



VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) submission to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) re: the proposed English Language study design.

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About the VATE submission

VATE sent its online survey to its VCE English Language Network (404 members) and asked a range of questions grouped under the following themes: The study of English; Areas of study; The exam. We received only 3 responses.

We reflected on the lower than expected number of responses and understand that it continues to be a challenging time in schools and that teachers are stretched. However, the responses that inform this submission were lengthy and fully engaged with the proposed study design and the questions posed.

We look forward to continuing to work with the VCAA to support the English teaching community across the state with the implementation of the finalised English Language study design.



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The study of English

We started the survey with a focus on subject English and the role of senior English in the 21st century and how it equips students to become responsible and responsive citizens in a democratic society.

The following specific comments were made:

- Being able to communicate clearly and understand the power of language is vital in the 21st century. We need to understand how our language works in order to be able to use it effectively.
- Critical thinking and reading, deconstruction of meaning in a wide range of texts.
- Reading for information/understanding
 - writing for information/understanding
 - critical thinking
 - reading critically/strategically
 - writing (persuasive, analytical, expository)
 - metalanguage
 - teamwork
 - respectful debate
 - speaking and listening skills.

Does the proposed Study Design equip students with these skills? Why/Why not?

- It provides opportunities to equip students with these skills, yes. Year 12 does not explicitly require speaking and listening skills, but we develop these through classroom practices.
- I think that the real world application of the study design does equip students with these skills. I would like to see the 'future' English remain in the study design as this helps students to be forward thinking.
- Yes, enables students to be introduced to a much broader range of texts than mainstream English and Literature.

Does the proposed Study Design offer equity for the diversity of our student cohorts? Why/Why not? Does it offer a balance of rigour and opportunities for success?

- Overall yes. At times there is limited scope to acknowledge the strength of students who are insightful about language but unable to express this in metalanguage – there should be a differentiation between low students showing no insights, and low students who are insightful in their understanding of the sociolinguistic ideas underpinning the study, but not skilled in the technicality of the subject.
- Yes. It is still a challenging subject but is manageable.
- I think it is quite rigorous and the specification of the linguistic theories enhances this. I think quite a lot of students will find it challenging.

How does the proposed Study Design build on the knowledge and skills developed through the 7-10 Victorian Curriculum/Australian Curriculum?

- I don't teach 7-10 so can't comment.
- It connects with the curriculum by asking students to write sustained pieces of prose as well as analyse texts. It also incorporates the spoken element which is represented in English.
- The use of multimodal text and metalanguage.



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Critical literacy encourages individuals to understand and question the attitudes, values, and beliefs in written texts, visual applications, and spoken words. In essence it ensures individuals become thoughtful, active citizens. How does the proposed study design provide opportunities for critical thinking in students?

- Attitudes and values are embedded in texts, and students need to be aware of these. They could be a little more clearly required, eg. in Unit 4 Identity. Also, we don't analyse visual applications much, except in discourse > coherence > formatting.
- While Unit 1 is fairly theoretical, Units 2-4 asks students to think about their experience of language in the world. It looks at why we need to be politically correct etc. This encourages critical thinking.
- Analysis of texts they encounter in their everyday lives, encouraging analysis of their own use of language, particularly in online contexts.



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The Areas of Study

Respondents seemed pleased with the overall changes to the proposed study design.

Characteristics of the study section

- Good idea.
- I really like that the theories are explicit. I found the previous study design frustrating as I didn't know what I didn't know.
- Seems okay.

A metalanguage list mapped to each Unit

- Excellent idea.
- I love this.
- Very useful.

Terms used with definitions

- Excellent idea
- I really like this as it encourages students to use the study design for revision.
- Very useful but perhaps limiting?

Key linguistic theory and theorists linked to Key Knowledge

- I'm a bit wary of this one – I really like the content focus, and am not interested in it becoming a historical study of dead white men, which I previously experienced in literature and philosophy. It needs to be contemporary, relevant to students' lives, and ideas/concepts focussed. Am open to being proven wrong.
- I love this. Thank you for adding it.
- Helpful to know which specific theories and theorists to focus on.

Unit 1: Area of Study 1 and Outcome 1

- I really love the explicit limiting of metalanguage to be studied here... it was too much. I do find this outcome the hardest to teach – the theories/big ideas are quite abstract, and the metalanguage is so technical. Would love some good supplementary resources/suggestions for this outcome.
- I would prefer to do all 5 subsystems at the start as I think that dividing them into different units makes it confusing for the students. We could introduce them all in Unit 1 AOS 1 and then expand upon them later.
- Not a fan of the Jakobson language functions... The term 'tenor' is also not necessary was covered by the old terms, will have to redo all the acronyms they have.

Unit 1: Area of Study 2 and Outcome 2

- Fabulous. Love the focus on phonetics and phonology here. I do find this a nice place to teach some discourse – eg. turn taking, scaffolded by parents. Intonation – learned before words are learned etc.
- This hasn't really changed. We already do an oral for this AOS.
- Glad to see the inclusion of fieldwork and consent!



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Unit 2: Area of Study 1 and Outcome 1

- Fantastic unit – glad there aren't too many changes. Love the mini-unit suggestions but am confused – do you pick a category (incursions) or a dot point (plague). This AOS is one of those areas that is HUGE, and the question of what to focus on is always pertinent – I've succeeded in transforming it from a historical study to a language change study but it took a few years to get right. Love the opportunity to go in depth in one of the areas.
- I love the mini-elective idea.
- The introduction of mini units for deeper investigation is very helpful, and it is useful to know which events are deemed most important.

Unit 2: Area of Study 2 and Outcome 2

- Relieved we can cut out the speculation of the future.
- I would like to retain 'future English' in this outcome as it encourages the students to think.
- Good to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait mentioned specifically.

Unit 3: Area of Study 1 and Outcome 1

- OK.
- I really like the differentiation between function and purposes.
- Good clarity of politeness theory and how it can be informal as well as formal.

Unit 3: Area of Study 2 and Outcome 2

- OK.
- I like the differentiation between function and purposes.
- As above.

Unit 4: Area of Study 1 and Outcome 1

- OK.
- I am grateful that we have an updated definition for Australian identity.
- Love the discussion of stereotypes and how they can be adopted both subconsciously and deliberately.

Unit 4: Area of Study 2 and Outcome 2

- OK.
- This is a wonderful outcome.
- The social disadvantage and discrimination stuff is good to see too.



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The exam

Please comment on whether or not retaining an external exam is the most effective and equitable way of measuring and standardising student achievement at the end of the VCE English Language course?

- What other options are there? The exam puts students under a lot of pressure, but also gives a meaningful goal.
- I think that it is the only fair way to assess students.
- Yes.

Do you have any proposals for how the external exam could be modified, improved or replaced?

- Perhaps it would be better to make it 40% of mark – 50% feels huge. I love the stimulus for the essay questions, and I think the AC task and SAQ test knowledge well. The recent move towards slightly shorter texts is good. Sometimes the texts seem incredibly dull – I really make an effort to pick vibrant engaging texts in my classes, and the exams are often a bit of a letdown. Sometimes they seem quite middle-aged too. Could you get some youth (eg. 19-21, recent VCE graduates) on your exam development panels?
- I like the breakdown of the paper. Students would benefit from more time though.
- Make the three sections equally weighted. Perhaps increase the time limit if needed.



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Additional comments

- I think the move towards an oral or multi-modal option is good. It will help shift some students who pick the subject only because it doesn't have an oral. I'd like to know more about the multi-modal options.
- I think that it is a huge improvement on the last one as it more overtly outlines the required theory.
- Overall, I'm excited to come back in 2024 to a new study design, it will refresh my teaching a lot.