

Philosophy

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Society and Environment Learning Area



Government
of South Australia

SACE
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PHILOSOPHY

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GENERAL COMMENTS

It is pleasing to note that more schools offered Philosophy this year. Consequently the range of activities and assessment tasks has expanded.

Teachers new to the subject need to ensure that the *Learning Area Manual* requirements are met and that assessment tasks meet certain design criteria.

It is interesting to note an increased use of the Internet and technology both in resource material and in the presentation of assessment tasks. However, a cautionary comment for students is to not rely entirely on this as a source for research information. Reference solely to the Internet will indicate a limited research effort. Students should create a comprehensive bibliography with evidence of a range of sources.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 1: ARGUMENT ANALYSIS

The basics concepts are well summarised in the resource booklet '*Árgument*' available on the SACE website. Teachers are encouraged to develop tasks beyond these basics, and include students' abilities and interests.

It is suggested that logical fallacies can prove to be an interesting area for study, particularly when analysing the logic of humour or letters to the editor.

In spite of all the resource material available there were still a few students who confused deductive and inductive arguments – this is one of the essential concepts of philosophy.

The importance of critical thinking cannot be underrated. One of the most pleasing aspects of this subject is the contribution argument analysis makes to empowering students to think for themselves and not to take the arguments of others for granted without proper analysis.

A wide range of media was used as the source for analysis this year. There were successful analyses of arguments as viewed in current affairs, news editorials, films, and documentaries.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 2: ISSUES ANALYSIS

Moderators were impressed by the enthusiasm that students brought to grappling with life's big questions and how philosophers try to answer them. The key to success, in relation to the specifications of the curriculum statement, is to focus on individual philosophers' responses to an issue, and then develop one's own position by considering the philosophers' positions.

Less successful students referred to a general position rather than to individual philosophers' responses to an issue. In this case students could not demonstrate the depth of analysis in terms of contradictions within a general movement. For example, in discussing utilitarianism, more successful students considered the individual contributions of J. S. Mill, Jeremy Bentham, and Peter Singer, rather than focusing on the general position.

Students need to be aware, both in this component and in the major investigation, of not including unnecessary and irrelevant biographical details about philosophers. A philosopher's life – date of birth, marital status, fame and fortune has no place in a serious discussion of an issue. Similarly, mentioning that an issue has been of interest to philosophers for thousands of years is equally not relevant to high-end deliberations.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 3: PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES STUDY

It is interesting to note the types of topics that reflect the interests and concerns of students and how they relate to the trends in society's concerns. There appears to be a growing number of studies investigating vegetarianism, animal rights, the Iraq war and asylum seekers. These topics are quite suitable for investigation as long as students analyse philosophical positions in relation to the issues.

The majority of students are now framing their topic in the form of a question, although some students are not fully aware of the implications of this approach. It is necessary to analyse in some depth a number of positions in response to the question. Students then develop their own position by examining the arguments of the philosophers and show how their position is a result of this careful consideration.

Less successful students tended to describe a number of positions and then give their own position without demonstrating how it was reached. It is important that students do not 'sit on the fence' after such analysis. The art of debate, critical to learning in this subject, is to demonstrate that one has a clear and informed point of view.

On the matter of word limit, it is possible to meet all the assessment criteria in less than the maximum. However, where possible students should be encouraged to make the most of the opportunity and meet the maximum word limit. Conversely, it is disappointing when the word limit is reached, and the work is irrelevant, repetitive, or not philosophical.

Finally, markers continue to be impressed by the large number of competent, fluent, thought-provoking, and insightful investigations which delved into difficult and challenging topics.

Chief Assessor
Philosophy