

Summary of findings from schools that used the Curriculum Council sample papers as Semester 1 examinations or as assessment tasks.

Curriculum Council officers visited schools that indicated they had used the sample examination papers within their schools. A record of each interview with the HoD at the respective school was prepared and presented to the HoD for checking as an accurate record.

Council officers were unable to locate any school, that after trialling the sample papers or questions, had then come to the conclusion that the sample papers were not appropriate to the course.

Outer metropolitan government school

We used the same format as the sample paper with our Stage 3 students but used different stimulus materials with the questions.

We found that the paper worked quite well. Students need to be taught how to use what they have been taught in class and apply it to questions. We completed some work on breaking down questions and linking to what has been studied.

Section 1

Question 1 of Reading section was generally done well and students achieved better in this question than the second. This was a good question to allow the weaker students to write something. It is also good to have two questions in this section as our weaker students struggle to write on a topic for an hour.

Question two was more challenging for the students but we focused on generic ideology, conventions and codes when teaching texts this year and taught students how to link texts together by focusing more than on just content alone.

Section 2

Students handled this section well. We told students not to write a narrative story as the marking of narratives is less reliable than of essays and it may be a little risky. We instructed all of our students to make reference to texts they studied and taught them how to integrate what they have learnt about textual features, ideology and reader positioning into open ended questions. The openness of the questions allowed our students to use what they studied in class. Students can do this if they are taught how to do it through the term. No students wrote an imaginative story based on the photograph provided, but some wrote an essay based on the image.

Section 3

Both of our questions in this section required students to refer to the images provided. Students were able to handle the questions which required them to analyse a static image as they had studied the conventions of film and film language in the course, so they applied their understandings to the images. They were able to link their discussions to the viewing texts they had studied as we taught them to focus on the relationship between texts and society as well as film conventions.

Large Co-educational Catholic School

This school sampled some of the questions from the 2009 Draft Stage Two and Stage Three Exams in their mid-year exam. Apart from one of the images from the 2009 Draft Stage Three Exam, the school chose to use different stimulus material.

A total of 176 Year 12 students sat this exam, including a mixture of 2A, 2B and 3A students. Of the 47 2A students who sat the exam, 4 students achieved a mark of 50 or higher. Of the 92 2B students who sat the exam, 51 achieved a mark of 50 or higher. Of the 37 3A students who sat the exam, 36 achieved a mark of 50 or higher.

The belief that Stage Two students shouldn't have to sit an external examination was expressed. It was felt that these types of students were not capable of doing well at this type of exam. It was believed that if they do have to sit an examination, there should be greater scaffolding; the questions should provide clear direction to students on what they have to do and how they should do it. These students need to have the parameters set for them as they don't cope well with 'loose type questions'.

Section one - reading

The school provided one passage in this section, which was an excerpt from a novel. The two questions in this section were similar in requirements to those provided in the 2009 Draft Stage Three Exam. The first question required students to discuss the passage, and the second question required the students to discuss how their wider reading experience influenced their response to the passage.

2. *Explain how your wider reading has influenced your response to the notions of place and identity in this passage.*

The majority of students responded quite poorly to this second question. A lot of marks less than 7 were awarded to students' responses. The markers of this question felt that students did not attend to all aspects of the question. It was felt that students were being asked to do 'too much' in having to make links to other texts.

Section 2 - writing

Students were provided with a choice of 5 questions in this section. 4 of the 5 questions were sampled from the 2009 Draft Stage Two and Stage Three Exams.

1. *In a form of your choice, write for an audience of graduating students persuading them that: "There is more to life than just earning money." (Stage Two)*

Most students who responded to this question were Stage 2 students. The Stage 3 students avoided this question. Most of the responses were either in the form of an essay or speech. It was commented that there was no real 'top end' for this question. Some students made reference to their expository text in their responses, although this generally involved a paraphrase of the text.

2. *Evaluate the idea that engaging with a text involves escaping from your world and exploring others. (Stage Three)*

A number of the Stage 3 students opted to respond to this question. The HOD commented that the responses to question 2 and question 5 were generally better than those to the other questions. The HOD thought this was due to the nature of the question, as there was more direction to the students on what they needed to write about.

3. The third question was not from the 2009 draft exams.
4. *Using a form of writing of your choice use the image below as a stimulus for a piece of writing. (Stage Two and Three)*

A different stimulus image was used for this question. Of the 176 students who sat the exam, 10 – 15 chose to respond to this question. The responses included a mixture of narratives, journal entries and a few essays. The essays focused on the chaos and confusion prevailing in the world today. The comment from the marker on this section was that a lot of the responses were unfocused and the students tended to ramble.

5. *“Texts have the power to evoke powerful responses”*

Discuss how a text you have studied has been constructed to stir people into action.
(Stage Two)

As with question 2, a number of the Stage 3 students opted to respond to this question. It was noted that students who responded to questions 2 and 5 generally did better than those who responded to the other questions.

Section 3 - Viewing

There was a choice of 2 questions in this section. Each question required the student to discuss at least one of the images and a non-print text studied. One of the questions was from the 2009 Draft Stage Three Exam, as was one of the images.

1. *“Visual texts hold a mirror up to our world but the reflection is often distorted.”*

Discuss why at least one of the images and at least one non-print text that you have studied may be viewed as distorted.

Students who responded to this question did not clearly define ‘our world’ and tended to ignore the term ‘distorted’. It was also noted that there needed to be a closer examination of codes and conventions in the students’ responses.

Students in response to both of the questions tended to discuss the texts in isolation, failing to make appropriate links between them. There was concern over the requirement for students to have to make connections between static images and a non-print text studied. It was felt that students should have a choice to either write on the images provided or to write on a non-print text studied, and if students want to make connections then they should be allowed to.

Key Points

- Greater need for scaffolding in the Stage Two exams
- Questions with clearer direction on 'what' to write about and 'how' to do it
- Questions in the Reading Section should focus on the passages
- Questions in the Viewing Section should allow students to write on either the static images or non-print texts studied, they should not force students to write about both.

Outer metropolitan government school

The school used the **2A sample paper**. It found that the paper was an excellent paper. The questions were fair and provided the students with a good range of questions. With such a range of topics it can confuse some students by offering them too much choice, but the teacher can see the value of having a wide range for a group of students that is so diverse. The school has spent time teaching students to de-construct texts and they were able to write a lot with the questions,

Section 1

Question 1 was done well as students were taught generic features and relationships to target audiences. The school used the same question but used stimulus materials that linked to what students had studied.

Question 2 was more challenging and some students found it hard but were able to cope. The school spent time teaching these students how to de-construct questions and respond appropriately. The teacher believes that if the course is taught properly it is a very good question. It is a tough question for Semester One as students haven't read a large number of texts to discuss broader reading, but as the year progresses they will be more able to attempt this type of question.

The teacher believes that if a question in the comprehension question requires students to discuss values and beliefs, the question needs to have an instruction that only one page of writing is required and that students should spend time thinking about the question rather than just launching into an ill thought out response. These students need to go for quality rather than quantity in their responses.

The teacher believed that the **Writing section** gave students plenty of scope to demonstrate their writing.

Question 1 was a great question and was done well by students.

Question 2 wasn't really relevant to the texts the students had studied and no students attempted it.

Question 3 had a number of students that wrote well on this question. There was a tendency for the weaker students to slip into generalisations with this question. This is where it is important for teachers to warn students that broad questions do not require broad generalised answers, students must be quite specific in their discussions.

Question 4 No students attempted this question as they probably thought they didn't have the range of writing skills practice necessary to tackle it at this stage. Perhaps later in the year they would be more able to attempt it.

Question 5 Nobody did this question. They could have done it but chose question 2 instead.

Question 6 Some students had a problem with this question as they wrote a series of one way correspondences from the point of view of a customer. They didn't pick up that two-way correspondence was required. The decisions to write in letter format didn't bring out their best writing as they wrote simple basic letters rather than showing their skill with vocabulary and other generic features. The question evoked more 1A type of material and the range of responses was not there. Students need to be advised by teachers not to choose what is the easiest option as often that option doesn't allow them to show off their best writing.

Question 7 had one student attempt it from the perspective of a character. Understanding values and beliefs in texts is very difficult for students in this stage. This student missed them totally and didn't do well.

Section 3

The students did section 3 well and there were no major problems here.

English

Question 1 allowed the students to write a lot and show their understandings. The open question format allowed them to write well.

Question 2 The teacher thought responses to question 2 could be a bit simplistic but if visual texts have been taught students generally found it to be straightforward. The key was to get students to focus on visual codes and use the correct terminology and understand the main ideas are presented.

General Comments

The teacher teaches students that they are surrounded by texts all of the time and that they need to practise these skills whenever they see these texts. Students also need to be taught to write in different writing forms. The teacher requires students to do reading out of class hours so that there is enough time in class for teaching the range of texts and the range of writing forms required. The teacher spends 3-4 weeks on each text and uses class time to develop different readings of texts.

Independent school in outer suburbs

On arrival at the school it was noted that the school had used the ETA paper in Semester One rather than the CC Sample paper. It was decided to continue with the interview as there were similarities between the ETA paper and the Curriculum Council sample paper.

The teacher is concerned that open ended questions lead to 'waffle' and would recommend that questions need to allow access link to texts studied.

She believes that has led to a much larger 'tail' in the school cohort than in previous years as less able students choose what appear to be the easier questions and tend to 'waffle'.

In the past the teacher has been able to teach the lower end of the cohort about texts and students have been able to apply what has been taught and they have coped with exams reasonably well. The teacher believes that the new course doesn't allow for in-depth teaching of texts (as there is much more to teach now) these students have nothing to fall back on in the exams and tend to struggle.

The teacher believes that a problem here is that before, the kids who studied hard were able to use what they studied and do reasonably well in exams and get into uni. Now if those kids study hard they are out performed by kids who haven't studied hard but can write well 'off the top of their head' in open ended questions, that don't require reference to texts. The teacher believes that the hard workers are the ones that will ultimately achieve well at university rather than the students with natural flair as the ones with flair haven't developed a work ethic and will fall by the wayside at uni. The English course exam should reward students who work hard rather than just those with natural flair, who have a strong personal voice and good general knowledge.

The teacher believes that the use of learned essays is not such a big problem as most markers can identify essays that are learnt responses and do not mark them as highly as other responses as they don't address the question anyway. It is better to give kids questions that demonstrate what they have studied than let students who are more able but lazy use their general knowledge and pass the exam without having really studied hard.

Stage 2

The teacher believes that the stage two exam questions are too hard and need to be scaffolded more to give students clear direction on what is needed.

The teacher believes that the wide range of text types listed and the wide range of writing types required is too hard for the weaker students. She believes it is possible for the stage 3 questions to remain more open but stage two students need more structure and clearly defined boundaries to what the course covers. The teacher believes that as most students do quite well in viewing questions, it may not be necessary to have such a strong emphasis on viewing in the exam.

Questions that require comparison between texts where students are asked to make links between texts require 'high order' skills and maybe are too demanding for many students to be able to complete in one hour. Less able students have enough trouble understanding and comprehending without asking them for these higher order skills

English

such as comparing, synthesis and making intertextual links.some but how much should we be asking for?

In previous years the teacher believed her school averaged 61% in raw scores in TEE exams but in 2007 the average dropped to 59%. The teacher believes that her teachers have engaged with the new course all along but the less able students have been disadvantaged in this type of exam as they can no longer rely on what they have studied to get them through. The course is too broad and comprehensive for lower end – too many text types, too many forms to master, too many things to synthesize, not enough boundaries at the Stage Two end.

Email message attached with final copy:

'Probably don't feel it quite as strongly as it reads but essentially it does capture what we are thinking. Thanks for listening.'

Independent country school

Stage 2

The school had 6 students study 2A, there were 4 boys and 2 girls.

Comprehension

The school used the 'AFL' passage in the comprehension.

The teacher reported that the comprehension was well chosen. It had enough for the weaker students to write on and allowed for discrimination of the more able students. Problems that arose in the test for the students arose when they misread questions or didn't read instructions carefully enough. The teacher believed it would be appropriate to use more responses and keep them shorter in the Stage 2 Reading section as stage 2 students typically have more difficulty writing at length on a single question. The teacher believed that no students were disadvantaged by this test. It was thought that perhaps some of the questions were a little too predictable and simplistic. The students were able to use what they had studied in class.

Viewing Section

The teacher thought **Question 1** could be closer to the course content dot points such as requiring students to look at 'values and attitudes', elements of construction and 'representations'.

The teacher thought that it was important for the **Question 2** to require the students to make links to the texts they had studied in the course, so that they could use these texts in the exam. The course encourages students to read widely and make links between texts and the examination should encourage that.

Stage 3

The school had 13 students study 3A/3B. The teacher believed that 4 of those students would be better suited to 2A/2B. The teacher believed that the Stage 3 sample exam was excellent as it allowed students to use what they had studied as part of their reading, viewing and writing in the course. The course allows students to make links between texts and see the broader patterns and forces in society 's culture and history. The examination allowed the good students to demonstrate this and the teacher believed that his students are starting to complete some quite startling work which demonstrates sophisticated understandings of texts and ways of thinking in society. He thought the examinations were moving away from writing essays and he was happy for students to write speeches and feature articles etc. as they allowed for better demonstration of knowledge, skills and understanding.

Writing Section

The teacher thought the writing section worked very well and allowed the students to demonstrate their understanding of the types of writing they completed in class. The teacher thought that the students demonstrated that they could use language conventions effectively. Such things as the use of personification, similes and metaphors were demonstrated in different types of writing. Most students did either question 1 or 3, The students didn't attempt questions 4 and 5. It was very encouraging to see that what the students had studied in class was coming through in the exam. The teacher thought the section allowed those students who were better at essays to write essays; and those students that wanted to demonstrate wider control of language conventions were able to do that as well.

The teacher found that students used a range of writing forms in the writing section when writing about texts. He also noted though that some students also wrote a speech as part of their answer in the reading section or a feature article in response to questions in the viewing section. He thought this had a detrimental effect on

English

student answers in the reading and viewing section and would encourage students not to do this in those sections.

Reading Section

The teacher thought the reading section did not work well. The article on Australia Day needed a title to give the students a way into the article. There was a title included in the acknowledgements but this was not included above the passage and this oversight led to some aberrant readings of the passage. The teacher would prefer to have one question in the reading section rather than two or three. The teacher believes that too much time is wasted by students setting up introductions and conclusions for questions and that if there was only one question, the students could spend more time on answering the question and showing understandings, rather than structuring introductions and conclusions. The teacher believed the section would have worked better if the two questions were combined into one.

The teacher believed it was appropriate for Stage 3 Reading comprehension questions to make broad links to other texts they have read in class so they could use their wider reading experience. The teacher thought most students don't read beyond what they read in class. The teacher believed that most teachers are only just starting to understand what this course is about. That is, that the course requires students to not only understand specific texts but to also see broader patterns and forces in society which govern particular uses of language. The teacher believes that this is the really exciting aspect of this course and as more teachers latch onto this, there will be some excellent work done by students. He believes he is already starting to see this occur.

The average for the reading section was 17/30. The teacher believed that the **comprehension passages** were quite complex and care needs to be taken that passages are not so difficult that it becomes hard to discriminate between student performance. The teacher believed that the passages in the sample paper were too difficult for the weaker students. It was also noted that some students ran out of time in this section.

Viewing Section

The average for the viewing section was 19/30. The teacher believed that the students did well in the Viewing section and that the highest marks were awarded in this section. The students had studied notions of gender and identity in class and the teacher thought that the static images provided in this section were relevant and accessible and invited students to demonstrate the understandings and knowledge they had gained through their class study.

The school did not use the whaling image as in the viewing section they tended to use texts beyond those just studied in class, more so than reading where when they just focused on what was read in class and it was not as clear as the other two images. The teacher believes it is important to retain the use of static images in an exam, as it is easy for students to demonstrate broader understandings gained through the course on a single text which can be presented in its unified totality. The teacher finds teaching complex understandings such as positioning and ideology using static images just as effective as using longer texts such as films and documentaries. The teacher stated that, to do this effectively though, teachers need to find images with a lot in them, such as the image of the beauty queen soldier which was an excellent image for analysis. The teacher believed that visual texts surround students in their everyday life and it is crucial that students are taught to analyse these and that they should be part of the examination.

English

The teacher thought the viewing section worked better than the reading section as students only had to answer one question.

The teacher thought that the instructions not to use the same primary text as reference was fair enough as the course is trying to get students to develop wide reading and viewing and they should be encouraged to demonstrate this in the exam. He believed that students were still confused over these instructions. He stressed that this instruction needed to be made clearer to teachers and students.

General

The teacher questioned whether there was enough 3B material in the paper and recommended that there needs to be a balance of questions which allows for 3A and 3B understandings. The teacher thought this paper was a little more focused on the 3A recommended focus rather than 3B. It was not a problem as a semester one examination but needs to be considered when structuring exams that assess progress across the whole year.

The teacher indicated that he was enjoying teaching the course and the concepts focused on in the course. The variety of assessment tasks brought more interest to the course for students, rather than a course where the analytical essay predominated.