstrate the key knowledge and skills through these tasks if the focus of teaching and learning activities had been on these skills. It is disappointing that some resorted to using a past examination question, or one from the sample paper. Not only are these predictable but the questions were set for writing done in examination conditions.

The focus of this task is on a ‘detailed interpretation’ of the text. By expecting the student to ‘develop and justify’ an interpretation should provide the opportunity to demonstrate the reflection on and exploration of the text that the student has done over a period of time. The assessment handbook provides some suggestions for teaching the pre-task knowledge and skills (page 47). Some tasks set were of a more general ‘text response’ nature which did not directly invite this possibility.

It is important that the task is seen as more than just examination preparation. Teachers are encouraged to explore the potential to provide a task which clearly focuses students’ attention on the outcome.

Assessment

The assessment approach is new in that criteria are no longer listed and weighted. The new assessment handbook provides descriptors of typical performance within a given mark range. Teachers base their marking scheme on the elements in these performance descriptors. A marking scheme or assessment sheet shows students how they will be assessed. ‘The marking scheme should reflect the relevant aspects of the performance descriptors in the assessment handbook and be explained to students before starting the task’ (assessment handbook page 41).

Most schools submitted a copy of the performance descriptors rather than a marking scheme. In some cases it was difficult to be confident that teachers had explained to students how they were to be assessed. A few schools were clearly using assessment sheets from commercial publications. Successful marking schemes had adapted the elements of the performance descriptors without introducing numerical weightings for different criteria.

Outcome 2

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.**

Most schools chose the first option - a sustained response. Tasks set as an examination questions do not invite the type of writing which this School-assessed Coursework encourages. A few tasks were clearly exploring the possibilities opened up by this section of the study design with options which approached this writing as something more than exam practice. Others limited their expectations to tasks which could be seen as practising 'exam-style writing'.

The length of responses and the conditions under which they were done were generally consistent with the advice in the assessment handbook. Some had clearly been informed by use of the course support materials provided for each Context on the VCAA website. Teachers are encouraged to make these materials their starting point for teaching and learning activities for the Context and to explore the opportunity to design School-assessed Coursework tasks which expect something other than an examination-type essay response. As for Outcome 1 the use of prompts from the sample exam paper was disappointing for the reasons stated.

ESL students are not required to provide a written explanation of their authorial choices. For ESL students it is expected that discussions about these aspects of writing will form part of students' preparation to write and that their writing will then reflect this preparation process. ESL students are required to study only one selected text for this outcome and may draw on other material.

Assessment

Comments made in relation to Outcome 1 also apply here.