VCE Philosophy (2019–2024)

School-based Assessment Report

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

This report provides advice for the first year of implementation of the [*VCE Philosophy Study Design 2019–2024*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/philosophy/2019PhilosophySD.pdf). The [VCE Philosophy *Advice for teachers*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/philosophy/advice-for-teachers/Pages/Index.aspx) provides teaching and learning advice for Units 1 to 4 and assessment advice for school-based assessment in Units 3 and 4. Other support materials for the study can be found on the [VCE Philosophy study webpage](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/philosophy/Pages/Index.aspx) on the VCAA website.

This report is based on the findings from the 2019 School-based Assessment Audit for Units 3 and 4 VCE Philosophy. 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.

Overall, the schools audited demonstrated a strong understanding of the core requirements of the reaccredited *VCE Philosophy Study Design*. Schools are creating School-assessed Coursework (SAC) tasks that are varied in design, scope and difficulty, ensuring tasks are accessible for students at a variety of skill levels. There was a noticeable focus on written assessment and extended writing pieces, including essays, which provided students scope for rich and in-depth analysis and discussion. In addition, most schools are ensuring that the mandatory number of essay tasks are being assessed using the appropriate VCAA performance descriptors, which provide clear and detailed information for students. Instructions provided to students were clear and concise, and avoided ambiguities that have the potential to create disadvantage. There was evidence that teachers were looking to create entirely new SAC tasks or redesigning previously used SAC tasks to suit the changes in the study design and updated text list. There was minimal evidence of commercially produced tasks being used or tasks being reused from previous years without modification.

Schools were reminded that when SAC tasks are created using materials available in the public domain (such as commercially produced tasks, subject association materials and past VCAA examinations), these materials must be checked against the requirements of the current VCE study design to ensure compliance. For authentication purposes, schools must also ensure that SAC tasks used for school-based assessment are significantly different from the publicly available materials. Any materials in the public domain are potentially accessible to students, and students who access these materials prior to undertaking their SAC task may gain an unfair advantage over other students in the cohort.

Contemporary debates and thought experiments are being incorporated well. The breadth of different debates and experiments across the schools audited showed evidence of the variety of ideas students are being exposed to. Of note, however, is the absence of specific assessment of the new terminology within Outcome 1. It is imperative that schools ensure criteria within the key knowledge and key skills are being assessed.

Schools are reminded to provide clear instructions to students and staff in terms of the policies surrounding authentication and moderation, and other policies and procedures.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 3: Minds, bodies and persons

Outcome 1

Examine concepts relating to the mind and body, analyse, compare and evaluate viewpoints and arguments concerning the relationship between the mind and body found in the set texts, and discuss contemporary debates.

Task type options

The student’s performance is assessed by at least two of the following tasks:

* an essay
* a written analysis
* short-answer responses
* a written reflection
* presentations (oral, multimedia)
* a dialogue (oral, written).

*At least one essay task is required for Unit 3.*

Through their school-based assessment, schools are providing students with adequate opportunities for in-depth philosophical discussion while also providing some shorter and more manageable questions specific to key ideas or arguments within set texts. The SAC tasks submitted for the audit revealed a strong focus on the set texts but also provided opportunities for students to discuss philosophical terms and ideas without direct reference to the set texts.

Given the changes in the *VCE Philosophy Study Design* regarding key relevant philosophical concepts used in discussion of the mind and body, schools need to ensure that they are creating adequate opportunities for students to discuss these both within the set texts and in a more general sense. Schools that addressed this well provided students with glossaries of key terms, provided lower order questions requiring definitions of these terms and in exemplary cases, required students to analyse the set text ideas and arguments in relation to these terms. The strongest responses opted for a range of assessment opportunities that challenged students in different ways.

Within assessment of set texts, it was clear that the Smart and Nagel texts are being assessed appropriately, and the audit responses showed that a variety of different aspects of those texts were being assessed. Assessment of Descartes indicated that schools have largely mastered the key concepts and ideas worthy of assessment of this text. Most schools opted to use the performance descriptors from the VCAA *Advice for teachers,* choosing to convert these to rubrics that are student-friendly and clear, giving students the best chance of understanding what is expected.

SAC tasks should be designed to provide a range of opportunities for students to demonstrate the outcome in different contexts and modes. SAC tasks should also provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate different levels of achievement by including higher and lower order questions.

Outcome 2

Analyse, compare and evaluate viewpoints and arguments on personal identity in the set texts and discuss related contemporary debates.

Task type options

The student’s performance is assessed by at least two of the following tasks:

* an essay
* a written analysis
* short-answer responses
* a written reflection
* presentations (oral, multimedia)
* a dialogue (oral, written).

*At least one essay task is required for Unit 3.*

Schools are providing students with a range of learning opportunities and assessment task types within Outcome 2. Overwhelmingly, schools have responded to the new Michael’s text well, incorporating it into Outcome 2 both as a standalone text and as a way of exploring and critiquing the Locke and Hume extracts in greater depth. The assessment of Locke and Hume indicated that an appropriate understanding of the core and more central concepts of both texts is prevalent.

For the essays submitted as part of the School-based Assessment Audit, students were generally provided with prompts in the form of quotations or images with questions, allowing students to critically compare and contrast the set text’s views.

Contemporary debates and thought experiments were explored creatively. Numerous schools investigated recent news events for their debates, which included topics such as the complexities associated with modern technologies and theoretical future technologies.

The thought experiments that were investigated included traditional examples such as the Ship of Theseus as well as more contemporary options that considered theoretical future events and technologies such as memory erasure, cloning, and the disintegration and reintegration of a human body as a form of transportation. Assessments often asked how these events might affect the ongoing continuation of the identity of someone experiencing them.

There were numerous schools that provided short-answer style assessment for this outcome, with a text focus as well as essay questions. There was less evidence of more extended or multi-part questions when compared to Outcome 1.

It is recommended that schools provide sufficient opportunities for extended thinking and writing philosophically. No schools were found to be providing oral or multimedia assessments for this outcome. It is recommended that all available assessment task types be considered when developing SAC tasks.

Assessment (Outcome 1 and 2)

Schools are largely opting to use the VCAA performance descriptors in the *Advice for teachers* and presenting these thoughtfully and with clarity to their students.

Unit 4: The good life

Outcome 1

Discuss concepts related to the good life, and analyse, compare and evaluate the philosophical viewpoints and arguments in the set texts in relation to the good life.

Task type options

The student’s performance is assessed by at least two of the following tasks:

* an essay
* a written analysis
* short-answer responses­
* a written reflection
* presentations (oral, multimedia)
* a dialogue (oral, written).

*At least one essay task is required for Unit 4.*

It was evident from the audit that schools are providing students with a variety of different learning opportunities within Outcome 1. Set texts are being adequately assessed, and it was apparent from responses to the audit that many schools are confident in their ability to deliver the content of this outcome. For assessment, students are being provided with stimulus material to respond to as well as short-answer questions that require a variety of different skills to be demonstrated, with special emphasis on outlining, evaluating, applying and comparing.

Many questions in the SACs submitted to the audit focused on the skill of analysing philosophical viewpoints as opposed to fact recollection. Dialogue-based tasks were chosen by some schools for this outcome, and this approach to assessment provided opportunities for high-level discussion and thoughtful, rigorous debate between philosophers. Notably, no oral tasks were submitted as part of the audit. Schools are reminded that there are a variety of assessment options available for use when determining student achievement.

An area for improvement is the formal assessment of the key concepts and terms outlined in the key knowledge in the study design. Terms such as ‘justice’, ‘praise’, ‘duty’, and ‘teleology’ did not feature in the SAC tasks submitted by many schools. These terms are an important part of the study design and some formal assessment of them is required. Some SAC tasks incorporated these terms into multi-part questions that also featured the set texts rather than assessing the terms in isolation, encouraging students to provide in-depth responses. While assessing terms in isolation is valid, it is less demanding for the students and facilitates less differentiation.

Outcome 2

Discuss contemporary debates related to technological development and the good life, and examine the interplay between technological development and conceptions of the good life.

Task type options

The student’s performance is assessed by at least two of the following tasks:

* an essay
* a written analysis
* short-answer responses
* a written reflection
* presentations (oral, multimedia)
* a dialogue (oral, written).

*At least one essay task is required for Unit 4.*

Audited schools were providing students with clear guidance for producing work that meets the requirements for this outcome. However, some schools had not shifted their assessment to reflect the changing debates in the reaccredited study design, opting to create essay questions that assessed topics such as obligations to others and consumerism. The reaccredited study design has a clear focus on the impact of different technologies on the pursuit of a good life and valid assessment should incorporates these ideas.

In addition, some schools were not providing students will multiple tasks as part of their school-based assessment. Schools are reminded that at least two tasks must be used, one of which can be the essay (which is a required task for Unit 4 in either Outcome 1 or Outcome 2). Schools that met this requirement adequately incorporated into their tasks reflections on research into contemporary debates, analysis of set texts in relation to contemporary issues, and dialogic responses that allowed students to consider the interplay between philosophers on complex technological questions.

Responses that best met the requirements for this outcome utilised visual and written stimuli (often short passages of writing rather than single line quotations) and complex or open questions, incorporating multiple philosophers to construct their topics. These types of topics allow for a variety of analytical approaches for students and give scope for depth.

Common contemporary debates that schools examined included the relationship between technology and freedom, questions surrounding progress and creativity, and the impact technology has on morality and living a moral life. Such areas of concern met the requirements of the outcome well and required rich and complex responses, which is a valid expectation of the study.

Assessment (Outcome 1 and 2)

Assessment rubrics were largely derived from the VCAA performance descriptors. However, some schools opted to use in-house rubrics to support their student cohort. Schools are reminded to be careful with such approaches as rubrics not derived from the key performance indicators in the study design may not be valid nor adequately assess the outcome, thus disadvantaging students.

Schools are reminded that at least two SAC tasks must be undertaken for each outcome as outlined on page 25 and 29 of the study design. At least one essay task is required as one of the SAC tasks for Unit 4, which can be undertaken either in Outcome 1 or 2.