**VCE English**

**Units 1 and 2: 2016–2022;   
Units 3 and 4: 2017–2023**

School-based assessment report

This report is provided for the first year of implementation of this study and is based on the School-based Assessment Audit and VCAA statistical data.

All official communications regarding the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) English Study Design are provided in the *VCAA Bulletin*. It is recommended that teachers subscribe to the VCAA Bulletin to receive updated information regarding the study. Schools are required to alert teachers to information in VCAA Bulletins, especially concerning assessment schedules. Important Administrative Dates and assessment schedules are published on the School administration page of the VCAA website.

GENERAL COMMENTS

A review of the work conducted by schools in the first year of the new curriculum indicates that the vast majority of schools have given thoughtful consideration to the design, implementation and assessment of the expected outcomes. They have drawn on their expertise to develop interesting and engaging courses that cater for a range of student abilities and given consideration to the expected qualities of the work produced as outlined in the study design.

The wide array of options on offer in the VCE English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) has meant that schools have selected engaging texts and developed appropriate tasks which have successfully met the expected learning outcomes and needs of the various school cohorts. The introduction of new elements to the course; in particular, the Creative Response to Text for Outcome 1 in Unit 3 and the Reading and Comparing Texts for Outcome 1 in Unit 4 meant that most schools had given due consideration to the texts that they were offering and the ways in which they were establishing their School-assessed Coursework assessments. Most schools offered their students a range of text types across both units, providing access to a breadth of styles. In Unit 3, in particular, schools have drawn on the full array of text types on offer. They have, for the most part, developed interesting opportunities for learning and for students to demonstrate their skills and understanding.

In Unit 4, schools have predominantly chosen pairings where one or more of the texts in the combination have appeared on previous Text Lists. While there is a benefit in schools selecting texts they are familiar with, teachers should be mindful of the distinct differences in the demands of this outcome, as opposed to those in previous study designs. Supporting materials and pedagogical practices may need to change or be adapted in order to meet the demands of the new course. Schools are, therefore, encouraged to read widely and select wisely when designing their new courses and reviewing their book lists.

The vast majority of schools are using the VCAA descriptors to assess their students’ SACs. They are most effectively used when they are directly linked to the teaching and learning process. Students who are aware of the means by which they will be assessed are more likely to address that criteria and to develop pieces of writing that demonstrate the desired levels of understanding and mastery. Some schools have chosen to develop their own rubrics and criteria sheets. While this is permissible, the spirit of the task and the study design should not be overlooked. Adjusting the weightings of criteria can alter the way in which a piece of work is assessed and should be treated with caution. No schools in this audit had used a commercially produced assessment criteria sheet. The audit indicates that teachers in schools were able to work collaboratively to come to a common understanding of the rubrics and this can only have benefits for students, especially in terms of developing fair practices and equitable outcomes.

School planning documents indicate that most schools have considered the timing of SACs and planned a purposeful and meaningful curriculum that meets the needs of their students and adequately prepares them for their assessments.

The presentation of course materials varied from school to school. Most schools provided clear and cogent task and assessment sheets which were often well formatted and provided students with clear instructions and requirements. Schools should endeavor to provide students with Task Sheets that clearly outline such elements as:

* the outcome being examined
* expected qualities of the piece
* word limits
* specific conditions such as time limits, room allocations, materials allowed
* clear instructions about the topics
* school specific instructions, such as the inclusion of teacher’s names, student numbers etc.

Additionally, if schools decide to apply a school-based specific condition, such as allowing students to bring copies of the text into the classroom, this should be communicated clearly to ensure that all students have access to the same conditions and expectations. Similarly, assessment rubrics should be made available to all students and should be clear in their presentation. Ideally, students should have an opportunity to see these assessment sheets prior to the SAC and be fully cognizant of how they will be assessed to maximize the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding. Results from the audit indicate that the majority of respondents work with their peers either within their own school or within their region to develop appropriate academic tasks. A wide range of sources were used to support this task development, including subject association, commercial and VCAA publications.

Moderation of SACs remains an integral part of the assessment process. It ensures that student work is treated equitably and that assessment criteria is applied fairly and consistently. Schools where there is more than one class of students enrolled in English must have moderation procedures in place. Schools are encouraged to establish procedures for ensuring that their marking is constant and just. Most schools use a combination of the following: teacher discussion of assessment criteria and/or performance; and benchmarking initial pieces and cross-marking all or part of the cohort’s work. It was pleasing to see that schools with smaller cohorts or single classes had established procedures, such as drawing on the expertise of peer teachers within their schools (such as a Unit 1 and 2 teacher), or developing networks with neighbouring schools to cross-mark student work.

Schools were consistently using VCAA reports such as the Examination and Statistical Moderation reports to refine their practices. Good use was also made of the Advice for Teachers, particularly in the development of courses and suggested assessment practices. Many schools acknowledged the discourse and learning from various professional organisations such as that offered by VATE (The Victorian Association of Teachers of English) as being instrumental in developing their pedagogical practices and learnings. These, along with other professional publications, offered opportunities to further their understanding, to access resources and to connect with other teachers across the state.

Most respondents used the School-based Assessment Audit as an opportunity to review both their practices and their documentation to ensure that they were compliant, especially with the advent of the new course. Most respondents were aware that the audit process is an essential to ensuring that VCE providers are delivering school-based assessment in line with VCAA principles of assessment and the requirements of the study design. Since school based assessment contributes 50 per cent towards the calculation of a student’s study score in this subject, it was important that the audit panel were able to determine whether the answers submitted, along with any accompanying materials, fulfilled these expectations. Schools selected for audits in the future are encouraged to provide as much information as possible to ensure compliance. Most requests for additional information stemmed from issues surrounding authentication of assessment, particularly for the Creative Response to Text task or because the information provided was vague or unclear, such as moderation practices. At times too, schools had not yet finalised their assessment, such as with the selection of the issue and accompanying articles for Outcome 2: Analysing Argument. Where possible, schools should endeavour to provide the panel with as much information as possible.

On the whole, most schools had made concerted efforts to develop curriculum that was in keeping with the spirit of the study design and had provided the panel with documentation that was well considered and professionally presented.

Specific information

Unit 3 School-assessed Coursework

Outcome 1 - Reading and Creating Texts

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to produce an analytical interpretation of a selected text, and a creative response to a different selected text.*

* An analytical interpretation of a selected text in written form.

and

* A creative response to a selected text in written or oral form with a written explanation of decisions made in the writing process and how these demonstrate understanding of the text.

The Analytical interpretation of a text was well understood by schools, as evidenced by development of interesting and appropriate topics on a wide variety of texts. There were very few issues with either the development of topics or the SAC conditions. The study design recommends that “the suggested length of written responses is approximately 800–1000 words” (p.22) for this outcome, which this should be adhered to wherever possible.

Some schools took the opportunity to replicate End of Year Examination conditions. For example, a one-hour time allocation, unseen topics and no notes. Other schools were more flexible with their conditions, such as using a double period (typically 80–100 minutes) and/or allowing the use of the text in the exam room. Audit submissions indicated that whatever conditions were agreed upon were universally applied to ensure equitable opportunities for all students.

VCE providers should be wary about re-using previous SAC topics, recent Examination topics or commercially produced topics, as these are often in the public domain and schools cannot guarantee that some students might be advantaged by having access to these pieces.

The Creative Response to Task Component was more problematic, possibly because it is a new requirement. Schools are reminded that the Creative Response to Text is worth 30 marks and that a legitimate learning experience should be fostered for its design, implementation and assessment. It was clear from Planning Documents and time allocations that schools that did not adequately prioritise this task, principally because it does not appear in the End of Year Examination, missed opportunities to foster student learning. The study design clearly points out the benefits of this assessment:

*In developing a creative response, they explore issues of purpose and audience and make key choices about structure, conventions and language. They develop a credible and effective voice and style and use the chosen features of the selected text, for example characters, narrative or dialogue, to offer an interpretation of the selected text. They produce and share drafts, practising the skills of revision, editing and refining for stylistic and imaginative effect. (p. 18)*

Schools that valued the task and the links to developing students’ understanding of a text produced excellent and engaging tasks. Their work was characterised by clear expectations around the work required. Students were typically encouraged to develop insightful and original pieces allowing them to explore the text in their own way. A ‘one size fits all’ approach where students are required to write on the same scene or from the same character’s point of view were limited in their aims. For instance, asking all students to write a scene from *Frankenstein* in which they MUST imagine being a grave digger denies students the opportunity to explore the richness of this text. Those schools that set parameters for exploration were more likely to produce tasks that were rigorous and engaging for students.

Additionally, schools that excelled in the audit were very clear about the ways in which they were able to authenticate student work. Schools employed a variety of strategies to ensure that student work was legitimate. This included, but was not limited to, such things as:

* having students provide detailed plans
* setting up Critical friend processes in classrooms where students tested their ideas
* using opportunities for short-writes in classrooms to draft and edit work
* one on one feedback sessions on plans
* completing drafts and/or final pieces in class.

No schools in this year’s audit had chosen to have their students present their work in oral form.

Most schools handled the accompanying “*written explanation of decisions made in the writing process and how these demonstrate understanding of the text”* (p.22) well. A variety of approaches for supporting students with this was evident. Many schools encouraged their students to annotate and critically evaluate their final pieces to highlight connections with the canon text. Others had students keep records of their planning processes to stimulate their reflective and analytical writing. Schools should be mindful of developing strategies and practices that allow their students to critically reflect on their own writing and foster learning that enables their students to address the Very High descriptor

*“Insightful justification of decisions related to selected content and approach made during the creative process, demonstrating meaningful connections to the original text and complex understanding of purpose, audience and context.” (Advice for Teachers p.42)*

Assessment

Most schools used the VCAA assessment criteria rather than developing their own. Those providers that did adapt the rubrics in the Advice for Teachers used the assessment descriptors in some form to assess student responses. Using the descriptors enabled teachers to make ‘on balance’ judgments about the level of student achievement in the elements of the Outcome. Adapting the descriptors into a well-presented assessment sheet enabled students to comprehend what was required to succeed in the task. In most tasks where an adapted assessment sheet was given to students, teachers used a scale to indicate the level of achievement rather than specific marks or weightings.

Outcome 2

*Analyse and compare the use of argument and persuasive language in texts that present a point of view on an issue currently debated in the media.*

*An analysis and comparison, in written form, of argument and the use of persuasive language in two to three texts that present a point of view on an issue. Texts must include written and visual material and have appeared in the media since 1 September of the previous year.*

This part of the course was fairly unproblematic. Most providers had worked hard to select an appropriate issue and to select articles that would allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the task. Some errors by providers could have been easily avoided by being more attentive to the dates on which the articles appeared. The completion of this SAC was spread throughout the semester with most schools preferring either to start or finish the unit with this outcome, whilst some providers chose to split the Analytical and Creative Text SACs with this outcome.

Some schools had difficulty providing the panel with copies of their issues and articles as they had not yet finalised their pieces at the time of the audit. This is typically not an issue but does require the school to provide the appropriate information in a later stage of the audit process.

Many schools establish SAC conditions under which the students complete their analysis on unseen articles and sometimes on an unfamiliar issue. These task sheets tend to provide appropriate background information on the issue similar to the End of Year Examination. Other schools provide the articles as either a suite of potential articles or as definite pieces 24 hours prior to the SAC writing time. Schools that adopt this process must ensure that fair and equitable conditions for their students and authenticate the work that is then produced under examination conditions.

The change in the study design has meant that some schools have taken advantage of linking this outcome with Unit 4 Outcome 2: Presenting an Argument. In this model, schools complete the Analysing Argument outcome at the end of the semester (end of term two). They have selected an issue and immersed their students in it, choosing to complete practice pieces and teaching and learning activities on articles related to the identified issue. These schools have quarantined unseen articles, so that their students complete their SACs on an issue that they are familiar with, but with articles that they have not yet analysed. These schools have indicated that they will commence Unit 4 by having students complete oral presentations on this same issue thereby allowing students to draw on their knowledge of articles already encountered.

All schools need to be mindful of ensuring that students who may have missed a SAC date due to a legitimate reason are not given an unfair advantage over their peers upon their return. Quarantining articles may enable schools to develop alternative assessments for these students. Additionally, some schools have used their networks to develop redemption SAC tasks for these students.

Assessment

Almost without exception, VCE providers selected to use the VCAA assessment criteria.

Unit 4 School-assessed Coursework

Outcome 1

*Produce a detailed comparison which analyses how two selected texts present ideas, issues and themes.*

* A detailed comparison in written form of how two selected texts present ideas, issues and themes.

The 2017 audit revealed that the vast majority of schools had taken advantage of the opportunity to select from the eight pairs of texts available for Unit 4. While many schools had selected a pair in which at least one of the texts had appeared on previous Text Lists, others had been more adventurous in their selection. Schools are reminded that this new aspect of the course demands different skills to previous incarnations of the study design and that their approaches need to be adjusted to the teaching of paired texts for the new study design.

Schools had adopted a number of approaches to the teaching of this outcome. Some schools decided to teach one text first as a base text, then followed their teaching and learning sequence with the second text for illustrative purposes, drawing attention to the similarities and differences in the texts. Other providers had decided to teach the text concurrently. Schools are free to adopt whatever method they think is appropriate for their cohorts.

Many schools had given consideration to the ways in which this outcome builds on the Unit 3 outcome (and indeed the Units 1 and 2 Coursework). Planning documents revealed that most teachers were drawing attention to the ideas, issues and themes in the two texts. Additionally, given that each text in the pairing is of a different text type (i.e. a novel and a film), schools were also mindful of embedding explicit teaching and learning around the way authors convey ideas, issues and themes, looking at the features of these texts.

Approaches to the SAC varied. Most schools preferred to leave this assessment to the end of the unit to allow for maximum teaching time. The conditions under which these SACs were completed varied from school to school. Most schools replicated the conditions under which the students will encounter this task in the Examination; that is, unseen topics, no notes, one hour etc. Schools had their own variations on these conditions, such as allowing texts in the room or extending the writing period to include a double lesson (typically 100 minutes). Whatever models were adopted schools were mindful of establishing a level playing field for their cohorts.

Most schools provided students with two essay topic options. They had given due consideration to the ways in which the students could demonstrate their understanding. The topics were generally modelled on the approach as provided in the VCAA Sample Examination. For instance, by providing a statement, followed by an instruction, such as:

***Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home by* Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer (eds), and**

***The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri**

*The process of assimilation is a matter of gains and losses.’*

*Compare the way the two texts explore this idea.*

Others opted for two quotes, followed by a question, such as:

***Black Diggers* by Tom Wright and**

***The Longest Memory* by Fred D’Aguiar**

‘Memory is pain trying to resurrect itself.’ (*The Longest Memory*)

‘That’s the thing, the bits left behind, theyll come out, they must.’ (*Black Diggers*)

Using these quotations as a starting point for a comparison between *Black Diggers* and *The*

*Longest Memory*, analyse how, in the texts, memory is simultaneously inescapable and unbearable.

Others selected a single quote, followed by a prompt such as:

***Invictus* directed by Clint Eastwood and**

***Ransom* by David Malouf**

**‘**Look, he wants to shout, I am still here, but the *I* is different.’ (*Ransom*)

Compare the way the two texts explore the idea that people can change.

Outcome 2

*Construct a sustained and reasoned point of view on an issue currently debated in the media.*

Assessment

The 2017 audit revealed that most schools were familiar with the demands of this task. Drawing on previous incarnations of the assessment, few were troubled with the requirements. Some schools had completed this in Unit 3, contravening the intent of the study design.

Many schools had taken the opportunity to use the Written Statement as an opportunity for students to draw on their learnings from Unit 3, Outcome 2 and apply this to their own work. In this way students’ understanding of argument and persuasive language was maximised. Schools chose to complete this part of the assessment either prior to, or just after, the Oral presentation was delivered.

The selection of issues by schools was varied. Some gave their students free reign in the selection of their topics, whilst others gave students a range from which to choose. Some schools who had taught Unit 3, Outcome 2 towards the end of the semester cleverly used this issue for their cohorts, but provided them with an array of scenarios in which to develop their response, to ensure authentication was met.