

Aboriginal Studies

2009 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Society and Environment Learning Area



Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

ABORIGINAL STUDIES

2009 ASSESSMENT REPORT

GENERAL COMMENTS

Student engagement, interest, and general understanding of the course were reflected in the assessment tasks seen by the moderators and markers.

The provision of options for coursework assessments means that students can adequately address criteria without the need to complete all tasks in essay form. However, as in previous years, the *analysis* criterion tended to be marked too generously across each assessment component and presentation modes. This was particularly apparent in the Community Report and Investigation components.

It is recommended that teachers refer to the relevant section of the Society and Environment Learning Area Manual, which contains information about moderation and marking requirements and procedures for each of the course components. It is also recommended that, at the appropriate time for each assessment component, teachers provide students with the relevant criteria for judging performance.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 1: COMMUNITY REPORT

Students interacted with a wide variety of Aboriginal communities and organisations throughout South Australia and the Northern Territory to complete the Community Report. By using clearly labelled maps, diagrams and photographs, students were able to enhance the presentations of their interactions and experiences with Aboriginal communities and organisations.

It is recommended that teachers use the five sections for the Community Report as outlined within the curriculum statement as it was noted by the moderators that the provision of such scaffolding supported students with developing literacy skills to achieve success in this component. Following the five section structure should ensure that the assessment component requirements and criteria for judging performance are better met.

All students were able to meet the *description* criterion to a high degree. However, teacher emphasis on this criterion often disadvantaged students because they tended to produce a narrative of events and activities that were undertaken rather than an *analysis* and *reflection* upon these events and activities. Successful Community Reports contained thoughtful analysis of, and reflection on, students' time spent with the community or organisation, thus allowing them to meet the *analysis* and *reflection* criteria to a high degree. These reports also included an Aboriginal 'voice' as students quoted from the people they had interacted with, and learnt from, to support their *analysis* and *reflection*.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 2: COURSE WORK

Students' work reflected a range of classroom activities and the resources available. Where assessments were clearly written with criteria appropriate to the topics and tasks, students tended to be advantaged. By assessing one or two criteria for each task, and providing a broad marking scheme, teachers enabled their students to address the criteria more effectively than when three or four criteria were selected and a low range of marks (e.g. a mark out of five for *analysis*) was allocated. It is recommended that, when options are provided within a task for students to show

their knowledge and understandings, these are presented as options for presentation, not as different task types.

Generally, of the four assessment criteria, *critical analysis* continues to be inadequately addressed. This is an area that requires explicit teaching. It is recommended that this include the provision of well-constructed exemplars to guide students and to support them in developing the skills needed to adequately address this criterion. Given the nature of this subject, teaching about bias and reliability is important. Students need to become 'critically literate' as they research, evaluate resources, and make judgments.

It is recommended that, if an assignment is presented in the form of a visual representation, it has a brief explanation to show how the criteria have been met and to explain the purpose. It is recommended that when students create artworks, rather than present the work which may be damaged in transit at moderation, photographs with the assessment task sheet attached be used to show the student work.

Assessment task sheets need to clearly show the percentage being awarded for the task and, for moderation, class mark spreadsheets that indicate the mark and the percentage need to be included.

Topic 1: Histories

Generally, the Histories topic is taught first by teachers with the assessment task taking the form of an essay. However, students with developing literacy skills, or who were responding to an essay question that was too broad for a restricted word limit, were often disadvantaged as they tended to write recounts rather than show evidence of *investigation* or *analysis*. The moderators noted that the breadth of research for essays was often limited and that referencing was done poorly. Bibliographies were also often lacking.

Tasks that involved the meeting of three or more assessment criteria generally tended to have one or two of these met poorly. Where teachers provided an alternative assessment mode to essays, such as through a creative response or a PowerPoint, all students, particularly those whose literacy skills were developing, were able to show evidence of their knowledge and understandings.

Topic 2: Aboriginal Cultures and Identity

Where the teaching resources and the topic focused on cultures, this allowed for students to develop an understanding of what identity is and what it means to Aboriginal peoples.

Many classes undertook the reading of autobiographies or interviewed Aboriginal people. Where these autobiographies or interviewees were appropriately selected, students demonstrated sound understanding in relation to Aboriginal cultures and identity. This understanding was evident in the use of appropriately selected supporting quotes.

Again, the moderators noted that many tasks required students to address three or more criteria, or were too vague and broad in their design, or the criteria for the task were inappropriately selected. In each of these cases, students were disadvantaged as they could not adequately show their knowledge and understanding and this impacted on the mark awarded for this topic.

Topic 3: Contemporary Issues

Tasks which enabled students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of contemporary issues included newspaper articles, letters to the editor or a politician, and oral presentations. As in previous years, the focus for this topic was on locally-based issues or broader-based issues that were current and contentious. The chosen issues generally focused on a discussion of the causes and effects of racism, thus allowing students to explore the *investigation* criterion. Well-structured tasks that did not focus on too many issues allowed students with developing literacy skills to successfully meet the task criteria.

Topic 4: Aboriginal Arts

Arts selected for study in this topic included poetry, performance, photography, painting, and music. Selection of the art works was often made in relation to issues of significance to Aboriginal people and the way in which art reflects cultural values, tradition and identity, as well as how it can be used as a means of political and social expression.

The moderators again noted that where students were required to meet more than two criteria or the criteria were inappropriately selected, the students often struggled. When the task required students to produce their own art work, the higher achieving examples were accompanied by explanations or rationales that provided supporting information against the criteria.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 3: INVESTIGATION

Investigations followed, for the most part, the structure recommended in the curriculum statement and generally adhered to the maximum word limit of 2000 words. Students were disadvantaged by either selecting topics that were too broad or by clearly exceeding the specified word limit. Where choice of topic/hypothesis was narrow, students were best able to address the criteria of this assessment component. Where topics addressed a specific question (for example, by using *how*, *why*, *what*, *who* or *did*), investigations maintained a stronger level of *analysis* and *reflection*.

Students who accurately referenced their sources, including the Aboriginal people they had interviewed or surveyed, met the *research* criteria better than those who had little or no referencing. Overall, the level of referencing was poorly done as many students did not acknowledge their sources of information. Bibliographies were generally done poorly or not provided at all. Many students are using Canadian Aboriginal and/or Indigenous information believing it to be Australian-focused. It is recommended that teachers make students aware of the differences between such sources of information before students begin their research and writing of their investigation. Students should avoid the use of unacknowledged photographs.

Students who had a broad research base and worked with a specific question or hypothesis tended to address all criteria to a higher degree than those students who relied solely on the internet for their research or used a topic with no specific question (e.g. the issue of petrol sniffing). Students who relied heavily on the internet, particularly Wikipedia, as their sole source of information were also generally unable to meet the *research* and *communication* criteria. Often, students who interviewed Aboriginal people did not include any reference to the views of this person in their Investigation.

When investigation topics were about local issues or issues recently in the public arena, students were generally able to obtain a range of perspectives and thus meet the *analysis* criterion to a higher degree than those students who chose a broad topic. Investigations based on a one word topic (e.g. Health) tended to be a simple recount of the facts with little or no analysis. Markers noted that, often, when students included the perspectives of Aboriginal people, the assumption was made that all Aboriginal people have the same views. Information tended to be provided in a simplistic and narrow manner and without discussion. As a result, the marks awarded for the *analysis* criterion, which is the most heavily weighted of this component, were low and the overall mark for the Investigation was affected.

It is important to note that:

- SACE Board cover sheets for this component should be filled out with the required information (i.e. student registration, investigation topic and word count) and be attached to the front of the Investigation. The cover sheet proforma is available on the SACE Board website.
- There should not be any school, teacher or student identification on the Investigation, except the SACE Board registration number on the top right hand corner of each page.
- Teachers should allocate marks against the Investigation assessment criteria published in the Aboriginal Studies curriculum statement and by using the Investigation performance indicators which can be found on the SACE Board website.

Chief Assessor
Aboriginal Studies