

# Aboriginal Studies

2011 Assessment Report



Government  
of South Australia

**SACE**  
Board of SA

# **ABORIGINAL STUDIES**

## **2011 ASSESSMENT REPORT**

### **OVERVIEW**

Assessment reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

This year was the first year of the new SACE at Stage 2. While the number of students who chose to study Aboriginal Studies was smaller than in previous years, moderators and markers noted that student engagement, interest, and understanding of the course continued to be reflected in the range of classroom activities and assessment tasks. Students performed strongly in both the school and external assessment components; 95% of students achieved a C grade or higher in the school assessment and 92% achieved a C grade or higher in the external assessment.

Generally, the provision of options for coursework assessment allowed students to adequately address criteria without the need to complete all tasks in essay form. However, the moderators and markers noted that the assessment design criteria of analysis and evaluation, and reflection tended to be marked generously across assessment components and presentation modes; this was particularly apparent in Assessment Type 2: Report and Assessment Type 4: Investigation.

The moderators also recommend that, at the appropriate time for both the school and external assessment components, teachers provide students with the relevant performance standards.

### **SCHOOL ASSESSMENT**

#### **Assessment Type 1: Response**

The subject outline required at least two responses for Assessment Type 1: Response and generally two response tasks were completed by students. While all four topics listed in the subject outline were represented in this assessment type, Topic 1: Histories and Topic 4: Aboriginal Arts were the popular choice of topics in allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in this assessment type. The moderators noted that where teachers provided an alternative assessment mode to essays, such as a creative response or a PowerPoint presentation, all students, particularly those whose literacy skills are developing, were generally able to show evidence of their knowledge and understanding. However, the moderators noted that selection of specific features of the assessment design criteria by teachers often disadvantaged students when too many features or inappropriately selected features were being assessed.

The two assessment design criteria to be assessed for this assessment type are knowledge and understanding, and communication. The moderators noted that, generally, the knowledge and understanding criterion was well addressed by students; however, the communication criterion, particularly in relation to the use of evidence and acknowledgment of sources, was poorly done. The moderators recommend that this is a skill which needs to be explicitly taught to students, particularly given its importance in the external assessment.

The subject outline states that one of the response tasks should require students to reflect on what they 'have learnt about intercultural communication and understanding from two or more sources'. The moderators noted that this was often poorly done, as some tasks did not allow students the opportunity for reflection. It is recommended that the concept of 'intercultural communication' is unpacked for students during the teaching and learning for the assessment task.

## Assessment Type 2: Report

In 2011 students continued to interact with a variety of Aboriginal communities and organisations throughout South Australia and the Northern Territory to complete their reports. It was noted by the moderators that students who chose to visit organisations often did so over a series of visits to different organisations.

Student presentations of their interactions with Aboriginal communities or organisations were enhanced by their preparation for the experience, as well as by the inclusions of clearly labelled and annotated visuals such as maps, photographs, and diagrams. The moderators also noted that successful reports included the clear acknowledgment of the Aboriginal people with whom they had interacted in the use of attributed quotes and within bibliographies. The moderators were pleased to note that more students are acknowledging the Aboriginal people they interacted with in the bibliography of their report.

The moderators noted that some reports followed the outline of the previous course's community report; this often disadvantaged students, particularly in relation to the assessment design criterion of reflection. It is recommended by the moderators that teachers provide all students with the relevant information about the form of the report from the subject outline to allow students to focus their interactions with Aboriginal people and to provide them with an understanding of the purpose of the report as is now required by the subject outline. It was noted by the moderators that the provision of this scaffolding by teachers supported those students with developing literacy skills in achieving success in this assessment type.

Students successfully met the knowledge and understanding criterion to a high degree. However, the moderators noted that many student responses to the reflection criterion tended to produce a narrative of events and activities that were undertaken, rather than a *reflection* on the student's own learning about intercultural communication and understanding through their interactions with Aboriginal people and the activities undertaken, as stated by the subject outline. Successful reports contained thoughtful analysis of, and reflection on, the time the students spent with the communities or organisations they visited. These reports also included an Aboriginal 'voice' as students quoted from the people whom they had interacted with and learnt from, to support their personal reflection on their experiences. Students who acknowledged the information gained from their interactions with Aboriginal people were able to meet the communication criterion to a high degree.

## **Assessment Type 3: Text Production**

The subject outline required at least one text production for Assessment Type 3: Text Production and generally two text production tasks were completed by students. While all four topics listed in the subject outline were represented in this assessment type, Topic 2: Aboriginal Cultures and Identities and Topic 3: Contemporary Issues were popular choices in allowing students to show their knowledge and understanding. A variety of assessment forms, both written and multimodal, were used in this assessment type; however, it is recommended that tasks are kept manageable by not including too many different options for students to address in one task.

According to page 30 of the 2011 subject outline, 'The set of assessments, as a whole, must give students opportunities to demonstrate each of the specific features by the completion of the subject.' Again the moderators were concerned that often too many specific features within the assessment design criteria were being assessed within a single task and that these features were not reflected in the intent of the task design. For example, the blanket use of all three specific features of the knowledge and understanding criterion often disadvantaged students; it is recommended that teachers carefully select the specific features to be assessed to match the task design and intent.

The three assessment design criteria to be assessed for this assessment type are knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation, and communication. The moderators noted that, generally, the knowledge and understanding, and communication criteria were well addressed by students; however, the analysis and evaluation criterion was generally poorly done. It is recommended that teachers explicitly teach the skills of analysis and evaluation to students, as they need to become 'critically literate' while they research, evaluate resources and information, and make judgments based upon this evaluation.

## **EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT**

### **Assessment Type 4: Investigation**

Markers noted that investigations generally followed the structure recommended by the subject outline and adhered to the maximum word-limit of 2000 words; however, the markers noted that on many final products the word-count was missing. No students took the opportunity to present their final product as a stand-alone oral presentation or in multimodal form, as is now possible

The breakdown of the investigation results shows that 92% of students achieved a mark of C or better; however, 50% were within the C grade band. Students were disadvantaged by selecting topics that were too broad or by not having an obvious purpose to the investigation being undertaken. Where choice of topic/hypothesis was narrow or where topics addressed a specific question (for example, using 'how', 'why', 'what', 'who', 'when', or 'did'), investigations maintained a stronger level of analysis and reflection, and students were best able to address the criteria for this assessment component.

Markers noted that those students who accurately referenced their sources, including the Aboriginal people they had interviewed or surveyed, met all the criteria for the external assessment component at a higher degree than those who had little or no referencing. The markers noted that overall bibliographies were often done. It is recommended that teachers explicitly teach students how to construct a bibliography or reference list. Students should avoid the use of unacknowledged visual material such as 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. Those students who relied on the Internet as their main source of information were generally unable to meet the knowledge and understanding, and communication criteria.

The markers observed that many students indicated they had interviewed Aboriginal people in relation to their chosen topic or issue, but this was not reflected in the body of their investigation; that is, the information gained was either not used or not used well. As a result, the markers noted that the reflection criterion which focuses on intercultural communication was poorly done or often missing from the investigations. Students who provided a range of Aboriginal people's perspectives were able to meet all criteria to a high degree. However, the markers also noted that, in relation to the analysis and evaluation criterion, many students had a tendency to make generalisations in relation to Aboriginal perspectives with the assumption that all Aboriginal people have the same views.

It is recommended that teachers explicitly teach research methods e.g. to provide students with the skills to assess research materials for their relevance and currency. It is also recommended that teachers provide students with examples of successful investigations so that they can successfully develop investigation questions and hypotheses to meet the analysis and evaluation criterion.

## **OPERATIONAL ADVICE**

It is highly recommended that teachers consult the relevant section of the learning area manual which contains information about marking requirements, moderation, and procedures for each of the course components. It is also recommended that, at the time of submitting student materials for moderation, teachers carefully reread the information provided by the SACE Board in relation to the requirements for the moderation process, such as presenting the student sample as indicated on the blue form. It was also noted by the moderators that some teachers had not included the assessment plan as required or had not attached assessment sheets to the student work. Occasionally teachers did not clearly indicate on their assessment sheets the following items: the assessment type, the specific assessment design criteria being assessed, or the assessment awarded. Of particular concern to the moderators were tasks on which teachers indicated that one set of specific features was being assessed, but the rubric used to assess the student's performance in the task indicated a completely different set of specific features had been used for assessment.

Again, it is recommended that student artwork is not sent in for moderation; rather than the actual work, which can be damaged in transit, photographs of the work should be attached to the assessment task sheet.

It is also recommended that digitally presented work is provided for moderation on CD or DVD rather than on cassettes or USB drives. When students create

multimedia responses, these should be clearly labelled with the student name and the task, such as 'response' or 'text production'. It is also important that a check is done to make sure that the task to be moderated is actually accessible on the CD or DVD. Teachers should follow the advice on the submission of electronic files in the learning area manual.

In relation to the externally assessed component (investigation), teachers' attention is drawn to the SACE Board cover sheets which should be filled out for this component. The cover sheet proforma, which outlines all the required information (such as student's SACE registration number, investigation question/hypothesis, and word-count) is to be attached to the front of the investigation, and is available on the SACE website. Teachers should ensure that each page of the investigation is numbered and that the student's SACE registration number appears on the top right-hand corner of each page.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

Student work reflected a range of interests and classroom activities. Moderators noted that the most successful tasks were those that provided students with options for presentation within a single task rather than a variety of choices for the task. The moderators were concerned at the number of tasks which were too similar in content and/or focus, thus not allowing students to communicate a range of knowledge and understanding. It is recommended that individual tasks within an assessment type do not assess too many specific features, as this can hinder student success; for example, aspects of the knowledge and understanding, or communication criteria are not necessarily appropriate for all individual tasks.

Overall, of the four assessment design criteria, analysis and evaluation, and reflection were poorly done by students. It is recommended that these two criteria be unpacked for students; for example, for reflection, a question might be: 'Have you provided personal anecdotes of learning from Aboriginal people?' Given the nature of this subject, teaching about bias and reliability is important to allow students to successfully meet the analysis and evaluation criterion. Areas where the moderators recommend more explicit teaching relate to the viewpoint (held by many students) that all Aboriginal people hold the same opinion on issues of importance to Aboriginal people; historically inaccurate information and terminology (for example, that Captain Cook settled Australia in 1770); and the personification of governments and Western culture as 'the white man'.

Teachers are encouraged to look at the exemplars of annotated student work on the SACE website and to deconstruct these with their students in relation to what makes a good student response.

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