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CHANGE

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**NEW VCE
STUDY DESIGNS**



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We are keen to receive contributions in a range of forms, combining sound theory with concrete detail about actual classroom situations. All contributions will be reviewed, and you can expect feedback to help you shape your work effectively.

Don't be afraid to contact us, as this could be the beginning of a fruitful dialogue between us that will eventually lead to the publication of a worthwhile article.

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It's time for change

Josephine Smith, Managing and Contributing editor,
VATE Publications and Communications Officer

In farewelling the VCE Class of 2022, we are also archiving elements of the VCE English studies and starting to usher in changes to the VCE English, EAL and Literature courses. In 2023, the new Units 1 and 2 English and EAL courses will commence, to be followed by Units 3 and 4 in 2024. For Literature students and teachers, the full Units 1–4 of the new VCE course will be implemented from the start of next year. 'It's time', to echo the theme of the recent VATE State Conference, for change!

There have been many opportunities throughout 2022, both online and in-person, for discussions about the aims of the new VCE English studies and ways of understanding and implementing the changes. This edition of *Idiom* seeks to add to this conversation and support the English teaching community in Victoria as it engages with the new VCE curriculum. In adding 'Part 1' to the title of this issue, we recognise that this is an ongoing conversation, one that we will revisit again in future *Idioms*, as well as in discussions at professional learning events and on VATE's online teacher networks.

We are grateful to the contributors to this edition who have taken the time to write and share their expertise, insights and practical advice, especially our lead writers Annelise Balsamo, Curriculum Manager, English, and Kellie Heintz, Curriculum Manager, EAL, for the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), who have led the development and implementation of the new VCE English, EAL and Literature Study Designs across the state.

In 2021, VATE surveyed the member community about the proposed English and EAL Study Design, and the proposed Literature Study Design. The predominant thread in VATE's submissions to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), was that our students need to be able to think critically and creatively in order to be active participants in a democratic society. VATE looks forward to continuing to work with the VCAA and with the wider English teaching community in embracing the opportunities for change and innovation in the new courses, and most importantly, supporting students to engage meaningfully and have every opportunity for success in their chosen VCE English studies.

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Focus on new English/EAL and Literature Study Designs

Annelise Balsamo, Curriculum Manager, English, and Kellie Heintz, Curriculum Manager, EAL, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA)

General context for reviewing a VCE study

VCE studies are reviewed every five years. There are two types of reviews – major reviews and minor reviews. A major review may redevelop the Study Design or parts of the Study Design which might include the rationale, the outcome statements and the knowledge and skills, and the number and types of assessment. A minor review may refine and/or clarify aspects of the Study Design including possible reorganisation of content and skills.

A minor review would typically occur every second cycle – so a major review would occur every ten years, though this can change if the accreditation of the study is extended.

We would have expected both VCE English and EAL and VCE Literature to have faced minor reviews in this cycle as they both underwent major reviews in their last cycles (2013/2014). However, significant factors in both studies meant they both underwent major reviews in this cycle (2020/2021).

English and EAL

Context of the review

VCE English and EAL was monitored in 2018, in preparation for a 2019 review. Monitoring identified the combined nature of the study itself should be reviewed, and EAL, more generally, should be examined as fit for purpose. The identification of this key issue meant that both English and EAL were recommended for major review.

Victoria is the only jurisdiction with a combined English and EAL study in senior secondary. EAL, in senior secondary in other jurisdictions, is typically a language acquisition study rather than a language application study. Initially, the obvious solution to the issues identified with VCE EAL was to split it from VCE English and to create two studies. VCE English would be maintained with little change – and VCE EAL would be developed as a standalone study focused on language acquisition.

Research was conducted in the history and the initial intention of the combined study – going back as far as the Columbo Plan. The research indicated the value of the combined study as it:

- benchmarks EAL against English so that EAL learners can meet the English requirement for ATAR and VCE
- provides a clear pathway to tertiary studies for EAL learners
- values and provides visibility of EAL learners.

Conversely, a standalone VCE EAL study for language acquisition would mean that EAL learners completing this study would not meet the English requirement for ATAR and VCE so EAL learners would need to complete a whole other study.

With this in mind¹, it was decided that VCE English and EAL would remain a combined study. But the major review was already in process, though one of the major questions had been withdrawn. This was an opportunity to consider other data, to commission a new benchmarking report asking different questions, and to reconsider the study overall.

The issues that surfaced after this additional work were:

- the implementation of the study in a combined English and EAL classroom
- the focus on text response and analysis of text
- the place of writing for context, audience and purpose
- the lack of examinable knowledge and skills in Unit 4 for EAL learners.

The review, having been delayed through 2019 in order to address and recommend on the question of a combined study, was scheduled to begin in 2020. And then COVID-19 occurred and the timeline changed again.

¹ We acknowledge that the support of EAL learners in Victoria could also include an English language acquisition study, potentially to sit in the language suite of studies, but this study would not meet the English requirement for ATAR and VCE.

The review panel continued to meet online throughout 2020 to consider, research, discuss and recommend on the issues identified above.

Issues of content and skills

In our benchmarking against other jurisdictions (national and international), it was noted that there was limited engagement with the knowledge and skills required to create texts for context, audience and purpose and no high stakes assessment of that knowledge and those skills. It was also noted that, in comparison with other jurisdictions, the study was heavily focused on response to literary text (in many forms).

Further research, including working closely with expert critical friends, provided recommendations to balance the study between response to text and writing for additional purposes, and in consideration of audience and context. The NAPLAN Review Final Report also informed the thinking and recommendations of the review panel. Findings from the report indicated:

While the review panel heard some variation in the intensity of the views, the common thread was that overall, the NAPLAN writing test does not support students to produce excellent writing; in its current form, is not highly valued by teachers and school leaders; is not well-designed, impacts negatively on how writing is taught in the classroom; and leads to narrowing of students' literacy learning. It was frequently mentioned that students produce formulaic writing for NAPLAN. It was also common throughout the consultations to hear that the writing test is having a negative impact on children's and young people's enjoyment of writing, their creativity, and opportunities to express imagination in writing. An additional claim, often repeated, was that the test has the effect of suppressing the quality of the writing students could demonstrate at the high-end of performance in favour of attempts to deliver writing to fit the formula (p. 86).

From this work, we concluded that we needed to include the valuable knowledge and skills of writing for an intended purpose and in consideration of audience and context without defaulting to the teaching of genre and generic conventions. While teaching genre and generic conventions is important at particular stages of learning, there looks to be a point at which leaning too heavily on these conventions could compromise the quality of student writing, and could impact on creativity and engagement.

Importantly, genre is specified in the Victorian Curriculum F-10: English (narrative, persuasive, informative) and therefore including it again in the VCE study could potentially limit developmental growth in student writing and creating.

The recommendation, therefore, was to include an Area of Study focused on writing for purpose, audience and context in both Unit 1 and Unit 3 and that both Areas of Study would invite an exploration of writing beyond genre and into experimentation, flexibility, hybridity and student agency and voice. The panel did, however, also acknowledge the need for cohesion in classrooms and direction for teachers. The Study Design therefore also includes Frameworks

of Ideas at Unit 3 (through which teachers can explore effective and cohesive writing), mentor texts (that offer stepping off points for students and exemplars of effective and cohesive writing), and four broad purposes for writing that students engage with (to express, to explain, to argue and to reflect).

The panel also recommended that knowledge and skills for writing for purpose, audience and context are represented in the end of year external examination. This recommendation ensured a valuing of the knowledge and skills and fidelity to the curriculum document.

These recommendations were adopted and are in the new VCE English and EAL Study Design as:

- Unit 1, Outcome 2: Crafting texts
- Unit 3, Outcome 2: Creating texts

The addition of these Areas of Study resulted in the removal of the comparative Areas of Study (Reading and comparing texts). As students will continue to read, explore and analyse high quality texts in light of ideas, values and concerns, the removal of the comparative Areas of Study did not result in the removal of any core knowledge and skills.

The Study Design therefore also includes Frameworks of Ideas (through which teachers can explore effective and cohesive writing), mentor texts (that offer stepping off points for students and exemplars of effective and cohesive writing), and four broad purposes for writing that students engage with (to express, to explain, to argue and to reflect).

Issues for EAL within the Study Design

The identified issues associated with EAL explored other issues. The first – around the complexities of implementing the English and EAL Outcomes in a combined classroom (typically these classrooms are mainly comprised of English students and fewer than five EAL students) – was considered in light of statistics indicating up to 200 schools were teaching combined English and EAL classes and navigating the different texts, and the additional Area of Study in Unit 3 was difficult for EAL students and for teachers. It was recommended that differentiation for EAL learners be included in a manner that supported the cohort but did not make classroom teaching and learning atomised. The second issue – most of the knowledge and skills in Unit 4 were not examinable for EAL learners – was also considered in light of the recommendation of a more aligned curriculum document with distinct differentiation.

The recommendations were adopted and appear as the following changes to the new English/EAL Study Design:

- The Outcome statements for the EAL curriculum are slightly different to English to allow for the differences in skill level as EAL learners develop their language proficiency. This allows scope for EAL students to meet the Outcomes without having to achieve the exact higher order skills expected of first language learners.
- Assessment options for EAL learners include scaffolding tasks that support language development and build confidence. Some examples include: annotations, mind maps, short-answers and note-form summaries.
- Inclusion of a personal response to a text provides an entry/connection point for students and offers an opportunity to discuss identity, self and culture.
- Connection of listening skills to developing the contextual knowledge of a text makes the learning authentic and builds understanding of the text.

- Broadening texts types so that audio/ audio-visual texts (with captions) can be used to support learners who are deaf and hard of hearing.
- Expansion of the delivery of oral presentations for assessment to include: dialogues, debates and small group discussions.
- Provision of the option for extracts to be studied instead of complete texts (where appropriate).
- Inclusion of mentor texts that can be curated to meet the needs, interests and strengths of the cohort.
- Refinement of examination tasks so that in three hours, there are three distinct tasks to be completed by EAL learners that are aligned with the requirements of English students (no listening task and no short-answer questions). Instead, EAL learners will write: one text response, one self-created text and one analysis of argument.

Literature

Context of the review

Like VCE English and EAL, a number of key indicators created the environment for a major review of VCE Literature. A key issue was the declining enrolment numbers. Decline in enrolments in Literature studies is a national and international trend – and enrolments in the humanities more generally are declining nationally and internationally. The reasons behind this trend are not entirely clear – the recent focus and emphasis on STEM studies might be part of this, as might employability perceptions. In the Victorian context, the scaling that VTAC imposes on study scores is a concern for schools, teachers and students. Additionally, the current VCE English and VCE Literature studies both focus on response to text and offer similar assessment tasks – creative response to text, comparative essay on two texts, analysis and interpretation of text – which had blurred VCE Literature's distinct identity as a study focused on the form and language of written, literary text. And finally, the complexity of the assessment for the Literary perspectives Area of Study, both internal and external, had been

identified through monitoring as a burden for teachers and students. The monitoring – and anecdotal evidence – indicated students and teachers enjoyed the exploration of literary perspectives but found the mandated assessment very challenging.

Many of these issues we could not address in the review – some, like the decline in enrolments in Literature across national and international jurisdictions, were external issues and trends. However, there were some issues that were clearly in the remit of a review.

The Study Design review panel, therefore, was charged with addressing the following:

- Establishing a clear vision and identity for the study.
- Securing an exploration of literary perspectives while changing the assessment.
- Acknowledging significant change creates anxiety for teachers and students.

In addition, and as identified by the benchmarking report, the Study Design required an update to include contemporary knowledge and meaningful ways to include student voice and agency in the curriculum.

Change and continuity

The Study Design review panel put many possibilities on the table for consideration including some reasonably radical suggestions for changes to the Study Design for VCE Literature. However, the panel was keen to balance proposed changes with the benefits of continuity and stability in the study. We did not want to place undue pressure on teachers; the solutions to the issues needed to support the teaching and learning of the study.

The review panel decided to keep Units 3 and 4 as stable as possible. The shape and intention of the units were retained and the well-established Areas of Study of Adaptations and transformations, Creative responses to texts, and Close analysis appear in the new Study Design with minimal changes. The key changes in Units 3 and 4 were to the

The Study Design review panel put many possibilities on the table for consideration including some reasonably radical suggestions for changes to the Study Design for VCE Literature. However, the panel was keen to balance any changes proposed to address the identified issues with the Study Design with the benefits of continuity and stability in the study. We did not want to place undue pressure on teachers; the solutions to the issues needed to support the teaching and learning of the study.

sequence of the Areas of Study and to the Literary perspectives Area of Study.

- 'Literary perspectives' was reshaped into 'Developing interpretations' and moved to Unit 3.
- 'Creative responses to texts' was moved to Unit 4.

The change to the sequence was a response to data from our annual audits. The audits strongly suggested Unit 3 – with no skills directly examinable – was in danger of becoming undervalued in the Study Design, and Unit 4 being overly emphasised.

The largest changes were made to what is now called Developing interpretations.

- Reduced the required secondary reading/perspective from two to one.
- Changed the approach to the secondary reading/perspective from a 'lens' to deep exploration and close analysis.
- Retained a focus on the set text and emphasised students' interpretation of the text prior to the exploration of a secondary reading.
- Asked students to consider how a secondary reading enhances their own interpretations.

The examination is clearly impacted by the changes. More information will come through the publishing of the sample Literature examination.

In Units 1 and 2, the review panel addressed the issues of contemporary content and student voice and agency. Each unit has a familiar Area of Study and a new Area of Study. Unit 1 retains Reading practices and adds Exploration of literary movements and genres. This new Area of Study is designed to extend the types of texts we might see in our Literature classrooms, and provide space for students' reading choices and practices to come into the Literature classroom. Unit 2 retains The text in its context and adds Voices of Country. The new Area of Study is designed to highlight and honour the voices, perspectives and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and creators, and to invite engagement with representations of experiences of colonial and post-colonial Australia, as well as dispossession and reconciliation.

Final words

Undertaking a major review of a study is demanding and requires significant commitment from all panel members. It can be stressful work – panels are asked to reach consensus in all decisions, and this is not easy. Members attend long meetings and participate in complex discussions. They also need to be incredibly responsive with limited time to read and consider suggested changes or revisions. It is also important to remember that most panel members are also full-time teachers, many have commitments with their families and communities, and they are not paid for their time or work. We thank them from the bottom of our hearts for their willingness to continue to participate in the process and to work together to produce Study Designs to inspire, support and skill Victorian students.

Selecting a Framework and mentor texts

Virginia Danahay, Berwick College

We are strong supporters of writing at Berwick College, introducing a student-led newspaper and a poetry and creative writing club this year. Therefore, we are very excited about the new VCAA English and EAL Study Design, Unit 1, Area of Study 2: 'Crafting texts'. The rationale behind our choice of Framework and selection of mentor texts is outlined in this article. We hope some of our thinking may prove useful when selecting a Framework and mentor texts for your cohort.

Introduction

On our journey towards the new Unit 1, Area of Study 2: 'Crafting texts', we draw inspiration from the Canadian writer, Margaret Atwood. Atwood aptly describes power as being 'a word after a word after a word'. It is important to communicate to students that, in the very often daunting English classroom, words are vehicles to be used purposefully to express students' own power: through writing, through the power to explore, the power to discuss, the power to analyse, and the power to share thoughts and experiences and dreams.

Selecting a Framework of Ideas

Our aim is to create confident and competent young writers, equipping students with the skills necessary to successfully complete a range of writing styles in Year 11 and in Year 12, perhaps even more importantly, equipping them with the belief that they CAN be effective writers. Thus, selecting an engaging Framework of Ideas and suitably diverse and inspiring selection of mentor texts was critical to our approach at Berwick. For Unit 1, schools cannot select from the four Frameworks

set for Unit 3 (Protest, Play, Personal Journeys, Country – beginning in 2024), although they may be inspired by them. Ideas for Unit 1, Area of Study 2 are up to individual schools to select. For 2023, we have decided to work within a Framework of 'Loss' for our Year 11 cohort. In selecting this Framework, we took into consideration a range of factors. These factors included:

The key ideas within texts students had studied in Years 7 to 10. Students had studied texts that dealt with grief, death, identity, isolation, relationships, the natural world, and storytelling. We wanted to build on student understanding from previous English classes, adding complexity and nuance to their initial understanding of key idea/s previously studied. This also allowed a degree of 'comfort' or familiarity to our students – and our teachers.

We also considered the print texts we wished to set for Year 11 (*The Longest Memory*, *Extinction*). We wanted all our texts to include some common thematic elements, thus helping build that layered understanding in students but also providing opportunities for teachers and students to make connections between text types and explore how different

writing styles and different voices can communicate important ideas in multiple ways. For example, *The Longest Memory* deals with loss of life as does *Extinction*, yet the authors of these two texts explore loss of life in completely different ways, using different contexts and writing features.

The accessibility of the Framework idea in terms of 'buy-in' from our students was also a critical factor. Did students have experience or understanding of the Framework idea already? What had they already read or understood about 'loss'? What losses had they experienced themselves and could they share these experiences with the class (in written or spoken form?). The cultural context of our cohort was also very important. We have many students who suffered great losses in recent bushfires. We also have students who have experienced loss in the form of family breakdowns, loss of employment during COVID, and loss of confidence as learners. We wanted a Framework idea that was universal in connecting to students but that had the capacity to engage our learners on different levels, whether it was 'loss' of something tangible – a loved one, an object. Or the 'loss' of something intangible such as a relationship or a sense of identity. More broadly, we also

wanted students to make connections to the world around them. We are currently experiencing great losses as a result of natural disasters. There is also scope for students to explore texts related to loss of species and habitat and loss of freedom. Loss – and by extension, grief and death – have always been widely written and spoken about and, therefore, we have a beautifully diverse range of texts from which to draw on as our mentor texts.

The Mentor texts

Recent lockdowns, and the associated remote learning, also taught us very quickly the need to think more flexibly about accessing and teaching texts. Many students left books in lockers during lockdown. Some of our set texts were not available as audio books or downloads. It was quite difficult to teach texts when students did not have access to these texts. Thus, we created what we call our 'online book boxes'. These build on the long-standing practice of having boxes of thematic-based books for junior classes e.g. boxes of books on ancient Egypt for History classes. We took this idea and turned it into an online resource. We created the online book boxes for Years 7 to 10 in 2021 originally, and built on the idea across 2022. We compiled a range of texts – short stories, poetry, song lyrics, picture books, transcripts – and added the web links to these texts on a Google document. The texts were arranged by genre and were also differentiated. The texts were also available as 'read alouds' via YouTube (or similar) links as it is important for students to hear some text types (e.g. poetry) read aloud. It was also helpful to have texts read to students to support the different learning needs and learning styles in our classrooms.

Our thinking in creating a Year 11 'book box' for the mentor texts builds on the rationale used for junior levels but also allows us to have consistency between Year 11 classes and access to a range of texts online (cost effective). It also facilitates teacher and student voice and agency. All Year 11 classes will study the same three or four mentor texts from the book box but there is a lot of flexibility for teachers to supplement the three or four mentor texts with additional texts of their choice or, perhaps more importantly, invite students to find and share their own texts on loss. We have organised the book box by text type, allowing students to see how an idea can be communicated in different ways and for different contexts, purposes and audiences. So far, we have compiled a selection of song lyrics (e.g. 'Took the Children Away' by Archie Roach), short fiction (Cate Kennedy's short stories 'Laminex and Mirrors' and 'Waiting' from *Like a House on Fire*), poetry (A. B. Paterson's 'A Bunch of Roses' and Auden's 'Funeral Blues/Stop all the Clocks'). We will also include letters to the editor, editorials and transcripts about loss. The idea is for this to be a flexible resource that can be adapted or built upon and accessed within the classroom or from home for students who cannot attend onsite.

We have worked as a team to compile the texts in the book box. We have a range of experienced and graduate teachers which has enabled us to include traditional or 'classic' additions to the book box but also texts that are more contemporary. We have actively looked to include different voices and different cultural contexts, mindful of our cohort and the interests of our budding writers. We have very much focussed on thinking ahead to 2024 and the new Unit 3 Creating texts Area of Study. Therefore, we are looking to include quite a broad range of text types so students are prepared for the further study of mentor texts in Unit 3.

Everyone, teachers and students, need to just start writing. Every lesson. Even if it is just a sentence in response to one of the mentor texts. What did students like? What was their favourite line? Why did that particular line resonate?

Students as writers

We all have a story – or stories – to share. As mentioned earlier, it is so important to encourage students to believe in their ability to be writers. Helping students connect to a mentor text is a first step in enabling them to build the confidence to explore and experiment with their own writing. Finding a short story or song lyric or revisiting a treasured picture book (I plan on using a personal favourite, the classic children's book *The Velveteen Rabbit*), anything that gives students that 'a-ha!' moment is critical. We want students to read a text and realise that they have been there, felt that, seen that, understood ... we want them to feel that the author is writing just for them. Shared experience brings confidence.

Everyone, teachers and students, need to just start writing. Every lesson. Even if it is just a sentence in response to one of the mentor texts. What did students like? What was their favourite line? Why did that particular line resonate?

We will also be asking our students to complete a reading journal as they navigate each text. Students will be tasked with unpacking how each author or speaker has communicated their idea – looking at the titles, structure, figurative language choices, characterisation, and setting of each mentor text and how these authorial choices position a target audience. However, students will also be completing short pieces of writing (between sentence level length up to half a page in length) as they explore each text. This 'folio' of short pieces will hopefully give them confidence (and material!) to workshop, draft and edit in preparation for the Crafting texts SAC.

Finally, English teachers are usually the first people to acknowledge the power of words. Hopefully, upon completion of this Area of Study, after exploring a range of mentor texts and building up their own skills as writers, students will believe in some of that power, too.

A poet and passionate fan of writing in all its forms, Virginia Danahay has been the English and Literacy Leader at Berwick College since 2019. A previous contributor to *Idiom*, Virginia worked with VCAA this year on a webinar for the implementation of the new Study Design. Virginia is also a VCAA English assessor and a presenter at the 2022 VATE conference.

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A chance to refresh and re-engage

Helen Billett

It is just one of those things that Victorian students, at least for a while, were the most 'locked down' students in the world. Ideally, we would never have to say to a student: 'Off and on for two years you need to stay indoors away from your peers and community, do very little and just wait.' Of course, conditions were far from ideal and we did what we needed to do at the time. While this disempowering message impacted on our whole society, its impact was disproportionately felt by young people. We are now living out the consequences of young people internalising this message.

Many schools are reporting that young people have struggled to re-engage this year. A new [English Study Design](#) is appearing at a time when we need to reconsider our pedagogy and curriculum to meet the educational consequences of managing the pandemic with extended lockdowns. Over the next decade, the children of the pandemic will move through the education system. We are unsure how the lockdown years will impact cohorts in the medium and long term. However, it is fortunate that the new English Study Design has arrived, with its focus on renewal and student agency, at this time.

In 2023, Unit 1 begins, with a focus on the purpose of reading – engaging with ideas in texts. There is no longer a requirement for traditionally structured responses that, for some students, reduced enjoyment and personal engagement in the reading process. Students no longer need to ask the question: 'How is this idea, that other people say has value, being presented?' Instead, students can focus on exploring their own personal responses to texts, exploring questions such as: 'How do I react to this idea? How do I respond to the way the text is positioning me? How do I bring myself to the text and with the author build meaning?' Students will also be given agency in the way in which they can present their understanding of the text's ideas and their response to them. At least for Unit 1, freed from the constraints of the unseen topic formal essay and timed response, students will be able to immerse themselves in the experience of reading and playing with ideas. Instead of being told to 'wait for the chance to express your individuality,' students will be free to respond to texts innovatively.

This is a wonderful opportunity to engage, or perhaps re-engage, young people with the experience of reading. The English Study Design's focus on the explicit teaching of inferential reading skills will be valuable to all and will hopefully go some way to support students denied access to school libraries and texts for some of

their crucial middle years, but it is the freedom for students to express their ideas in ingenious and contemporary ways that will be most relished. Of course, it is possible that we will have to coax some students into embracing that joy. For some students, who missed the opportunity to make meaningful decisions in the past few years, choice may seem a little overwhelming. We may need to encourage students to believe in their capacities. We might need to model risk-taking. The time will come when students are asked to respond to texts in more formal ways later, in their studies of English, when they have cemented their skills and knowledge, but Unit 1 will be a celebration of the joys of reading, free from expectations about the way in which ideas 'should' be expressed. I think we are all ready for both more freedom and more joy.

Students in Unit 1, Area of Study 2 will also be invited to find their voice about ideas that matter to them. This year, teachers have been relishing the chance to invent 'frameworks' that speak to their cohorts. Future Worlds, Judicious Justice, Money and Meaning, Escape, Concealment, Food and Success are just some of the stimulating and challenging frameworks that have been created by teachers to excite students. Exploring effective structures and linguistic features in Mentor texts will allow students to experiment and develop their own powerful voices. Students will be encouraged to bring texts that inspire

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them into the classroom and share and discuss them. And all this excitement will be generated before students even unlock the joy of creating their own powerful and potent texts.

It is timely that we are inviting students to engage with ideas and reflect on the experiences that have shaped their understanding of the world. Having the opportunity to experience the efficacy of their own voices, as well as reading and hearing the ideas of others, will be an empowering experience. For a number of years, students have felt silenced. But now our English classrooms are going to be encouraging students to present ideas that matter to them and to their communities. This capacity to express ideas and connect with others through the production of text will empower our students in the short, medium and long term.

The exploration of current issues in our society has been broadened in the new English Study Design in a number of ways. The distinction between material published by the 'Australian media' and that published overseas has been blurred by an accessible internet. Thus, the place of publication is no longer specified in the VCE English Study Design as an acknowledgement of the ways in which young people now access the media. Indeed, the definition of media has also been broadened. Texts to be studied now include audio and audiovisual material, so we can be confident that we are teaching students the skills they need as they navigate the media's increasingly sophisticated methods of positioning readers/viewers.

As well, students will continue to be encouraged to present their own beliefs about relevant issues and develop the important skills of oracy. I know that I have always finished the week when 'Orals' are assessed, inspired by the commitment of young people to their roles as stewards of our land and community. It is important that this element of the current English Study Design continues.

As English teachers, the opportunities the new English Study Design provides excite us. But sometimes that excitement is tempered by the overwhelming feeling of responsibility for students' success in the final exam. Sometimes we feel that we need to know what is on the exam so we can 'work backwards' as we design learning experiences for our students. While it is vital that teachers and students understand all assessments, it is also important to note that the final assessment of the course must examine the skills and knowledge in the Study Design. As English teachers, we should take pride in our capacity to mark student work using the principles of global assessment, and to assess accurately. While there is no cause for complacency, English teachers understand what good communication is and we need to acknowledge our ability to accurately construct formative and summative feedback. We will navigate the changes that the new course brings to assessment successfully. We know that 'training' students for an exam does not educate them. Neither does it empower students. Indeed, students

who have been narrowly 'trained' for the exam often lack the confidence, flair and engagement that allow students to achieve their full potential. If we teach the key knowledge and the key skills in the English Study Design we will have prepared the students for all their assessments. If we teach the students to read carefully, think deeply and communicate effectively, we will have prepared them, not just for the exam but also, more broadly, for life. While we will always worry about our students' success – we can't help ourselves, we care deeply – we need to embrace the chance to share with our students our love of literature, our excitement about the process of writing, our joy in powerful oracy and our commitment to ongoing learning. We can't become 'helicopter teachers' playing to fears of failure, or reduce learning to narrow exam preparation. Training students in formulaic writing does not 'keep them safe'. We're now all out of lockdown and we have a chance to renew and refresh. It's a time for us to be creative, optimistic and enthused. The new VCE English Study Design is everyone's chance to refresh and re-engage.

Helen Billett is an experienced teacher. She has navigated her way through many Study Designs and looks to the future with optimism. She believes that this Study Design offers teachers the flexibility they need to develop a course of study that meets the needs of a variety of cohorts. Her role in assessing VCE English ensures that she is cognisant of the demands and responsibilities that teaching and assessing VCE English entails.

New directions for assessing listening in VCE EAL

Linda Hogan, Caulfield Grammar School, and Amy Christensen, Scotch College

Introduction

Although there is no longer a standalone listening Outcome for EAL students in the new Study Design, listening skills remain both necessary for students to succeed with their studies and part of their assessment. Active listening skills are a fundamental part of engaging in debate and discussion, and teachers are now directed to include audio and/or audiovisual texts as part of their exploration and analysis of Argument.

In Unit 3, Outcome 1 (Reading and responding to texts), EAL students are required to 'listen to and discuss ideas presented in a text' for two assessment tasks. Task 1 is an extended piece of writing, generally the text response essay, and Task 2 is a specific response to spoken, audio and/or audiovisual text(s), but does not require an extended written response. The listening text(s) relate to 'the wider study of a text' through discussing relevant themes, ideas or issues related to the text that the students are using for their Task 1 text response task.

As an example, a class is studying a coming-of-age novel for this Outcome, so, as a learning activity, they watch an episode of the ABC TV series *Old People's Home for Teenagers*, discussing ideas and issues raised, and drawing links to the novel in a small writing task. For assessment, they listen to a section of a podcast where two teenagers from the same cultural background as the author discuss how the novel compares with their own coming-of-age experiences, taking notes as they listen and then responding to a series of questions. These types

of learning activities will not be new to teachers; what is new is using them in writing the assessment task.

Students need to go beyond recording information or demonstration of literal comprehension of the material presented to them through, say, a cloze activity. Similarly, teachers must also move away from the listening tasks developed for the previous Study Design where students dealt with unfamiliar speakers and contexts to demonstrate their general listening proficiency. The focus is on both comprehension of the text as well as inferring and creating meaning to develop their understanding of the historical context and social and cultural values in the text being studied.

Testing listening

Testing listening is more complicated than assessing, for example, writing or speaking, as it is impossible to have access to students' thinking to determine if they have understood. Essentially, we cannot directly assess listening. The student may have understood but may not show any external evidence of their understanding (Wang & Treffers-Daller, 2017).

An additional step is needed, usually speaking or writing, so teachers can then make inferences about the students' application of listening strategies. Essentially, we cannot access a student's brain to assess their understanding, but we can ask them questions about the text to then infer whether they have understood what they have heard.

It sounds obvious, but it is worth acknowledging the difficulty of assessing listening so teachers can be aware when designing assessment tasks and avoid, as much as possible, assessing something else entirely. For example, using an overly lengthy text may unnecessarily draw on student memory and stamina, as listening in English requires significant concentration for many EAL students. Similarly, a student may answer a question incorrectly because it was phrased in a complex way and they had difficulty reading it.

Yeldham and Gruba (2015) state that test-takers must demonstrate 'fluent listening' to answer listening task questions correctly. That is, they must both extract information from the text and then additionally use contextual and prior knowledge to infer meaning and rationale for the speakers' adoption of certain strategies. In this situation, students will draw on their previous experiences in class as well as their understanding of the novel being studied.

Essentially, we can't access a student's brain to assess their understanding, but we can ask them questions about the text to then infer whether they have understood what they have heard.

Designing a listening task

- Unlike study of a written text, students cannot review sections of a listening text repeatedly before responding to a question. So, try to avoid questions which hinge on students catching one word or remark that a person makes in an extended interview.
- We want to test listening, not memory, so keep texts to the length required or assess them on part of a text.
- When selecting an extract from a text, remember the section may require contextualising. For example, viewing the start of a TV program where the guests are introduced may be necessary before then skipping to the section for assessment. Or, it may be appropriate to watch an episode and discuss in class and then use a subsequent one for assessment. Consider if there are factors from earlier in the text or outside the text which students may need to be made aware of before completing their task. Providing a short biography of a speaker may be useful.
- Allowing students adequate time to preview a task or questions before listening or viewing a text helps focus their listening (Hughes, 2003).
- Listening to a text more than once helps students confirm answers and listen carefully to key sections they know they need to focus on. Tell them how many times they will hear a text before the task commences.
- Giving a practice task with similar conditions and form to the genuine assessment task helps students know what to expect
- Where speakers use vocabulary or idioms unfamiliar to the students and difficult to understand from context, providing a vocabulary list may be helpful
- Some speakers may speak too quickly for students to understand. It may be appropriate to slow the pace of a text, although not all texts lend themselves to having their playback speed adjusted. Most media players allow for playback speed to be adjusted.
- Short answer questions should be succinct and straightforward.
- Multiple choice questions, if used, should be shorter and simpler in wording than those which can be appropriately used for assessing reading as students need to keep the options in mind while listening (Hughes, 2003).
- Ensure students need to listen to the text to answer the questions. They should not be able to find answers by reading other questions, in background information or through general knowledge.
- Authentic texts are preferable to performance of scripts – 'what people actually say is very different from what they think they say' (Halliday, 2013, p. 34).
- Be aware of speakers with accents unfamiliar to the students, whispering, yelling or children's voices as they can be more challenging for EAL students to understand.
- Have someone other than the task designer(s) complete the task with the same conditions as the students before the students complete the task. The test designer(s) may believe a question is clear but fresh eyes may discover issues such as an ambiguous question or wording.
- Formulating a list of potential answers to short answer questions is both a way of checking the clarity of a question and confirming there is enough material to answer the question. Be aware the students may provide a response not foreseen by the task designer(s) but which is correct nonetheless, making adjustment of the answer key necessary.
- If a question asks for a specific number of pieces of information, generally teachers mark only that number of responses as that is what happens in the final examination. For example, discourage students writing every possible answer, including incorrect ones, by marking only the first two answers if that is what the question asks for. This prevents students from fishing for marks by

providing lots of information when they are actually unable to discern the correct answer(s).

- Remove as many distractions as possible. This might mean closing blinds, checking the audiovisual equipment sound quality in advance or using an alternate space.
- Teaching note-taking skills helps students record information. It can be helpful to encourage note-taking while listening/viewing rather than filling in questions so students don't miss key information.
- While the VCAA Performance Descriptors direct teachers to assess use of appropriate language conventions, avoid overly punitive responses to errors such as spelling, particularly of uncommon or new vocabulary.
- If watching an audiovisual text where a variety of speakers appear, it may be helpful to put an image of the speaker referred to in a question next to that particular question so the students clearly know who they are to refer to. Or, they can be provided with images of each speaker with their names before listening to the text to refer to as they listen.

Sample assessment items

To assist with developing these assessment tasks, we have used a listening text to produce a series of sample assessment task elements which can be selected from and adapted for other texts and contexts. These sample tasks respond to the ABC program *Old People's Home for Teenagers* where elderly Australians spend time with teenagers (full episodes and edited extracts addressing a theme available on ABC iview <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/old-people-s-home-for-teenagers>).

The context is the study of a coming-of-age novel. Ideally, the students would have watched one or more episodes to become familiar with the concept and people involved, with the assessment task using an extract from an episode they haven't previously viewed. These tasks respond to Episode 3, where the participants discuss ageism including prejudice against both teenagers and elderly people. The students would be provided with screenshots showing the participants' faces and labelled with their names to assist them with responding to the questions.

Here are some examples of ways to assess listening. There are more here than necessary for an assessment task and the list is not exhaustive. Their purpose is to show ways this task can be completed.

- What is one negative stereotype of teenagers and one stereotype of elderly people mentioned in the discussion? (2 marks)
 - Asks students to demonstrate literal comprehension and distinguish negative stereotypes from neutral ones.
- Identify one participant whose perspective changes. In your answer mention:

What is their initial viewpoint?
How does their viewpoint change?
What leads them to change their viewpoint? (3 marks)

 - Requires students to write a few sentences. Asks students to identify changed perspectives and the stimulus for that change including combining information from different moments in the text
- The teenagers in *Old People's Home for Teenagers* have different attitudes to ageing than those seen in the selected coming-of-age novel. Compare the attitudes of one teenager from each and the reasons for their attitude. (could be 4-6 marks)
 - Students need to identify factors leading to the teenagers having the attitude they do towards ageing and draw comparisons with their novel.
- Cecilia and Lily discuss the experience of migration to Australia and how it impacts their lives now. Provide a note-form summary of their discussion. (marks vary)
 - Students are asked to listen to both sides and to make notes of key points. They can use their summary to show points of similarity as well as the contrasting experiences of the two migrants. This gives students a chance to address historical and cultural factors. A subsequent question could ask students to find connection to the novel.

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- The experts watching the conversations share their opinion about why some of the elderly people and teenagers have trouble communicating with one another. List two of the reasons given. (2 marks)
 - Providing students with two clear dot points to write next to helps them organise their response.
 - A subsequent question could ask students to find connection with the novel and ways characters have trouble communicating intergenerationally.
- Write a paragraph discussing the ways the teenagers' lives are shown to be different to the elderly people's experiences. Include social or historical factors that make it challenging for the elderly people to understand the teenagers' lives. (marks vary)
 - This question invites an extended response. A subsequent question could then ask students to refer to the novel.

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Making magic with the fifth text in the new Units 3 and 4 Literature Study

Briony Schroor, Nossal High School, and Christine Lambrianidis, Westbourne Grammar School

In this article, two experienced and current VCE Literature teachers share how you can authentically embed the unassessed fifth text required when teaching Units 3 and 4 Literature.

It's an anomaly for the Literature ages: we assess four texts and an adaptation, but we teach five texts. That's right, it's four texts, plus an adaptation, assessed; five texts taught. Many of us have asked or answered this question at least once. Many of us have scrambled back to the text list counting how many we have on the booklist, hoping there's five, plus all the required forms as well as at least one Australian text. Many of us have wondered, simply, why? In a packed VCE Literature course, the ubiquitous fifth text can seem challenging to fit into a schedule and irritating in its irrelevance to the critical process of assessment, but this text offers opportunities to the Literature classroom that are pedagogically valuable.

Student choice

There are four SACs in the [new Literature Study Design](#), each requiring one text for assessment (and in the case of the Unit 3, Area of Study 1: Adaptations and transformation SAC, one text and one adaptation) which leaves very little room for student choice and agency – important factors in developing and enhancing student engagement.

Next year, we plan to teach the fifth text in the transition period from Semester 1 to Semester 2, then follow this study with the text we plan to use for the Unit 4, Area of Study 1: Creative responses to texts SAC. When the time comes for our students to respond creatively in Unit 4, we will offer them the choice of two texts to base their own writing on. Based on experience, while the majority of our students will elect to write in response to the text they have just studied, three or four of our students will prefer to return to the 'fifth text' as the inspiration for the Creative SAC. They will do so because they preferred the 'fifth text' or they found themselves curious about an aspect of this text that they want to explore further, or they are keen to experiment with this writing style or genre, or they feel more comfortable with the ideas raised in this text. The fifth text allows us the space in the curriculum to honour these student preferences without having to rearrange the whole course or rewrite SAC questions to suit individual requests. It enables students to make a meaningful choice about their assessment that suits their personal inclination, which is part of the Literature experience.

And because we do the Creative task as an oral presentation, in the form of an evocative reading of the students' original short stories, having 20-30% of the stories about the fifth text relieves the potential tedium of the experience for everyone.

Focusing on skills rather than assessment

As we come to know our students at the start of Year 12, their skills and skill gaps become increasingly apparent to us. Although we make every effort to address these skills deficits, the merry-go-round of high stakes assessment is often distracting to students as they become frantic about the specific requirements of each upcoming SAC and panicky about memorising quotations for assessment. The fifth text provides an important moment of pause in the schedule, allowing students to practise the particular skills they need to hone, without worrying about the demands of a SAC. When we're studying the fifth text, usually third (or fourth, including the adaptation) in the year, we have some students working on responses that are helping them to develop interpretation skills for Section A of the exam, and we have others who respond to passages to consolidate their close language analysis work for Section B of the exam. Momentarily freed from the tyranny of SAC preparation, the fifth text provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their skill sets and work more explicitly on areas of need in a low-stakes context. They often know that they're not going to write about the fifth text in the exam, they don't need it for a SAC, so rather than being swallowed up by a focus on acquiring comprehensive content knowledge, the fifth text is useful as a facilitator for improving writing.

Enhancing interpretations

Even though the dialogic is no longer prescribed in the new Study, we know, as literature teachers, that dialogism, the use of one text to enhance our understanding of another, is still a way of enhancing students' interpretations. There is a variety of texts on the current text list that can be used as an introduction or even supplementary reading for another text. For example, there is no doubt that an understanding of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* can enhance a student's understandings of Suzan Lori Park's *Father Comes Home from the Wars* Parts 1, 2 and 3. Baldwin's essay can be used to introduce students to a way of understanding how race is portrayed in the play. There is a fear that including one text from the list to a Unit for another text may end up with students writing on both in a comparative way on the exam, especially when considering Part A and its emphasis on developing a student's initial interpretation. Even though this is a risk, using the fifth text in a supplementary way to introduce students to the context of their main text, and/or as a supplementary reading gives the fifth text true purpose, and may even inspire some students to make it their main text, giving them real choice, which will only enhance their engagement with the greatest subject of all.

We conclude by challenging you, appealing to you to take a risk in your teaching. Don't take the easy road with the fifth text, which is, as we all know, teaching two poems during Orientation and never mentioning it again. Bring your teaching back to its core, back to its true purpose and back to the reason why you became a Literature teacher in the first place. We want students to experience the magic of literature so take that fifth text, stop the assessment for just a moment, and create some magic.

Dr Briony Schroor and Dr Christine Lambrianidis have taught VCE Literature for over ten years. Both are published authors, avid readers, theatre lovers, Idris Elba fans and have worked in a variety of ways with VATE and VCAA to professionally develop teachers in their implementation of the new VCE Literature Study Design.

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