VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies Units 1 to 4: 2024–2028

Frequently asked questions

Teachers are advised to consult the frequently asked questions (FAQs) and answers in this document, as well as other support materialsprovided on the [VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies study page](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/outdoor-and-environmentalstudies/Pages/Index.aspx), when implementing the 2024–2028 VCE Outdoor and Environmental Study Design.

The FAQs will be updated if required during the course of the study design and teachers will be notified of changes via a VCAA Notice to Schools.

This document provides information on the following:

* Cross-study specifications
* Indigenous Australians’ knowledge, culture and history
* outdoor experiences
* use of logbooks
* Unit 1 and Unit 2
* first aid skills
* biomes
* the impact of fire and flood
* approaches to Unit 1 and Unit 2 Area of Study 3
* Unit 3 and Unit 4
* environmental policies of the major political parties
* historical and contemporary relationships with the environment
* Assessment
* use of abbreviations
* use of structured questions
* use of logbooks for assessment
* Unit 4 Area of Study 3 written report

Cross-study specifications

Indigenous Australians’ knowledge, culture and history

How should I approach teaching content associated with the cross- study specification ‘Indigenous Australians’ knowledge, culture and history’?

The cross-study specification encourages teachers to include Indigenous peoples’ knowledge and perspectives in the design and delivery of teaching and learning programs related to VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies.

Specifically, the aim of the content related to Indigenous peoples’ perspectives in VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies is to develop an understanding of historical and contemporary Indigenous peoples’ relationships with outdoor environments via knowledge systems and traditional management techniques*.*

To deliver this content, teachers are encouraged to consider the following:

* Wherever possible, source information that is developed *by* or in consultation *with* Indigenous peoples.
* Many local Indigenous Australian communities have protocols that they have developed in relation to education. The education model preferred by the Victorian Koorie community, outlined in the [Koorie Education Policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/koorie-education/policy), is a good starting point for understanding the nature of these protocols.
* The development of relationships with Indigenous peoples in order to seek information that may not previously have been freely available requires cultural sensitivity and consideration of protocols. For this reason, it may sometimes be more appropriate and practical to consult generic sources, or sources related to the lands of other Traditional Owner groups, and apply these to the outdoor environments being studied.

A list of suggested resources includes:

* [VCAA Outdoor and Environmental Studies support materials](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/outdoor-and-environmentalstudies/Pages/Index.aspx)
* [Parks Victoria – Managing Country Together webinar](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/news-and-events/professional-learning/VCE/Pages/VCEOutdoorandEnvironmentalStudies.aspx) (VCAA and Parks Victoria)
* [Managing Country Together framework](https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/managing-country-together) (Parks Victoria)
* [Koorie Education Policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/koorie-education/policy)
* [Trove](https://trove.nla.gov.au/) (and search particular Indigenous groups)
* [Victoria’s Registered Aboriginal Parties](https://www.aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/victoria-registered-aboriginal-parties)
* [Outdoors Victoria](https://www.outdoorsvictoria.org.au/) (including the [Brian Nettleton Lecture – OV Conference 2023 – John Quay](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxBZSI0565M&t=225s) on YouTube)
* [The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) Victoria](https://achper.vic.edu.au/) and other subject association networks

What impact does the addition of Registered Aboriginal Parties to the existing key knowledge point in Unit 3 Area of Study 2 have on teaching content related to Indigenous peoples’ custodianship of outdoor environments?

Students are now required to understand how Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP) and land and water councils are formed, along with the work that these groups do. The First Peoples – State Relations website outlines the [processes of formal recognition and the requirements for a group to become a RAP in Victoria](https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/traditional-owner-formal-recognition-victoria).

If the area being taught does not have a recognised RAP or land and water council, teachers are still required to teach the role of these groups, and how the establishment of a land and water council or a RAP may affect the chosen outdoor environment into the future.

What is the difference between the key knowledge related to Indigenous peoples’ land management in Unit 2 Outcome 1 and Unit 4 Outcome 2?

In Unit 2 Outcome 1, the focus is on Indigenous peoples’ understandings of and perspectives on the land management of outdoor environments. In Unit 4 Outcome 2, the focus is on the land management *strategies* used by Indigenous peoples, based on accepted understandings and perspectives. These can be broken down into the following areas:

**Unit 2 Outcome 1**

* the ways in which Indigenous people might approach land management from different perspectives on outdoor environments, including the perspective that ‘being’, ‘knowing’ and ‘doing’ are inseparable
* historical and contemporary land management practices (such as traditional burning, agricultural techniques, hunting and gathering, and natural resource use)

**Unit 4 Outcome 2**

* examples of specific Indigenous peoples’ land management strategies in action, such as those featured in the [Managing Country Together](https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/managing-country-together) framework

Outdoor experiences and use of the logbook

See also the [Outdoor experience hours: School and teacher guidance](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/outdoor/2024OESOutdoorExperienceHoursSchoolTeacherGuidance.docx) support document.

What are suitable outdoor experiences and outdoor environments for VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies? When should outdoor experiences occur?

Outdoor experiences can be varied and include day trips, multi-day trips, recreational activities and guided activities. These may involve participation in community projects and conservation or restoration activities.

The outdoor experiences selected should allow students to make connections to key knowledge and key skills within the study design. This includes allowing students to observe the interrelationships between humans and nature, for example the effects of nature on humans and the effects of humans on nature. Further information about types of outdoor experiences is included in the study design (pages 11 and 12) and the [Planning](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/outdoor-and-environmentalstudies/Pages/Index.aspx) section of the support materials.

Outdoor environments should be an identifiable location (for example, the Mallee; the Surf Coast between Anglesea and Lorne; the Apollo Bay dune system; the Bendigo goldfields; the Bogong high plains; Wilsons Promontory; or Barmah forest or lakes), rather than a general area (for example, south-west Victoria). While environments located far afield have an important place in a teaching and learning program, equal importance should be placed on accessing environments local to the school. The advantage of local environments is that they can be engaged with readily, during class time and at minimal cost. They offer rich opportunities to develop and apply theoretical concepts through and in outdoor environments, in both urban and rural areas.

It is important that outdoor experiences occur before the scheduling of school-based assessment, as students will need to refer to these experiences in their assessment tasks in order to demonstrate achievement of the outcome.

How many outdoor experiences do students need to undertake per unit? And how can the required 25–50 hours per unit be met?

VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies has a strong focus on time spent in outdoor environments and developing human relationships with Country. Experiential education is the foundation of the study and while there is no minimum number of outdoor experiences required, teachers are reminded that students must spend between 25 and 50 hours participating in outdoor experiences (excluding travel and sleep) per unit.

Outdoor experience hours can be accrued in different ways (for example, through multi-day, single day or half-day activities, and timetabled lessons), and are a matter for teachers and schools to decide. However, teachers are encouraged to accrue as many hours as possible in local environments during timetabled lessons.

What happens if a student is absent from outdoor experiences?

To demonstrate each outcome, students must be able to engage in and reflect on outdoor experiences. If a student is ill or injured, or due to personal circumstances is unable to complete an outdoor experience, the teacher should refer to their school’s special provision policy, particularly if the outdoor experience is directly related to assessment (for example Area of Study 3).

The VCAA website also contains information about [special provision for classroom learning and school-based assessment](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/special-provision/Pages/SpecialProvisionforClassroomLearning.aspx).

For a student who qualifies for special provision for their school-based assessment, a teacher could use strategies such as:

* considering if the skills and knowledge have previously been demonstrated in class
* allowing the student to draw on previous outdoor experiences
* allowing the student to research the environment as a substitute for visiting the environment
* using an alternative outdoor experience and/or environment
* rescheduling the task
* setting a substitute task.

What should I consider when selecting outdoor environments to explore in Unit 4 Area of Study 3?

The outcome requires students to evaluate information gathered from 2 different outdoor environments across Unit 3 and Unit 4. To facilitate suitable depth of comparison and evaluation, these environments should have different characteristics, but should not both be located far away from school. To help students develop a familiarity with the selected environment, it is recommended that one environment is close to school. This will enable them to engage with the environment on multiple occasions during the year and help teachers to manage students who miss a visit to the selected outdoor environment.

How is the logbook used in Units 1–4?

Students undertaking this study must maintain a logbook of outdoor experiences in each of Units 1–4. This is used by teachers as a formative assessment tool to help determine the satisfactory attainment of an S for each outcome, and is a requirement for the completion of each unit.

Students must use their logbook to record primary data (such as observable characteristics of an outdoor environment) while conducting outdoor experiences. They can also use it to document the planning element of outdoor experiences.

Students can also use their logbook to record their written reflections on their demonstration of key practical skills.

The logbook provides students with a source of primary data, rather than being used as a specific assessment task.

See page 7 for information on the use of the logbook for assessment.

Unit 1 and Unit 2

Do students need to do a formal first aid course?

There is no requirement for students to undertake a formal first aid qualification. The key knowledge in Unit 1 Area of Study 3 requires students to develop only basic first aid skills, including the management of blisters, small wounds, snake bites and severe bleeds, and CPR and immobilisation. Teachers are encouraged to share their own understanding and skills when teaching these basic first aid skills.

What do students need to know about biomes?

Biomes are important ecological communities that are categorised according to factors such as geographical area, climatic conditions and vegetation. Students should learn the biome type, climatic conditions and examples of vegetation within the outdoor environments they visit. [The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Bioregions and EVC Benchmarks website](https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/bioregions-and-evc-benchmarks) is a useful resource for teaching students about the biomes they are visiting for their outdoor experiences.

When teaching the impact of fire and flood, what do I need to cover?

The study design specifies that students explore scientific understandings related to the effects of natural and human-induced changes, such as fire and flood. Teachers are reminded that when exploring the effects of natural and human-induced changes with their students, they have autonomy over what is studied, as suggested by the words ‘such as’. Teachers should therefore use their discretion and be sensitive to the potential emotional impact of discussing fire or flood in their particular school setting.

When exploring the effects of fire on environments, students should consider how the effects of controlled burning (also known as fuel-reduction burning) differ from those of wildfires. When teachers are exploring scientific understandings of flood with their students, they should consider the ecological impact that higher water flows have on specific ecological communities.

How should I approach Unit 1 and Unit 2 Area of Study 3 when developing a unit of work?

The purpose of Area of Study 3 is to provide an explicit opportunity for students to develop theoretical and practical understanding (key knowledge and key skills) *in* outdoor environments and *through* outdoor experiences.

Area of Study 3 in Unit 1 and Unit 2 has a distinct set of practical skills (key knowledge) that are to be applied (key skills) to and demonstrated during outdoor experiences. The intention is that the key knowledge will be delivered, in a practical way, during class time throughout the unit, and then assessed during the outdoor experience selected for Area of Study 3.

Where possible, the outdoor experience should be at least a full-day trip (and preferably a multi-day trip), given that the key knowledge includes route planning, the use of equipment to safely explore environments and navigation in Unit 1, and peer leadership and food planning in Unit 2. Outdoor experiences should also directly teach key knowledge and skills from the other areas of study within the relevant unit.

Unit 3 and Unit 4

What do I need to teach in relation to the environmental policies of the major political parties, in Unit 3 Area of Study 2? How do I ensure that what I teach is current, as policies can change?

Students need to explore an environmental issue in Australia and the related policies of 2 federal political parties or representatives, which must include at least one of: the Australian Labor Party, The Greens and the Liberal–National Coalition.

Each political party has information on its website about its current environmental policies. Accessing this information online will assist teachers to ensure that the content they teach is current.

What do I need to consider regarding time periods when comparing historical relationships and contemporary relationships with the environment?

In the context of the historical relationships discussed in Unit 3 Area of Study 1, ‘post-federation’ refers to the period 1901–1990, while the focus for the contemporary relationships covered in Unit 3 Area of Study 2 is the past decade.

It may be appropriate to consider ‘historical’ periods that extend beyond 1990 if a specific outdoor environment is being studied for its historical non-Indigenous relationships (Unit 3 Area of Study 1) and those relationships shared by Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals and groups (Unit 3 Area of Study 2), particularly in the context of Unit 4 Area of Study 3.

When covering conflicts in Unit 3 Area of Study 2, the focus needs to be on events that have taken place in the last decade, even if the conflict has roots that can be traced back to before the last decade.

Assessment

What abbreviations are acceptable for use in assessments?

Students can use any scientific abbreviation or an abbreviation that is stated in the study design or support materials without needing to write the term out in its entirety (for example, ‘RAP’).

For other terms a student wishes to abbreviate, they must write the term out in full the first time they use it, abbreviate it in brackets (for example, ‘Liberal–National Coalition (LNP)’) and then refer to the abbreviation for the remainder of that question only. If they refer to the term again in a different question, they should write it out in full and provide the abbreviation in brackets the first time they use it in that question.

If in doubt, students should write out the entire term and not use an abbreviation.

Can I provide structured questions as part of the assessment program?

The VCE assessment principles require school assessments to be designed in such a way that they provide a range of opportunities for a student to demonstrate, in different contexts and modes, the knowledge, skills, understandings and capacities set out in the curriculum.

The following measures have therefore been put in place to prevent the common practice of overusing structured, exam-style questions:

* In Units 1 and 2, given the widely used school practice of providing an internal school exam at the end of each unit, there is no further opportunity to use a structured questions assessment task.
* In Unit 3, there is no structured questions task; however, in Unit 4 there is an option to select this task.

Teachers are reminded that if they have selected a case study or data analysis task in any unit, they can choose to develop this task using short-answer questions, provided that all questions relate to the chosen case study or data stimulus.

How should the logbook be used in the assessment of Unit 1, Unit 2 and Unit 4 Area of Study 3?

**Unit 1 and 2 Area of Study 3**

When completing their assessment of a student's practical skills, teachers should use a rubric (see VCAA support materials) and also cite and consider the student's written reflections in their logbook. This assessment should be conducted in the field, not back in the classroom.

**Unit 4 Area of Study 3**

Unit 4 Area of Study 3 is assessed via a written report in which students draw on entries (primary and secondary data) that they have recorded in their logbooks. Students must therefore have access to their logbooks when completing the written report; however, it is the written report responses that are assessed, not the logbook itself.

Students should use their logbooks to record primary data while completing outdoor experiences in the 2 selected outdoor environments. Teachers might also provide students with the opportunity to supplement their primary data with secondary data and add this to their logbooks.

To assist with authentication, it is recommended that teachers retain the students’ logbooks and only allow entries to be made by students during class time. To help students use their logbooks in an effective and efficient way when completing their written report, teachers are advised to place a limit on the amount of data that students can record when in the field (for example, one page per key knowledge point).

For Unit 4 Area of Study 3, can the 4 key knowledge points selected as the context for the investigation be assessed in other Unit 3 and Unit 4 school-assessed coursework tasks?

It is reasonable that there should be some crossover between the assessment of the 4 selected key knowledge points that form the focus of Unit 4 Area of Study 3, and the assessment of other areas of study in Unit 3 and Unit 4. However, to avoid over-assessment of these points, teachers should not directly assess them in Unit 3 and Unit 4 Area of Study 1 and 2 assessments.

How should the written report for Unit 4 Area of Study 3 be structured?

Given that the task is a written report in which students evaluate 2 outdoor environments, it is appropriate that the teacher provides students with an inquiry question to help shape the written report. This question should be focused on the first key knowledge point of Unit 4 Area of Study 3, which represents the 4 selected key knowledge points.

Like all reports, the written report must have a defined structure and contain:

* an introduction, including a brief summary of the main findings or outcomes
* the body of the report, which should unpack the main findings or outcomes and provide a detailed evaluation of the 2 outdoor environments supported by data (primary and/or secondary, depending on the task requirements)
* a conclusion, which should describe what was learnt during the investigation and include a summary of findings or outcomes.

The teacher can provide scaffolding prompts in each section for students to respond to. These could be dot points that prompt students to explore the key knowledge that is the basis of the inquiry question.

The [sample performance descriptor](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/outdoor-and-environmentalstudies/Pages/Assessment.aspx) for Unit 4 Area of Study 3 in the VCAA support materials provides guidance on assessing the written report.