VCE Extended Investigation (2019–2024)

School-based Assessment Report

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

This report provides advice for the first year of implementation of the [*VCE Extended Investigation Study Design 2019–2024*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/extendedinvestigation/2019ExtendedInvestigationSD.pdf). The [VCE Extended Investigation *Advice for teachers*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/extendedinvestigation/advice-for-teachers/Pages/Index.aspx) provides teaching and learning advice for Units 3 to 4 and assessment advice for school-based assessment in Unit 3. Other support materials for the study can be found on the [VCE Extended Investigation study webpage](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/extendedinvestigation/Pages/Index.aspx) on the VCAA website.

This report is based on the findings from the 2019 School-based Assessment Audit for Unit 3 VCE Extended Investigation. Schools providing the VCE must deliver the course to the standards established by the VCAA, ensure the integrity of student assessments and ensure compliance with the requirements of the VCAA for the relevant assessment program. For school-based assessment, the standards and requirements are stated in the assessment specifications set out in the relevant VCE study design and the [VCE assessment principles](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/VCE_assessment_principles.docx). The School-based Assessment Audit checks that the standards and requirements set out in study designs are being followed and that assessment is being carried out in line with the VCE assessment principles.

*Please note, as there is no specific school-based assessment for Unit 4, this report is based on   
Unit 3 only.*

Unit 3: Designing an extended investigation

Unit 3 provides the basis for students to plan and design their investigation, as well as develop their critical thinking skills. This unit is crucial to the success of students’ later investigations as it establishes many of the core skills and knowledge drawn on in Unit 4 as the investigation comes to fruition. Schools undertaking VCE Extended Investigation have demonstrated a comprehension of the central role this unit plays and are sequencing school-based assessment tasks to accommodate a deep level of student thinking about their investigation. There are a variety of approaches to this scheduling; however, the aim across each outcome is to cumulatively build students’ knowledge regarding their research area and skill with regard to the research process.

In particular, schools are making use of the range of support materials provided by the VCAA. Schools demonstrated that they have established processes including additional moderation, mentoring, and opportunities for students to engage in discussions about their research project in order to complement student thinking. There is also a strong understanding regarding the use of mandated assessment criteria provided by the VCAA, and a high level of compliance with this process was evident in schools.

While scheduling of School-assessed Coursework (SAC) tasks was effective across schools, it is worth noting that this needs to consider the timeline for Unit 4. In particular, sufficient time needs to be allowed for students to progress their investigation to a point where they can engage in the substantive work of data collection and writing their final report. This is an essential consideration in the scheduling of Unit 3 assessment tasks.

Assessment

The specifications of each internally assessed task are outlined in the study design and there is currently a high level of compliance with these parameters. In addition, it is evident that schools are aware of the requirement to use VCAA mandated assessment criteria and performance descriptors for all internally assessed tasks.

Schools are reminded to use the assessment criteria and performance descriptors available on the VCE Extended Investigation study webpage on the VCAA website.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 3: Designing an extended investigation

Outcome 1

Design and justify a research question.

Task type

*Written rationale (800 words)*

The written rationale provides an opportunity for students to begin demonstrating their knowledge of a research area and consider the practical conduct of their investigation. Audited schools were using a range of strategies to assist students in structuring this early work as they began to engage with the core skills required to conduct their investigation. Regardless of the approach, all schools were providing students with scaffolding in terms of writing structures for this task, designed to maximise students’ understanding and enable them to demonstrate their knowledge. However, schools should be aware that highly prescriptive structures may limit a student’s ability to demonstrate their knowledge, and as such, framing principles and sequencing of key ideas needs to be left to the individual student and their investigation. Similarly, students may elect to adopt a different structure from that indicated in SAC materials within schools. Unless this negatively affects the coherence and academic writing of their task, these structuring decisions should not be penalised.

Overall, schools demonstrated a strong grasp of this task, providing students with the necessary materials to succeed across each assessment criteria. Particular consideration should continue to be given to the full range of investigation approaches that may be adopted and the potential need for writing structures to differ depending on this. Just as there is no one structure for a written report, so too is there no one structure for the written rationale that will suit all students and their investigation.

Outcome 2

Write a research plan, begin research and present an oral report to an educated non-specialist audience that explains the investigation and justifies the selected research method/s.

Task type

*Written research plan (1000 words)*

*AND*

*Oral report (12–16 minutes, 6–8 minutes for presentation, 6–8 minutes for question and answer segment).*

The oral report provides students with an opportunity to experience presenting and defending their research question through an oral presentation. Alongside this, the written research plan supports students as they embark on their investigation to consider the practical aspects of their work. Both tasks develop students’ abilities to not only explain their choices but justify these using sound evidence.

Many schools continue to see Outcomes 1 and 2 as linked and as an opportunity for students to test their ideas and decisions before fully commencing their data collection. Some audited schools elected to separate the two tasks, leaving the oral presentation to later in Unit 3 when students have already commenced their investigation and are beginning to reflect on this. Both approaches are equally valid and the choice remains dependent on the school’s overall timeline for the study and the needs of the students.

As with the written rationale, schools demonstrated strong evidence of scaffolding students’ learning through these tasks using supportive writing structures and examples. This was particularly the case with regard to the written research plan and first section of the oral report (6–8 minutes of presentation). Given the equal emphasis on the question and answer segment in the oral report, it is important that schools spend time preparing students for this and that the approach to the task is conducted in the way it is intended. Students should not be given prescribed lists of questions that will apply to all students. The purpose of this aspect of the task is to promote students’ own critical thinking and response skills, and to develop an understanding of their level of knowledge with regard to their research topic and approach. Students should be guided to expect a range of questions regarding their investigation that are specific to their work. An important aspect of this task is the preparation it provides for the end-of-year oral presentation (EAT) where questions are not scripted or common to each investigation, but rather are generated based on the student’s presentation and investigation.

Outcome 3

Develop and apply the skills of critical thinking.

Task type

*To demonstrate satisfactory completion of Unit 3 Outcome 3, students must complete practical exercises in critical thinking in their Extended Investigation Journal that address the key knowledge and skills.*

*Outcome 3 in Unit 3 will be externally assessed by a Critical Thinking Test.*

While critical thinking is delineated as an individual outcome within the *VCE Extended Investigation Study Design*, it is an underpinning feature of all aspects of the students’ work. The development of critical thinking skills across both Units 3 and 4 impacts strongly on a student’s ability to engage with their investigation and consider the choices they are making throughout the process.

To support this, it is important that the practical exercises used in Outcome 3 are not only reflective of the key knowledge and key skills within the study design but are also tied to the student’s own research. Audited schools engaged with this outcome through the provision of a range of activities for students. The schools who did so more successfully also included tasks that specifically drew on students’ own investigations.

The journal, and its use to document the practical activities completed by students for this outcome, is an area that schools can more consistently reinforce through the conduct of this task. Documentation of all aspects of students’ work through the journal is essential, and the recording of critical thinking activities within Outcome 3 is an integral component of this. Not only does the recording of critical thinking tasks in the journal provide an authentic record of student work for this task, it also allows closer connections to be made with the student’s own investigation.

Finally, it is important that the tasks set within this outcome are fully reflective of the key knowledge and key skills set out in the study design. Schools are reminded that the study design does not specify the number of activities required to fully expose students to the range of key knowledge and key skills outlined in the study design. For this reason, schools are reminded that there needs to be ongoing work throughout Unit 3, and explicit teaching should occur throughout the program that gives students opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of the outcome.

Assessment

Schools are reminded that teachers are **not** required to submit a numeric score to the VCAA for Outcome 3. Outcome 3 is assessed through the externally assessed Critical Thinking Test. That being said, students must still demonstrate their achievement of the outcome through school-based work. To satisfactorily complete the unit, students must be able to demonstrate their achievement of all three outcomes in Unit 3.