

## ENGLISH WRITING (ENW315114)

Thank you and a round of applause (or collective sigh of relief!) for taking the time to access, download and/or print this important document, whether you are a teacher or student of English Writing. TASC and the marking team cannot emphasise enough the importance of reading and considering the feedback and advice in this report that is a compilation of a number of markers' responses. It provides invaluable insight in the creation and submission of English Writing folios for external assessment, as well as in developing and refining pieces of work throughout the year, so that candidates can achieve individual and collective success. If you know of a teacher new to this subject in 2018, please alert them to this document as they begin their experience of teaching and assessing English Writing. It can make the students' experiences and outcomes so much more favourable if they act on the advice of past works presented.

The 2017 marking process was again affirming and valuable for those involved, and the collegial and professional conversations that occur during this period are highly beneficial for teachers who make the commitment to mark. The opportunity to see the range of standards and pieces presented from around the state supports and inspires our own teaching of the subject moving into the future. The number of candidates in the subject was higher than usual this year, which confirms the interest and enjoyment in having the opportunity to write creatively in a TASC Level 3 English subject, and how this prepares and benefits students for the pathways available at UTAS and other tertiary institutions in a range of fields.

Overall, there were once again a wide range of folios presented for assessment in 2017, including a select number of superb submissions where students explored ideas, form and style in highly sophisticated and refined pieces of writing. There was some terrific experimentation with and facility with language, and those pieces with a strong voice, clear sense of purpose and progression stood out in terms of engagement and effectiveness. Stronger folios were dense in imagery, quirky, engaging and often provocative, inviting the reader to make connections and draw conclusions in texts that were well-paced and unified. Pieces addressed a wide range of topics and forms with some well-conceived titles. There was a good effort across the range to show character development and a clear narrative arc in texts.

Some students believed they needed an over-arching theme across all folio pieces, such as death, mental health or betrayal: this is not the case, and it may indeed pose an unnecessary limitation on the diversity of ideas. This was problematic when folios featured the same characters in two or even three pieces – these folios seemed comprised of a single long piece being divided to meet the folio requirements.

Fan fiction inclusions are risky and problematic, and students are discouraged from presenting such pieces. Whilst this is a popular writing movement, it is very difficult to show originality of ideas and style. As encouraged in Module B, student writers really need to be demonstrating the ability to go beyond the character, plot and setting details of existing texts into uncharted and unique creative expressions.

The diversity of form across folios was disappointing this year, although those that included divergent offerings without insight and control were difficult to reward. Teachers and students must, within the challenges of time, be confident in their understanding of different form conventions if they are to succeed. There were a number of composite submissions, and markers do encourage such experimentation with multiple forms. However, it is important that these pieces are not weakened by, for example, poetry inclusions that may diminish the overall quality and effect.

Non-fiction writing, with some notable exceptions, was perhaps not as strong in 2017, despite students grappling with a variety of ideas and concepts. There were a number of pieces which effectively showed a clear awareness of the significance of audience (including reading age) in determining key features such as structure, paragraphing, word usage, captions, images and their relationship with the text, and aspects of style related to specific publications. In approaching this text type, it is important that candidates consider creative possibilities that are unique, and are supported with a clear sense of purpose and audience, with weaker pieces revealing a generalised

or confused style. Heavy reliance on other sources in journalistic texts is problematic in evaluating originality, with some submissions lacking a strong authorial voice and message. The particular journalistic text type – such as feature article and opinion piece – needs to be clear and crafted according to conventions.

Personal experiences and stories can provide a terrific source of inspiration and encourage a distinctive narrative voice, as long as there is a clear sense of audience and intention. Such pieces really resonate their truth with the reader, and there were some laudable examples presented this year. However, it takes a skilled writer to ‘pull off’ a personal essay style piece, whereby strong voice, perceptions and expression in effectively structured texts is paramount. Essay style pieces, as noted this year, generally do not afford students enough opportunity for creativity, unless a unique subject, voice and mastery of style and structure can be incorporated.

Poetry inclusions were predominantly free verse, which often featured extraordinarily short lines – suggesting usage of fewer words than the prose conversion word count indicates. Candidates must be very careful in their creative choices so that minimalist expression is not a substitute for depth, impact and intention. Many free verse poetry submissions read as though little consideration was given to punctuation for meaning and line structure for effect: an aspect of this form markers encourage future candidates to be more attentive to. It is important students discuss their specific poetic choices in the Reflective Statement, and that greater thought is given to the language and figurative imagery details incorporated. There was an evident dearth of classic poetic forms this year, which may challenge future students to explore more sophisticated and precise poetry inclusions.

Conversely, there were poetic pieces that were clearly effective in achieving meaning and effect through deliberate sparseness. Markers noted some excellent poetry inclusions that demonstrated a masterful understanding of structure and technique, with a few exploring more classic forms. Presenting poetry as the Writing Project is unfortunately very risky, unless the subject, structure and delivery are meticulous, skillful and impact on the reader. A few candidates presented entire folios of poetry which again, unless accomplished and engaging, are not terribly successful.

Scripts, on the whole, needed to evidence greater understanding of the features of form. Students must be competent in their knowledge of dramatic monologue, interior monologue and different forms of script. Engagement with effective models is essential if students are to impress the marker with their pieces. Many monologues lack a unique voice, sense of purpose and theatrical effect. Script writing was often naïve, with no emotional arc and conceptual development. Stage directions should add to the artistic intentions of the piece, and not merely be word fillers that provide little insight into the delivery.

There were a number of folios which demonstrated strong ideas and features in their writing, but consistency throughout and across pieces is vital in achieving the HA or EA award. There were a number of high CAs that evidenced standout sentences, ideas or other elements, but these details need to be prevalent rather than intermittent in order to gain the top awards.

Once more, the marking team would like to record the issue of folios presented for assessment that were not at the minimum standard required for a pre-tertiary SA. It is recommended that students study English Writing in Year 12 whereby the extra year of life experience, along with engagement with English Foundations, English 3 or English Literature in Year 11 puts candidates in a better position to do well. Both teachers and students are advised to seriously consider this prior to enrolment.

Notably short ‘support’ texts were of concern in a number of folios this year. It is difficult for students to adequately develop ideas, characters, themes and messages in pieces that were under – including some well under – a thousand words. This is an area markers encourage attention to in future submissions. There were many folios that were at the lower end of the 5000 to 8000 word count, and while this is not necessarily disadvantageous, it can be limiting in demonstrating skills across the range of criteria. Unfortunately, this is often the case. Alternatively, there are still a number of submissions that really need greater editing so that pieces – particularly Writing Projects – are not drawn out texts that struggle to sustain the reader’s interest due to weak plots and writing skills.

Plain text versions of formatted works are important supplementary inclusions in the folio – as per the guidelines. There were a number of folios that failed to feature plain text versions this year; these are important in

distinguishing the actual text from an illustrated or designed piece, which enable the marker to focus on the assessable features of the text.

## LIST OF CONTENTS

In the majority of instances, the List of Contents page was clear and accurate. However, we would once again like to remind students of the importance of this introductory page. Correct details regarding the titles, identification of the Writing Project, form and genre, and word counts of each piece are vital in directing the marker to best appreciate the contents of the folio. There are still issues with accuracy of word counts and identifying both form and genre.

However, it was also noted that identification of obscure (or even made up) genres are not necessarily helpful in providing the reader with a clear notion of the particulars of each folio piece. Such references included poise poetry, ballade, misery literature and secular fiction, among others. Unusual forms should be explained for clarification and intention. Conversely, very generic forms and genres can indicate a lack of understanding of the expectations of these, and greater specificity is advised, which should be supported through explanation in Reflective Statement discussion.

Many candidates neglected to specify actual or equivalent word counts, particularly in poetry, and some were evidently inaccurate. Such issues do not present a favourable first impression with the marker.

## CRITERION I

As indicated in the 2017 Marking Tool and previous Assessment Reports, the markers' focus in assessing criterion I prioritises *accuracy and polish of pieces, quality of referencing and diversity of style*. Range of texts is interpreted as range in point of view, tense, voice and idea. Three similar forms – frequently narrative - are perfectly acceptable, and often very successful if there is variety. It is crucial teachers and students of English Writing are mindful of this clarified assessment focus of this criterion, in order to hone their attention to the specific emphasis that is applied.

Accuracy in presentation continues to be an issue for some students. A variety of fonts, sizes and line spacing are commonly used by students, which should be consistent and in adherence to protocols dictated in the Folio Guidelines as per manuscript formatting. Paragraph and dialogue indents were often problematic. These are basic presentation expectations that should not be inaccurate, and teachers and candidates are strongly advised to review and address this issue. The Folio Guidelines clearly state 1 ½ - 2 line spacing, with single line spacing for poetry. Block paragraphing OR indented paragraphs are required.

Poor proof-reading remains an issue in a number of folios submissions annually, and is of concern given that the folios are a reflection of ongoing work over the course of the year that is expected to be refined and polished for final internal and external submission. However, there were markers who commented that this was better in 2017.

Students who reference tend to do so accurately, although full details are not always provided. With the shift in attention to referencing the influences of others in the Reflective Statement, students are encouraged to be more precise in this aspect of their folios in future – this is also a vital skill in preparation for successful tertiary study. Weaker students tend to reference only websites, and a number did not present references in the required alphabetical order. Application of a consistent referencing method is desired for all future English Writing candidates to ensure consistency – something to note in the 2018 Folio Guidelines. The markers advise that a full Reference List be presented at the end of the folio, rather than following the Reflective Statement, or a combination of lists within the folio.

Along with accuracy of presentation, diversity of texts is significant in this criterion, with many candidates offering varied submissions, in terms of form and /or style. Such creativity of voice, perspective, language and concept enables favourable assessment in various criteria. A number of submissions lacked diversity of voice and method across the folio pieces; while some candidates are able to present pieces that reflect a particular literary emphasis and style, many were too similar in expression, limiting their achievements to the C range on this criterion.

## CRITERION 2

Success in this criterion is dependent on the candidate's ability to *select and use language for impact and effect, encompassing style, vocabulary, language techniques, point of view and voice*.

Markers notes spelling as generally sound on the whole, although the use of American spelling applications was of concern. Automated spell checks are NOT a substitute for careful proofreading, and candidates must be more vigilant in rectifying these errors. There were still an array of examples of incorrect word choice – laziness and/or ignorance cannot be excused at this level. The difference between crevasse/crevice, break/brake, except/accept, series/serious, a part/apart, to/too, everyday/every day, allude/elude, seize/cease, close/clothes, its/it's, then/than, there/their, disburse/disperse, colt/cult, fowl/foul, prey/pray, sole/soul, peak/peek, peddle/pedal, dissent/descent, passed/past, for example. Such a lengthy list of examples not only indicates lack of close proofreading but also disrupts the flow of the narration, causing engagement and suspension of belief to be lost by the reader.

In a similar vein, inaccuracies such as 'had of', 'I've gotten', 'the less of her boy' and use of contractions in the Reflective Statement (including 'you'd' and 'would've') jar the reader and consequently detract from the evidence of achievement in criteria 1 and 2. Unless there is a specific artistic choice in applying such colloquial expressions, they should be avoided.

Limited vocabulary and word choice, along with clichés and 'dead words', continue to adversely affect the impact of many folios, preventing students from effectively developing the range of interesting ideas they aim to bring to life through their writing. Wide personal reading is such a vital element in achieving success as a writer, and as teachers we must do all that we can to encourage and expose our young writers to diverse and quality examples. Prepositions at the end of sentences were also noted as a problem in a number of pieces, which is perhaps another indicator of the need to read.

Greater use of figurative language is encouraged, particularly in poetic works, which often detracts from the evocation of mood and emotional response. Once initial drafts are completed, refinement of works should be mindful of this element of expression. There were some superb pieces in various forms presented for assessment this year, which were rich in evocative vocabulary and imagery, and clearly attuned to rhythm, pacing and effective syntax to elucidate and enhance meaning.

There are still a number of students who present pieces that are a rather 'clunky' telling of events rather than showing. This weakness reflects a lack of understanding of the craft of writing and candidates are again encouraged, after writing their first draft, to closely review and refine their execution so that there is variety of action, description and dialogue (according to the piece and its purpose, of course). Consideration of voice, restraint, pace, tension and conflict are advised. Writers should not reveal everything, and allow their readers scope to interpret and imagine – this is what ultimately engages the reader in genuine storytelling.

## CRITERION 3

Criterion 3 assesses both the *holistic and detailed structure of each folio piece, from the overall level of unity and conventions of form to the microcosmic level of paragraph and sentence structure, and word choice and order*.

Selection of form was noted as predominantly narrative in 2017, although there were a number of non-fiction (autobiographical and journalistic), script and poetic submissions. It was noted that narrative pieces were largely diverse in terms of voice, style and content, which provides a legitimate variety of texts. There were, however, some folios that lacked variety in voice, tense and style, which made favourable assessment difficult. Such similarity really restricts students to a C range on this criterion, along with 2 and even 4. Students who demonstrated a strong sense of personal voice and style were acknowledged and rewarded – this is a legitimate reflection of real world practice where many writers do create within a certain genre and style, and deserves recognition.

Not every narrative is a short story, and candidates are advised to be more accurate in their identification of this form, as it involves a specific range of features. These pieces sometimes lacked a sense of progression and focus, with no rising of conflict or building to a revelation. There were a number of shorter fictional pieces that would

have been better identified as an extended narrative or descriptive scene, vignette or slice of life narrative, for example.

Skills in applying punctuation marks were varied. Greater focus in accurate utilisation of commas, semi-colons, colons and apostrophes for meaning and accuracy are encouraged as a focus of attention for teachers and students. Semi colons were noted as often being over-used or incorrectly applied. Unacknowledged inclusion of run-on sentences remains a concern for the marking team – suggesting that writers are not aware of the fundamental conventions of sentence structure. The humble apostrophe begs mention here ... yet again. This is such an elementary punctuation mark, and yet still so many students fail to get it right. Teachers must be vigilant in guiding students but they are ultimately responsible for accurate application. Students of a Level 3 standard should not fail to include accurate syntax and punctuation marks in their writing.

Many candidates appeared to struggle with basic sentence construction, resulting in writing that was often fragmented and difficult to read. Short sentences to increase pace and tension are a key component in narrative writing, along with a balance of more complex sentences, and these are features could be better employed in a number of pieces to reveal skill in structure and style. Many students still present sentences that lack variety – often the 'I' plus verb and/or subject then action – and become monotonous to read. While some students stated in their Reflective Statements that they utilised varied sentence structure but this was not actually the case. Future English Writing students need to demonstrate greater understanding of how sentence construction adds pace and meaning to texts, and be more conscious of actually refining this aspect of their pieces for greater impact.

Problems with paragraphing continue to abound, despite the Folio Guidelines clearly stating that these must be indented or blocked – not both. Accurate paragraphing is important in achieving purpose and expressing ideas, whereby the significant pause or shift in time, place, character or idea that occurs with a paragraph break provides a clear signpost for the reader. This principle also needs to be carefully considered by students in structuring stanzas in poetry. There are still a number of students who are starting a new line mid paragraph, which reveals a lack of understanding of the requisite format and purpose of paragraphing in creative writing.

Correct dialogue formatting was still a significant issue in 2017 folios, and both teachers and students are implored to take greater care to improve this so that the continuity of pieces is not adversely affected by poor presentation of speech. It is strongly advised that indentation, punctuation and dialogue tags are explicitly addressed in classes, with authoritative models from published texts used to illustrate how dialogue should be presented. There is no line space between lines of dialogue, and narration that follows direct speech should not begin on a new line mid paragraph. Weaker pieces continued to present dialogue that was wooden and unnecessary – the conversations of characters really need to be edited to ensure they are authentic and actually enhance the progression of the piece, rather than serve as fillers that frequently slow the pace of the narrative.

There were some very interesting and effective structural choices noted in 2017, including the use of flashback, circular narrative and synchronicity. The use of multiple characters' perspectives to tell a story more completely often provided greater depth and impact.

## CRITERION 4

Criterion 4 considers the *level of style, complexity and credibility of ideas and characters, and the degree to which this engages the reader in unified texts that evoke an emotional and/or intellectual response.*

There were a number of highly imaginative folios presented for assessment this year, evident of wide reading, conceptual creativity, strong skills in storytelling and a real appreciation of the subtleties of language. These pieces were an absolute delight to read. Often, folio inclusions are the result of writing prompts presented in class, which are great if students can really develop the ideas and details into unique scenarios with engaging conflicts and endings. More effective pieces tended to be realistic, although this is not to say there weren't those that were excellent examples of fantasy, horror and sci-fi inclusions, among others. Excellent pieces understood the power of describing subtle moments and that good literature reflects life. The best candidates also understood how much to reveal and how much to conceal in order allow the reader to infer, rather than have all details explicitly disclosed.

A strong sense of voice epitomises effective texts, with fluidity of expression and originality of ideas engaging the reader into the reading of pieces that offer pace, tension and captivating detail. Representations of life and the world through clever perspectives and from interesting angles, showing mature and thoughtful insights, were arresting – for example, an anthology of vignettes about love that captured a variety of moments so cleverly, with unexpected humour and arresting plot twists, and a sophisticated piece about a deliverer of symbolic black roses that featured diverse structural and expressive elements that were highly intriguing and masterful. Carefully evoked tone enables the reader to emotionally engage and bond with the subject of the text, eliciting desired reactions to the character or persona trusted with relaying events or capturing 'the moment'.

Many middle range folios included reflections and reactions to suicide and mental health issues such as personality disorders and schizophrenia. Other themes explored included murder/death, relationships (particularly family and some romantic) and drug use. There were a number of concerning pieces, with some entire folios focusing on graphic and gratuitous violence. In these cases, there was little consideration of purpose and audience and students really needed guidance in terms of what is appropriate content for inclusion in a Level 3 English Writing folio. Many weaker pieces lacked a clear narrative arc, and understanding of what makes good writing that engages and sustains the reader's interest. Indulgent and childish ideas, unnecessary character and setting details, and excessive and laborious dialogue really detract from the purpose and progression of a piece. Many longer pieces, particularly in the Writing Project, would have been far more successful if they had been rigorously edited – less is far often more!

Narratives set in places familiar to the author were generally more successful. This is no doubt because the writer is able to evoke genuine sensory description and authorial conviction. Pieces set in contexts familiar to the writer are generally more authentic and engaging. Conversely, it is difficult to write about the sights, sounds and smells of Central Park credibly if the writer has never been there.

Research is vital in attaining credibility and impact, particularly in pieces that are set in a specific time and place. Plausibility is compromised if historical, geographical and/or social details are inaccurate. References to 'cool' and 'guys' in a medieval context, for example, were inappropriate and disengaging. Once again, pieces featuring arbitrary USA settings without specific purpose were lacking in conviction.

## CRITERION 5 – THE REFLECTIVE STATEMENT

Although discussion continues as to the focus of one criterion on the Reflective Statement, this is an unavoidable position that candidates of English Writing must be mindful of. As such, students, teachers and markers must accept and embrace this circumstance and focus on crafting Reflective Statements that are effective in evidencing the standards and taking every advantage of the word count available.

Essentially, the Reflective Statement should discuss the *inspiration, form and genre, purpose and audience, influences/models, audience and intention, elements of form and structure, language and stylistic features, and particular aspects of process* in each of the three folio pieces, with a greater focus on the Writing Project. This is no easy feat in a 1000 word maximum, which reinforces the point that every single word must be relevant and precise. Maximising the word count is key to success. There is no room for generalisation or unnecessary discussion of self and sources when the standards are clearly very demanding that students address a range of features of their writing, and relate these to purpose and effect.

Students who are able to communicate the details demanded in the standards in an objective, formal, articulate and comprehensive manner are rewarded in this criterion, as are those who are able to achieve this in a creative way which features a strong individual voice and unique approach. Again, there were some stunning Reflective Statements that were able to skillfully fuse the specifics of their pieces with imaginative structure and expression – which is invariably an indicator of a truly talented writer.

It is important that the Reflective Statement discusses pieces in the same order as they are presented in the folio. A number of candidates in 2017 were inconsistent, which challenges the markers in processing details regarding each piece, and suggests a lack of care in preparing the folio. The Writing Project, as the most substantial piece in the folio, should be weighted more heavily in the word count and offer more detailed discussion.



Many candidates did not explain audience, the choice and/or purpose of the genre, form and techniques used, instead spending most of the Statement discussing sources of ideas and plot. A number mentioned techniques but revealed almost no analysis of their purpose and effect, which means their rating is limited to the C range. Quotations of own work are predominantly problematic: it should be enough that a student refers to - for example - their symbolism throughout a poem, or use of sensory details within a narrative, without having to illustrate with a quotation. The reference should be enough to guide the marker to be alert to this feature in the reading of the piece. Frequently, this occurred in weaker students' work, as an apparent method of fleshing out the word count, rather than being an insightful inclusion.

Similarly, there seem to be an increasing number of students who are incorporating quotations from authors (and even texts) that lack specific relevance to the discussion of the writer's own work. Once again, the markers would like to remind students to be very discerning in the inclusion of such quotations: unless they are vital in illustrating a particular aspect of the writing, they are not necessary and can even alienate the reader. This often appears merely to be a 'name-dropping' exercise. How and why the techniques of others have been used is a paramount consideration.

The use of the analogy at the beginning and end of Reflective Statements has become a bit timeworn, and students are advised to avoid this. It is better to utilise the word count to discuss the specifics of the pieces. Unfortunately, the Reflective Statement is often the weakest piece within the folio, which may be evident of last minute and/or ineffective crafting, or a lack of ability in analysing and discussing features of pieces. A number of statements this year were below the 750 word minimum, which does not put students in a position to gain a C on criterion 5. Adherence to word counts is considered in criterion 1, but a short Reflective Statement simply cannot discuss each folio piece in sufficient depth, and address the range of features identified in the standards, to achieve a C rating or better.

Given that this piece introduces the creative texts within the folio, and is the first impression the marker receives, it is vital this is a polished, precise and comprehensive piece.

## FINAL COMMENTS ... AND PARTICULAR PLEAS FOR FUTURE FOLIOS!

- Proofreading is essential! Fundamental inaccuracies in pieces are simply not acceptable at this level.
- Dialogue must be accurately presented, and it must be authentic and purposeful. Teachers are urged to explicitly teach this in the classroom so that students are accurate and effective in writing dialogue.
- Candidates are advised to include one complete Reference List at the end of the folio.
- Unique and challenging ideas cannot be emphasised enough as themes for exploration. A concerning number were simplistic and not engaging to read.
- Reading as a writer is VITAL, and both teachers and students must challenge candidates to go beyond their reading comfort zone and to access models of writing that have literary merit – across genres, eras and forms.
- The marking team would love to applaud the many fantastic achievements of the English Writing candidates of 2017, which revealed some amazing young writing talent in our state. We encourage all of you to keep writing and take forward into your future careers and personal lives these special gifts.

\*\*\* Continue reading, continue writing and continue to let your imaginations flourish! \*\*\*