

# English as Second Language Studies

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government  
of South Australia

**SACE**  
Board of SA

# ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE STUDIES

## 2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

### OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' reports give an overview of how students performed in the 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.

### SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

#### Assessment Type 1: Issue Analysis

The issue analysis assessment type was successfully managed this year, with students demonstrating engagement with and analysis of significant social issues through a range of texts. The issue analysis addresses all the assessment design criteria. There is a particular opportunity to explicitly teach and assess specific features KU2, KU3, and An1 through this assessment type. It is valuable for teachers to choose different sets of specific features across the oral and written tasks to suit the particular issue and context, so that students can demonstrate different skills for each task.

It is important that, across the written and oral tasks, students present not only information about the issue and a recount of the process, but also articulation and justification of opinions and evaluation of processes and sources used in forming these opinions. Students who demonstrated achievement at higher levels of the performance standards in knowledge and understanding, analysis, and application explicitly stated their points of view, which they also justified with reference to evidence from texts, alternative perspectives, and critical evaluation of the ways in which source texts presented opinion and information.

The most successful written tasks were structured clearly and presented a balance between an aspect of the issue, articulation and justification of opinions, and evaluation of the process and sources. A structured format with, for example, headings or paragraph topics provided, can be a successful way of ensuring that students address all aspects of the task. Although there is no formal requirement for a reference list in this task, referencing in some form provided evidence of students' use of sources, as in specific features Ap1 and Ap4.

In the most successful oral discussions the student did most of the talking, formulating spontaneous responses to explicitly address the teacher's questions, rather than presenting prepared extended responses with only weak connections to the questions. Evidence of spontaneous language of this type allowed students to achieve more highly in KU3, Ap3, and C4. Students who achieved well in knowledge and understanding, analysis, and application were able to incorporate reference to sources in their discussion, as well as critiquing texts or aspects of the issue. Specific

questions asking students to evaluate process or sources are useful in eliciting this type of evidence.

In the oral discussion it is expected that questions will vary from student to student according to the chosen focus of the issue and the direction of the discussion. Teachers may need to ask additional specific probing or prompting questions to elicit evidence from students, depending on the proficiency and confidence of the individual student.

It is very helpful for students to have written information, such as notes, copies of sources, or visual information, with them during the discussion so that they can refer specifically to the evidence or texts that they are discussing. These materials can be helpful to moderators if they are submitted with the audio or video recordings.

A range of contemporary topics were addressed in this assessment type, including environmental, health, and social issues. The most successful topics were connected with students' experience, and allowed students to develop a genuine opinion about issues that affect them. In some cases, all students addressed a broad class topic through one or two texts then chose individual aspects or perspectives to focus on through additional sources.

## Assessment Type 2: Text Production

The text production assessment type addresses all four assessment design criteria across the essay and creative writing tasks. Most essay tasks addressed all four criteria, whereas creative writing tasks focused on knowledge and understanding, application, and communication. However, some creative writing tasks that required students to produce specific text types also included aspects of analysis.

In text production, teachers are encouraged to carefully consider which specific features are assessed in the essay and creative writing tasks. It is important that the specific features match the kinds of evidence that the task is intended to elicit, and that criteria are balanced across the two tasks, so that particular specific features are not over-assessed.

A range of successful essay tasks addressed diverse texts and issues. Students were able to achieve higher in the performance standards, particularly for analysis and application, when essay questions focused on issues in texts rather than on the texts themselves, and when the essay type was specified, such as an 'exposition' or a 'discussion' essay. Some examples of specific question types that encouraged analysis and discouraged recount included 'to what extent does...', 'should...', 'what is the effect of ...', 'compare and contrast ...', and 'why...'. Some essay tasks used questions from past examinations, but these sometimes limited the extent to which students demonstrated depth of understanding of an issue (KU1) and complexity of meaning (Ap2).

Issues addressed in the essays included cultural and social, as well as some environmental, issues. The range of stimulus texts used to engage students with cultural and social issues included *The Kite Runner*, *East Is East*, *The Sapphires*, and *Little Miss Sunshine*. Feature films and short novels, sometimes supplemented with a limited number of short informational or media texts related to an issue, were generally successfully used to develop students' understanding of issues. Very brief texts such as short stories, film clips, or music videos sometimes limited evidence of

knowledge and understanding or analysis at the higher levels of the performance standards.

Among the range of creative writing tasks and stimulus texts this year the more successful tasks specified such criteria as text type, audience, and purpose. This allowed students to demonstrate higher levels of the performance standards across all the assessment design criteria. Specific text types such as love letters, letters of complaint, or news articles allowed students to: demonstrate particular language features of a text (addressed in specific features such as KU2, KU3, An1, Ap2, Ap3); develop more complex and subject-specific language (KU4, C1, C2, C3); and focus on particular issues in a text (KU1, An2). Tasks such as diaries, journals, sequels, and alternative endings were most successful when they gave rich descriptions of a single moment in time. Otherwise, these tended to produce recounts, which often limited achievement to the lower levels of the performance standards. In future tasks teachers might consider a range of contemporary electronic text types, such as social networking posts, blog entries, online reviews, or emails.

Evidence in the text production samples indicated that students had been given appropriate opportunities to draft and edit their writing.

### Assessment Type 3: Investigation

The investigation assessment type addresses all four of the assessment design criteria across the written presentation and tutorial tasks. In this assessment type teachers are able to select which specific features apply to the written and oral tasks, to suit the student cohort and the evidence elicited in each task.

Student investigations this year addressed a broad range of issues, including social, cultural, environmental, health, technological, legal, and educational issues. Topic selection and articulation are important aspects of success in this assessment type. The most successful investigations have specific and clearly worded questions or topics that are reflected throughout the written and oral tasks. Generally speaking, the more clearly defined the topic is, the more successfully the student will be able to analyse and synthesise information and apply evidence to the investigation. For example, rather than the general topic 'plastic bags', the specific question 'Are plastic bags or paper bags better for the environment?' may allow a student to achieve at a higher level.

Teachers are encouraged to support students in the development of their investigation question. It may be necessary to review the wording of the question as the investigation progresses. Some students may also benefit from guidance in choosing topics appropriate to their age group and intended audience. It is useful to consider, from the beginning of the investigation, how successfully the tutorial audience might engage with particular topics.

The written task was completed successfully by most students, with a range of responses in essay or report format. Students achieved more highly when they demonstrated analysis, comparison, or evaluation of evidence to develop a strong conclusion in response to a controversial question. Less successful investigations presented unanalysed research in a simple information report format.

To achieve well in knowledge and understanding, analysis, and application, it is important that students refer to a range of texts in their investigation, rather than

relying on only one or two sources, or on only one type of source, such as a website or survey. Care should also be taken to maintain clarity and consistency in referring to sources through in-text referencing, reference lists, and bibliographies.

The more successful investigations showed a distinction between the content and the purpose of the written and oral tasks. The tutorial need not present the same information that is covered in the written presentation, but should focus on specific aspects. The tutorial may examine a particular point of view or be presented with a specific purpose. When large sections of tutorials and written presentations were identical, student achievement in all assessment design criteria was limited.

A range of approaches to tutorials were demonstrated this year. The main features of successful tutorials were a clear format, depth of understanding, active interaction, and management of the tutorial by the student. This was achieved in a number of ways. One structured format included a brief presentation supported by simple slides, followed by questions from the audience and then a discussion led actively by the student. This format allows students at all levels to meet the requirements for a tutorial.

Another approach involved the student asking questions and leading discussion with the audience throughout the tutorial to introduce each concept, then providing details to expand on these concepts. This format is more demanding of the student's interactive and management skills, but allows proficient and confident students to demonstrate high achievement, particularly in communication.

Students who actively managed the discussion part of the tutorial could achieve well in C4 (use of interpersonal language to sustain spoken interaction), and potentially in KU3, Ap2, and Ap3. Students can achieve this by asking questions, and also by responding to audience input by summarising, making observations, expanding on ideas, and linking back to the research. Tutorials were less successful when discussion was limited to asking and answering factual questions.

Investigation tutorials were also less successful when students read from scripts or slides, limiting engagement with their audience. This particularly affected application and communication. Additionally, although video clips can have a purpose in engaging the audience or imparting information in student presentations, they should be used with caution; they can detract from the evidence of the student's own work and may also limit the way in which the student can actively manage the tutorial.

Video recordings of tutorials have been useful in providing comprehensive evidence of student performance across the assessment design criteria. However, care should be taken to ensure sufficient sound quality.

## **OPERATIONAL ADVICE**

The packaging and presentation of moderation materials was generally well organised and clear. It was useful when teachers included cover sheets summarising student grades for each task and assessment type. Teachers are reminded that the SACE results sheets are used in moderation, and that different grades submitted with student samples cannot be taken into account. It is important to clearly label student samples, both written and electronic, using the student's SACE registration number and not any school-specific identification numbers.

Teachers are urged to check the permissible file types for audio and video recordings, and to double-check before submission that the files recorded will play. When recordings for a whole class are on one disc, it is useful for the moderation process for two copies of the disc to be submitted.

It is important for teachers to include a copy of the learning and assessment plan addendum if any changes have been made to assessment tasks after the approval of the learning and assessment plan. Additionally, a Variations — Moderation Materials form must be submitted if any student samples are missing or have not been submitted, or to explain the rationale for any 'I' grades or penalties applied for breaches of rules. This information allows moderators to confirm teachers' decisions or to clearly identify reasons for any adjustments.

Tasks must adhere to written word counts and oral time limits set in the subject outline. Written word counts are to include in-text referencing. Evidence presented outside the word count or time limit cannot be taken into account for the assessment and moderation of tasks.

When classes are combined into a single moderation group, it is in the best interests of students and teachers for teachers to work together to confirm assessment standards before results sheets are submitted to the SACE Board.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

Moderation this year generally confirmed teachers' assessment standards, with some grades being adjusted down slightly, and some grades adjusted up. The range of topics, texts, and tasks used appeared to connect with and engage students. Most tasks were designed appropriately to support student achievement across the assessment design criteria.

Teachers are encouraged to access the online exemplars and attend professional development workshops to consolidate their understanding of tasks and assessment standards and to assist with task design. The experience gained through moderating is valuable in developing an understanding of assessment standards and processes as well as in showing different examples of successful tasks and texts.

## **EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT**

### **Assessment Type 4: Examination**

Approximately 1825 students were enrolled in English as Second Language Studies in 2012. The examination required students to demonstrate a range of skills and allowed them to show achievement against the performance standards. Most students managed their time and completed all sections of the examination. The responses to the listening examination were generally of a good standard; however, the written examination revealed a greater range of abilities. The difficulty that some students had in showing depth in their responses limited the amount of understanding they were able to convey in both the essay and the letter.

## **Section 1: Listening Comprehension**

### *Part A*

In this section students were required to demonstrate an understanding of the text and respond in either complete sentences or a few words. Part A of the listening examination focused on performance standards for the knowledge and understanding (KU1, KU4) and communication (C1, C2) assessment design criteria. Students generally found Part A easier than Part B, with a mean mark of about 70%. The more successful students carefully followed instructions about full-sentence responses and also ensured correct spelling of keywords in the question. It is important for students to make sure that they completely understand the question that is being asked and the information that is necessary to answer it.

Most students answered Question 1 well and found the information to answer both parts of the question. In the better responses, students correctly used verb phrases such as 'make people aware', 'the need to manage', and 'conserve and protect'. They also used dictionaries to ensure correct spelling of key terms.

Most students scored high marks in Question 2, which required them to listen carefully to the information and to write exact responses. Students are reminded of the need to check their answers carefully and to ensure that they make sense, and not just write what they think they have heard. Students are also reminded to write their responses in full and not abbreviate their answers.

Question 3 required careful consideration about what was being asked. This question, which had to be answered in full-sentence form, asked students for 'two major health problems faced by people in many parts of the world', not two diseases faced by children. This was also important in Question 5, to which some students gave the same responses as they had given to Question 3; however, the questions were asking for different information.

Students were asked to write their answers to Questions 1, 3, and 5 in complete sentences. Successful students used keywords from the questions to write the answers and were careful in spelling these words. Marks can be lost for simple spelling errors.

### *Part B*

Students generally found Part B more difficult than Part A; the mean mark was about 56%. Part B focused on performance standards for the knowledge and understanding (KU1, KU4), analysis (An2), and communication (C1, C3) assessment design criteria. Many students struggled to differentiate between giving the information required and ensuring that it was relevant to the particular question. The successful students in Part B demonstrated that they understood what they had heard and synthesised the information into their responses.

Question 6 was done well by most students, as it only required them to carefully select the information from the text. Some students found Question 7 more difficult because, in order to answer 'why', students needed to infer from the question that 'if we can understand our carbon footprint we can reduce it'. Most students had a topic sentence and used keywords from the question to construct it.

Question 8 required an extended response that demonstrated understanding of the information and the ability to organise it logically. For this question, 60% of the mark was allocated to the answer and 40% to how students wrote their answer. The 40%



included a clear topic sentence for every paragraph, organisation of ideas, connection between ideas within paragraphs, and grammar and spelling. To show understanding, students had to use the information to answer the question. The responses of students who simply copied what they heard became lists of what individuals had done. The better students used these as examples that all people could do, and organised their answer into two or three paragraphs. Answers were more commonly organised into a paragraph about lifestyle choice and rules at home or into 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle'. However, there were many other ways in which students could organise this answer and still receive full marks.

Finally, students are reminded that they should only use information from the texts in the examination. Students who try to demonstrate understanding by using information from other sources may lose marks.

## **Section 2: Written Paper**

### *Part A*

Part A of the written examination focused on the performance standards:

### **Knowledge and Understanding**

KU1 *Knowledge and understanding of the ideas, concepts, and issues in texts.*

Does the work show that students have understood what they have read?

Do they understand the ideas they are using in their essays?

KU3 *Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which [the essay is] composed for specific purposes and audiences.*

Does the essay demonstrate an appropriate structure?

Introduction (general statement, clear statement of position, preview of arguments)

Body (topic sentence, elaboration/evidence, with in-text referencing)

Conclusion (restates position, short summary of argument, general statement)

Is there demonstration of an understanding of academic language?

KU4 *Knowledge and understanding of context-specific or technical vocabulary.*

Is language use relevant to the topic? (technical language)

Is the language relevant to this type of essay? (argumentative language)

### **Analysis**

An2 *Location, recording, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of ideas, information, and opinions from a range of texts.*

Is there evidence of finding and correctly referencing information?

Is there evidence of joining ideas from different texts into one argument?

Is there evidence of the ability to paraphrase the information?

### **Application**

Ap1 *Selection and use of information from [all texts].*

Ap3 *Use of text-appropriate language features to make meaning.*

Ap4 *Use of evidence from a range of sources to build logical and coherent texts or arguments.*

Is there evidence of the development of ideas?

Is there evidence of connection between paragraphs?



Is there evidence of connection between ideas and sentences within paragraphs?

### **Communication**

C1 *Clarity and coherence..., using appropriate vocabulary.*

C2 *Demonstration of grammatical control and complexity.*

C3 *Use of formal and objective language.*

There was a fairly even distribution between responses that supported the question and those that opposed it. The better essays clearly stated their position in the introduction and focused on this argument throughout the response. Students who attempted to explore both sides of the argument were often unable to demonstrate a clear stance; their essays also tended to lack depth and did not allow students to show adequate understanding of the texts. Students are reminded that they need to argue either *for* or *against*, and this must be clear throughout the essay.

To complete the essay successfully it was important for students to consider the question carefully. Some students did not show an understanding of the word 'justified'. Students are strongly encouraged to make sure that they completely understand what is being asked of them before they start the essay and to use a dictionary for clarification if they are at all unsure. There are many interpretations of this term; however, those most commonly used by students were about whether the use of animals was acceptable, ethical, or could be supported by evidence. Students who tried to argue about whether or not the use of animals should be encouraged were often less successful in conveying their position.

The texts were evenly balanced and allowed students to effectively argue either position. These arguments could also be clearly organised with a lot of supporting evidence. However, some students had difficulty synthesising the information, which resulted in essays that merely listed evidence and did not adequately demonstrate understanding of the information being used. The better responses extracted the evidence and paraphrased the information to support their argument. Technical and scientific language from the texts can be used, but students should be careful that they try to change not only the words but also the structure of the original ideas they are using. Although there was minor copying in some of the better essays, this was minimal and the more successful students always attempted to paraphrase the information.

Students should only use evidence from the texts in their responses. Most students showed a thorough contextual understanding of the human use of animals but some then supported their arguments with prior knowledge. The purpose of the written response is for students to read, comprehend, synthesise, and use information to form an argument. It is not to evaluate prior knowledge. Students should not use evidence from outside the examination to support their position.

Students generally demonstrated an understanding of the structural requirements of an argumentative essay: introduction, paragraphs with topic sentences and elaboration, and conclusion. Most students also identified appropriate points for either 'con' or 'pro' arguments. However, some students still need to develop expository or argumentative vocabulary, beyond the basic 'for example'. The students who were more successful in the essay had a wider range of nuanced language. Some of the better essays also showed practised use of conditional language, especially adjectives to give weight to different points, and the use of 'although' or 'despite' or 'however' in refuting points briefly, to strengthen the argument.

The better introductions began with a brief general statement about the topic, in one or two sentences, before stating the position and previewing the arguments that would be explored in the body of the essay. However, many introductions explored the topic too much and lacked focus. It is important for there to be a clear statement of position in the introduction. Some introductions discussed the topic in general and explored evidence from opposite sides without taking a position. If the argument was not clear in the introduction, this affected the overall grade. In many less successful responses, students started arguing a position in the introduction by exploring the evidence in detail.

Thus most essays had a clear structure and students were able to effectively organise their arguments into paragraphs. Students also used many other structures that provided the opportunity to gain full marks. However, there needs to be continued emphasis on developing the topic sentence. The better essays had topic sentences that were clear and had a strong statement that further developed the stance taken in the introduction. It is not a good technique to use the topic sentence to present opposing viewpoints or to provide examples.

Although students generally managed connection between paragraphs effectively, there needs to be a greater focus on connection *within* paragraphs. Most students were able to use simple linking connectives such as 'and' and 'also' but this was often the limit of their connection between different ideas. This shows that students recognise similar ideas, but it does not demonstrate understanding. These transition signals within paragraphs are an area that many students need to develop.

There was considerable variation in students' use of evidence to support their arguments. The more successful students demonstrated a sound understanding of paraphrasing and quoting with correct in-text referencing. When quoting, students should choose only one or two short, highly relevant examples to demonstrate their understanding of the skill. Some students over-quoted in their essays and this had an impact on their grade. In-text referencing is another area where students had difficulties. In correct in-text referencing only the author's last name and the year of publication should be used. The better essays demonstrated a sound understanding of in-text referencing through the use of a range of referencing techniques. These students also referenced only important ideas and avoided referencing every sentence. In the more successful essays, the evidence was presented and then explored and evaluated. Students are reminded that there is no need for reference lists, as they do not contribute to their marks.

The better essays showed that the students had a good understanding of academic language and were able to communicate using formal and objective language. The more successful students avoided using the first person, and instead used the passive voice effectively. Some of the less successful students used a lot of subjective language to explore what 'I think' and what 'I believe'. Other weaknesses included the use of contractions, and a range of colloquialisms such as 'in a nutshell', 'in short', 'in brief', 'to wrap things up', and 'to start off'. Successful responses also demonstrated complexity of language through more specific word choices such as the use of beneficial, instead of good.

Most students showed careful planning, with conclusions completed, rather than left out because of lack of time. The less successful students just restructured their introductions or summarised the evidence in their essay. Some weaker conclusions introduced new evidence. Well-constructed conclusions clearly restated the position taken in the essay. They concisely summarised points raised and avoided raising

new points. Some of the more successful students ended with a concluding statement that was different from the general statement made in the introduction. A good strategy to differentiate the introductory general statement from the concluding general statement is to explore the importance of the issue at the start and the consequences at the end. The better essays used the general statements to show an understanding that the essay is part of a broader argument or issue.

## Part B

Part B of the written examination focused on the performance standards:

### Knowledge and Understanding

KU1 *Knowledge and understanding of the ideas, concepts, and issues in texts.*

Do they respond to the text?

How much understanding do they show about the issue?

Do the ideas logically develop?

Do they show a connection between the ideas in each paragraph?

KU3 *Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which texts are composed for specific purposes and audiences.*

Have they used formal language?

Do their word choices fit who they are and who they are writing to?

### Application

Ap2 *Meaning that is conveyed and exchanged in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.*

Can the ideas be understood?

Is meaning conveyed appropriately for the letter?

Ap3 *Use of text-appropriate language features to make meaning.*

Have they followed the correct conventions?

Writer's address	}	In Australia or elsewhere
Date		Anywhere above the letter
Recipient's address		Addresses and date to the left or right

Dear Mr X,

Paragraphs (clear purpose in each)

Concluding paragraph (recommendation/solution/action/thank you, etc.)

Yours sincerely (name known)	Yours faithfully (name not known)
Name written	Name written

### Communication

C1 *Clarity and coherence in written ... communication, using appropriate vocabulary.*

Are the sentences connected?

Are the paragraphs connected?

Do they express their ideas clearly?

C2 *Demonstration of grammatical control and complexity.*

C3 *Use of formal and objective language.*

The format of the letter was understood well and used appropriately. Letter structures were also generally clear. However, achieving a formal polite tone needs to be further explored and practised, particularly the ability to make a strong clear point without being too direct and informal. Question 11 was more popular than Question 10, and the students who undertook it generally scored more highly than those who chose the text. Both questions were open, allowing a range of possible responses. However, students need to ensure that they consider who they are, who they are writing to, and what the purpose of the letter is. This was often not clear and affected the logic and understanding of the letter. If this information is not given, it is important for students to develop these ideas themselves.

The AusAsia food text had a number of different interpretations and allowed students to successfully respond in a range of ways. Many responses to Question 10 requested more information about the food festival. This allowed students to demonstrate the skills being examined for the formal letter; however, it often restricted the grades as the letters were structured around a series of questions and it was difficult for the students to show sophisticated and complex language, and much understanding of the issue.

Students who performed better in Question 10 wrote either a letter of complaint or a letter of congratulations. This allowed a much clearer focus and gave students the opportunity to explore the issue in depth and thus show greater understanding. It is important for students to develop a clear purpose for their letters and to write about the main issue. The less successful students showed limited performance against the criteria as they merely converted the information into a letter.

Question 11 was more focused on an issue, and students seemed to find it easier to develop a clear purpose for their letters. Letters were appropriately addressed to a range of people, including an editor, a taxi company, a Minister of Traffic and Police. Many students focused their ideas and explored them in detail, showing a lot of understanding about sending text messages and driving. The more successful students explored the problem and its impact on society, often supporting their answer with a personal anecdote. Some students interpreted the picture as something that had happened to them or someone they knew, or more generally as something that happens on the roads, but all approaches were equally successful. The better letters put the writer into the issue rather than referring to the picture itself.

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