**Annelise Balsamo –** Hello and welcome to this on-demand video exploring possible ways to approach assessment in the new area of study in Unit One of the VCAA English and AAL study design. My name's Annelise Balsamo and I'm the English Curriculum Manager at the VCAA. Your presenter today is Helen Billett. She's a highly experienced English teacher. She will be exploring the possibilities of assessing crafting text through her own perspectives and her own practise. In addition, she will share her thoughts on developing rubrics. Please note that this is advice only and that this video has been produced to support and to value teacher practise and agency. I'll now hand over to Helen.

**Helen Billett –** This recording looks at a possible way in which schools can create rubrics to assess Unit One, Outcome Two, Crafting Texts. This is a new area of study and hence we're all keen to understand how we can teach and assess this new area of study effectively. The study design presents us with a clear understanding of the intent of this area of study. We need to both allow students to explore the key knowledge and the key ideas in Unit One and also ensure that they're prepared for crafting texts in Unit Three. There's a reasonable amount of overlap between the two areas of study, but the significant difference is on the developing of original ideas to write about. In crafting texts, the focus is on how to express ideas for a specified audience to achieve particular aims, and in creating texts, there's more focus on the student generating the ideas and original exploration of the ideas, as well as the focus on developing the ways to communicate those ideas.

In Unit One, we have a chance to focus on the important aspects of communication, and hopefully, as students find their voices, they gain agency in developing and presenting their own ideas. There are many ways that we'll be exploring the creative process with our students in VCE. We know that we need to base our Unit One assessment on the Unit One key knowledge and key skills in the study design. The key knowledge is listed here. And the key skills are listed here. As with Unit One, Outcome One, we need to select those key skills and the key knowledge that are relevant to the assessment task. And I've done that here with some highlighting. Outcome is as follows. "On completion of this unit, the student should be able to demonstrate an understanding of effective and cohesive writing through the crafting of their own texts, designed for specific context and audience to achieve a stated purpose and to describe individuals decisions made about the vocabulary, text structures, language features, and conventions used in the writing process.

Two student-created texts such as short stories, speeches with transcripts, essays, comment, opinion, reflective, personal, podcasts with transcripts, poetry, songs, feature articles including a series of blog postings, and memoirs could be used." And students need to include a description of the writing process. Therefore, assessment could be based on the following key skills. Six rows might seem excessive here, and it possibly reflects our anxiety early on in the study design about this new area of study, and it will be interesting to see whether, as we use these rubrics, if using fewer rows might be more useful to students and more effective as a formative and summative tool. The VCAA suggests we should have no more than six assessment rows for any tasks so that students aren't required to complete an overwhelming amount of work and that students are not overwhelmed by the volume of feedback. Equally, they suggest there should be no fewer than four to allow students enough information about their level of achievement and for students to make balanced judgments.

Traditionally, English has used five levels of achievement for each row. Particularly given the number of assessment rows, this would seem to be appropriate in this case. Once the rows have been established, the task then becomes to recognise the cognitive stages involved in developing capacity and to present them positively. The focus is a reflection of what the student has achieved. This allows rubrics to be respectful of student achievement rather than being based on a deficit model. Equally, it's necessary to avoid quantitative terms such as some or a few to avoid confusion. Professional judgments are being made about what student work reveals about the student's stage of development and what they're able to demonstrate in this outcome. The feedback should present both a reflection on what the student has achieved and advice pertaining to future development.

Teachers may find taxonomies of learning a useful here to help explain cognitive stages of development. Here is a possible rubric based on the key skills we've selected. And this next one might be a little contentious when you see it, but it's looking at the student's description of the writing process. The Unit One rubric is designed to reward students for their process as well as their product to encourage the formation of sound habits. This requires excellent recording-keeping strategies on behalf of the teacher, and teachers may feel uncomfortable assessing the process as well as the product. It's not something that you would be able to do in Unit Three, and you may prefer to rewrite a rubric such as this to have students provide evidence of themselves achieving each stage.

That's something to think about, to think about what would work best with your cohort. In the recording about reading and exploring, I presented a breakdown of what meeting the skills at different levels might look like. It's more difficult here because the framework of idea is so likely to be different at different schools, and because the mentor texts which encourage students to explore different forms, styles, and literary features will also be so different. The degree to which we can control this curriculum and tailor it to our cohort's needs is exciting. It's also an anxious time for us as we wait to see what Unit Three will produce. Particularly in the first couple of years we will be learning with our students, and so we need to be ready to revisit rubrics that we create instead of seeing them, developing them as a failure to get them right.

We need to see developing them as a sign of our own growing confidence and expertise. However, we know what principles we can use and we know what principles to apply. For example, it's very likely that student skills will develop at different rates and hence students' performance is unlikely to always be at the same level in each row. It's unfair to students, as it was in reading and exploring, to imply that each skill is equally and independently valued by a mathematical formula in a grid.

To do this gives the appearance of objective assessment. However, this also presents inaccurate feedback because it doesn't recognise the way in which skills are interconnected. It's possible that when considered globally, the sum of a student's capacity is greater or less than its parts because of the interplay between its parts. Complex and professional judgements that can be substantiated need to be made about the interrelation between the aspects of a student's work when making a final global judgement about the student's level of achievement. We need to resist being seduced into needs solutions to the complex web of skills that is communications.

In this area of study in particular, we need to be open to the variety of ways in which students can demonstrate achievement of a particular skill and not insist that it's demonstrated in a prescriptive way, or we risk muting student voices and inhibiting student creativity. We need to demonstrate the value and respect that we hold for student voices that we are assessing. We need to create safe places for our students to experiment with the creative process. We need to relearn our role as mentors and editors of student work, because after years of it being denied to us and our students, we have the opportunity to work with our students on developing pieces of writing, and this is a much more genuine and authentic and successful way for students, or indeed anyone, to produce text.

Now that we have the opportunity, we need to use it. This means we can count on developing and modifying these rubrics as we become familiar with the new freedoms we and our students are allowed and we discover just how creative our students can be. For so long, our courses have required students, with perhaps the exception of the oral, to reflect on other people's thinking and now we are asking students what they think. It's an exciting time. Because we need to get this right, we also have to ask ourselves can our rubric be understood by teachers and used consistently to create fair assessments? Is the rubric useful for students as an indicator to them of both what they've achieved and what they need to work on? Rubrics need to be meaningful and useful to both teachers and students because they serve multiple functions.

We need to remember too that the lockdowns and enforced passivity inflicted by necessity on students is going to take some time to undo. In this area of study in particular, we are given a chance to give students back some of the agency that they've been lacking and we need to ensure that our assessment methods support this. We also need to ensure that the task that's set is consistent with the rubric and allows the student the opportunity to demonstrate the skills that are being assessed as well as to engage our students in the creative process and offer them the opportunity to experience success. In Unit One, there is no requirement set in the study design about form or style of response. There is no requirement in the study design about the set task being unseen or timed. We need to be pragmatic. At the end of Unit Four, there will be an exam. However, we need to follow the spirit of the study design and consider the fact that the VCAA administrative handbook was changed so that we could teach students a genuine editing process and be true to the fantastic opportunity that this offers our students to develop authentic skills.

It could also be considered unfair to require students to display skills not required by the study design, particularly when demonstrating them may detract from the student's capacity to demonstrate the knowledge and skills that are required by the study design. One way schools can meet this challenge is by using semester exams. Exams are clearly timed. A comparison of the level that a student is able to attain under different conditions may be very useful feedback to the student in developing skills and strategy that allow them to achieve their best under exam conditions such as in Unit Four. However, this should be considered a factor for the school to decide and the VCAA makes no mention of exams in either Unit One or Unit Two. Please note exams at this level are not a specified outcome and only an S or an N judgement for Unit One and Unit Two is recorded by the VCAA. Developing exam skills takes time and experience, hence, many schools introduce exams much earlier than Unit Four.

Obviously, there's an overlap between the creative process and writing a first draught piece for submission and exam but we need to demonstrate to students where these overlaps come from and how they transfer their skills from one to another, not just dismiss the vital opportunity that the study design allows for students to participate in the genuine process of developing a text over time. When using a rubric to assess outcomes the rubric needs to be flexible enough to allow for individual adaptations for students' needs. Would the rubric allow, for example, a students create an oral presentation of their response, perhaps a podcast, and then submit a transcript for assessment? Could a student use a series of short responses to demonstrate capacity? In Unit One In particular, there will be a range of abilities and a range of capacities. Assessment needs to be designed to maximise student success. Assessment will become more specific and restrictive in terms of form, condition, and styles as the units progresses, however, we'll have more success with engaged students who've developed confidence in the capacities that they have. Students will build skills over VCE English.

Students are not required to have the skills and knowledge to complete Unit Four in Unit One, and so our assessment tools in Unit One need to promote engagement and celebrate what students can achieve to give students strong foundations and confidence in their capacity to develop their skills. So the the rubric needs to be flexible enough to allow this and accurate enough to allow students to understand the level of achievement that they've displayed. Because of this, rubrics needs to be constantly reviewed, adapted, and developed as the understanding of students' needs and capacities develop. The rubric is the assessment tool and not the assessment rule. My final point is that too frequently we see assessment as a chore. I would love it if this assessment was a celebration of the achievement of our students and, of course, our hard work too. Would it be fantastic if we loved assessing student work and we had not just some fun teaching our students but also assessing our students? It should be joyful, so enjoy.

**Annelise Balsamo –** I'd like to thank Helen for her insights into this assessment practise. If you're interested in more information you're welcome to contact me at any time. My contact details are on this slide, and you can either ring or email me, and I'm always happy to talk. Thanks for your time.

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