

Outdoor Education

2011 Assessment Report



Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

2011 ASSESSMENT REPORT

OVERVIEW

Assessment 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.

This is the first year of the new Outdoor Education SACE course. The course delivery was very similar to previous years, but all assessment tasks needed to be modified. There has been information, including learning and assessment plans, course work exemplars, annotated work samples and practical checklists added to the SACE website to enable a smooth transition to occur.

Thirty-eight schools offered Outdoor Education with an enrolment of 420 students. Because of the changes in the new SACE a larger cohort of students has been able to select the subject.

There was a good variety of courses that used each school's natural environment, and teaching staff assisted in developing practical skills whilst also reinforcing the theoretical components of the course.

Clarifying forums run by SACE assisted both continuing and new teachers to ensure that their programs and tasks followed the subject outline. The *Learning Area Manual* needs to be consulted closely and is available online and from each school's SACE coordinator. The timelines and guidelines for the subject need to be closely applied.

Students who performed well in all course components clearly displayed evidence of reflection and analysis in their responses, and showed a high level of understanding of course material. Students should be discouraged from producing short responses that are heavily based on secondary sources, or diary-type journal entries that do not address the assessment design criteria.

SCHOOL-BASED ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio

There was a variety of assessment tasks presented for moderation. These tasks gave students the opportunity to complete tasks in a range of assessment modes such as written tasks, tests, video, multimedia and oral presentations.

It was evident that those students who achieved highly in this component were given tasks that enabled them to display their skills of understanding, application, communication, and evaluation. Students who performed at a lower level focused heavily on a narrow interpretation of the assessment design criteria. It is important in task design that students are given the opportunity to meet all assessment criteria,

and that tasks allow for high levels of evaluation, analysis, and reflection. Tasks that ask fewer questions which required extended responses allow students to provide responses that demonstrate greater depth of knowledge and critical analysis.

It was also evident that some tasks required students to produce excessive amounts of work. It is worth noting that the externally assessed investigation has a maximum word count of 2000 words. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that students could display evidence of understanding, application, communication, and evaluation in fewer than 2000 words in course work tasks. In fact, many students perform better in shorter tasks because this encourages them to focus on meeting the criteria rather than just recalling information and observations.

Tasks should be directly related to course topics to allow students to apply their knowledge of environmental studies, management practices, sustainable environmental practices, and leadership and planning. In some tasks it was difficult to link the task with the course. It also should be noted that students are not permitted to 'double-dip' by using course work tasks that have been assessed in the practical performances associated with the Group Practicals or the Individual Practical components. For example, when students have completed a risk management plan in the folio section the same plan should not be assessed for their outdoor journey or individual practical.

If orals and multimedia presentations are being used, it is important that these are filmed or taped (for presentation at final moderation) in a way that is readily accessible to moderators (e.g. using Windows Media) so that there is evidence of marking against the criteria. Information about submission of electronic files can be found in the Learning Area Manual.

Assessment Type 2: Group Practical

The Outdoor Journeys component continues to be the foundation of Outdoor Education courses. Students generally achieved well in this component as its practical nature meets the needs of most of the cohort. It was pleasing to see a wide range of journeys and locations used, with students enjoying worthwhile and rewarding experiences and linking these journeys to course work.

It was also pleasing to see the majority of teachers using the assessment checklists available from the support materials on the SACE Board website, and running expeditions that met the requirement of the three-days minimum during Semester 1. Only when students have been granted special permission should some of the checklist points be excluded.

At least one of the expeditions must be of a lightweight and nodal nature. It is good practice to involve the students as much as possible in the planning of these journeys as preparation for their self-reliant expedition in Semester 2.

It would be helpful for the moderators to be able to distinguish between planning undertaken by the teacher and what planning involved the students before the trip, as well as the location and the route followed. When using the practical checklists, teachers are encouraged to write comments that allow moderators to get a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the students.

Reflection and evaluation is one of the criteria for this task type and this is difficult to assess when only checklists are used. Teachers are advised to allow students to provide evidence of this criterion in either written or oral form.

Assessment Type 3: Individual Practical

Students who achieved highly in this component displayed thorough and well-documented planning, with clear evidence that they were responsible for all aspects of the plan. The subject outline requires students to keep a planning folio that can be submitted as evidence for final moderation. If small groups collaborate in the planning stages, it should be clear in the evidence presented by students, what tasks were allocated to each student.

High achieving students also displayed a high level of evaluation and reflection in their report, with good emotional and cognitive responses throughout. This evaluation and reflection is not a diary of what they did but a critical analysis of the planning, risk management and running of the expedition.

As the reflection is often one of the final pieces, it provides a good opportunity for students to show what they have learnt throughout the year. Students should be encouraged to look at the questions asked, and the criteria on which they will be assessed, so that they can show critical analysis and reflection. This evidence is to be presented as a report, and the method of its presentation is detailed in the subject outline.

As with the group practical, teachers should use the individual practical checklist, and are encouraged to write comments that will allow moderators to get a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the students.

Teachers are reminded that assessment of the individual practical covers three components: planning the journey, conducting the journey, and a report providing evidence of reflection and evaluation. Consequently, the task needs to identify appropriate specific features to allow for assessment of all of these components. The practical should provide students with the opportunity to plan and conduct the expedition in a self-reliant manner with minimal input from the teacher. As safety is a priority, students are expected to have experience in the chosen activity from the group practical or from previous years.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 4: Investigation

For many schools, this was the first year of completing the investigation. Markers commented on the good standard and range of environmental issues investigated. They noted that those students who clearly identified an issue that created debate, and which was directly related to an expedition, were more often able to achieve at a high level. It is strongly recommended that students and teachers work closely in selecting an investigation that allows the student the opportunity to meet the required assessment criteria to the highest standard.

Good investigations had students using an appropriate range of primary data sources, including observations made while on the expedition, which were then used as the foundation of their report. These students included material from experts using appropriate and relevant sources, and clearly linked their findings to secondary data. They were prepared to consider a range of perspectives and to examine these critically. Their reflection clearly articulated emotional and cognitive responses and made a genuine connection to the issue and the environment through which they

travelled. It is important that students present their findings and analysis and not get caught up in over-use of secondary data that then limits their performance against the assessment criteria.

This year, tables, images, graphs, and visual materials were used effectively and were usually referenced correctly. They supported the analysis and discussion without introducing new data or being used as a filler.

Good investigations had sub-headings to define the topic being discussed, a clearly stated investigation process, and continual use of referencing either from expert opinions or secondary data.

It is important to note that the generic cover sheet available on the SACE Board's website should be used. Students should provide a word count at the end of their report.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

As this was the first year of the new course, teachers sometimes modified their original Learning and Assessment plan (LAP) during the year. When this is the case, teachers are advised to complete the addendum to show these course changes and include this in the moderation package.

An essential component of teachers' work for all assessment task types is supervision and verification of student reports, including referencing and word count. Details of requirements are included in the subject outline (word count) and *Learning Area Manual* (potential breach of rules).

During final moderation, moderators commended those teachers who followed the details outlined in the *Learning Area Manual* for the submission of student work. Teachers are advised to read the *Learning Area Manual* to clearly identify the school assessment materials required for final moderation.

Outdoor Education
Chief Assessor