

# ASSESSMENT REPORT 2020

## ENW315114 – ENGLISH WRITING

### Introductory Comments

In 2020, there were 722 English Writing candidates, an increase of almost a hundred from 2019, with the following distribution of final awards:

NN	PA	SA	CA	HA	EA
40 (6%)	24 (3%)	189 (26%)	282 (39%)	102 (14%)	85 (12%)

This year, there was a higher percentage of EA's which has impacted on the maximum score (20.3), however the assessment panel felt these students deserved to be rewarded for their achievements in this challenging year. Overall, there is a pattern of higher internal ratings compared to externals, so this may need to be taken into consideration by teachers in 2021 as they apply the standards in assessing students' work internally.

As in previous years, the majority of the students in the course, 522, were in Year 12 with only 195 Year 11 students enrolled. There were also five Year 13 students. Despite the difference in enrolment numbers, 10% of the Year 11 cohort achieved EA's, compared to 13% of the Year 12 students. Again, the predominance of final awards fell in the CA to SA range.

Yet again, we implore teachers and students to read this and past Assessment Reports carefully alongside the current External Assessment Specifications (EAS). We find ourselves commenting on so many issues that have previously been identified – repeatedly. To avoid labouring over these issues again, key recommendations are included at the beginning of each section of this report to highlight them. In doing so, we can focus the discussion on new aspects of the folios for recognition and suggestion.

There were some wonderful folios submitted this year, with delightful instances of experimentation, and many pieces that evoked strong emotional and intellectual responses, with a general perception that folios were more accurately formatted and presented in 2020. Weaker folios still demonstrated more cliched and limited ideas, and a lack of finesse in the construction and expression of these.

As anticipated because of COVID-19 and the reduction in minimum word counts, there were a number of shorter pieces included in folios this year, but the majority of these did demonstrate a sense of structure and purpose that afforded them unity. There were still a number of pieces that would have benefited from more rigorous editing to really hone the progression of ideas and promote greater reader engagement, and attention to showing rather than telling to demonstrate a stronger understanding and mastery of the craft of writing. The first module is so vital in providing student writers with access to the tools of the literary trade and the opportunity for thoughtful experimentation and practice.

## General observations: Folio Presentation, List of Contents, Word Counts and Academic Integrity

### Key Recommendations

- The official TASC List of Contents page, complete with the TASC header, must be used – an additional contents page is not appropriate.
- Information on the List of Contents page must be accurate and fully completed.
- Word count limitations MUST be adhered to, in order to avoid a penalty on Criterion 1.
- All sources of inspiration must be openly declared and appropriately acknowledged.
- Be clear about formatting and presentation requirements as directed in the EAS.
- Undertake a final proofread of the folio to ensure word counts have been updated and all teacher comments and annotations have been removed from the final PDF document.
- Also ensure that the final PDF is accurately presented in terms of page breaks.
- Ensure the order of pieces on the List of Contents page matches that of the Reflective Statement and the order of texts within the folio.

The List of Contents page is the Marker's first impression of the folio; accurate and thorough completion of this information is vital in positioning the Marker to fully appreciate the work. Identification of both form and genre is required, and these should be accurate in corresponding with the pieces. Genre and form should not be a final addition to the List of Contents page, but should be consciously considered in planning and crafting each piece.

There were again some issues with inaccurate and/or deceptive word counts. Teachers and students need to be aware that these can be verified - and if you declare 1000, 4000, 1500 and 1500, trust that it will be checked (this folio was, and found to be inaccurate, and consequently penalised).

Candidates must be very aware that if they are replicating ideas from films, Netflix, video games and other such sources, they need to be honest in declaring these. There were several pieces this year that directly copied plots and/or characters, which constitutes plagiarism. Student writers should assume Markers are familiar with these texts to avoid the risk of academic integrity consequences as a result of attempting to deceive.

Manuscript formatting and presentation was generally noted as more accurate this year, although there were still pieces (or entire folios) that were single line spaced and needed to be more polished. Some folios featured multiple reference lists interspersed throughout the folio, rather than a single one at the end; a single reference list is all that is required.

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

### Key Recommendations

- In-text/footnote references to texts and authors who have inspired student writing are mandatory (please refer to the EAS and TASC Academic Integrity Guide) - it is not sufficient to just include them in a Works Cited or Reference List at the end of the folio.
- Referencing must be consistent, accurate and provide full publication details of texts referred to.
- There should only be one reference list, which is included at the end of the folio.

- Paragraph formatting needs to be consistent – indent OR block paragraph. In the former there is no line space between paragraphs.
- Dialogue formatting is still problematic – students should be explicitly taught this convention, including punctuation. Additional line spaces between dialogue needs to be deleted.
- Consider how the three creative inclusions work as a whole in demonstrating diversity. This could be style, structure, voice, characterisation, themes etc.
- In terms of accuracy, avoid US spelling, note fiction conventions for the spelling out of numbers rather than using numerals, and double check use of punctuation, particularly in dialogue.

Teachers and students are reminded that there are five standards indicators in the Marking Tool that are the focus for determining a Criterion 1 rating in the external assessment of folios: This is an attempt to clarify the problematic range of standards indicators for Criterion 1, and ensure fair and consistent assessment of this criterion.

*(\*C standard)*

Accuracy, polish and presentation

- creates texts appropriate to purpose, context and audience (range)
- creates texts that address task characteristics (manuscript formatting, word counts)
- clear and controlled communication of ideas (accuracy and polish)

Academic integrity

- identifies sources of information, images, ideas and words that are not their own
- appropriate references and reference lists, using accurate conventions

While many students included two or more narrative pieces, diversity in ideas, structure and style provided evidence of “range of texts” in successful folios. There is still the issue of accuracy and polish in many submissions – given this is a folio subject, with ample time provided for editing and proofreading, this is still an area for improvement. Students must be diligent in their commitment to refining their work, so it is as accurate and impactful as possible before folios are submitted for external assessment. In a disappointingly large number of cases, folios were scarred by typographical errors, poor punctuation and inaccurate or clumsy sentence structure.

The poetry word counts can be problematic, particularly in the Writing Project. It would be good for students and teachers to check both the minimum lines required and what is meant by a substantive line. At the Markers’ Meeting this year, there was some discussion about further clarifying and simplifying this in 2021.

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

### Key Recommendations

- Students should endeavour to read more widely to extend their vocabulary.
- Avoid overwriting – precision and simplicity have impact.
- Correct use of apostrophes.
- More experimentation with a greater range of figurative language techniques. Avoid clichés.
- Demonstrate diversity of voice and point of view in each creative inclusion.

Students need to take care they clearly understand the meaning of a word they are using in their writing: malapropisms and imperfect word choices (often apparently quickly discovered in a thesaurus) disrupt the reader's immersion and belief in the writing.

Successful writers demonstrated controlled and nuanced language, used figurative language well and were thought provoking and emotive. These students are clearly avid readers, and there were many instances of “sparkling” language that really captivated the reader's imagination in their surprising and inventive expression of ideas. Engaging pieces revealed a particular attunement to minutiae, sensory details and the cadence and sounds of words and language. There were some well-executed pieces that featured powerful use of symbolism and motif.

Less successful folios demonstrated a disappointing similarity, especially in voice or style, across all three pieces; the ideal experience would be to hear very different narrative voices if one is operating in a similar genre or form across more than one piece of writing. This allows a student to demonstrate proficiency in one of the fundamental skills of this craft – adapting language for varied purposes and effects, according to purpose or intention. More care and attention needs to be paid to the editing process and word choice – many folios felt rushed, as if still in first draft form in terms of word choice.

Switching narrative perspective needs to be carefully considered and crafted – some did this well, creating the possibility for multiple viewpoints. However, there is great risk of confusing the audience if not carefully managed. Students are advised to read strong examples where authors manipulate and use multiple points of view to guide their understanding of this technique (and, of course, this is also useful for the Reflective Statement).

Second person point of view was less prevalent this year, and candidates are reminded to think carefully about the application of this perspective. Some candidates declared it was to generate intimacy but did not explain how it can either place the reader in the story or be quite distancing, leading to the question of whose voice is behind the narration. It can be difficult to develop convincing characters when using this point of view and it should be employed sparingly. Again, students are advised to read pieces in second person to understand its impact and guide their use of this narrative perspective.

One Marker wisely suggested that shorter pieces from the Craft of Writing module – refined and developed for the folio – might better position some candidates to showcase their use of language and stylistic features. Texts crafted to focus on descriptive writing, creating character, or short pieces showcasing the development of voice or dialogue might benefit weaker students, in particular, to present higher quality writing.

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

#### Key Recommendations

- Before you write poetry, read poetry, study poetry, understand the poetic form.
- Maintain consistent tense. Good folios not only maintain tense but manipulate tense to highlight time shifts, for example, past tense for flashbacks.
- Three narratives were still predominant in this year's submissions - successful folios featured diversity of ideas, structure and style, including point of view, tense, voice and language.
- Work for control and variety in syntax to create rhythm and pace.

The most well-structured pieces were obviously planned, constructed and executed with a sense of intention. Students who are avid readers, but who also read a lot of short fiction, were evidently better able to control the structure of their pieces. Once again, some students' plots were too ambitious for the word count limits in the folio. Pre-planning is crucial, as is careful editing, to ensure the piece has a clear sense of progression and unity and to cut unnecessary narration of events and drawn-out description that affects the pace.

Students need to be familiar with the conventions of the form and genre they are writing in, and adhere to these or purposefully challenge them – and acknowledge this in the Reflective Statement. Students demonstrated a strong understanding of genre conventions in dystopian texts. Murder-mysteries and crime tended to be weaker, with two-dimensional protagonists, predictable plots and poor structure.

Poetry was again mixed and problematic in many instances. Poor quality poetry was characterised by a lack of imagery and very ordinary language choice. In the worst cases poems featured overly sentimental representations of regret and loss for deceased pets and relatives.

Free verse remains difficult to assess as it can be so subjective. Students who make a deliberate effort to employ literary/poetic/language devices (alliteration, sibilance, assonance etc.) to show experimentation should remember to explicitly refer to these in the Reflective Statement. This would help Markers to know the student is making a concerted effort to think and work like a poet. With this, reference to other poetic devices, including metre, rhythm and so on, where relevant, would be beneficial. Reference to specific poets who have influenced the poetic style in the Reflective Statement would also help (not necessarily the content as this tends to be less problematic). In too many cases it is difficult to determine the difference between free verse and prose which has been formatted in an apparently poetic manner.

Candidates should be reminded that while forms such as journalism are encouraged for submission, this is nevertheless a form which focuses on sophistication and the power of expression to evoke response. Journalistic pieces should have a clear audience and experiment with phrasing, technique and even imagery just as any other piece of writing would, therefore news reporting style journalism is not appropriate. Focus instead on feature writing, or narrative or creative nonfiction. Reading the work of great modern journalists such as Trent Dalton can be a wonderful inspiration as to how this might be done. There were, however, some quite sophisticated and well-researched examples of journalistic pieces in this year's folios.

Forms such as screenwriting have been rare in previous years but are becoming more prominent. It was pleasing to see several candidates not only attempt this form but also utilise its layout and conventions to craft clear, engaging pieces of work. This takes serious attention to detail but can pay off for a sufficiently dedicated student. There were some other stage or screen scripts that were not as successful. A number of stage monologues were poorly visualised, perhaps again showing the undue influence of film. Weaker ones included an excessive number of scene changes, very short scenes and a lack of character development. The best examples provided riveting reading and provoked a strong desire to see the monologue performed.

There were some very average personal and familiar essays this year; students need to think carefully about their choice of form and what their purpose in writing is. A clear sense of audience and how the reader is engaged is important, so these texts are not perceived as self-indulgent. Forms such as psychological reports or police reports can be difficult to reward as creative opportunities for narrative and character development, as well as stylistic elements, are limited. However, these documents interspersed in narratives can work well to add to the plot and characterisation.

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

### Key Recommendations

- Gratuitous profanity and graphic content should be avoided – explicit horror, sex, violence and other similar subjects are not appropriate in this writing context, particularly without a clear purpose for doing so.
- Research for accuracy and credibility in writing pieces.
- Look for fresh material, and avoid the frequently explored ideas, unless you can explore these in innovative ways.

Popular ideas this year, unsurprisingly, included Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter, with varying degrees of success, along with other contemporary issues and events. A number of engaging folios featured interesting use of historical contexts, and good use of comedic voice. In writing historical pieces, however it is vital students research the context to ensure that details are consistent and accurate. Markers commented on being particularly engaged with pieces that were more light-hearted in tone and quirky – a notable example was a piece on Hagaromo Chalk. A few folios used ekphrasis or supported work with photos or drawings. In these cases, the arts were well researched, and the folios displayed a depth of understanding and precise control of language.

Titles of pieces, along with character names, are small but crucial details that many students need to be more conscious of. A working title is appropriate but once a piece is refined, this should be reviewed – is it interesting, engaging, indicative of content? Character names should not just be your current favourite name but need to be appropriate to the character and not intrusive or conspicuous. There were many thoughtfully considered titles and character names that were subtle in their enrichment of the text's ideas.

The overwhelming influence of American film played out in a higher than usual number of folio pieces that were loosely set in the USA and featured plots based on film, stereotyped characters and underdeveloped settings. Overall, a strong sense of place was missing from many folios resulting in a very generic feeling. Texts based in a recognisable Australian setting tended to have more depth and complexity, with characters that were part of their setting or reacting to it. It would be good to see teachers featuring more great Australian (and Tasmanian) writers who ground their work in recognisable landscapes such as Tim Winton, Robbie Arnott and Heather Rose.

Student writers are encouraged to draw on the world around them for ideas and read more to see what other writers are doing in terms of originality. The most successful pieces were imaginative and evidently the product of exposure and interest in the wider world of literature and media. Pieces that were introspective/lacked maturity in ideas were not engaging and often melodramatic. Students should really ask themselves whether writing about issues and experiences they are unfamiliar with is wise - there were too many pieces that were cliched, stereotypical and sensationalised that came across as rather shallow and unqualified.

Candidates must be careful including pieces that appropriate another writer's style, plot or character. It is hard to show freshness and originality when much has been borrowed from another writer. Poor attempts can verge on plagiarism. Students who did extend their own pieces beyond the plot, characters and settings of (worthy!) literary models, emulating aspects of style, were able to produce carefully crafted and engaging pieces of work. If the Marker doesn't know the particular author or their text, then any nuances or irony will be lost on them.

Overall students needed to show a greater awareness of how they are positioning their audience through crafting choices. Students are implored to consider who they are writing for, what impact they intend the piece to have, for

example, is the impact emotional or intellectual or both, and how is this achieved through language, structure, style, voice etc.

There were a number of confronting pieces submitted in folios this year, and teachers need to be firmer in guiding students not to include texts that will cause the Marker to feel traumatised or offended. Examples included erotic, fan-fiction style pieces, poorly written (in one case hilariously so!) pornography and those featuring sickening and excessive violence and cruelty, including rape. Common themes – such as abusive relationships, mental health (suicide, anxiety, depression), social media and body image – felt tired and overdone.

## Criterion 5: The Reflective Statement – Sources, models, purpose and audience, form and structure, techniques, specialist terms

### Key Recommendations

- References to reading are essential and must be explicitly linked to the student's texts.
- Avoid lengthy and generalised introductions reflecting on reading and writing.
- Maximise the available word count to address as many indicators as possible.
- Students should avoid quoting their own work in the Reflective Statement.
- Avoid too much plot retelling and focus on the techniques and terms.
- Weaker Reflective Statements adopted a shopping list approach and tended to discuss the same few techniques in each piece.

There was a general consensus that students are increasingly aware of the requirements of the Reflective Statement to more effectively demonstrate evidence of the Criterion 5 standards indicators. It is still a worry that some are under the 750 word minimum or have many words unused where they could easily discuss more aspects of their pieces to provide this evidence.

The most successful Reflective Statements made full use of the maximum word count and effectively balanced their discussion of the Writing Project and other two pieces. Less effective ones did not discuss the pieces in sufficient detail, and/or did not devote enough words to the Writing Project. Further attention to logical structure and clear paragraphing will enhance these discussions.

Some students titled their Reflective Statements. Overall, these titles were very creative and clever, and provided a lovely introduction to the Statement and Folio on the whole. Strong folios also had a wonderful grasp of metalanguage, weaving specialist terms into their discussion of folio pieces. Inspiration for pieces was generally acknowledged well, and this also was an indication of a stronger folio.

A number of candidates referred to too many texts of influence in their Reflective Statement – only mentioning these and going into no further detail about the connection between the text and their own work. Students are advised to be selective and specific in explaining the ideas and techniques that have been adopted and for what purpose. It would be good to see more students discuss the influence of other writers on how they write, rather than just what they write.

Students should avoid being conversational or adopting an informal register, unless there is a clear artistic purpose in doing so. Inclusion of a metaphor to frame the Reflective Statement revealed mixed results. Such a decision should be made carefully, and in consultation; in some cases, the results were clichéd and sounded rather hollow, while in others

the student showed some restraint and achieved a more understated, subtle result which was rather more enjoyable to read.

Impressive Reflective Statements featured a strong voice, purposeful discussion and critical analysis of techniques used and their intended impact on the reader. Generic descriptions of the purpose of certain techniques, such as, “I used first person because it creates a sense of immediacy” would benefit from the consideration of why a sense of immediacy was important with specific reference to their text and the intended emotional and intellectual impacts on the reader.

The element that seemed most lacking was intended audience and purpose. Rather than simply stating that their work is for a young adult audience because the content is “confronting” or “serious”, students are encouraged to focus carefully on ensuring that they are clear and specific about which genre/demographic audience a piece is for, and how it has been crafted to engage them specifically. Just listing a demographic or genre audience is insufficient.

## Final Comments

One marker succinctly summed up our collective experience as markers in 2020:

“it has been a privilege to be a Marker this year. The folios have made me laugh, cry, and even terrified me at times. Most importantly, many have taken me on an evocative, spellbinding journey.”

It has indeed been a pleasure to read and assess the 2020 submissions, in a year that has challenged both teachers and students. Well done to all for so many fine achievements!

Line of the year: *“Writing is my escape goat.”*