English Writing
Course Code: ENW315114

Introductory Remarks

In the first instance, the 2015 marking team would like to reinforce the value of reading and acting on the advice of this annual document. This Assessment Report comprises the synthesis of a range of external markers’ comments that articulate the positives and negatives of candidate folios for each year, with a view to improving future submissions. For teachers and candidates of English Writing, it is a vital resource in addressing the course requirements and preparing the final folios for submission and external assessment.

In the second year of the revised syllabus and criteria assessment, processes were generally clearer, reinforced by positive and consistent results attained by candidates in 2014. This is a positive affirmation for 2016 teachers and candidates of English Writing. The external marking process this year did reveal significant divergence in the assessment of a number of folios, resulting in a large volume of discrepant folios that were addressed at the meeting in December. In the vast majority of cases, the third marker agreed with the higher ratings – which largely represented a dominance of As and some Bs in contrast with Cs and even Ds awarded by the second marker. Consistency of marking and greater moderation is clearly an area that needs to be addressed in 2016 and beyond to ensure uniformity of assessment of English Writing folios.

Outstanding folios really reveal the ‘culture vulture’ candidate writers, those who have broad and extensive knowledge of history, the arts, literature and travel. These were candidates who sourced and developed ideas beyond the mainstream and the popular; consequently, they effectively engaged the reader - often in surprising and highly original ways.

Without a TASC 2 course alternative for English Writing, it is vital that teachers and candidates carefully consider whether they are capable of submitting a folio of writing at the pre-tertiary standard. This was not the case with a number of candidates in 2015. Early feedback and counselling of candidates – who must realistically consider their abilities in achieving against the standards - is important so that a year of work does not conclude with a PA or NN result.

Likewise, given that the folio is a prepared and refined collection of pieces, lack of proofreading either reflects laziness on the candidate's behalf, or sub-standard understanding of correct spelling, grammar and formatting requirements. It is very difficult for markers to fully appreciate the ideas, structural and stylistic elements of a text if the writing is hampered by errors that disrupt the reader’s attention and diminish the ‘flow’ of the piece.

This year, poetry submissions within folios were mixed. There were a number of candidates who were clearly adept in the form, and a range of beautifully crafted and evocative poems were acknowledged. However, there remain the cohort that present poems lacking in basic understanding of the craft. Weaker candidates include poems that are merely narratives formatted as poems and/or are poorly executed, evidently used as ‘fillers’ or in a superficial attempt to include a different form of writing.

It is crucial candidates strive for consistency across all pieces within the folio: it is difficult to fully reward candidates if there is discrepancy in the quality of folio texts. All pieces contribute to the overall ratings, and where there is diversion in standard, the overall results will be affected.
Contents Page, Range of Form and Genre in Folios, Word Counts

The Contents Page is a requisite introduction to the English Writing folio, and it is essential this is accurately and thoroughly completed. Teachers and candidates are again reminded to clearly consider and identify both the form AND genre of each text within the presentation of their folios. These are two distinct elements and must be accurately recorded on the Contents Page, and should also feature in the Reflective Statement discussion as relevant to purpose and audience. Contrived or omitted forms – and more particularly genres - limit the marker’s ability to discern and evaluate the effectiveness of these. Unfortunately, a number of candidates failed to clearly address this requirement, despite previous advice and examples provided.

These details should not be an afterthought or invention, but should offer a clear reflection of conscious decision for each piece within the folio. This is vital in indicating insight into these expectations and details, and those who failed to adequately address this requirement generally revealed lesser understanding in their folio submissions. Effective Contents Pages included clear and accurate details that assisted markers in their appreciation of the material contained within the folio. Ineffective identification of forms such as ‘familiar essay’, ‘poetry’ ‘point of view’ and invented or inaccurate genres such as ‘fable/fairy tale/magic realism’ – were not accurate or insightful. These details should guide the marker as to what to expect in terms of content; poorly considered information proved confusing and/or misleading.

These problems of identification aside, many candidates did proffer a pleasing range of forms and genres within their folios. Candidates were rewarded for diversity and experimentation. A number of science-fiction, life writing, poetic and journalistic texts, for example, were presented which were particularly effective when combined with contrasting pieces within the folio. It was pleasing to see a number of folios containing pieces from Module D, including some well-written blogs and other examples of e-writing. Solid candidates submitted folios that were diverse compilations of style and form, and effective in achieving purpose and engaging the reader.

The word count expectations for the English Writing folios are explicit and broad in range. Consequently, there should be NO pieces submitted in a folio that fail to meet the minimum requirements or exceed the maximum. This particularly applies to the Reflective Statement and Writing Project; other pieces may vary in length but the total should be within the overall 5000 to 8000 word range. Pieces under the word count requirements must be developed and extended, and these frequently reveal a lack of depth and ideas that is difficult to reward. A number of candidates only just managed the 5000 word count minimum in 2015. Candidates MUST edit those pieces exceeding set word counts until they comply. Candidates are penalised in Criterion 1 for failing to meet these fundamental requirements, and this can negatively impact on final ratings, awards and points.

Script and poetry word counts were still problematic in a number of cases, moreso in poetry. Poems may adopt the poetry to prose equivalent formula, but this should not occur in short poems as a means to ‘bump up’ the word count of a folio. Rather, this method should be reserved for longer, more complex, poems that reflect a deeper engagement with and exploration of the craft of poetry. In the Folio Guidelines, the inclusion of stage directions in the word count has been amended, as these were agreed to form part of the creative element of the text. The names of characters speaking should be excluded.

The Writing Project

A reminder to all future candidates of English Writing that the Writing Project must be clearly identified on the Contents Page and in the title of the piece within the folio. Again, Writing Projects were predominantly narrative focused, although markers were refreshed by texts that were diverse in form; more prevalent were journalism and poetry. Future candidates are encouraged to consider alternative forms – if not for their Writing
Project, then at least in other pieces so that diversity of form and style is evident. Successful folios generally offered a mix of pieces to highlight their writing skills and range.

A number of candidates evidently struggled to compose an extended piece of writing, resulting in pieces that relied on ‘telling’ - too much plot and not enough craft – or pieces that meandered and ultimately lost focus. In such cases, these candidates could perhaps consider combinations of forms within a text to add to the interest and design, or present a pair of pieces whereby variety in style and voice might enhance the impact on the reader and overall folio impression.

A folio consisting entirely of poetry can be successful, however as with three narrative pieces, diversity of style and ideas must be clearly demonstrated. One example this year comprised only free verse form, which was similar throughout in language, structure and voice, meaning it could not be awarded higher than the B range.

Several markers felt that American (and other exotic) settings and terminology were overused. If a candidate deliberately chooses to set a piece in a specific location or context, then the purpose of this must be clearly explained in the Reflective Statement and evident in the writing itself. Arbitrary settings – apparently based on research and yet not revealed in the writing - can confuse and irritate the reader if the intention behind it is not explicit and rational. Similarly, Americanised language in a piece set in a different context is distracting, and reveals a lack of understanding of appropriate and credible style. Writing about places and circumstances that are familiar to the writer may prove far more effective in evoking a rich and believable setting and context.

**Individual Criteria**

**Criterion 1**

This particular criterion remains challenging and broad in terms of expectations and marking consideration. In the last two markers’ meeting, it has been agreed that the marking focus should be on the range of texts that are crafted and refined for a purpose, accuracy of presentation and correct referencing.

Candidates who succeeded on this criterion provided evidence of variety, polish and accuracy of texts. Future candidates are reminded that the ‘range of texts’ is not merely about different forms, but about offering contrast in style: language, voice, tone, context and so on. Three narratives (or other forms) can represent an outstanding folio if they are divergent in style. Conversely, a candidate who presents a monologue, poetry and a short story might still have a certain ‘sameness’ in their work that does not indicate the ability to successfully produce a range of texts.

There were a number of effective examples of specific forms of journalism which showed a clear awareness of the significance of audience (including reading age) in determining key features such as structure, paragraphing, usage, captions, images and their relationship with the text, and aspects of style related to specific publications. Weaker pieces treated the form of ‘feature article’ as an opportunity to write generally, personally and with little or no sense of audience. A few exceptional candidates were able to demonstrate the expressive potential of non-fiction in a way that made their work distinctive and memorable. One candidate, for example, presented an extremely sophisticated and engaging ‘collaged’ essay on the meaning of goodbye. Future candidates are encouraged to consider and explore the possibilities of such unique options.

Presentation requirements clearly include correct manuscript formatting requirements, and paragraph formatting remains an issue. It is advised candidates block paragraph their pieces and do so consistently to clearly indicate the distinction of paragraphs (and ideas). There were a disturbing number of pieces in 2015 that were unclear and/or inconsistent. Many candidates presented single line spaced narratives (appropriate only for poetry, scripts
and screenplays). Cover pages for each piece are not required: a simple bold centred title at the top of the first page of each piece is sufficient (Writing Project in brackets under or beside the title of that particular piece is advised).

The need to reference appropriately and accurately is vital in any TASC 3 course, and in preparation for University study. Most candidates demonstrated satisfactory referencing details, but others needed to be more attentive to expected requirements. It is important sources of inspiration are acknowledged in the Reflective Statement, and that particular quotations are referenced accordingly within folio pieces. All teachers and candidates should be familiar with the TASC Authenticity and Academic Integrity Guide as they prepare and submit their final folios.

A range of outstanding candidates demonstrated the ability to reveal both precision and distinction in their writing that empowered markers in confidently recognising their skill and originality. Proofreading is paramount! Needless errors such as changing/misspelling character names within a text, and reliance on autocorrect to do the proofreading for the writer, were of great concern to markers. There were many careless errors such as ‘son if a bitch’, ‘Las Angeles’ and ‘strom’ (storm) which immediately jar the reader and can instantly ‘kill the mood’. This problem also led to Americanised spelling or similarly spelt but completely different words such as ‘physiology’ instead of ‘psychology’.

In the same vein, it is important candidates are accurate in the factual/contextual details and continuity in their work: what is a lethal dose of morphine? If the family is flying out in the morning, would the sun be setting as they drive to the airport? Careful and close proofreading of work is a fundamental requirement in crafting polished writing, and a number of markers noted that this was particularly disappointing in a substantial number of folios this year.

Criterion 2

Criterion 2 is focused on language and more successful candidates clearly understood and demonstrated the importance and effectiveness of precise and extensive vocabulary, realistic dialogue and effective narration in their folios. Strong writers appreciated the importance of word choice and the process of editing and refining to achieve precision and effect in polished texts. A number of candidates explored and incorporated language that was both relevant and evocative, clearly evidencing an understanding of the impact of word choice according to purpose on the reader.

Unfortunately, many folios presented texts that were lacking in rich and varied diction, which resulted in pieces that were mundane, generalised and ultimately failed to impact on the markers. Limited vocabulary frequently led to over-reliance on weak verbs, adjectives and nouns such as ‘made/make’, ‘started’ and ‘beautiful’. It is suggested that perhaps teachers and candidates could spend more time in the Craft of Writing module exploring the impact of words and images. A majority of candidates would apparently benefit from time spent experimenting with and seeking precise nouns and verbs, in combination with an active voice, to better bring their writing to life. Candidate writers should be aiming for precise and vivid diction to eliminate (or at least minimise) extraneous adjectives and adverbs that tend to be overused and laborious. The inclusion of figurative language in folio pieces this year was varied in skill and prevalence: the most outstanding writers were able to use imagery and sound devices in unique and evocative ways, while weaker writers either overused or ignored this stylistic element in their work.

A history of wide – and challenging - reading is essential for extending one’s vocabulary, and this is always clearly evident in candidates’ writing. Telling rather than showing is a weakness that candidate writers should strive to address in the future. Many candidates included this phrase in their Reflective Statements, but the concept was
not evident in their writing. Weaker writers again tended to document a series of events – this happened and then this - rather than successfully evoke characters, scenery and atmosphere. Subtext is crucial, and candidates of writing at this level should be considering what the reader is capable of inferring and imagining as opposed to simply revealing everything that occurs in terms of action and events.

Many candidates were able to create texts featuring sustained and distinctive voices in their pieces, with strong writers revealing adaptability and diversity across all pieces. This is such a vital element of writing that enables the reader to genuinely engage and empathise with the character or persona. Stand-out examples in 2015 included an epistolary piece that revealed the evolving voice of the persona from childhood to maturity, and a compelling story narrated solely through the words of five different characters. A number of candidates wrote pieces from a child’s perspective; in some texts this was successful, but it can be challenging for the writer to avoid simplicity of voice and style. Perhaps future candidates could consider utilising this perspective in sections within a narrative, rather than the entire piece.

Weaker candidates struggled to maintain consistent tense in their writing, which detracted from the expression of ideas. At the other end of the spectrum, however, there were a number of pieces that successfully experimented with varying tenses to produce sophisticated and engaging writing results. The inclusion of dialogue presented a similar trend: engaging pieces featured conversation that was life-like and relevant, enhancing the progression of ideas and revealing distinctions of character. Less able writers tended to include lengthy conversations that did not add to what was happening; rather, it bogged down the pace of the narrative. Future English Writing candidates should really think carefully about what the characters need to say and how they might say it, and edit conversations ruthlessly to feature only what is absolutely essential.

Words are the primary tool of the writer, and must be consciously sought and selected. In the first instance, candidates are advised to read, read widely, and read as a writer. (No, reading will NOT cause you to lose your individuality and personal style as a writer – quite the opposite!) Other suggestions include crosswords, familiarisation with the dictionary and thesaurus … any means that can enhance and extend vocabulary.

**Criterion 3**

This criterion examines the structural elements of candidates’ writing – on the micro and macro scale. Candidates are reminded to attend to sentence, paragraph and overall text structure as they craft and edit their folio pieces. Clear and concise sentence and paragraph structure is vital in arranging and expressing ideas, and strong folios evidenced this. Clarity and control is essential, and successful candidates demonstrated accurate and effective paragraphing and punctuation, along with varied and experimental syntax, to produce pace and diversity. There were a few whose basic literacy skills were excellent, enabling them to use colons, semi-colons and dashes, for example, with confidence and flair. Overall, more successful writing clearly demonstrated control of an array of literary conventions and structural elements, varying sentence and poetic structure in the production of sustained, well-paced and unified pieces.

Inaccurate and ineffective paragraphing (or stanzas) did not enhance the progression and clarity of pieces, along with unconscious utilisation of run-on or fragmented sentences without purpose, and incorrect use of punctuation. The use of italics in writing was often inconsistently utilised by 2015 candidates. In a first person narrative, italics are not required to indicate the character’s thoughts. Candidates must be clear and accurate in how they feature italics, and should not use them to mask weaknesses in the structure of their texts.

Texts where writers were able to manipulate and then surprise the reader with an unexpected twist, for example, ended their pieces on a strong note and left a positive impression on the marker. Similarly, pieces that drew the reader in with suspense and gradual revelation of detail were effective. Clever methods of structuring
narratives were evident in a number of folios, such as one that revealed the premise of a story by inserting small segments of dialogue between two unknown characters. This technique effectively added to the pace and poetry of the piece, and really impacted on the reader.

Experimentation in structural elements was acknowledged and generally rewarded by markers – although this needs to be clearly explained in the Reflective Statement. A number of candidates effectively crafted pieces that alternated in perspective, scene and time that proved intriguing and satisfying. However, in some cases candidates went overboard with a dizzying array of changes in point of view and time which became overwritten, confusing and/or tiresome to read. ‘Moment in time’ pieces – rather than those featuring extensive plot and backstory – can be extremely successful. One candidate created a marvellous descriptive piece on the theme of seduction inspired by a French painting, which offered a powerful and sophisticated evocation of the moment. Future candidates are encouraged to consider including pieces of work from the Craft of Writing module to showcase their specific writing skills and avoid multiple short stories.

Candidates can be successful in including opening chapters or beginnings of intended longer works, if they are clear in purpose and structural expectations, but these offerings should not be included if they are merely a ‘way out’ of actually finishing something more effectively.

**Criterion 4**

Candidates who were successful in this criterion offered a diverse combination of engaging, sustained and complex texts that were both unique and credible. Clearly, a number of writers were inspired by experiences such as excursions and exposure to interesting visual or other stimuli. Markers noted that such pieces predominantly revealed a strong sense of place, featuring details that were effective in evoking images and emotion. Many texts inspired by the author study in Module B also proved to be strong and convincing, apparently as a result of close study of authorial methods in writing.

Candidate writers should aim to be clear in their purpose and intended audience so as to engage the reader with their combination of ideas, writing style and structure. Unfortunately, a number of writers were apparently not aware of their intended audience and the specific emotional and intellectual response they sought to evoke. As a result, ideas and expression were often pedestrian in pieces that struggled to create believable characters, contexts and plots. Many of these writers were also more introverted in content and lacked literary style and flair. In order for the reader to really believe in the characters - their conflicts, relationships and contexts - the writer must be clear about who they are writing for and how they want them to respond, and keep this at the forefront of the writing process.

‘Depression, suicide and paranoid schizophrenia’, along with domestic violence and drug-related pieces, again appeared as ‘popular’ subjects, often proving to be cathartic for the writer rather than engaging for the reader. Many of these compositions were filled with stereotypical characters and poor (often lengthy and trite) dialogue and contextual details. If a candidate is determined to write about a popular idea, or within a trendy genre such as dystopia or science-fiction, they must actively strive for ways to be inventive in their approach. Reliance on plot often gets in the way of quality writing in such cases and future candidates are encouraged to attend more closely to evoking character, atmosphere and theme. Unfortunately, a number of pieces seemed to rely on the dramatic, catastrophic or tragic nature of the subject matter to do the work for them, so to speak. There are still a number of writers who are trying to span too much time and action in their writing rather than focusing on the depth, detail and tension of their work.

There were many strong writers (obviously avid readers) who were able to develop sophisticated ideas and themes, create credible and complex characters and really engage the imagination of the reader. This year, there
were a pleasing number of folios and individual pieces that were highly engaging, experimental and ultimately truthful. Compelling pieces revealed a strong command of the elements of description, narration and dialogue in writing and employed these judiciously for effect.

**Criterion 5 – The Reflective Statement**

A number of markers raised concerns that the Reflective Statement is becoming formulaic in its form and style. However, fulfilling the requirements to address sources, purpose, audience, form, structure and style - and the relationship between these elements - requires candidates to be concise and information rich. Candidates are encouraged to consider the creative opportunities offered in this introductory folio piece and encouraged to challenge the demands of this element of the folio. Candidates are advised to beware ‘schooled’ or ‘groomed’ approaches and strive for individualised statements that address criteria standards and reveal a personal style and voice. There were a large number of considered and insightful Reflective Statements, delivering an authenticity of voice, honesty and warmth. These candidates considered their relationship with the reader and genuinely engaged the markers in their discussion of their folio pieces.

Quotations on writing that are included as embellishment without being directly relevant to a piece should be avoided; in a number of folios this appeared to be an emerging trend. Similarly, references to authors and/or texts must be explicit in terms of how they impacted on the development of a folio piece. Successful candidates were able to clearly discuss how they adopted a writer’s manner of description, language and dialogue or unconventional paragraphing, for example. There were a pleasing number of Statements that were both specific and insightful in this component in 2015, clearly thinking about connections and experimenting in their writing. In general, a greater variety of textual references were provided in 2015. Weaker candidates are still only addressing this point at a very basic level, with general comments about a novel of influence, for example.

In a concerning number of folios, there was far too much writing about self, sources and influences with only cursory attention to other dot point standards for this criterion. These candidates are encouraged to increase the range of narrative devices and terminology they feature in their discussion to achieve higher than a C rating. The superficial discussion of poetic devices was particularly noted as disappointing in a range of folios featuring poetry.

More successful candidates were able to interweave a range of technical elements in their discussion, highlighting diverse and relevant stylistic features within each folio text. It is refreshing to read Statements where candidates adopt a unique approach and style, and engage the reader through a distinctive voice or humour, for example. There was some great discussion of more sophisticated narrative devices in a number of Statements, such as framed/split narratives, anti-humour comedies and flash fiction. Less able candidates featured heavy plot retelling, discussing the same elements as utilised in all three pieces, generally lacking discernment of audience and intention. Quotations from candidates' own folio pieces in the Reflective Statement generally failed to add any particular insight into the pieces, and should be avoided – particularly lengthy extracts.

Candidates should avoid making judgements about their own writing, such as ‘this was my best piece’, ‘I’m proud of it’ or ‘I was pleased with the end result’. Nor should candidates advertise their failings. Candidates should not applaud or criticise their own pieces but focus on discussing the elements of their writing with the intention of informing the reader as to the purpose and method of their pieces and allow the reader to respond without prejudice. Introductions and conclusions were often too lengthy and self-indulgent: personal stories of childhood reading and writing, the state of the world and lengthy ‘my writing journey’ rambles should not be included – particularly at the expense of the requisite and more pertinent discussion of the elements of the writing pieces.

Proofreading for effect and impact is of ultimate importance. Typographical errors have a genuine bearing on the success of texts and it is imperative candidates take the time to carefully proofread their pieces prior to
submitting folios, including the Reflective Statement. In a number of folios, the quality of the Reflective Statement contrasted with other pieces: some were more polished while others lacked accuracy and detail. It is also important that candidates discuss their pieces in the order they appear in the folio.

Criterion 5 is specific and limited to the Reflective Statement; as such it is a vital piece within the folio. It should not be a last minute, imprecise inclusion in the folio that fails to address the range of standard indicators, nor should it be a mechanical and/or contrived discussion that sacrifices or fails to consider purpose and style. This text serves a vital purpose in introducing the candidate’s folio, and candidate writers must ensure it both engages and informs the reader.

Concluding Remarks and Pertinent Recommendations

To reiterate some of the key issues to be addressed by teachers and candidates in 2016 and beyond:

**Quotations** must be excluded from word counts in candidates’ pieces, including the Reflective Statement, and these should be clearly discriminated. Extensive quotations can detract from the originality and fluency of candidates’ texts, and lack of discernment in identifying the included word count of others’ work is of concern. Candidates are reminded that word counts on the Contents Page and at the end of pieces should be accurate and transparent, noting total word counts and words excluding quotations. This is vital so as to avoid penalty regarding dishonest word counts.

**Dialogue formatting** has proven to be inconsistent and inaccurate in a substantial number of folios this year (and in previous years). Teachers and candidates are strongly advised to refer to published manuscripts to guide accurate and conventional formatting of dialogue – errors have drawn valid negative attention of markers. If candidates deliberately choose an unconventional method of formatting dialogue, such as the absence of speech marks or use of italics, this must be noted and the reason for the choice explained in the Reflective Statement.

**Careful proofreading** of work to correct errors in spelling, grammar and formatting is essential for success. This is a crafted and polished folio of work – not pieces presented within exam conditions – and candidates must be prepared to review and correct their work thoroughly to succeed at this level.
Notable References

Electronic sources:
Tumblr: http://creepypastatales.tumblr.com/
Cracked online articles http://www.cracked.com/funny-articles.html

Short Stories
Neil Gaiman Trigger Warning
Neil Gaiman Forbidden Brides from Fragile Things
AJ Ashworth Sometimes Gulls Kill Other Gulls in Somewhere Else, or Even Here
Marjories Barnard The Persimmon Tree

Poets/poetry
Percy Bysshe Shelly
Louis de Paor
Alan Bennett ‘Lady of Letters’ (Monologue)

Novels
Justine Larbalestier Liar
Tina Fey Bossy Pants
Amy Poehler Yes Please
Mindy Kaling Is everyone hanging out without me?
Holly Black The Darkest Part of the Forest
John Green An Abundance of Katherines
Judy Blume It’s Not the End of the World
Muriel Spark The Driver’s Seat
Ian McEwan Saturday
Alice Pung Laurinda
Marjorie Barnard The Persimmon Tree

Playwrights
Polly Teale

Columnists
Phillip Adams (Weekend Australian)
Benjamin Law (Good Weekend)

Dialogue Formatting References that may be helpful

And to finish – a great quote for showing rather than telling:
“Don’t tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.” (Anton Chekov)