ASSESSMENT REPORT
ENW315114 ENGLISH WRITING

Introductory Comments

There were a total of 624 candidates in English Writing in 2019, a drop from 2018 but still very healthy numbers for this specialised Level 3 English course. As per the TASC Course Scaling Document, the spread of awards and points in 2019 is as follows:

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With a maximum score of 21.7, higher than 21.1 in 2018, top students were duly rewarded for their terrific efforts and achievements in English Writing this year. The majority of students undertaking the subject are in Year 12: 431 compared to 187 Year 11s. Despite representing only a third of the cohort, Year 11s represented almost a quarter of the EAs and half of the HA awards. Whilst English Writing is recommended by some schools for Year 12 students, acknowledging that students benefit from an extra year of English study - English Literature and English 3 - as well as general life experience, it appears that those students who do have an aptitude for writing are clearly capable of success and should be encouraged in their creative writing pursuits at this level if this best suits their pathway and particularly in light of a Level 2 option being currently unavailable.

The new TASC student management system, Reporting, Assessment and Certification System (TRACS) was used for the first time this year. The system allowed another layer of managing discrepancies and moderation not afforded in the marking process previously. Students benefited from markers revisiting folios with many discrepancies in results resolved in this process before the assessment panel meetings.

It is both dispiriting and frustrating that year after year, markers are noting many of the same errors and problems that recur in English Writing folios - which consequently get regurgitated here in this report – that could easily be avoided if the previous Assessment Reports were read and acted upon. In an attempt to foreground fresh ideas and suggestions in this 2019 report, issues that have been raised in the past will be relegated to dot point reminders. For those new to the course and/or unsure, please access previous reports for clarification and detail.
The Marking Tool (Appendix 1) was altered slightly this year to incorporate notes to Markers and information on penalties as reminders, but the details and focus for each criterion has been consistent over a number of years. The key areas of focus are stated in the External Assessment Specifications (EAS) and further noted in bold italics below, effectively summarising what candidates should be demonstrating in each criterion in the context of external assessment, and what markers are thus looking to reward.

**General Observations on Folios**

Many Markers were impressed with the *overall quality* of this year’s folios. There were some highly polished and crafted folios, with those written from personal experience and real world engagement tending to be the *strongest and most emotive*. Quality folios showed a propensity to purposefully play with form and structure that showed a sophisticated understanding of genre and literary tropes and conventions. They also showed ease with narrative which resulted in engaging and imaginative stories. The works in these folios also portrayed well-rounded characters developed through actions, reflections and interactions featuring a balance between action, reflection, description and dialogue to keep an audience engaged.

*Authenticity and verisimilitude* of setting was another aspect that added to quality folios. A further important aspect was that stronger pieces demonstrated the writer’s well-developed ability to explore pertinent issues in society but in a non-judgemental and non-polemic fashion. Such pieces had a strong sense of purpose, and future students are encouraged to write about subjects they are passionate about.

*Weaker folios* lacked polish and tended to include more melodramatic, cliched and writing where more limited personal experiences dominated all pieces. There is a difference between writing from experience - ‘write what you know’ - and ideas that are bound by teenage life participation. Whilst Markers appreciate that the 17 to 18 year old’s life experience may be quite limited, and characterised by certain thematic trends, it is important to be sourcing inspiration, ideas and styles of writing beyond day to day life and relationships, and online media. Go out into the world, and read to experience other worlds!
Generally, writing students could improve through:

- using plausible plots and character responses and making sure that the reader can gauge a clear understanding of a character’s motivation
- avoiding covering too much in each piece - the more focussed the story, the more likely it is to be successful
- avoiding spelling out step by step what your character is doing, for example, getting up, cleaning teeth, getting bread from cupboard … sometimes this can be done to create tension, but often it can just become labored
- restricting the number of characters depending on the word count of the piece
- carefully considering the role of the dialogue and editing carefully to leave in only purposeful dialogue
- considering point of view carefully and avoiding the excessive use of first-person narration especially in all three pieces
- resisting the urge to use the ‘unreliable narrator’ - this takes expertise and must be clearly linked to the purpose of the piece
- taking care with allusions and intertextual references - if these do not serve a real purpose in your own pieces take them out
- carefully editing their work – a successful way of doing this is to read the piece aloud because the ear can easily pick up linguistic dysfluencies and awkwardness that they eye does not
- using a program like ‘Grammarly’ proactively to serve your intent to help ensure the language, syntax, spelling and grammar, are all accurate
- removing clichéd language or nonsensical descriptions
- being vigilant about the excessive use of adjectives
- considering setting carefully - avoid setting stories in America or other, often exotic, locations that don’t serve a definite purpose.

It is evident to the markers that **the more students read, the better their folios are.** Students are encouraged to read a variety of short stories and explore the way different writers use the form. Short stories are easily accessible and there are abundant examples available that provide an extensive range of models for ideas, genre, style and structure. The same is true for other forms, including but not limited to poetry, scripts and non-fiction. It is also advised that students have exposure to emerging publishing trends and experimental texts to further stimulate their own ideas.

Poetry continues to be problematic with many offerings that are too short overall or feature too many short lines and show little **understanding of the poetic form** particularly the role of punctuation (use of
enjambment and caesura) and rhythm in poetry. Students are encouraged to study a variety of poems in a range of forms so that their offering is enriched through investigation and research. Students need to be careful not to see free verse as an easy option and use form and structure in poetry for a specific effect, justifying these choices in the Reflective Statement (RS). As well as using thematic groupings for their poetry, students are urged to also investigate and implement a complex thread that runs through a suite of poems.

The order in which pieces in the folio are presented is an important consideration; some students needed to rethink this to provide an overall balance when the folio is read. For example, separate pieces that may feature similarities, and avoid placing the weakest piece at the end. The folio should present the marker with a reading experience that highlights the skill of the creator and develops a response in the reader that is foregrounded in the RS.

Titles are a key feature of effective writing and students are encouraged to give greater thought to finding appropriate and evocative titles. They should not be an afterthought but an integral part of the creative process. Experimenting with titles early will increase the likelihood of settling on the most appropriate and intriguing titles, the relevance of which only becomes apparent through engagement with the text. A couple of notable titles included ‘Why Birds are Shit’ and ‘The Policewoman’s Guide to Romance and Weaponry.’

Criterion 1: Range of texts, accuracy and polish, presentational formatting, referencing

In the List of Contents, please specify if a script is for stage or screen, as well as in the RS. It is important the final folio has been updated to reflect any changes in titles, for example, and that the pieces are listed in the same order they are discussed in the RS and featured in the folio.

Identification of forms and genres should be precise - obscure or generalised (such as ‘a mix of genres/forms’) are not helpful to the marker and do not effectively reveal the student’s understanding of what these terms mean in their own work. There is some concern about apparently invented genres or forms: students and teachers need to research carefully, although at times more specific sub-genres might prove more insightful as to the student’s ideas and intentions. For example, Bangsian Fantasy or Culinary Fantasy might be more specific than simply stating Fantasy.
**Academic Integrity** is about students being honest about declaring any material they have borrowed, sourced or used from another’s work, therefore it is essential that all pieces are accurately referenced and referencing in the 2019 folios was at times questionable. Some students copied and pasted extracts from sources (notably online) without identifying which sections were copied. Simply including a web address in the List of References is not sufficient - full details of author, title, date and so on must be provided as far as these can be discerned; in-text referencing is another step which ensures students are clear about their use of others’ work or ideas. Where it is necessary to reference in creative pieces to meet the Academic Integrity requirements, it is noted in the EAS, and we advise the use of footnotes so that the reading experience is not interrupted. Excessive referencing is unnecessary and should be confined to specific texts of influence in the folio pieces. Conversely, there were candidates for made no references whatsoever to authors or written texts, which is cause for alarm. Reference lists must be alphabetical.

A **plain text manuscript version** featuring in-text referencing, as stated in the EAS, must be included if formatted pieces such as a feature article, blog or experimental writing form are included in the folio. This enables the marker to assess the merit of the writing itself without prejudice.

2019 comments which have been raised in previous reports:

- **Range of texts** does not necessarily mean range of forms or genres, but may show range in terms of style, voice and ideas. As such, folios containing all narratives or all poetry are perfectly acceptable and capable of EA awards. It is helpful to highlight the diversity in the RS for clarification. As a general example, there are instances where students would be better off including multiple narratives rather than presenting a contrived poem or monologue that is not skilful in the execution of form.

- **Adherence to word counts** is imperative. There is considerable scope provided in the RS, Writing Project and overall folio, and failure to adhere to these does indicate lack of endeavour or editing, and will incur a penalty on Criterion 1. The number of under-length RS and/or folios was more frequent this year. Students should ensure they meet these requirements as the penalties can make a major difference to final results.

- **Accuracy of word counts** is a matter of academic integrity, and students should be honest about these. It is possible for markers to check these, so students are strongly advised not to take the risk.

- **Inaccuracies in written expression** indicates a lack of skill in spelling, punctuation and grammar or laziness on the part of the student - or both. A vital part of presenting a refined folio is proofreading and editing to ensure accuracy required at a pre-tertiary level. This includes Americanised spellings - spelling and grammar checking are terrific tools, but not a substitute for
responsible individual checking and correcting. Editorial polish is a key component of successful folios. When a folio is littered with minor errors, the marker is jarred from suspending their disbelief, which diminishes the reading experience; however when a folio is flawlessly presented, the marker can immerse themselves in the content of the writing.

- **Requirements of formatting** are clearly stated in the External Assessment Specification and Folio Guidelines (titles, margins, page breaks, line spacing etc) and are expected to be consistent and accurate. It is a requirement that the folio be of manuscript standard and too many students receive penalties for poor formatting that could easily be rectified with attention to detail.
- The use of the correct **List of Contents** page is a requirement of the folio’s presentation, students are expected to submit this fully completed and accurate, including titles, word counts, and identification of both form AND genre. Most students did distinguish both.
- **Inaccurate dialogue formatting and punctuation** remains a prevalent issue. Teachers are urged to address this in the Craft of Writing Module so that students master the expectations early.

**Criterion 2: Style, vocabulary and techniques, point of view and voice**

Markers noted that successful pieces featured choices genre, form and language that shaped mood and tone, that all had links to **purpose**. If the purpose is not clear in the RS and the piece itself, it significantly weakened the candidate’s work. Stronger candidates clearly adopted stylistic techniques that served their intentions in writing.

The **standout folios** were precise, nuanced and creative in their word choice. The writing suggested both a creative facility with language and sophisticated editing skills. Voices were convincing, vivid, distinctive and sustained, imagery was evocative and seamlessly integrated into the narrative style in a way that progressed the scene, characterisation or plot. Many students would benefit from focussing on this aspect of writing as developing a unique narrative voice is an important way of engaging the reader. In less successful folios sensory language was either lacking or felt tacked on to plot; narrative voices were clichéd, simplistic or irregular; and clichés were rife. Students are encouraged to explore using more sensory description to draw their readers into the scenes and settings presented and to focus more on language choices that help shape mood and tone.

Higher ratings were easier to reward when students found new ways of expressing and exploring ideas, experimenting with **word choice and order**, **unique imagery** and **thoughtful inclusion of sound devices** to capture the reader’s imagination. Poetry, in particular, should demonstrate an understanding of figurative language and imagery.
Stronger writers artfully created and maintained distinctive voices appropriate to the fictional or non-fictional context, and carefully evoked tone which enabled the writer and reader to co-construct a fictional reality. It was pleasing to note idiomatic and colloquial language used in pieces which created realism and original character voices. Candidates who set their texts in settings and times other than the familiar could be inspired to adopt this technique to enhance authenticity.

For creative non-fiction, personal essays that used a creative approach to language by interweaving vignettes or other strategies to show the audience their meaning tended to be more effective and subtle than those that were shaped as blogs or opinions pieces, which tended to be characterised by more simple language. “Ranting voices” are ineffectual when they are not informed by complexity of thought.

2019 comments which have been raised in previous reports:

- Overused (‘dead’) words and cliches are still prevalent in many folios.
- Vocabulary can only be expanded by reading, and reading widely - the thesaurus is a fantastic resource, but only if a word clearly suits the meaning and style.
- Too many adjectives and adverbs where more precise nouns and verbs will make writing sparkle with precision and evoke the desired response from the intended audience/reader.
- Flair and style in the application of language was a feature of the best folios.

**Criterion 3: Form and genre conventions, structural elements, unity**

The well-structured pieces were obviously planned, constructed and executed with a sense of intention (explicitly addressed in the RS). However, overall progression and unity of pieces was often overlooked. Experimental structures were not used as often as they could be and were often a feature of stronger folio pieces. Stronger pieces in the folios were effectively paced and utilised or played with structural features and conventions to shape meaning and create a response in the audience. In these folios, the use of non-linear structures in fiction and creative nonfiction were able to create complex shades of meaning that elicited audience response.

Shifts in time and perspective can also breathe new life into tired pieces of work, enhancing and transforming the revelation of the plot. Stronger folios successfully experimented with point of view and language features, and cleverly considered non-chronological structures. Weaker fiction and creative nonfiction tended to be characterised by issues with structure; they tended to be unbalanced and had erratic, unclear or ineffectual shifts in scene or time which made it difficult for the reader to keep track of plot and character.
Students need to marry their objective with the word count, so that pieces aren’t forced into a rushed ending or dragged out. Many may be novel readers who find it difficult to scale back extensive plot ideas in composing shorter folio works. It is helpful to study texts of similar word length to get a clear sense of what is achievable in a Writing Project or shorter pieces, and plot the structure of their ideas so these are effectively executed. Time needs to be invested in the ‘ingenuity of design’ (VS Pritchard), being mindful of sequencing and pacing.

Greater attention needs to be paid to sentence and paragraph structure and varying it to create and alter pacing and engage the reader. So many students wrote in a series of simple sentences throughout all pieces. Avoid numerous sentences in a row starting with ‘He…’ or ‘She…’. Again, reading aloud can help the student identify where more cadence can be employed to enhance the rhythm of the writing. Successful pieces demonstrate obvious attention to precise word choice and careful ordering in both prose and verse, with effective and varied construction to augment meaning and mood.

Some Markers noted that narratives and poetry were the most common forms included in the folios, whilst others noted that forms such as memoir or autobiographical writing, script and non-fiction featured. Poetry collections that were comprised of entirely free verse poems tended to be weaker than those that utilised a variety of forms, due in part to the tightness formal structures offer. One, short, free verse poem is not sufficient to constitute an entire piece of writing in the folio.

Teachers and students might benefit from further research into forms and genres of writing and study more examples to develop a greater understanding of the conventions and requirements. For example, in historical fiction students need to be using the features of the work and ensuring their writing is historically accurate. In formal poetic structures, students must be certain the form’s conventions are appropriately followed – again, reading aloud helps!

Correct use of the gamut of punctuation marks is crucial in suggesting an awareness of audience, pacing and the conveyance of intended meaning,
2019 comments which have been raised in previous reports:

- **Tense** was still too often inconsistent and uncontrolled in a number of pieces.
- Students must be clear about the difference between poetry and prose: words that are arranged to look like a poem do not necessarily make a poem.
- More variety in sentence and paragraph structures will breathe greater life into students’ writing.
- Paragraph formatting - indented or block paragraphing is acceptable but this must be consistent throughout the folio.
- Edit rigorously to cut unnecessary descriptive details and dialogue that slow down the pace and do not contribute to the advancement of the plot.

**Criterion 4: Style, complexity and credibility of ideas and characters, audience engagement, unity**

Successful pieces were noted as:

- featuring a strong narrative voice
- utilising experiences and places familiar to the student
- purposeful experimentation
- using immersive and unique figurative language
- featuring a range of pieces (form, genre and ideas)
- based on issues or historical events/people
- clearly featuring the element of showing rather than telling
- imaginative and a result of exposure and interest in the wider world of literature, events and people
- Making use of extensive and relevant research to achieve realism.

**Consideration of audience** can be to identify the reader demographic most suited to a particular theme or non-fiction topic but a more sophisticated sense of audience hinges on where the reader is in their understanding of events and a character’s emotional state at clearly planned moments of a poem of piece of prose. This is linked to timing and structure, the deliberate placement of little stepping stones to move the reader to revelations within or at the end of a text. Better writers know when and how much to reveal and what to conceal, understanding that the reader must be involved in intellectual piecing together of the writing.

Some of the stronger folios engaged their reader’s emotions with a ‘lighter touch’, presenting unique insights in a humorous and heart-warming way. It is not the case that only bleak texts are great literature.
Students should note that invoking an emotional response from readers is not always best achieved through shock, fear or misery.

Students who wrote from their own experiences and contexts, or using historical research/influences, tended to develop more authentic and engaging ideas, resulting in stronger overall folios. For genre writing to succeed against this criterion, characters needed to be fresh and complex and story-worlds fully fleshed out. Creative nonfiction that does well against this criterion tends to be pieces that are thoroughly researched, or pieces in which candidates speak from their own experiences or the experiences of family and friends.

However, indulgent and introspective pieces often fail to engage the reader, with ideas lacking maturity and complexity. This reflects a need for a greater understanding of intention, audience and impact as students craft and refine their folio pieces. When literary writing becomes too cerebral, audience engagement is diminished; as such, writers of literary writing should aim to balance exploration of complex themes and ideas with engaging characters, plots and scenarios that sustain and audience’s interest.

Students should be cautious about using the same storylines as films or other stories they have read, to avoid the risk of apparent plagiarism. It is also important that students check their own work for plot holes, which can disengage the reader and thus the desired impact may be compromised.

A candidate is not always aware who their Marker might be, and their knowledge and expertise in all manner of fields, from plant biology to World War II. It is best to assume the marker does know the topic well, and so students must research thoroughly to ensure texts are believable and accurate.

2019 comments which have been raised in previous reports:

- Texts containing graphic violence, sexualised torture and the like intended only for shock value are not appropriate in a TCE context – nor are the perils and legal issues of accessing the Dark Web. A clear purpose in writing and sensitivity to reader response is an important consideration for student writers, and teachers need to be actively guiding students in this area.
- Cliched and stereotyped ideas and characters generally struggle to engage the reader’s interest - students should always be striving for fresh perspectives, complex characters and surprising whilst credible events.
- READING as writers is crucial in exposure to writing forms, styles and techniques and opening up the mind to a greater realm of possible ideas.
Criterion 5: The Reflective Statement - *Sources, models, purpose and audience, form and structure, techniques, specialist terms*

A number of Markers noted **improvement in the overall quality** of the Reflective Statements in 2019, with many RSs addressing most of the required elements thoughtfully and evaluatively. Statements that provided the required contextual information and demonstrated *imagination and flair* were particularly impressive. Those that are well-constructed, logical and unified are much more efficacious.

Strong candidates were able to make **clear connections between influential texts and their own writing** making clever observations about style and other features, and accounting for their appeal and impact on their own work. Weaker students made superficial and limited references to authorial influences, indicating a lack of wide reading which is frequently reflected in the quality of writing.

In a similar vein, detailed **analysis of other authors’ work** is not appropriate in the RS, where the focus should be predominantly on the student’s own writing. Rather than name-dropping other texts, successful reflective statements seamlessly wove critical analysis of the styles and techniques of other writers into discussion of their own writing by using that analysis as a tool to elucidate and evaluate the construction of their own texts. Some of the effective statements analysed the source text and techniques following on with a discussion of how these were deployed in their own work.

In general, however, students should be making more **connections between the purpose and audience**, and how the technical features *and their crafting choices* contribute to these intentions. Some students failed to demonstrate any awareness of this in their RS. This is a fundamental and essential component in crafting an imaginative text, and texts will fail to resonate with a reader if the writer does not have a clear sense of why they are writing and for whom.

More specific explanation of ideas and poetic influences, features of form and style, is generally required in **discussing poetic inclusions**. Given the subjective nature of poetry, students really need to emphasise the elements they have employed and their desired effect to guide the marker to appreciate what is being attempted. This is particularly vital in free verse, which can often sound too much like prose. Suites of poetry offer an extra challenge to discuss pieces in the same depth as singular texts, so extra vigilance in being concise, including diversity of techniques for purpose and impact, is crucial. In many folios containing poetry, discussion of poetic devices was minimal, indicating students lacked awareness of both the presence and effect of these in their own writing.
In the context of external assessment, **lengthy reflections on the writing process** need to be edited—whilst these are important during the year for students to reflect on and improve their writing, it is advised that the final RS focus more on the final product rather than the abandoned ideas, struggles and multiple changes that occurred during writing. Certainly, it is helpful to highlight changes to enhance purpose and impact but avoid detailing these at length. Likewise, lengthy plot retelling and quoting own work are also inappropriate: along with extended treatises on concepts that underpin the work. Students should provide the required contextual information and justification and the writing should speak for itself.

Many great **resources and models** were mentioned in the RS this year. Students are reminded, however, that print-based influences should always be prioritised over films etc. as writing is the focus.

Weak reflective statements often failed to mention purpose, audience and language, instead focussing on recounting the plot of the stories within the folios; such statements both failed to address the elements of the assessment criterion, and diminished the reading experience of the pieces within the folios by way of spoilers.

Teachers and students are encouraged to **practise writing Reflective Statements throughout the year** to develop skills and content - build this into the course content and don’t leave this vital folio inclusion until the last minute!

2019 comments which have been raised in previous reports:

- More successful candidates **maximise the available word count** to address the range of standard descriptors in detail. Statements over or under the 750 to 1000 word limit simply must be expanded or pruned to fulfil requirements and avoid penalty.
- **Influential authors and texts** must be clearly connected to students’ discussion of their own ideas and style, rather than a cursory reference to address this standard indicator. The temptation to simply list authors should be avoided in favour of explicit explanations of the influence that other authors’ work has on the writing being presented.
- **Broad and lengthy introductions** to ‘my life as a reader’ and the like restrict the words available to candidates to discuss specifics of the writing pieces. As such, students are advised to avoid or limit this content.
- Avoid attempting to position the marker with **self-congratulation and denigration** – focus on the elements of the writing and allow the marker to respond and evaluate based on its merit.
- **Citing of own work** is often problematic: discuss the features and their relevance, and allow the markers to discern and appreciate these for themselves.
Final Insights and Recommendations

Students need to read widely, beyond their comfort zones, read good quality writing, and read as a writer to appreciate and adopt new and effective ideas and techniques.

Teachers and students also need to read this assessment report and previous ones, if they are serious about crafting, refining and presenting folios that will impress the markers and demonstrate achievement and success against the criteria standards.

The conversion of poetry to prose word counts presented some issues this year, with different versions apparent. The marking team agreed to accept all word count conversions so candidates were not penalised (as long as they were deemed accurate). We will seek to clarify this in 2020.

It is highly recommended that in line with the requirements in English Literature and those of all English students studying at the University of Tasmania, that English Writing students move towards using the latest version of the MLA Citation system (MLA8). This will mean that students, teachers and markers are dealing with one referencing system and students are also being prepared for future studies in English.