**Kellie Heintz** - Hello and welcome to this video, which will explore some of the possibilities for assessment in unit one, Reading and exploring texts, which is part of the new VCE English and EAL study design. My name is Kellie Heintz, and I am the curriculum manager for EAL at the VCAA. Your presenter today is Helen Billett, who is a highly experienced English teacher and assessor. She will explore assessment through the prism of her own perspective and practice. She will include ideas about how to develop rubrics in this presentation. Please note that this presentation provides advice only, and these videos have been produced to support and value teacher practice and agency. It is also important to note that although Helen makes specific references to English throughout the video, all of her advice also applies to EAL.

**Helen Billett** - This recording considers the steps that a school may follow in order to develop assessment practises and tools for English unit one, outcome one, Reading and exploring. It uses the VCAA principles of assessment as its basis. That is, that assessment should be valid, reasonable, equitable, balanced, and efficient. Assessment for each outcome should be based on the key knowledge and key skills outlined in the study design and should be consistent with the outcome as specified by the study design. When considering English unit one, outcome one, Reading and exploring, the study design notes the following. Given this is a change from the English study design of 2017 to 2022, I've highlighted the differences between what's very familiar in the past as unit one, which is in green, and what is new, which is noted as yellow.

As a quick summary of the changes to the study design, there's no longer a creative assessment. Students' work has an analytical focus in all units. In unit one, the focus is personal engagement. That is, students understand the texts of vehicles to convey views and values, and that readers engage with the ideas that are presented in texts. The analytical aspect of this unit is explored by considering the ways in which readers interpret the text to make sense of the views and values presented. To allow students to focus on this crucial aspect of reading, the study design does not prescribe a formal essay style response, thus freed from following specific rules about presentation of their ideas, and on being required to address a specific aspect of the text, students can focus on exploring the connections that have interested them, discussing these, and explaining how they have built their reading of the text. In unit two, the focus of the text study is based around the exploration of how ideas are conveyed by the text.

Thus, when students come to be assessed, they will know the style of response that's required to be presented. It will be a how question. This question will direct students to a specific area presented by the text, and the students will be encouraged to demonstrate their knowledge of the many ways in which ideas were presented in the text. This will be accompanied by the explicit teaching of formal essay structure, but only one form of the essay, the how response, will be required. Hence, students will not need to focus on the different types of essay questions commonly used to assess student understanding in the VCAA exam.

In unit three, students again consider texts, and this time, the focus is on propositional topics, and ways to explore the complexity of the ideas that are presented, and ways to build an argument in response to a topic. By this stage, the study design explicitly discusses that students need to be ready to explore previously unseen essay topics to demonstrate their skills. Thus, students at this level will need to make decisions about what ideas from the text are relevant to the argument that they create about the text, and to do this under timed constraints.

And finally, in unit four, students are encouraged to use their inferential reading skills on the topics themselves in order to demonstrate their understanding of the implications inherent in topics. The students will ultimately be assessed by a similar exam to the current study design, but the learning they have undertaken will have a very clear focus on the progression of capacity, both in understanding and communication. Hence, the assessment at each stage needs to focus on the specific skills being taught at that level. Level. At unit one, the key knowledge in the study design is this, while the key skills from the study design are here.

Now I've highlighted dot points from the key knowledge and the key skills that could appropriately be assessed by the outcome, and these will inform the creation of the outcome and its assessment. Outcome one from the study design is this. On completion of this unit, students will be able to make personal connections with and explore the vocabulary, text structures, language, features, and ideas in a text. Using this information, it's possible to determine the skills being assessed by this task. A possible series could be, one, engagement with the ideas and values presented in the text, two, knowledge and understanding of how the text presents views and values, three, use of textual evidence to support a personal reading of the text, and four, capacity to use language to communicate clearly. Four skills would seem to strike a balance between covering the key knowledge and the key skills adequately, allowing the students to reflect on the quality of a manageable number of aspects of their work and teacher workload in making these judgements, and providing feedback.

Traditionally, English has used five levels of achievement. Schools may decide that they wish to continue this in order to have the rubric for each unit be consistent. Five levels of achievement seems to strike a balance between presenting clear gradations of capacity, and overwhelming students with excessive information. This is not, however, the only way it could be done. Schools may prefer to vary this. The VCAA recommends between four and six levels of achievement be established. Once these are established, the task then becomes to recognise the cognitive stages involved in developing capacity, and to present them positively.

The focus is on reflection of what the student has achieved, and this allows the rubric to be respectful of student achievement, rather than to be based on a deficit model. You'll notice that the rubric uses the neutral term level, rather than a more judgmental term. Equally, it's necessary to avoid quantitative terms, such as some or few, to avoid confusion. Professional judgements are being made about what the student work reveals about the student's stage of development, and what they are able to demonstrate in the 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 learnings are very useful to help explain cognitive stages of development.

Here is a possible rubric based on the key skills identified. Cognitive stages such as capacity to identify, describe, discuss, explain, examine, and deconstruct are used to describe what the student's work has demonstrated. It's worth teachers considering the skills and knowledge a student would need to demonstrate in order to achieve these levels. Now, what follows here are examples of levels of achievement that a group of teachers could agree achieve the different levels. It's worth noting that any samples should serve as examples to clarify what information and skills might be presented at different levels. It's dangerous to think of them as exemplars, because that can lead to very closed thinking about the way that students can meet levels, and we should try to be as open as possible to encourage and reward student creativity, and also, because recognising merit where its exists in any form is fair.

Equally, these are quite brief examples of a skill that a student would be required to sustain in an outcome. So, the first skill that's being assessed is engagement with the ideas and the values of the text. And it's worth looking at that one, because that's one of the new ones. So, at level one, the identified capacity was the student is able to identify key ideas the text considers, and the example, and I've highlighted it in yellow to talk about the fact that it's about the idea in the text, and then green is later talking about that personal and great engagement. The student's been able to identify a simple concept that's come from the text. At level two, it describes key ideas central to the text and students are able to relate to their own experience.

So, the first part in green is the student relating this to their experience. The part that I've identified in yellow is the idea from the text, and then the student returns to identifying the, to discussing their personal engagement. Now you'll notice here, and in fact on the rubric in the previous slide, that instead of saying as it does at units three and four, very low, low, medium, high, and very high, this is phrased in more positive language. It's phrased as level one, level two, level three, as a gradation of skills that the student's acquiring, because we don't want our brand-new students coming into unit one, which is usually the beginning of year 11. We don't want them to be feeling judged right from the very beginning about, you know that it's a very low capacity, that they're presenting rather simply. This is a beginning capacity, and we are demonstrating the optimism that we are feeling as they move through that.

So, at unit one and unit two, we are very aware that we are not required by the VCAA to be ranking these students, or to be making any kind of harsh judgements. And it's all about encouraging students to move forward. Level three is probably the area that we would expect most of our students to be at. And in this one, we've said that they're able, they discuss the ideas presented in the text, and links them to their own experience. So, we've got in green the idea, and you'll notice that it's a more specific idea that's being presented in the text than the student was able to identify in one or two. And then we've got the part where the student is talking about how it is that they've come to understand that idea and relate that to their own experience. In level four, and you'll notice that these are getting longer, because they're getting more complex, more complex ideas are being presented, the student is able to explain how ideas interconnect.

So, level three, they were able to identify the ideas. The increase in complexity is that they're able to explain how ideas interconnect and explain how these more complex ideas resonate with their own experience. Again, I've separated out for you where the student is doing each of those two parts. Now in level five, we're looking at the students examining complex interconnecting ideas, and looking at the way that the specific features in the text impact on the interpretation of those ideas. So, a much more complex skill than is being demonstrated at level four. Now again, I've identified out for you where students are looking at those particular aspects of the expected level of achievement.

Now be aware that these examples could be used to be looking at other skills that the student's demonstrating as well. I've just drawn out one, and I think, by working with your faculty to determine what do you mean when you say these things, you'll be clarifying in your own mind, and clarifying potentially in students' minds too, how these could be achieved. Now remember, these are just single examples of how these could be achieved, and there must be multiple ways that students could achieve these levels, because we do not want to limit student creativity. It's very likely that student skills will develop at different rates, and hence, student's performance is unlikely to always be at the same level for each skill. It's unfair to students to imply that each skill is equally and independently valued by applying some kind of mathematical formula to the rubric grid. To do this gives the appearance of objective assessment.

However, this also presents inaccurate feedback, because it doesn't recognise the ways in which these skills are interconnected. It's possible that when considered globally, the sum of the 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 aspect of students' work when making a final global judgement about the student's level of achievement. We need to resist being seduced into a neat solution to the complex web of skills that is communication.

And we also 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 voice and creativity. Once we have created a rubric, we need to reflect on it. Can it be understood by teachers and used consistently to create fair assessments? While students may have to have specific terms explained to them, is it possible for students to both understand what the rubric reveals about what they have achieved, and does it indicate to the students the next step in the development of their capacity? Rubrics need to be meaningful and useful to both groups as they serve multiple functions. At an even more basic level, we need to consider if the rubric is assessing the key knowledge and skills that we intended it to assess. It's tempting to see rubrics as fixed and accurate. They are neither.

We also need to ensure that the task that is set is consistent with the study design, and with the rubric, and that it allows students to develop the opportunity to demonstrate the skills that are being assessed. There's no requirement in unit one set in the study design about the form or style of response, and there's no requirement in the study design about the set tasks being either unseen or timed, but we need to be pragmatic. Some schools have requirements that assessments are conducted in a specific manner. Sometimes this includes a timed response and unseen topics. Given what is required by the study design, it would be fair to present the case to your school that change is needed, but we need to acknowledge that some schools may or may not be receptive to this.

Hence, if assessments were conducted in this more formal way, and given that the study design doesn't require this, it could be useful to build in a comment on a student who's unable to present these ideas, these skills, I should say, under timed conditions, but has developed them that this is the case, because this information will allow the students to understand that it is perhaps their degree of preparation for an assessment, or their capacity to manage limited time that needs to be developed in order to allow them to achieve success, rather than it be their capacity to read, interpret, and communicate in writing. That is the problem. Hence, students would gain agency, because they would be better informed about what skills they need to develop. It could also be considered unfair to require students to display skills not required by the study design, particularly when demonstrating those skills 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 the student is able to attain under different conditions may be very useful feedback to the student in developing skills and strategies that will allow them to achieve their best under exam conditions in unit four. However, this should be considered a factor for schools 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 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 earlier than unit four. Equally, exams are not always the best way to determine a student's level of achievement and capacity. Particularly in unit one, we need to use the flexibility that the study design offers us to allow students the optimum chance to develop their knowledge and skills, and to demonstrate a respect for that learning by allowing them to experience success. When using a rubric to assess outcomes, the rubric also needs to be flexible enough to allow for individual adaptations for student needs.

Would the rubric allow, for example, a student to create an oral presentation of their response, perhaps a podcast, and then submit a transcript of that presentation for assessment? Could a student use a series of short responses to demonstrate capacity? Remember, the study design says formal essay structures, not that a student must produce a formal essay, as we envisage in unit four. As you can tell, I believe in educating students, and allowing them a broad range of learning experiences and assessments, and I believe that not because I don't value the exam, and I don't wish to prepare them for the unit four exam, but because so many students who've been trained for the exam have not developed the mental dexterity and initiative that's required in the exam. I believe that this broader focus on exploring options better prepares students for the exam.

At unit one, in particular, there will be a range of abilities and a range of capacities. Assessment needs to be designed to maximise students' success. Assessment will become more specific and restrictive in terms of form, condition, and styles as the course progresses. However, we will have more success with engaged students who develop confidence in the capacities that they have. Students will build skills over the VCE. Students are not required to have those skills and that knowledge that they need 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 the confidence to develop better skills. So, the rubric needs to be flexible enough to allow this, and accurate enough to allow students to understand the level of achievement that they have displayed. Because of this, rubrics need to be constantly reviewed, adapted, and developed as the understanding of students' needs and capacity develops. The rubric is the assessment tool and not the assessment rule.

**Kellie Heintz** - I'd like to thank Helen for her insights and through her presentation. If you'd like to contact the VCAA for more information or advice, you can contact me or Anneliese Balsamo. All my details are on this slide, and you can either ring or email me. Thank you for your time.

[Copyright Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Footer/Pages/Copyright.aspx) 2023