

Outdoor Education

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' 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.

Thirty-five schools offered Outdoor Education with an enrolment of 497 students. The changes in the new SACE have allowed a greater cohort of students to select the subject and numbers have increased substantially this year.

There was a good variety of courses that used the school's natural environments and the skills of the teaching staff to assist in developing practical skills while also reinforcing the theoretical components of the course.

It was evident that students who performed well in all course components clearly displayed evidence of reflection and analysis in their responses showing a high level of understanding of course material. Students should be encouraged not to produce short responses that are heavily based on secondary sources, or diary-type journal entries that do not address the performance standards.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio

A variety of assessment tasks were presented for moderation. These 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 very evident that those students achieving at high levels in this component were given tasks which enabled them to display skills of understanding, application, communication, and evaluation. Students who performed at a lower level focused heavily on understanding within a narrow interpretation of the assessment criteria. It is important in task design that students are given the opportunity to meet all specific features within assessment design criteria across the range of tasks and that tasks allow for high levels of evaluation, analysis, and reflection. It is often better to ask fewer questions to allow students to provide responses that demonstrate greater depth.

It was also evident that some tasks required students to produce excessive amounts of work. It is worth noting that the 30% 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 less than 2000 words in coursework tasks. In fact, many students

perform better in shorter tasks, as they are encouraged to focus on addressing the performance standards rather than just recalling information and observations.

Tasks should be directly related to course topics in the current subject outline, allowing students to apply their knowledge of environmental studies, planning and management practices, sustainable environmental practices, and leadership and planning. In some tasks it was difficult to link the task with the course. It should also be noted that students are not permitted to 'double-dip' by using folio tasks that have been assessed in the practical performances associated with the group practical or individual practical assessment type. An example of double-dipping is when students have completed a risk management plan in the folio section and have not modified this plan for their group practical or individual practical.

If oral 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 (eg by using Windows Media) and that there is evidence of assessment against the performance standards.

Assessment Type 2: Group Practical

The group practical continues to be the foundation of Outdoor Education courses. Students have again generally scored 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 practicals to coursework.

It was also pleasing to see the majority of teachers used the Practical Knowledge and Skills checklist pro forma (available from the support materials on the SACE Board website) as required by the subject outline and running expeditions that met the criteria of 3 days' minimum during Semester 1. If any of the indicators on the Practical Knowledge and Skills checklists are not assessed for a valid reason, this should be explained in the Notes section of the checklist. If they have not been demonstrated by the student, this should be reflected in the overall assessment of the student. Teachers are strongly encouraged to write comments on the assessment pro forma, as it provides better feedback to the student while allowing the moderating team to gain a better understanding of the ability of the student.

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

It would be helpful to the moderators to know what planning students were involved in before the trip, the location, and the route followed.

If teachers are assessing the Assessment Design Criteria Investigation and Critical Analysis or Reflection and Evaluation in the Group Practical, then there needs to be evidence of this in the student material provided to moderators.

Assessment Type 3: Individual Practical

Students who were assessed to be at a high level in this component displayed thorough and well-documented planning, with clear evidence that they were

responsible for all aspects of planning. All students should keep a planning folio and this should be submitted as evidence for final moderation. It is important to know what tasks were allocated to each student.

High-achieving students also displayed a high level of evaluation and reflection in their report, with insightful 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 one of their final pieces of work, it is a good opportunity for students to show what they have learnt throughout the year. Students should be encouraged to look at the performance standards on which they will be assessed so that they allow themselves to show critical analysis and reflection. This report must be maximum of 1500 words if written or a maximum of 6 minutes for an oral presentation, or the equivalent in multimodal form.

As with the group practical, it is important that teachers use the Practical Knowledge and Skills checklists and they are strongly encouraged to write comments to allow moderators to get a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the students.

This practical should allow high-achieving students to plan and conduct the expedition in a self-reliant manner with minimal input from the teacher. As safety is a priority, students must have experience in the chosen activity from the group practical or from previous years. Teachers need to shadow their students while completing the individual practical and use checkpoints, meeting points, and communication systems to ensure safety of their students while also being able to validate their grading of the journey.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 4: Investigation

For many schools, this was the first or second year that they completed the investigation. Markers commented on the good standard and range of environmental issues investigated. It was evident that those students who clearly identified an issue that created debate and was directly related to an expedition were able to carry out their investigation well. It is strongly recommended that students and teachers work closely to select an investigation that allows a student to meet all assessment criteria.

Good investigations were produced by students who used an appropriate range of primary data sources, including observations and photos taken while on the expedition. These were then used as the foundation of their report. These students included expert material from appropriate and relevant sources and clearly linked their findings to secondary data. They were prepared to consider a range of perspectives and management strategies while also examining 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 overusing secondary data which then limits the student's performance against specific features being assessed.

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 filler.

Good investigations had subheadings 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 again important to note that the generic cover sheet found on the SACE Board's website should be used. A word-count should be included.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

During final moderation, moderators commended those teachers who followed the guidelines in the subject operational information for the submission of student work.

Below are a few points of clarification for teachers to ensure that moderation proceeds smoothly:

- Consult the subject operational information closely. This is available online and from each school's SACE coordinator. The timelines and guidelines for the subject need to be carefully applied.
- Include in the moderation bag clear task sheets for each piece of student work. This gives moderators an understanding of what the task involves and how it is being assessed against the performance standards. It also helps moderators when the tasks are clearly labelled and not just called task 1, 2, 3, etc.
- Include the approved learning and assessment plan. The learning and assessment plan addendum needs to be used to show changes made to assessment items in the approved learning and assessment plan and both then need to be submitted with the moderation materials.
- Provide a complete set of summative tasks for each of the students identified in the specified sample should be included. The Variations - Moderation Materials form needs to be included if students have been given special provisions or variations, or if their materials for final moderation are incomplete. If student work is missing and there is no valid reason, moderators must assume that the work has not been completed and their moderation decision is adjusted accordingly.
- Practical Knowledge and Skills Checklists need to be used for both practicals and tasks should be written to show which specific features will be assessed and what the assessment conditions are (for example, appropriate word-limits).
- The specific features that were listed to be assessed in the approved learning and assessment plan need to correlate with the specific features being assessed in the tasks during the year.
- As specified in the subject operational information, the external investigation should have not identify the school.

Moderators commented that when a spread sheet (or similar) of results for the class which separates the assessment for the Folio, Group Practical and Individual Practical it enables them to confirm assessments more readily.

Chief Assessor
Outdoor Education