Modern History

2011 Assessment Report

Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

MODERN HISTORY

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.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Overall, moderators were impressed with the standard of work submitted in the packages and the efforts of the teachers in preparing them. In looking to confirm the teachers' standards, moderators found it helpful when teachers indicated on student work where they identified the particular performance standard, and included their feedback to students.

Inquiry and analysis was the assessment design criterion that students struggled with the most and that teachers found most challenging to explicitly assess in tasks. Sources analysis tasks enabled the most clear assessment of this performance standard, but it was often more challenging to identify critical analysis in essay tasks.

The best tasks were detailed and explicitly told the students what they were required to do and which performance standards they were being assessed against. Some task sheets used vocabulary and ideas relevant to the topic to assist student performance. It was particularly useful for students if the conventions they were being assessed upon were clearly articulated on the task sheets. It is recommended that referencing is included in some tasks as a requirement when assessing the second communication performance standard.

The most popular topics were Topic 3: Revolutions and Turmoil; Topic 8: The War to End All Wars; and Topic 9: An Age of Catastrophes. Within those topics there was a range of case studies and it was noted that teachers were trying to incorporate a variety of tasks — such as essays, sources analysis, empathy pieces, role plays, oral presentations, and historical film studies — to assess the different performance standards, which was pleasing. Different performance standards are better suited to certain types of tasks and it is important in designing tasks that teachers ensure that tasks allow students to achieve the highest level within each selected performance standard.

It was noted that the word-limit of 1000 words was not always adhered to for all prepared written tasks. In particular, for sources analysis tasks in non-test conditions, there were examples of students writing over 1000 words. Students and teachers are strongly reminded that assessment of a task only covers material within the word-limit; the portion exceeding the word-limit is not considered for assessment. Word-counts should be specified on task sheets and be a requirement on student work. Where students wrote closer to 500 words for a task, it was difficult for them to

demonstrate the depth of knowledge and understanding required for most tasks, let alone move to analysis, reflection, or evaluation.

Assessment Type 2: Essay

While teachers are only required to assess one specific feature from each performance standard for the essay, it was felt by the moderators that both IA1 and IA2 (specific features, as numbered in the subject outline) were integral to this task. Most used the performance standards appropriately in task design, but did not always mark against inquiry and analysis in relation to the student's use and critical analysis of sources, or construction of a reasoned historical argument. Teachers are encouraged to assess communication, including conventions when designing this task.

In most cases where students did not successfully present a reasoned historical argument, the cause seemed to be the questions which only invited narrative or were too convoluted for the students to effectively address in 2000 words. The best questions had a clear focus and time frame, and invited an argument and, by definition, an examination of a counter-argument. Encouraging students to examine the structure of past exam questions can assist them in developing effective questions or hypotheses for this task.

Regarding the use of sources, it was observed that some students referred to more than three within their essay. The subject outline states that only three sources can be used (for the purposes of quotations and referencing), although it is acceptable for a bibliography to contain more than the three key sources in the search for the most useful for a particular topic. The moderators appreciated students listing the three key sources separately for the purpose of identification. Moderators also noted an over-reliance on Web sources. Several essays included pictures. It is advised that any visual sources need to be counted as one of the three key sources and they need to serve a purpose in the development of an argument rather than just being decorative. It was felt that the range of topics was not as diverse as in previous years.

The word-count was well observed overall, although not all students included a count. Best practice was observed to be a total on each page and then a final count at the end of the essay.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Assessment Type 1: Folio

It is important and indeed a requirement that teachers include the learning and assessment plan (LAP) in their moderation package, plus any addendums. It is also helpful and again a requirement to include a copy of each task sheet, including any sources analysis questions, with copies of all sources involved. There were several instances where not all of the required tasks and/or folios were included in the package, which made it more challenging for moderators to confirm the grades. Oral tasks also presented issues when only the brief slides from a PowerPoint presentation were submitted. It would be beneficial to include the audio of an oral presentation so that moderators have all of a student's work that they are being graded on.

Many teachers had obviously spent a lot of time preparing their moderation packages and there were some layouts which made it easier for moderators to examine the students' work. Work sorted by individual student into cardboard wallets was better than in sealed plastic bags. It was helpful to have a cover sheet which broke down the tasks set, performance standards, and the student's achievement in each category, with an overall grade. Including teacher feedback on work assisted moderators in finding evidence to support the teacher's marking more easily than in unmarked assignments. Work was also easier to deal with when each task was clearly identified with the student's name and/or SACE registration number.

Assessment Type 2: Essay

Teachers must note that both the folio and the essay need to be submitted for moderation for each requested student. Keeping the (clearly labelled) essays of all students in a separate wallet was also appreciated by moderators, and greatly simplified the process of dealing with the separate assessment types for school assessment.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Examination

Following the trend from last year, there was an even greater concentration of topics studied in 2011. In the thematic study part, questions were answered principally from Topic 3: Revolutions and Turmoil, with the Russian and French Revolutions being the examples chosen by the majority. It was noticeable that some students who chose a question from the modernisation topic (Topic 1: Pain and Gain) used information that was better suited to a revolution question. This they did with limited success.

In the depth study part, there was a greater range of topics taught, with Topic 9: An Age of Catastrophes; Topic 8: The War to End All Wars; and Topic 10: Postwar Rivalries and Mentalities (to a lesser degree) being the most popular. Questions on the dictators (Questions 34 and 35 in Topic 9) were the most frequently answered and were exclusively about Hitler. As was the case in the thematic study part, students who felt that the First World War questions were not to their advantage used their knowledge to answer a question from the topic on women (Topic 7: Public and Private Lives) — again with limited success.

The sources analysis part (Question 45) on the hippie movement engaged the students' interest this year. Many wrote empathetically in response to the evaluation question (part (e)).

This year there was a question on each key area for inquiry in all topics. This gave students every opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. The use of performance standards allowed for a more comprehensive assessment of student abilities.

Assessment Design Criteria

The following segments discuss how students were assessed in relation to the four assessment design criteria.

Knowledge and Understanding

Those students who wrote comprehensively on their chosen questions scored highly in relation to this assessment design criterion. They recognised that each question

invited a debate. In doing so, they addressed the issue of the question and gave specific, accurate examples to support their argument. Students who performed well addressed key words in questions. Words and phrases such as 'drastically' (Question 4), 'key feature' (Question 7), 'internal opposition forced' (Question 12), 'nationalist tensions in 1914' (Question 29), and 'all of society' (Question 35) invited responses that addressed these points.

Some answers were brief, resulting in superficial responses. Weaker responses were descriptive accounts, some of which did not adequately address the issue of the question.

Inquiry and Analysis

Each question in the exam paper invited a debate. Directive terms such as 'to what extent', 'evaluate', 'how valid', and 'do you agree' signal the scope of the answer required to score high marks. Students who performed well against the inquiry and analysis criterion addressed the issue of the question, recognised associated issues, and consistently linked these to the main issue of the question.

Conversely, weaker responses were mainly descriptive in tone. In many cases, students seized upon a key phrase such as 'Wall Street Crash' (Question 33) and wrote all they knew about the event. Occasionally they ignored the issue of the question and wrote a prepared answer. For example, Question 29 asked students to debate whether nationalist tensions in 1914 were responsible for the outbreak of the First World War, but many responses described, in a general manner, the alliances, arms races, and imperialism that had been developing over many years.

Questions which related to causation presented difficulties for many students. In many cases, responses recognised causes but failed to link them to the specific issue of the question. For example, in Question 34, students were asked to debate the weaknesses of opposition as a reason for Hitler's rise to power. Many students provided a list of factors — weaknesses of opposition, Hitler's personality, or propaganda — without linking them to when he actually achieved power in 1934.

Reflection and Evaluation

Students who scored highly in this criterion were able to demonstrate a high level of understanding of the interrelationship between individuals and events, and the situations they found themselves in. They were able to show depth and insight into how individuals and groups acted in certain ways at particular times. For example, in the question which asked students to evaluate the term 'destruction and devastation' as a description of the impact of the First World War (Question 31), responses that scored highly were able to reflect on political, social, and economic aspects of devastation on society both in the short term (during the war) and the longer term (after the war). They were able to clearly differentiate between destruction and devastation, instead of treating the two terms as one. Having done this, they considered that the impact of the war was more than just destruction and devastation.

Responses that were weak in this area were unable to spot nuances in the questions being attempted. For instance, in the destruction and devastation question, they merely described the issue generally with no analysis, nor reference to specific examples described in depth.

Communication

To achieve high marks in this criterion, students needed to communicate an effective answer. They needed an appropriate introduction that supplied a definition where necessary, addressed the issue of the question, and outlined the argument that they wished to present. In the majority of cases, students were able to do this. Markers commented that, in the body of the essay, there was a greater use of topic sentences for each paragraph this year. This was pleasing in that it enabled students to use relevant information in the presentation of a coherent argument. A conclusion that summed up the argument provided evidence of reflection. The use of accurate language and clear, concise, and grammatically correct expression made essays a joy to read.

Conversely, there were many examples of turgid expression expressed in untidy, scrawly handwriting that made it difficult for markers to decipher the argument. The problem was compounded by arrows and asterisks that directed markers to read along margins and at the foot of an essay. This showed poor planning and detracted from what students were trying to say. Poor spelling (such as 'biast' instead of 'biased'), incorrect grammar (such as 'brang' instead of 'brought'), and poor sentence structure compounded the problem. Markers surmised that there may have been less time spent in timed essay-writing during the year.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS ABOUT INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Part 1: Thematic Study (Questions 1 to 24)

Topic 1: Pain and Gain: Modernisation and Society since *c.* 1700
(Questions 1 to 4)

There were few responses to this topic.

Topic 2: Intruders and Resisters: Imperialism and Its Impact since *c.*1500
(Questions 5 to 8)

There were few responses to this topic.

Topic 3: Revolutions and Turmoil: Social and Political Upheavals since *c.*1500
(Questions 9 to 12)

Question 9

This question was the most popular question in the most popular thematic topic. Pre-revolutionary society of both Russia and France attracted the most attention. Pleasingly, few students used this question as a 'causes of revolution' question.

Unfortunately, however, many students gave a narrative description of the isolation that leaders adopted and offered the counterfactual argument that had the societies been less isolated, revolution would not have happened. Better answers defined the parameters of their answer and convincingly argued that there were times when rulers did listen to the people.

Question 10

Given that armed force was so much in the news in relation to the uprisings in the Middle East, it was surprising that not more students chose to do this question. Some

who did attempt this question found it difficult. Some students confused *armed force* with *armed forces* which was not relevant and did not address the word *necessary*. In addition, some students did not link the armed force to the actual occurrence of the revolution. The rider of the question asked students to evaluate armed force in relation to other causes. This did not happen in many cases.

Question 11

Despite the fact that students had problems with the concept of *struggle*, this question was well done. Most students were able to identify difficulties that revolutionary governments faced and the solutions that they adopted to rectify these problems.

Question 12

This question was not as popular as the other three but was also well done. Good answers debated *internal* as against *external* opposition, as well as addressing the concept of force when adopting different policies.

Topic 4: A Sense of Belonging: Groups and Nations since *c.*1500 (Questions 13 to 16)

There were few responses to this topic.

Topic 5: The Captives, the Unwanted, and the Seekers: Forced and Free Migration since *c.* 1500 (Questions 17 to 20)

There were few responses to this topic.

Topic 6: Slaves, Serfs, and Emancipation: Forced Labour since *c.* 1500 (Questions 21 to 24)

There were few responses to this topic.

Part 2: Depth Study (Questions 25 to 44)

Topic 7: Public and Private Lives: A Social and Political History of Women since *c.* 1750 (Questions 25 to 28)

There were few responses to this topic.

Topic 8: The War to End All Wars: The First World War and Its Consequences, *c.* 1870–1929 (Questions 29 to 32)

Question 29

This question, though seemingly simple, raised issues that required careful analysis. Many responses read *nationalism* rather than *nationalist tensions in 1914* and consequently gave stock and superficial responses linking nationalism with imperialism, militarism, and alliances. Better answers were able to differentiate between the tensions in 1914 and those that existed earlier.

Question 30

This question was a fine example as to why this section of the course is called d*epth study*. Successful responses were able to identify specific leaders (both military and

political), describe their actions, and evaluate these actions against other factors in determining the nature of the First World War. Weaker responses described the actions of leaders in a general sense and saw war as merely battles in trenches.

Question 31

As for the previous question, weaker responses spoke of 'destruction and devastation' as a collective term in relation to trench warfare. More successful responses treated each term separately (hence physical destruction, and mental and societal devastation) and tested its accuracy alongside other factors in determining the impact of the First World War. To their credit, often these students were able to describe the impact of the war after the events of 1914–18.

Question 32

On the whole, this question was well done. Students analysed more than one treaty and took their discussion up to 1929. They saw that treaties had short-term success but problems existed underneath.

Topic 9: An Age of Catastrophes: Depression, Dictators, and the Second World War *c.* 1929–45 (Questions 33 to 36)

This topic was the most popular in the depth study part. Questions 34 and 35 on dictators exclusively used Hitler as their example.

Question 33

Differently from past years, this question tested causation rather than impact. Consequently, many students tried to manipulate their answer into a discussion on impact with limited success. Better answers set the parameters to their discussion and also analysed causation outside of the United States.

Question 34

For an analysis of this question, refer to the discussion on causation in the 'Inquiry and Analysis' section earlier in this report.

Question 35

Many students ignored the word 'managed' in this question and consequently treated this question as a rise to power question. In addition, the words 'over all of society' demanded students set parameters to their discussion. What constituted *all of society*? For many students, this gave them the licence to describe the Holocaust with limited success. Better answers, having described Hitler's control of society, challenged the proposition using the Swing movement, Edelweiss Pirates, the Confessing Church, and army conspiracies as examples. Pleasingly, these arguments encompassed the war years.

Question 36

There were few responses to this question in contrast with the answers on Hitler. For many of the students who chose this question, it was a discussion of aspects of war rather than specifically the tactics that were used.

Topic 10: Postwar Rivalries and Mentalities: Superpowers and Social Change since *c*. 1945 (Questions 37 to 40)

Question 37

Many answers were well argued. Students set the parameters to their argument, which enabled them to discuss pre-war issues, the war years, and post war events up to 1949 (the Berlin Airlift). Weaker responses did not set these parameters and as a consequence began discussing events in the 1950s and 1960s. Better answers discussed many manifestations of aggression and evaluated them against other causes of the Cold War. Some better answers demonstrated critical analysis of the historiography surrounding the topic.

Question 38

In this question, students argued ideology in its broadest (and briefest) aspect without an awareness of its changes over forty years. However, there were good attempts at discussing other aspects of the nature of the Cold War, namely the nuclear arms race and Détente.

Question 39

There were very few responses to this question.

Question 40

Markers found the essays on this topic a pleasure to read. Students had a good knowledge of Mikhail Gorbachev and were able to balance this knowledge alongside other factors such as the events unfolding in Eastern Europe at the time, as well as the challenges posed by the United States.

Topic 11: Persecution and Hope: Power and Powerlessness in Society since *c*.1500 (Questions 41 to 44)

There were few responses to this topic.

Part 3: Sources Analysis (Question 45)

Question 45

(a)   Well done. Students were able to give two aims of the hippie movement. The only problem faced was that some students wrote too much for only one mark.

(b)   Well done. Most students were able to state what they believed the sources were about (conclusions) and provided evidence to support what they believed.

(c)   This was a different question from what has been asked in the past. Many students quoted sections from the source instead of identifying extreme language, different font sizes, and appeal to different age groups as examples of bias.

(d)   In this question, students were asked to compare sources. The question asked 'to what extent', which directed students to state similarities *and* differences between Sources 5(a) and 5(b) and Source 4. As in previous

years, many responses only cited similarities *or* differences rather than similarities *and* differences.

(e)   This question is similar to ones asked in previous years. This year the setters gave more clues ('content' and 'reliability') as to what was required of students in assessing usefulness and limitations. In many instances this was ignored. Usefulness in relation to content included a depiction of hippie culture, and in relation to reliability (Sources 5(a) and 5(b)), the photographs were taken at the time when hippie culture was at its zenith. As to limitations, the sources only gave a limited view of hippie culture in relation to other potential sources and in terms of reliability; for example, Source 6, was drawn ten years after the event. Common misconceptions that appeared included the suggestion that all primary sources were useful, instead of having degrees of usefulness, and that photographs were of limited use because they might have been cropped or doctored. Students are reminded that opinions need to be backed up by evidence.

(f)   Pleasingly, this year there were more students who presented an integrated response with an appropriate introduction and conclusion. They noted that several sources were about peace but other sources related to human rights, the generation gap, and subversion of the American way of life. Most students used all the sources, as was asked by the question, but they answered them in the order that the sources appeared.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The overall quality of student responses across all assessment components was consistent with previous years. 1204 students studied Modern History in 2011.

In the inaugural year of the new SACE, a majority of teachers adopted the sample LAP provided on the SACE website as their model. While many followed the plan closely throughout the year, it was not surprising to find, on the evidence provided in the addendums, that many others chose to vary the sample plan as the year progressed. This was at least in part in response to student interests and capabilities. Another reason for the modification of LAPs was a realisation by teachers that attempting to cover every assessment criteria in most tasks, when students are limited to 1000 words, does not enable students to demonstrate their capability as easily as when fewer criteria are assessed in each task. It was reassuring to find a strong degree of creativity being retained in most LAPs.

Careful individual task design proved to be the key to ensuring students the best opportunity to address specific criteria. Moderators viewed some excellent samples of task sheets that used a systematic approach to carefully set out task requirements and expectations (including performance standards) and that broke larger tasks into more manageable portions.

The communication assessment design criterion spells out the need for students to use appropriate conventions. For history such conventions relate to essay writing and evidence analysis in particular. In essay writing this includes structures such as introduction, conclusion, topic sentences, and paragraphs. Students benefit from appropriate modelling and scaffolding of such structures. Sources analysis and essay writing are areas that both employ a variety of command terms such as 'to what extent' and 'assess the usefulness'. The meaning of such terms needs to be explicitly taught to students to ensure that they are familiar with them and can respond appropriately in all assessment types.

Teachers are reminded that, although the external examination weighting has now reduced to 30% of the total assessment, it is still important for students to gain experience in extended writing under timed conditions. In general terms, examination results are invariably lower than school assessment results and hence the importance of practice. Such practice exercises need not be summative assessment tasks in the LAP; indeed the folio and the essay are designed to test skills other than exam technique. Interestingly, some teachers reported choosing to complete folio essays under time constraint not only for the purpose of exam practice but also to enable students to write beyond the 1000-word limit normally applied to folio assessment pieces. Perhaps not surprisingly given the common use of computers across all schools, the standard and legibility of handwriting in examinations presents a problem for markers with some papers, which emphasises the need for practice during the year. Accurate spelling of key words and names, and correct dates are appreciated by markers.

The change in requirements that ensured each of the four key areas for inquiry (KAIs) in each topic was assessed by an examination question led to a decline in the number of misplaced answers, where students answered a question on one key area using content more relevant to a different key area. Another positive effect was the improved depth of factual knowledge evident within answers, including relevant broader contextual content.

Teachers who become involved in the assessment panels for the moderation of school assessment materials and examinations always comment on the enormous professional benefits gained by their involvement. Such involvement leads invariably to a better appreciation of both processes and standards in all types of assessment.

One additional task undertaken by Chief Supervisors this year has been the collection of samples of moderated student work to be made available on the SACE website. A range of LAPs and individual tasks will become available on the website, as will material related to conventions in history. Teachers are also strongly encouraged to attend start-of-year clarifying forums and to join the online forum provided by the SACE Board.

Chief Assessor
Modern History