

Workplace Practices

2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

# Workplace Practices

# 2014 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.

In 2014, many schools and teachers used Workplace Practices to provide focus and meaning for the learning done by their students in a range of flexible programs. Students are being provided with an opportunity to explore their work choices and future learning while at school, which is indicative of the range of learning opportunities offered by schools.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

For this assessment type, students undertaking the 20-credit subject are expected to complete at least three assessment tasks designed to address the ‘Industry and Work Knowledge’ area of study (Topics 1–5) specified in the subject outline. It is important to note that for the 10-credit subject, students must undertake at least one assessment task and it must be from Topic 5: Negotiated Topics.

For this assessment type, students are asked to provide evidence of their learning in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

* knowledge and understanding
* investigation and analysis
* reflection and evaluation.

Please note that the application criterion is not assessed in this assessment type and students can be disadvantaged by teachers who choose to include this in their assessment task design.

It was clear during the moderation process that an increasing number of schools are attempting to tailor the folio assessment tasks to the needs of their students. It was pleasing to see assessment tasks that had been generated or adapted using subject operational advice and exemplars available on the SACE Board website.

It was also evident that teachers were striving to provide students greater opportunity to reflect on and evaluate their learning. Previous Chief Assessor reports have noted that reflection and evaluation must be assessed in *at least one* of the folio assessment tasks. Note, however, that reflection and evaluation does not need to be addressed in every folio assessment task. In fact, teachers may be disadvantaging students if they ask students to meet all of the assessment design criteria for the folio in each of the assessment tasks set. For example, many assessment tasks for Topic 4: Finding Employment was limited in the reflection and evaluation they demanded of students. Assessment tasks such as producing an employment portfolio, writing a resumé, wr iting a cover letter, and sitting a mock interview can allow students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding as well as investigation and analysis where sufficient evidence is supplied. However, in an increasing number of these assessment tasks, student work was marked for reflection and evaluation even though students hadn’t been explicitly asked to do either.

It is essential that students are provided opportunities to demonstrate each of the specific features by the completion of study of the subject;however, there is no requirement for each of the assessment design criteria to be assessed in *every* assessment task.

Moderators also noted that while highly prescribed and scaffolded assessments helped some students to achieve at a C grade, in many cases, it prevented the more sophisticated students from achieving at the higher grades. Teachers are encouraged to provide scaffolding where necessary, but to differentiate their assessment to provide students the best opportunity to achieve at all grade bands of the performance standards, including the highest grades.

It is also important to note that assessment task design must allow for more than simple regurgitation of factual information — such as brochures with copied slabs of text, responses to watching a video, or class responses to shared articles — to enable students the opportunity to demonstrate skills at the higher grade bands of the performance standards.

Finally, when providing evidence of student learning to moderators, it is essential that teachers include evidence of their assessment decisions. This can include work with comments, a performance standards rubric with the grade band highlighted for each assessment design criteria, and overall comments with a final assessment decision. Where no teacher interaction with the work was evident, it was often difficult for moderators to confirm the assessment decisions.

Assessment Type 2: Performance

Performance is the assessment of each student’s learning in and about workplace contexts. For students to be successful in this assessment type, they must have completed at least 50–60 hours of performance activity for the 20-credit subject, and 25–30 hours of performance activity for the 10-credit subject, and provide evidence of these through a portfolio.

It is important to note that for the 20-credit subject, this can be completed either as one assessment of 50–60 hours or two assessments of 25–30 hours each. Students are not advantaged by completing two or more placements of 50–60 hours each.

For this assessment type, students are asked to provide evidence of their learning in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

* knowledge and understanding
* application.

Student portfolios for performance should include three components:

* student evidence of knowledge and understanding, through a portfolio or similar
* a Workplace Supervisor’s Report (SACE Board form available), or evidence of completed vocational education and training (VET) competencies
* a Teacher’s Report on Student Performance (SACE Board form available).

It is a requirement that teachers use the relevant [SACE Board forms](https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/web/workplace-practices/stage-2/form) rather than creating their own templates.

Students performing well in this area were generally provided with guidance by the teacher such as a work log template, but highly structured journals generally did not allow students to achieve at the higher grades of the performance standards.

It was also noted at moderation that some students were asked to complete a significant number of hours over the allocated 50–60 hours for the 20-credit subject. Quite often students undertook VET units as well as work experience. In many cases these students were penalised for completing only one portfolio, despite the requirement of 50–60 hours being reached. Teachers are encouraged to refer to the subject outline for clarification of the assessment design criteria.

There were a small number of students who did not demonstrate learning for the minimum hours required for this assessment type. In these instances assessment decisions were not able to be confirmed. If a student is unable or unwilling to complete the required hours, this should be included in the ‘Teacher’s Report on Student Performance’ form (including confirmation of any hours the student did actually complete), and student achievement should be graded accordingly.

However, it is important to note that if students fail to provide the teacher with adequate evidence of their learning (log book, Workplace Supervisor’s Report, etc.) it is not grounds for an ‘incomplete’ grade. Teachers are able to record their conversations with employers, supervisors, and trainers on the ‘Teacher’s Report on Student Performance’ form and, although assessment decisions are adjusted accordingly, students should be given some credit for work completed.

Therefore, the ‘Teacher’s Report on Student Performance’ form, for either vocational learning or VET, is fundamental to this assessment type and must be completed for each student. These official forms allow teachers to describe exactly the context for learning and the hours completed, and provide the opportunity for teachers to explain their assessment decisions. When coupled with a Workplace Supervisor’s Report (or the Statement of Attainment for the VET units), these forms provide an invaluable insight into the performance of each student.

In addition to students demonstrating the requisite number of hours for this assessment type, it is essential that they demonstrate their knowledge and understanding and application. This can only be achieved through the provision of evidence in a portfolio or other acceptable format, such as a photostory with captions, a log of learning tasks and application of skills, an oral discussion with the teacher, or a recording that demonstrates what the student has gained through his or her vocational learning. Some teachers provided scaffolding in a booklet style for students to use to report on their workplace learning. This can be useful for some students but may also restrict achievement for others, especially if this discourages detailed and informative responses.

Where students are using evidence of performance through VET units of competency, they are still required to produce evidence beyond the Statement of Attainment from the registered training organisation or a letter from the principal in the form of a portfolio. Where a Statement of Attainment was the only evidence provided, moderators were unable to confirm teachers’ assessment decisions.

Finally, it is not acceptable for students to use a reflection on their work experience (used for Assessment Type 3: Reflection) as evidence of learning in Assessment Type 2: Performance. Where this was evident, moderators were only able to confirm teachers’ assessment decisions for one of the assessment types.

Assessment Type 3: Reflection

For this assessment type, students must include at least two reflection tasks for the 20-credit subject and at least one reflection task for the 10-credit subject.

Students provide evidence of their learning in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

* knowledge and understanding
* investigation and analysis
* reflection and evaluation.

Reflections can be personal (what the student has gained from their learning experiences) or work oriented (reflecting on how the workplace itself contributed to their learning). Moderators noted that, this year, there was an increasing number of reflections on different aspects of student learning throughout the year. Where students were asked, as per the subject outline, to reflect on a range of learning experiences in or about work, they were much more likely to complete this assessment type to a higher standard.

Students were limited in their responses when asked to complete two reflections on their work experience or VET learning as many only undertook a single placement or course and either repeated themselves in the second task or simply neglected to complete a second reflection at all.

Once again, it was evident to the moderators that students were able to achieve at higher grade levels when assessment tasks were designed to allow students to self-evaluate rather than to evaluate their workplace or the industry in which they had worked.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 4: Investigation

Approximately half the students for both the 10‑credit subject and the 20‑credit subject completed a practical investigation this year, continuing the upwards trend in this area. However, fewer students chose to use multimodal presentations. The majority of investigations were within the maximum word limit of 1000 words, or equivalent, for the 10‑credit subject, or 2000 words, or equivalent, for the 20‑credit subject. However, it was noted that a number of students were disadvantaged by exceeding the maximum word limit.

The majority of student work was packaged appropriately with the correct external assessment cover sheet. This sheet provides key information for markers about the type of investigation, the industry relevance, and the word count. It is important that students complete all of the required information on this cover sheet to ensure that markers have all information necessary to make an assessment decision. It is also important to remember that student work must be completely de-identified, including names of students, teachers, and schools.

Multimodal presentations that complemented a student’s vocational learning/VET were generally more successful than those that simply recreated a digital slide presentation that had already been published by another source. Also, it is essential that all multimodal resources have high-quality sound and that the files are not corrupted or in an inaccessible format. Refer to the video, ‘Preparation of Non-written Materials and Submission of Electronic Files’ under Stage 2 School Assessment on the [subject minisite](https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/web/workplace-practices/stage-2/assessment/school-assessment/advice-on-preparing-materials) for guidelines on preparing audio and video files of student materials for submission to the SACE Board.

If students were given the freedom to choose an industry-specific issue or practical investigation, the standard of student work was generally higher than in those classes where all students completed the same topic and presented their investigation in exactly the same style. Highly scaffolded assessment tasks did not allow students to meet the performance standards at the highest grade band. The most effective investigations were those based on a topic that had been negotiated between the teacher and the student around an issue or practical task of relevance to the student’s chosen industry, as the student was far more likely to engage with the work in a positive and meaningful manner.

Practical Investigation

In the most successful practical investigations, students were able to demonstrate their involvement in a real practical activity related to their focus industry. Many of these practicals incorporated a multimodal component (such as a video) accompanied by a written analysis of the investigation undertaken, and a reflection on, and evaluation of, student work.

In the less successful practical investigations, students were asked to imagine completing a particular work-related task, but were not actually required to perform it (or had only worked on it briefly during work experience). These investigations did not allow sufficient investigation and analysis or reflection and evaluation of a task, thus limiting the ability of students to meet the performance standards to a satisfactory level.

It is highly recommended that teachers avoid setting step-by-step guides or imagined practicals. Where students undertook a task or process with industry relevance and where some investigation and learning was required, they were consistently more likely to achieve at the higher grades.

Issues Investigation

The most successful issues investigations all began with an appropriately worded focus for the investigation. Where a clear and appropriate issue was identified, students were able to tailor their research accordingly. However, a number of students were let down by their choice of a topic rather than an issue. For example, choosing a general topic such as occupational health and safety, childhood poverty, or gender equity, without linking it meaningfully to their chosen industry, did not allow students to investigate and analyse work-related issues. It is essential that investigations are related to work in the students’ chosen industry, and how it impacts, or could impact, on their work is discussed as this will assist in demonstrating reflection and evaluation, and particularly self-evaluation.

In many classes where all students investigated the same issue, students struggled to complete their own research and analysis of the chosen information. These investigations were often heavily scaffolded with the same resources used by each member of the class, rather than each student researching and interacting with primary and secondary source material in a meaningful manner.

Performance Standards

For this assessment type, students are asked to provide evidence of their learning in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

* knowledge and understanding
* investigation and analysis
* reflection and evaluation.

Knowledge and Understanding

Generally this criterion was the one most effectively met by students in either the practical or issues investigations. In particular, students demonstrated good understanding of concepts relevant to the focus industry indicated on the cover sheet. Typically, students who had the most difficulty demonstrating and explaining concepts and issues related to the focus industry and work did not have a clearly defined issue for their investigation. It is also important that students who are investigating general workplace issues (rather than issues specific to a particular workplace) provide appropriate references for their information, as it is easy to copy and paste large chunks of general information.

Investigation and Analysis

The issues investigation allows the majority of students to address the investigation and analysis assessment design criteria to a satisfactory standard, as students need to investigate primary and secondary sources in order to understand an issue. This was more problematic for students undertaking a practical investigation. The tendency is for students to choose a task or process that they are already familiar with, which in many cases then limits the amount of investigation undertaken. It is important that even students who are completing familiar tasks recognise that industry-specific skills are not developed in isolation and the most effective workers understand the importance of investigating how to complete tasks and analysing the information that they discover.

It is also important that students understand the difference between presenting information — such as facts, statistics, and graphs — and analysing information and what they have learnt about their chosen topic. Having information from more than one source and more than one type of source helps students to synthesise and analyse a range of viewpoints before coming up with their own opinion or way of performing tasks. While surveys can be a helpful way of gathering information, they are not effective when the respondents are not involved in the chosen industry or have limited knowledge of what the student is investigating. In many cases, therefore, it was evident that significant investigation had taken place (IA2), but students had not adequately analysed the relationship between issues, tasks, and workplace practices (IA2).

Students who performed to the highest grade band of this performance standard investigated a range of both primary and secondary resources that were local or national in origin.

Reflection and Evaluation

Students who reflected on their time management, how well they wrote the paper, or how well they completed a multimodal presentation struggled to meet this performance standard to a satisfactory level. In order to be successful, it is essential that students reflect on and evaluate what they have learnt about an industry and about themselves as a worker. Markers found that generally students who undertook a practical investigation were able to reflect on their finished product and evaluate its relevance or effectiveness. In comparison, many students undertaking an issues investigation demonstrated only superficial reflection on their learning and many struggled to evaluate what they had learnt about an industry and/or about themselves as a worker. If students chose an appropriate, industry-focused topic of relevance to their own future, they were generally far more successful in meeting the reflection and evaluation assessment design criteria than those who completed a generic issue or topic that had no personal relevance.

Students who were most successful reflected on and evaluated the impact of what they had learnt, rather than merely discussing how well they completed the process. It was noted that where students used specific headings, such as reflection and evaluation, they were much more likely to meet this performance standard to a satisfactory level as they had specifically addressed the criteria for assessment.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

Of high importance is the use of an approved learning and assessment plan (LAP). At central moderation there were a number of LAPs in the white subject packages that were not approved because they did not allow all students to achieve satisfactorily across all assessment types. This is important because an approved LAP will help to ensure that the correct number of assessment tasks are completed and that all assessment design criteria are addressed.

Pleasingly, many teachers used the addendum section of the LAP to indicate changes to their learning plan over the year. In general, teachers had customised the LAP to meet the needs of all the students in their cohort. When coupled with the appropriate use of the ‘Variations — Moderation Materials’ form, moderators had a more complete picture of the student cohort, which helped them to verify teachers’ assessment decisions.

Packaging and presentation of student materials was generally done well; however a few key items to consider when packaging students’ materials for final moderation are:

* A complete set of assessment task sheets is included with the LAP.
* Student work is organised and includes marks or performance standards rubrics shaded by the teacher to indicate the grade level awarded, with supporting comments as appropriate. This helps the moderation team to confirm assessment decisions made by the teacher.
* All student work is clearly labelled.
* For Assessment Type 2: Performance, it is essential that all Workplace Practices forms are included in the materials submitted for moderation: Teacher’s Report on Student Performance Vocational Learning, Teacher’s Report on Student Performance VET, or Report on Performance as a Personal Carer; and, where applicable, Workplace Supervisor’s Report and the Agreement to Use Part-time or Casual Employment for Study.

## General Comments

It is clear that the most successful courses in Workplace Practices are those that allow students to focus on a particular industry, so that students are able to make meaning of their learning and see the relevance of the topics covered in each assessment type.

Workplace Practices

Chief Assessor