Assessment in VCE English (Unit 3 and 4)

### Types of Assessment

Students undertaking VCE English (Unit 3 and 4) face two types of assessment:

* Internal assessment (or school-assessed coursework/SAC), which has both formative and summative roles.
* External assessment (or examinations), which has a purely summative role.

This advice will focus on internal assessment and will explore developing robust assessment tasks for school-assessed coursework (with a sample sequence) and different models of marking school-assessed coursework.

Devising tasks for school-assessed coursework

The types of SAC tasks are mandated in Unit 3 and 4 for each area of study. These tasks can be found in the [VCE English and EAL Study Design](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/english-and-eal/Pages/Index.aspx) on pages 28 and 34, and the task conditions can be found on pages 29 and 35. However, the individual assessment tasks, based on the task mandated in the Study Design, are devised by each school. Schools are empowered to set a task that best supports their context and cohort, and to determine the physical conditions which students undertake the task.

It is important that these tasks are constructed with multiple entry points so that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills. Information about this can be found at <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/english-and-eal/Pages/Assessment.aspx>

### Setting school-assessed coursework

The [VCE assessment principles](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/Pages/VCEPoliciesandGuidelines.aspx)  should be considered when creating SACs and determining the conditions under which assessment occurs.

#### Devising a SAC: an example

##### Unit 3, Outcome 2

Demonstrate effective writing skills by producing their own texts, designed to respond to a specific context and audience to achieve a stated purpose; and to explain their decisions made through writing processes.

This sample approach focuses on the first part of the outcome.

#### Step 1: Define the parameters of the outcome and the related assessment task options

#### Read the outcome and key knowledge and skills for Unit 3 Area of Study 2: Creating texts carefully and consider what evidence could be gathered to demonstrate student learning. It should be noted that each key knowledge and skill does not need to be individually identifiable in the task nor should the task focus on too narrow a range of key knowledge and skills.

#### Step 2: Unpack the performance descriptors for the outcome

Unpack the [performance descriptors](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/english-and-eal/Pages/Assessment.aspx) as they provide a clear indication of qualities and characteristics that you are looking for in a student response.

For example, performance descriptors for this outcome include the skills:

* generate and use ideas,
* employ voices appropriate to purpose, context and audience,
* experiment with and extend vocabulary, and
* draft, refine and complete individual writing.

#### Step 3: Design the assessment task

The requirements of the task will be determined by the selected idea from the Framework of Ideas and the selected mentor texts.

The following is an example of an assessment task based on the idea ‘Writing about play’.

#### Writing about play

Drawing on the writing you have explored and constructed over the area of study, create a written text that explicitly incorporates one of the items of stimulus (below), for an audience of your peers in a public context. The purpose of the written text is to be determined by you.

Stimulus 1

“Play is, by definition, a safety space. If a designer or artist can make safe spaces that allow the negotiation of real-world concepts, issues, and ideas, then a game can be successful in facilitating the exploration of innovative solutions for apparently intractable problems.”  
 – Mary Flanagan, Critical Play: Radical Game Design

Stimulus 2



Stimulus 3

“I went to great lengths in that environment to hide my sexuality while I was playing footy, I didn't want any of them to figure it out. And what that looks like to give you an idea was I would second guess everything that I said or did — I wouldn't get involved in conversations about relationships or what I was doing on the weekend out of fear that they might figure it out. And I even went to the extent of creating a separate Facebook list, so that just my teammates wouldn't see photos I was tagged in, places I was checked into or what my relationship status was. And it probably limited the kinds of friendships and bonds that I could have developed with my teammates growing up. Cause I was always hiding a big part of my life.”    
Jason Ball, ‘[**I Played Better**](https://speakola.com/sports/jason-bal-men-masculinity-foruim-2018)’

#### Step 4: Determining teaching and learning activities

For Unit 3 Outcome 2, the teacher plans a sequence of teaching and learning activities that will enable students to develop knowledge and skills. This will include opportunities to plan, explore, draft, revise and complete a written text.

#### Other considerations

**When to assess the students**

The teacher must decide the most appropriate time to set this task. This decision is the result of several considerations including:

* the estimated time it will take to cover the key knowledge and skills for the outcome
* whole school planning and workload implications for students
* scheduling a common time for all English and/or EAL students to complete the SAC or producing different sets of stimulus to ensure fairness for students sitting the SAC at different times.

It is important to note that school-assessed coursework or SACs should be modified and updated annually to

### The purpose of and responsibility for internal assessment

The assessment of SACs is the responsibility of the school. This assessment has three roles:

* it forms part of the student’s final result,
* it offers an opportunity for feedback to be given to the student about their progress as well as an opportunity to offer advice about how to further develop their skills, and
* it offers the opportunity to celebrate student achievement.

No SAC is the ‘end game’ for a student.

Across a whole unit, SAC results are combined to achieve a score out of 100. This score, which ranks student achievement within the cohort, is submitted to the VCAA and forms an element of the student’s study score. Because the VCAA deals with all the students enrolled at a school in a Study as a single cohort, it is necessary that schools determine a process to establish the student work is assessed and ranked with consistency across the school. [See Methods of Moderation below]

Schools should offer students detailed feedback with about their performance in SACs to inform students of their level of attainment and to explain to them how to further develop their skills. Schools may use the VCAA performance descriptors, modify the performance descriptors or develop their own assessment tools to facilitate part of this feedback. Information pertaining to this can be found at: <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/english-and-eal/Pages/Assessment.aspx>

School-assessed coursework have a summative role after teaching and learning, however, a critical purpose of school-assessed coursework for students lies in their role as formative assessment. Formative assessment encourages student growth. School-assessed coursework allows teachers to witness and celebrate students’ emerging skills. The feedback that teachers offer for all formative assessments throughout the year allows connections to be built and this dialogue is essential for building student capacity, confidence and control in their reading, writing and oral work. While students place huge value of their ‘marks’, a number does not help them understand what they can do well and what their next steps will need to be as they gain capacity and develop insight that they can apply to thinking strategies, understanding text and constructing/presenting texts in this Study and beyond. We need to remember the vital role of internal assessment and acknowledge the formative role of SACs. In the short term it is also important that students understand the connections between the SACs and the summative assessment – the examination.

The formative nature of these SACs has implications on the way in which we approach setting and assessing them.

### Marking the SAC

##### Methods of moderation

In schools, there are various methods that can be used to determine that student work is marked and ranked consistently. Some methods will suit a school’s context better than others. Methods of moderation can vary from SAC to SAC.

English teachers are skilled at recognising students’ capacity to address specific assessment criteria within a task. English teachers rank student work with accuracy. The feedback that accompanies numerical feedback acts as a quality control mechanism in this process. A student’s feedback outlines, what they have achieved and how this has been demonstrated in the SAC. Importantly, teachers also use feedback to acknowledge and celebrate student achievement and it forms part of an ongoing dialogue about ways to develop capacity. The written feedback that a teacher produces for a student serves the secondary function of reflection on the student’s level of attainment. This acts as a ‘double check’ to the score that is awarded. English teachers, as skilled professionals, should be recognised for the quality of their skill in assessing student work and facilitating student growth.

##### Problematic student responses

All moderation processes need to be supplemented by professional discussions around ‘problematic student responses’. Problematic student responses are not common but can arise where:

* a student exhibits a wide range of skill level within a single response:
* a student has responded to a task in an unexpected way:
* a teacher feels unable to view the student’s work objectively:
* a student’s likely response to feedback concerns a teacher.

Under these circumstances teachers must be able to call on the support of their colleagues to confirm their marking.

##### Benchmarking

The most popular form of moderation involves creating benchmarks. This time efficient and effective form of moderation requires that the school’s marking scheme is applied to a range of scripts that demonstrate evidence of “typical” skills at particular levels of attainment – within the High, Medium and Low categories – this process forms the beginning of the SAC marking process. These scripts become benchmark scripts which teachers use, in conjunction with the school’s marking scheme, to determine the numerical ranking of students’ responses as they assess.

Benchmark scripts, which clearly illustrate an achievement level with a specific level of skill attainment, ensure that teachers award numerical scores with confidence and accuracy.

**Method for benchmarking**

* After the SAC is completed, teachers select examples of high, medium and low responses and attach a numerical number to these responses.
* A meeting is held where these responses are discussed in relation to the ways they have demonstrated the skills being assessed by the school’s marking scheme. Teacher consensus is reached regarding a specified score associated with these benchmark responses.
* Teachers mark their students’ work using the school’s assessment tool (often the performance descriptors; modified or not) in conjunction with the benchmark responses that illustrate attainment levels to ensure ranking is consistently applied across the cohort.
* Problematic responses are identified and resolved via a predetermined system (often discussion with colleagues).

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| Advantages | Disadvantages |
| * Teachers are involved in meaningful professional learning about assessment at the benchmarking stage. * Teachers use their knowledge of the students to tailor effective feedback to enhance skills development. * Importantly, student success can be acknowledged and celebrated. * Writing comments clarifies the teacher’s professional judgements and acts as a ‘double check’ to the process. * Teachers’ knowledge about student progress informs future teaching. * Problematic responses can be identified and marking these resolved using the school’s set procedure. | * Inexperienced teachers may still need reassurance that they have marked correctly, and this could slow the process down (see “Mentoring Inexperienced Teachers” below). |

**Implications for teachers and schools**

* Time needs to be allocated to set appropriate benchmarks and for teachers to meet to discuss them.
* A predetermined system to resolve problematic scripts needs to be outlined.
* Teachers are central to the assessment process as is best practice in formative assessment.

Cross marking

Cross marking is another form of moderation. This process can be effectively used where a team is experienced and has worked together for some time, and thus has an understanding of standards and ranking prior to SAC assessment.

**Method for cross marking**

* Teachers mark their students’ work.
* At a meeting with all teachers, responses at High, Medium and Low are identified. Responses are then discussed and a scored is agree to by all members of the team.
* Each team member makes direct comparisons between responses and ensures that they all exhibit the appropriate characteristics of the designated score.
* Any inconsistencies are identified and pursued; trends are considered for future teaching and learning.
* If necessary, teachers make adjustments to their original scoring to bring their ranking levels in line with the group.

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| Advantages | Disadvantages |
| * This usually only requires one meeting. * Teachers gain valuable feedback about their marking trends. * Teachers use their knowledge of their students to tailor effective feedback to enhance growth . * Student success can be acknowledged and celebrated. * Writing comments clarifies the teacher’s professional judgements and acts as a ‘double check’ . * Problematic responses can be discussed at this meeting which increases transparency and team understanding of the school processes. | * This is reliant on a team who are familiar with the tasks, assessment and each other. Thus, should only be used in particular circumstances and with experienced teams. * Each teacher must have completed all their marking by the meeting date to ensure all responses are available for cross marking or a subsequent meeting must be called. |

**Implications for teachers and schools**

* Time must be set aside for all Year 12 teachers to attend a meeting.
* There is a clear and transparent process for dealing with problematic responses.

##### Mentoring inexperienced teachers

As a support to successful moderation processes where a team has very inexperienced members, it is valuable to consider how those teachers might be skilled and empowered. The following ideas could be implemented.

**Method for mentoring inexperienced teachers**

* Teachers mark in pairs/teams where a mentor supports an inexperienced teacher(s).
* By ‘talking through’ the assessment procedure, experience is gained, and the assessment process is clarified.
* This can continue until the inexperienced teacher feels confident with the process.
* This could be taken in conjunction benchmarking or with cross marking.

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| Advantages | Disadvantages |
| * Inexperienced teachers benefit from mentoring and quickly gain skill. | * In the short term, this is time consuming for experienced teacher/mentor, while strengthening the team in the medium to long term. |

##### Less frequently used methods: blind cross marking

**Method for blind cross marking**

* This requires papers to be deidentified and for teachers to ‘swap’ classes and mark another class’s papers using the school’s assessment tool
* A second teacher (who does not teach the students) also marks these papers without knowing the first marks.
* If these marks agree the student obtains the score.
* A third marker (who does not teach the student) is brought in to determine cases where the mark is in dispute and resolves the situation by a final assessment.

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| Advantages | Disadvantages |
| * There is a perception that this marking is more “objective and fair”. * No meeting is needed. | * Multiple markings of all student work is very time consuming and can add considerably to teacher workload. * If pairs of teachers apply different marking processes to other pairs of teachers, consistency is not guaranteed. * Because it is time consuming it may also induce teacher stress. * Within a school it is not always possible to anonymise student work or class grouping which undermines the assumptions of the process. * It may not result in effective professional learning because there has been limited discussion about the assessment process. * Problematic responses are not identified and dealt with systematically. * Unless the class teacher remarks the SAC, students will not have the benefit of feedback from a teacher who understands them and their capacity. * Relative success may not be acknowledged or celebrated. * Students may be overwhelmed by an unhelpfully large amount of feedback. * Teachers may have to explain feedback that they do not endorse in specific circumstances. * An unintended consequence is the assumption that teachers need to have their worked ‘double checked’ because they can be unreliable, and this can undermine the value of professional judgement and teacher confidence. |

**Implications for teachers and schools**

* Up to three teachers mark the students’ work not including the class teacher. As class teachers need to know about their students’ capacity this means a fourth marking is necessary.
* An unintended consequence of this process is an implication that teachers’ assessment can be unreliable. This may act to undermine teachers’ professional standing.
* Schools must have at least four teachers teaching the cohort.

##### Less frequently used methods: outsourcing marking

**Method for outsourcing marking**

* An outside provider marks the whole cohort using the school approved assessment tool (usually performance descriptors modified or not).

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| Advantages | Disadvantages |
| * Reduces teacher workload. * It can be very useful where a teacher(s) is unable to mark a SAC | * There is limited professional learning. * Students do not have the benefit of gaining feedback from someone who understands them, their context and their capacity. * Problematic responses are not identified and dealt with systematically. * Relative success may not be acknowledged or celebrated. * The expense prohibits some schools from adopting this method. * Teachers may have to explain feedback that they do not endorse in specific circumstances. |

**Implications for teachers and schools**

* An unintended consequence of this can be that students assume that their teacher’s assessment is not optimal.
* Teachers either need to read the work and assessment or will not know students’ level of attainment and the advice they have been given.