

2020 VCE Extended Investigation oral Externally-assessed Task report

General comments

In 2020 students completed Externally-assessed Tasks (EATs) based on the adjusted *VCE Extended Investigation Adjusted Study Design for 2020 only*. The EATs provided students with the opportunity to demonstrate and apply a range of knowledge and skills.

The Extended Investigation oral presentation affords students the experience of presenting and defending the research they have completed over the course of a year. The conduct of the assessment allows students to celebrate and reflect on their research journey. Overall, students were able to adapt well to the impact of COVID-19 in 2020, displaying an ability to adjust their investigations and oral presentations to suit the changing landscape. Students who were able to use the experience of the pandemic as a challenge that could be overcome by finding practical solutions were able to access more marks than students who asserted that they were unable to do anything that they had originally intended and had no credible alternative plan.

The oral presentation comprises two sections: the presentation of the investigation and the response to questions/challenges. A slight reduction was made to the duration of the presentations in 2020 (14–18 minutes), which was in line with the adjustments made to the Extended Investigation written report. Students presented for 7–9 minutes, after which they were asked questions for a further 7–9 minutes.

Assessment of the oral presentation is based on knowledge and understanding of the research area; defence of research findings and understanding of audience; response to questions and challenges; and reflection and evaluation. Students are strongly encouraged to use these four assessment criteria when developing the content and structure of their presentations.

Advice for teachers and students

- The time frame for the first part of the presentation was 7–9 minutes, and students are reminded to stay within this limit. In 2020 some students rushed to fit all their material in, making it difficult to follow at times.
- Students need to read widely about their topic area so they are well versed and prepared to support their research in a variety of ways.
- Students should practise their presentations and use cue cards selectively (i.e. dot points). Many students in 2020 read directly from their cue cards with some even reading directly from their written report.
- It is important that students are made aware of speech structure, signposting, language choices and presentation techniques that will assist in explaining their research effectively, as this will build their confidence in giving a presentation.
- When preparing for their oral presentation, students should consider how they are demonstrating critical thinking skills.

- Students generally used visual aids effectively, though they are reminded to take time to explain the visuals (such as charts and graphs) they have chosen to present.
- It is important that students take ethical issues seriously in their investigation. In 2020 many students offered only a prepared statement, without engaging meaningfully with the ethics of their research.
- Extended Investigation questions and methods must comply with responsible and ethical research guidelines, as outlined on pages 6–7 of the study design.

Specific information

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Each oral presentation is assessed individually against the criteria. Comments regarding performance levels as outlined below are for illustrative purposes only and do not constitute all aspects of student work that may contribute to achievement.

Criterion 1 – Knowledge and understanding of the research area

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	1	3	6	12	15	17	15	15	12	5	6.3

In order to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of their research area, students are expected to engage with the full detail of their investigation. This includes the focus and significance of their research area and question, background research in the field, as well as their chosen data collection method(s). Both the presentation and questions/challenges sections are used to assess against this criterion.

High-scoring students engaged with specific researchers or research fields, identified ideas or theories relevant to their research topic and question and then deployed appropriate methodologies. They engaged with literature and methods throughout their presentations and demonstrated a firm understanding of the complexities of the research field. Through demonstrating a strong engagement with the academic literature, they navigated themselves to find a justifiable and credible place within their research field. These students understood their area of research and the process of their investigation strongly enough to create interest and significance throughout.

High-scoring students were able to demonstrate how their selected data collection method, whether interviews, experiments, review of documents or surveys, enabled them to collect data that would respond to the specific demands of their research question. Even under the COVID-19 circumstances, students who scored highly were able to use an approach that allowed them to effectively answer their questions/topics. High-scoring presentations often included multiple stages of data collection. Many of these students had developed their own testing equipment or techniques for coding/analysing literature and data, and had even created their own frameworks and models as part of their methodological approach. In 2020 a number of students designed and built prototypes and tested them out. This 'piloting' of a chosen method was a hallmark of presentations that scored in the high range. This area also afforded opportunity for students, who were then able to find practical and meaningful research-based solutions to the restrictions experienced during the year.

Mid-range and low-scoring students may have neglected the current literature in both the background to the research and in connection to their own findings. Some students struggled to demonstrate a clear engagement with the academic literature. They offered only brief summaries of key ideas without critical engagement or an understanding of how their research is linked to other research in the field. Students must ensure they can demonstrate a strong engagement with the academic literature so they can justify the significance of their project and method. A number of students adopted 'literature review' as their declared method because of the pandemic but had no real understanding of the complexity and depth of this as an actual method.

Students scoring in the middle and lower ranges often found it difficult to explain the relevance of their selected method within the context of the research area. There were some topics with very limited research designs and 'literature review' and 'survey' as methods caused some issues. Students who choose to nominate a systematic literature review need to understand what this is and what it involves. Many students consider research or a general reading of literature to be equivalent to a systematic literature review. Surveys were frequently used, but sometimes lacked complexity. The purpose of a survey in answering the question was also not always articulated or clear. There needs to be a deep understanding of the different types of methodologies and their justification for different types of research.

Criterion 2 – Defence of research findings and understanding of audience

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	1	4	7	16	13	18	18	12	9	4	6.0

Students are expected to discuss the relevance of their work and justify their findings in light of their primary research question. In explaining their work to the assessors, presentations are expected to be well structured, coherent and free from jargon. Subject-specific terminology should be clearly explained. Both the presentation and questions/challenges sections are used to assess against this criterion.

In defending their findings, students were expected to discuss the relevance of their work, justify their findings and clearly articulate an outcome of their investigation in light of their research question.

Most students displayed a very real sense of enjoyment and passion for their topics. They presented with confidence and it was apparent that they had prepared well. However, it was clear that some students selected research topics they were not passionate about or interested in. This often led to apathetic and unenthusiastic presentations. It is possible that some of these students had the topics allocated to them as opposed to 'owning' their own information.

The adaptation of language for a non-specialist audience was done well in 2020. Students who actively defined complex terminology tended to deliver clearer presentations that were easier to follow. It is important that students have a range of techniques for explaining highly complex and technical terms. Techniques include using metaphor, analogy and visual aids. Although the use of visual technology is not assessed, students who used this medium to illuminate findings within the data were often better able to tailor their presentation for a non-specialist audience.

High-scoring students displayed an ability to restructure their investigation into a form appropriate for an oral presentation. They consistently used techniques including signposting to show when they were moving from one section of the investigation to another. By highlighting the most significant findings of their investigation and demonstrating how their findings helped them respond to their research question, these students were able to show connections as well as areas of disagreement with previous knowledge in the research area. Students who scored highly clearly and purposefully highlighted the most significant findings of their investigation and demonstrated how their findings helped them respond to their research question.

Mid-range and low-scoring students' presentations lacked a coherent structure and speed was often an issue. Some students were unable to overcome the inherent bias that had affected their research from the start, and had collected data that simply confirmed what they already thought about their topic. Some students who used friends as source of data to complete their research found it difficult to defend the reliability and validity of their research findings. Middle- and lower-range presentations often made bold assertions about generalising their findings without acknowledging the inherent bias in sample size and population. The presentation of data was often a weakness in these presentations. Students should make close reference to their visuals rather than just displaying them briefly and assuming that the assessors understand what was contained in the slide. In some cases, students merely listed their findings, while some students showed a wealth of data but failed to adequately and clearly explain what they had discovered and how their data helped them respond to their research question.

There was a tendency for students to spend a lot of time on the description and explanation of their topic and chosen methodologies, which meant there was a limited amount of time left to defend their research findings. There were a number of presentations in which students did not explain all of their findings, even indicating or demonstrating that they had more but were not going to speak about the rest due to time restrictions. In some cases, this seemed to be a way for students to speak more at length about one finding, without discussing the rest of their ideas. In essence, this meant that they did not fully answer their topic question or display all of their knowledge on the topic. More than one significant finding and data set is beneficial to understanding the research question. These presentations hinted at deeper or more complex knowledge, though assessors are only able to assess what is actually presented. Skipping over findings (even with acknowledgement) did not work effectively.

Criterion 3 – Responses to questions and challenges

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	0.2	4	8	14	15	15	18	9	10	6	6.0

The response section is designed to illuminate aspects of a student's work that may not have been fully explored in their presentation. Although there is only one criterion that explicitly addresses this section, the questions and challenges can have significant implications for success across the whole set of criteria. Students should not leave out key information in the expectation that they will be asked a question about it. Through the questions, students are given the opportunity to clarify and elaborate on their investigation. This includes key issues in the research, background research, methods, findings and limitations.

As there is no set list of questions that assessors will ask, it is important that students do not attempt to pre-empt what the assessors will ask; this often leads to prepared answers that do not necessarily fit the context of the question. Prior practice in responding to unpredictable questions is the best preparation. If unsure of the meaning of a question, it is recommended that students ask for clarification rather than answering based on uncertain interpretation.

In responding to questions and challenges, students who scored highly elaborated on and clarified their research design, supported their discussion with reference to previous research and further reflected on the findings of their investigation. These students answered what was asked, rather than deflecting, and were able to discuss issues beyond the strict parameters of their investigation. The highest-scoring students were able to demonstrate, via their answers to the questions asked, that their work belonged within their chosen research field and held a credible place within it. They also were able to see that their own work had the potential to be adapted or re-employed within a different context and successfully perceived the wider implications of their work.

Many students missed the opportunity during the questions and challenges section to evaluate their methodological approach and the implications the method may have had for their findings. This often resulted in students providing more of the same details they had already discussed, rather than displaying a deeper understanding or complexity of thinking. As such, they were not able to provide evidence of the work undertaken and extensive gaps in their knowledge and methods were exposed. For some students there was an over-reliance on their visuals. They were bound to the screen and unable to reflect critically during questioning without reference to it. Students need to be more familiar with their material and not rely on reading cue cards or constantly referring to their visuals when responding to questions and challenges. There were also a number of instances in which a student appeared to be delivering a pre-prepared answer to an anticipated question rather than addressing the specific nuances of the question that they had actually been asked. These problems were common in middle- and lower-scoring presentations.

Criterion 4 – Reflection and evaluation

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	1	4	10	16	11	19	13	13	10	2	5.8

This aspect of the oral presentation requires students to critically reflect on and evaluate their extended investigation. Both the presentation and questions and challenges sections are used to assess against this criterion.

COVID-19 impacted students to varying degrees in 2020. For some, the impact was significant; for example, students that were unable to access important resources due to school lockdowns (this was most relevant to scientific investigations that need specialist equipment). Students that used COVID-19 as a way to gloss over the limitations of their research were often unable to score highly in this criterion. Many students used COVID-19 as a justification for collecting insufficient and unreliable data, and as such, were not able to respond to their research question. Students that were able to come up with creative solutions to the practical problems of the year were also usually able to reflect on these decisions with accuracy and insight.

High-scoring students reflected on the decisions they made throughout their investigation and were able to critically examine and evaluate these choices. They were able to comment on potential limitations, while still valuing what they had achieved. Furthermore, they were able to explain why their area of research is important and where it might lead in the future. High-scoring students critically explored the impact COVID-19 may have had on their investigation and clearly explained the adjustments and adaptations they made. Importantly, these students were still able to show how they were able to respond to their research question.

In middle- and lower-range presentations confirmation bias was often an issue. Students who pursued simple projects about a personal enthusiasm found it difficult to evaluate and reflect on the process and were unable to draw substantiated conclusions. These lower scores were more often due to poor planning and execution than the impact of COVID-19. It is acceptable if methodological approaches and data collection techniques do not work, so long as students demonstrate that they understand why this occurred. The trialling of a particular method is not limited to experimental research design and could be used when conducting surveys, interviews, document reviews and focus groups.

It is important that students take ethical issues seriously in their investigations and understand the ethical dimensions of their research. Students do not need to spend a lot of time reviewing the ethical approval process. Drawn-out discussions about removing names from data, obtaining informed consent, etc. were often unnecessary. Discussions of this nature were only really useful if the ethical dimension of the investigation was significant in some way. Students are advised to have a clearer grasp of what ethics within a research context actually means and to reflect upon whether they did genuinely have to wrestle with any ethical issues.