

Australian and International Politics

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Society and Environment Learning Area



Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

AUSTRALIAN AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 1: EXAMINATION

There were many high quality papers this year and fewer C or D grades than in the past.

Most students presented well-organised responses with a clear structure including an introduction, a body of paragraphs, and a conclusion. A number of students presented excellent topic sentences to each paragraph, and by clearly outlining their main point they quickly developed continuity of argument in the body of the essay, and a flow of logical thought. This high quality of knowledge, supported by a wide range of examples with a strong argumentative line, impressed all markers. The more successful students provided informative and probing analysis, and directly addressed the key words in the questions. These responses featured accurate evidence and were well planned.

Less successful responses relied on general ideas without considering the specific political issues. These arguments were not sustained, lacked application to the question, and included extensive narratives. A few students agreed automatically with a statement. A few seemed to have prepared an essay and tried to connect it to a question. Students should avoid the use of 'first person' and also stating, very early in their response, that the question set was totally wrong. Students are reminded to ensure that their responses are legible.

SECTION A: AUSTRALIAN POLITICS

The most popular questions, in order of preference, were 6, 8, and 1. 'Voting and Elections' was the most popular topic, while questions 2 and 7 attracted the best overall average results.

The Australian Constitution and Federalism

Question 1

This was generally very well answered. The essays were soundly constructed with a strong argumentative line. It was generally understood that in some areas the Constitution does fulfil its intended role and in other areas it does not. Students often mentioned the High Court as playing its two key intended roles, but went on to note that decisions post-1920 tended to shift power towards the federal spheres and away from states, which was not the original intention. A number of students looked at the idea that the lower house was to be the people's house – which tends to remain, whereas the senate has not remained the state's house. The idea that the Constitution includes a mechanism to solve disputes between the houses was noted (1974), but little mention was made of 1975, although in other areas the role of the Governor General was covered.

Students displayed considerable knowledge in exploring how and why the Constitution came into being (a common feature was students exploring historical reasons for federation as a first paragraph), and subsequent changes in Australian society. Many made the point that whilst it has lasted a long time and is relatively successful, the Constitution is limited indeed, and arguably outdated linguistically, culturally, technologically, and socially. Other topics of discussion revolved around whether or not a Bill of Rights is necessary, and whether or not

Australia should become a Republic. The more successful papers referred to specific sections of the Constitution to very good effect.

Question 2

Most students had an impressive range of High Court cases to use, and they examined whether or not the High Court effectively resolved issues. Engineers, Uniform Tax, Tasmanian Dams, and Mabo were popular examples. Almost without exception, the students who did refer to specific sections or sub-sections of the Constitution did so very effectively. Some seemed to miss the point that a resolution was a decision and by definition one/some of the parties must/may be disappointed. Students are reminded to try to use contemporary examples. The most successful students referred to a range of other methods to resolve issues. Some covered referenda and/or referral of power, but very few looked at either COAG and/or arbitration.

Political Representation, Parliament and the Executive

Questions 3 and 4

There were no responses to these questions.

Voting and Elections

Question 5

This was a relatively popular question. Students had very good general knowledge of the preferential and proportional voting systems. Some responses were too lengthy in their explanation of how selected parts of each system work, and did not focus on the precise words of the question. Others responses were fair because they provided a narrative description of both voting systems. The most successful responses looked at compulsory and optional preferential voting and/or mentioned the Hare Clark System in Tasmania. The outstanding responses made mention of the advantages to the voters, as well as the advantages and disadvantages to parties. Some impressive work on preference deals between parties was noted. A few students spent time on the now defunct 'first past the post' system, but others did not go beyond a brief mention when comparing it to the other two systems. Information about the donkey vote was interesting but unnecessary.

Question 6

The majority of responses were quite successful. One marker commented that 'it almost reached the point of enjoyable anticipation of reading the essay... they were of such a high standard.' Strong argument featured throughout. With 2010 being an election year, the South Australian and Tasmanian State Elections featured significantly, as did the 2010 Federal Election (where there was a close scrutiny of the Greens and Independents, and their respective policies, as well as the leadership of Julia Gillard and Tony Abbot). A few responses spent an unnecessary amount of time on the Chantelois affair. The 2007 Federal Election was also popular and students closely scrutinised the differences between Howard and Rudd as personalities, and then examined Work Choices as one point of policy difference. That said, there were some responses with only superficial detail. Thorough coverage was also given of the 2007 Federal Election, as well as to the paraphrase: 'we will say who will enter Australia and under what circumstance they will enter'. Some students mentioned that the Howard 'Battlers' had changed their allegiance. Any response that

attempted to introduce short and long-term factors in elections generally did not attempt to address the question. Some responses included material that was irrelevant, such as lengthy descriptions of Julia Gillard's haircut, dress sense, choice of partner, and non-religion, while others gave extensive coverage to Tony Abbot, his bathers, and triathlon participation. Some students raised the question of the media turning the election into a personal popularity contest.

Political Parties

Question 7

There were some outstanding, scholarly responses. Most students tended to grasp the drift towards the centre, but did not really appreciate the 'how and why'. Some referred to the Hawke-Keating government and its free market ideals and its bipartisanship with Liberals on a number of issues. Some tried to analyse what they saw as the lack of any identifiable agenda from the current opposition, beyond blocking. Many argued that Tony Abbott was more right wing than Malcolm Turnbull. This year, more students tied the historical facts to the words of the question, rather than offering a history lesson on the origins of the major parties. Ideas in and around the linear political spectrum were well known. Factions, wets, dries, small 'l' liberals and similar terms were used to good effect. One or two prepared essays dwelt on pragmatism and ideological purity, but avoided addressing the key thrust of the question. The more successful students had clearly spent time on party web sites gathering information.

Question 8

This was another popular question in which the strongest students identified the fact that, whilst extremes exist (citing the examples of the Sex Party), independents and minor parties are an outlet for expression of diversity and therefore a necessity in a pluralistic democracy. Argument was most often centred on Senator Xenophon, Rob Oakeshott (Lyne), Tony Windsor (New England), Bob Katter (Kennedy), Greens, Democrats (to a lesser extent than in past years) and the DLP. Some students took the stance that the existence of a hung parliament suggests that it does not represent extremes. Markers noted spelling problems in the names of some political candidates. Fewer students than in the past incorporated the Nationals into their argument. Almost without exception students referred to the Federal Election of 2010, and in general terms markers were impressed by the depth of knowledge.

SECTION B: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The most popular questions in this section were 12 and 25. Question 18 attracted the best overall average result.

Global Citizenship

There were no responses to this section.

Global Media

Question 12

Students took the opportunity to explore the dimensions of this issue and usually focused on Fox or Rupert Murdoch as their central case study. Most argued that Murdoch is an interventionist proprietor who sees no contradiction between the obligations of the press and his pursuit of commercial and political goals. Most students mentioned the relationship between Fox News Channel and the apparent link to the victory of George W. Bush in 2000 and 2004. Students mentioned the blurring of boundaries between opinion and news coverage citing the practice of Bill O'Reilly who uses the refrain 'like some people say'. Students reflected on the network's use of news alerts, special reports and the on-screen 'ticker' to heighten a sense of a threat. Some effectively used statistics from the survey of Fox viewers conducted by Robert Greenwald of PBS on 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' and other issues relevant to the 'War on Terror'. Others discussed what they believed to be the 'uneven coverage idea', and referred to the pro-Republican reportage and the 'imbalanced' views of numerous commentators. The best responses mentioned Murdoch's position as the largest single donor to the Tea Party movement and his employment of Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin.

A much briefer coverage was given to British politics. Time was spent on the *Sun's* campaigns against Neil Kinnock and Gordon Brown, as well as their initial support for Tony Blair. The well-known phrase 'could the last person to leave Britain turn out the lights' was quoted to good effect. Other evidence such as Blair's apparent willingness to court Murdoch (the Hayman Island speech) and 'was the *Sun* wot won it' was noted in a number of papers. On a local front, some considered what may or may not be a virulently anti-ALP stance of the *Australian* from 1975 onwards. Others mentioned the case study of Silvio Berlusconi and his monopolisation of the Italian media, and the impact during the last Italian election on Romano Prodi. Some students covered the regimes such as those in China and North Korea as examples of 'closed shops' as far as media access is concerned. Brief discussion of the Great Firewall of China was very effective. Other responses mentioned the threat presented to the traditional media by social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. One marker commented that students should not assume that public and small media proprietors are automatically independent and unbiased.

Question 13

This question attracted few responses. Students did use a good range of examples from democratic states (e.g. U.S.A, Australia), through to totalitarian regimes. (e.g. Burma, Iran, North Korea). Some of the more successful responses cited Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, the 1992 British general election, the 2004 USA Presidential election, and Murdoch in Australia. The website of 'The O'Reilly Factor' was used to good effect. In the less successful responses the student often wrote narratives about media ownership, and little else. Most papers had a brief paragraph about the role of alternative media in terms of setting the agenda. In almost all cases, this paragraph showed some depth of understanding.

Question 14

There were no responses to this question.

Australian International Relations

Question 15

Many students used a range of examples to explore this question. Some students referred to 1939, and then looked at the impact of Pearl Harbor and the fall of Singapore. Without exception both Britain and the USA were discussed. Few students took the opportunity to argue that Australia does have an independent position in the world. Most papers only referred to military and/or political reliance. One marker suggested that some students who were attracted to this question had not studied the topic, but studied the USA and World Affairs. Such essays were solid 'B', but did not achieve a higher mark because of their lack of knowledge of the dot points of topics listed in the curriculum statement.

Question 16

This question attracted few responses, but all were in the high 'B' to low 'A' range. The core of this question was an examination of Australia's foreign policy within the time frame outlined by the student in their argument. It was in this question where a core group of essays explored this very well, with solid use of examples including G20, APEC and ASEAN.

Question 17

This question attracted few responses and all were in the 'B' range. Quite a range of dispute types was mentioned from war to peace-keeping, to economic matters, to border disputes, to political and cultural ties. An historical approach was taken by some, while others looked mainly at twenty-first century examples. The words 'how significant' could have been attacked more openly. One marker noted that students would benefit by checking the geography of their answers as, at times, there were notable factual errors in terms of site and comparative position.

The United Nations and Human Rights

Question 18

This was by far the most popular question in this topic and usually exceptionally well answered. Most students demonstrated a very impressive knowledge of the structure and membership of the United Nations. A number of students quoted not only from the Charter, but also the chapter and the specific articles in the Charter. Many papers referred to the manner in which Security Council Resolution 1769 was intended to be the mechanism for resolving the Darfur conflict. The more successful responses focused on ideas linked to national sovereignty. The idea that Heads of State cannot be taken before the International Court of Justice received coverage.

Most students argued that human rights had been partly achieved, with the more successful ones looking at 'why not' and who went on to muse on the idea that the veto power of Security Council had been used to block progress. Others looked at the position in Somalia and the failure of broader policy in situations such as Afghanistan, and then debated the level of human rights. All made direct or oblique reference to the need for optimism in the face of near impossible tasks. There were a number of sound discussions around the contemporary position of Aung San Suu Kyi, a former General Secretary of the National League for Democracy.

Question 19

There were few responses to this question. All were in the range of a low 'B'. Usually students covered a range of ideas but not to the depth of the previous question. The range of examples used included Congo from the 1960s, Rwanda in the 1990s, Burma and China. Some looked at the role of agencies and mentioned UNICEF and UNIFEM and the follow-up actions after the Haiti earthquake of 2010. Often students 'played' with the word 'peace-keeping' and queried whether or not the United Nations kept the peace. The notion of national sovereignty was mentioned, but in an unconvincing manner.

Question 20

There were no responses to this question.

The Politics of the Asia-Pacific Region

More students answered this section than at any time in previous years.

Question 21

The responses covered the gamut of grading from 'A' to 'E'. The more successful papers did 'critically examine', while the less successful papers disappointingly gave a list. The manner in which strengthening or weakening happened was debated in the more successful papers. Some students argued in a convincing manner that problems came when diversity existed within the country, and cited the Korean peninsula, East and [West] Timor, and diversity within the Indonesian archipelago, but few mentioned the problems that the people of western China face. Most students made some reference to the internal problems of Fiji. Others students covered a range of border disputes and argued that diversity caused problems, giving case studies from South Asia.

Question 22

This question attracted few responses, but it also produced the most successful results and longest answers of the three questions in this section. Most covered North and South Korea as an example of a point of difference for countries/nations in close proximity. Others mentioned the differences between Samoa and Tonga. Some lengthy narratives were given about the struggles in East Timor. Less successful responses started with dictionary definitions of democracy and autocracy, which was neither needed nor recommended.

Question 23

The line that Australia only played a minor role was the touchstone of the papers in this question. Much was made of the use of economic aid, of moral and diplomatic support and work via the United Nations. Focus was given to our peace-keeping forces at a range of sites. Some students were determined to make the point that Australia is a bystander in the region. Examples here included East Timor and Fiji. Others noted that Australia played a more important role in the Pacific archipelagos than in mainland Asia. Some cynicism was noted about the idea that Australia is a 'quarry' for selected Asian countries.

The United States of America and World Affairs

Question 24

Most students handled responses to this question well. The more successful responses examined the term 'remains' in depth. Most referred to hegemony in a range of forms. One marker commented on the exceptional array of accurate and significant statistical information that was presented. Knowledge of specific geopolitical situations during and since the Cold War was outstanding. As in the past, there was good coverage of the contemporary dilemma of the sub-prime crisis. One or two perceptive students understood that America's global leadership has always been challenged in some way or another since WWII. Less successful responses missed the opportunity to take a comparative position.

Question 25

Students responded in an intelligent manner to this question. Some less successful responses jumped in to criticise American foreign policy and argued that it never has produced peace. The more perceptive implied that at worst it reduced the chances of prolonged war. Invariably, regardless of the position taken, the Vietnam War received a mention. The defenders of the policy referred to the domino effect. There was much criticism of George Bush and terms like 'war monger' or 'war hawk' were noted. It was equally possible to look at a selected period of time from the last century as it was to cover only matters from this century. Some impressive responses were noted in both categories. Interesting debate was centered on the concept of 'global police'.

Question 26

This was the least popular question in this section, but it attracted the best marks. Students should understand that there is no need to repeat acronyms and that the more obvious of the acronyms need not be expanded. That said, very effective use was made of E3 Visa, ANZUS, AUSFTA and UKUSA. Most of the papers made mention of shared facilities at Pine Gap, Nurrungar JDFN and North West Cape. Some responses referred to the Vietnam days and the LBJ/Holt links and argued that this was detrimental, but often added that the USA was needed for Australia's survival in World War II. The more successful papers looked at either a broad sweep of years from the end of the Second World War, examples from Korea and Vietnam, to the end of the Cold War, and onto the 'first' and 'second' Iraq War. More significantly, this led to debate and argument over the key word 'detrimental' and thus was rewarded. Other students chose to focus on the period since 1990 only, and then to select a different, but equally justifiable range of examples to mount their argument about our national interest. Some saw the opportunity to vigorously criticise George Bush over Iraq, and by moving away from the key words of the question tended to miss the point. The question prompted the historic phrases of 'deputy sheriff' and 'dog like devotion' to appear.

Comparative Political Systems

There were no responses to this section.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 3: SOURCES ANALYSIS

Moderators were impressed by the exceptional quality of the unsupervised sources activity. The activity completed when under supervision was generally of a lower standard, but in general terms it was a little better than last year. Students are reminded that:

- they are to attach a cover sheet to both sources analysis tasks
- if they are setting their own questions, then a range of tasks are needed where instructive terms such as 'what' and 'describe' are mixed with terms like 'critically examine' and 'analyse'
- the assignment task should be attached to each piece of work submitted
- it is essential to number each part of every question
- they would be better served by using contemporary sources
- they need to synthesise material from all or most of the sources that they use – or are provided with – to better answer the high-end questions.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 4: INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

Moderators were again impressed by the diversity of topics chosen and reported an outstanding overall quality of work. However, at the lowest end of the spectrum, the level of analysis was at times lost amid description. Moderators reported that the presentation of work had improved from last year.

Much lively debate came from a diverse range of topics such as: internet censorship; church and state; water resources; Aboriginal health care; paid maternity leave; safety on public transport; national curriculum; the Mount Barker development; ineffective domestic violence programs; political donations; stolen generation; disability funding; hoon driving; the cat debate; arts funding; climate change; Bill of Rights; alcopops; euthanasia; Darfur; bikie legislation; the Korean Peninsula situation; visa applications; national broadband; election 2010; HECS; Iraq; mandatory detention; international whaling; and the Chelsea cinema.

Students might consider the following:

- there are ways to present a report other than a typed response
- the use of more primary sources enhances a report, and is an effective way to demonstrate informed citizenship
- they should 'attack' a smaller rather than a larger topic
- a bibliography is essential
- appendices are not to be attached to the report
- use 'op cit' and 'ibid' where appropriate
- they need reflect on complex political ideas.

Chief Assessor
Australian and International Politics