



VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

## 2024 Year 12 English Language Exam Feedback VATE English Language Network

- **Q1** – The screenshot of the Study Design outlined the problem with this question and it has been recognised by VCAA as problematic. For many students, this question would have wasted a lot more time than they would have expected to use up on the first question, subsequently throwing them emotionally, and in terms of their time management, for the rest of the paper. This was a completely unfair beginning and nothing like any practice exams, including the sample paper published by VCAA mid-year.
- **Q2** – Again, this question would have taken far more time than should have been allocated as there is no metalanguage from the course in the main part of the question to guide a student in terms of what was expected for this question. It is all very well to think they have more to draw on but this creates problems when students are unsure what the question is looking for.
- **Q3** – The question word 'justify' was used when this has not been used in English Language exams before. It is a term that students are taught explicitly in other subjects and yet suddenly appears in a Language exam without any prior focus. Again, additional time may have been spent on students trying to connect this term to their English Language studies and distinguishing it from 'explain', 'comment on', or 'analyse' which have been used in the past.
- **Q5** – This question, for five marks at the end of a very challenging Section A in which time is now considerably running out, was just ridiculous. Connecting turn-taking strategies with group membership is not something, in my 20+ years' experience in teaching this subject, that I have ever heard discussed in any classroom across the State. The connection between floor and group identity is tenuous and a student is essentially joining dots that we would never expect them to join.
- **Section B text** – Including a multi-modal text is fine. They should have seen this before BUT there was a lot to read (the text was three pages), which would have placed even more undue stress on many students given the complexity and confusing nature of Section A. I just cannot understand what the exam setting panel was thinking and why they would make things so challenging in the first year of a new Study Design that in itself is full of confusion and contradiction. On top of that, photographs are line referenced when they are not part of the course – AGAIN, students may have been thrown and thought they could link them into analysis or were meant to include them in some way. Blank lines were referenced. This in no way followed the conventions of previous years. We were assured in the VCAA webinars at the beginning of the year that there would be no changes to the exam.
- **Section C Q9** – This question included the phrase 'the concept of social standing'. The idea of 'social standing' is not in the Study Design but the concept of 'social harmony' is a central concept that many students went to after a long and confusing paper. Students were expected to address the notions of register, politeness, frequency (often), hand-in-hand, and social standing, as well as address an instruction of 'to what extent is this true'. Surely, all essay questions should be approachable. This is beyond the scope of the Study Design with strange wording in an exam that does not permit a dictionary. Then, the first stimulus references AI/chatbots; I fail to see how this connects with the crux of the question. The second stimulus references a 2017 study about political correctness – a concept removed from the previous Study Design and made clear in the VCAA webinars was no longer an appropriate reference, and yet is used in the stimulus for Section C?!
- I would like to think I am a competent reader and yet it took me just under thirteen minutes to read the paper and insert. That is without reading the instructions for each section, glossing over the transcription key, no thinking time, and having read over 20 English Language papers plus practice papers over the years so with a fair idea of what I was expecting. This paper was ridiculously time-consuming and did not allow students to show their knowledge effectively. Many would have lost so much confidence after Q1 that it was all downhill from there in an extremely



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unfair paper. How is the exam-setting panel going to be made accountable? How did this get through?

- I fully appreciate the thoughtful work and dedication that goes into creating an exam. My intention here is to offer constructive feedback, not to place any blame:
  - Considering that these students were taught the previous Study Design last year and transitioned to the new design this year, an exam structure that reflects this adjustment would likely be beneficial. Beginning with a question that all students could approach confidently would set a more encouraging tone for the exam as a whole. Unfortunately, the initial question seemed to cause some confusion and may have affected students' confidence from the start. Many of my students felt bewildered and failed to fully recover.
  - While I anticipated the inclusion of new Study Design terminology, linking it with several complex factors that have historically challenged students may have been too demanding for this early stage.
  - The selected texts were engaging and well-chosen, though perhaps slightly lengthy.
  - Additionally, while hybrid tasks are valuable, they may have felt somewhat advanced for the first year under the new design.
  - English Language can sometimes feel daunting for students, almost as if there's a hidden aspect they need to decode. I consistently reassure my students that exam writers aim to challenge, not to mislead, yet some students seemed to leave this exam feeling slightly caught off-guard.
  - The essay questions, on the other hand, felt pretty appropriate – challenging yet fair.
  - Thank you for considering this feedback as we work towards supporting students' best performance under the new Study Design, obviously all of these reflections are assistive to us as educators and people engaged in the work of VCAA.
- I have copied below the reflections from me and the other English Language teacher at my school that I shared with the network the day after the exam. I received many supportive emails from network members following my email, so I think they may be a fair summary of how many felt.

*Thanks for sharing all of your responses. I was feeling pretty disappointed and worried when I left school yesterday, it is at least reassuring to see we are all feeling much the same about that exam. In the spirit of recording our reflections in the hope VCAA sees/actions our feedback, here are the concerns we had:*

- *The new SD was not a stepped implementation like most other subjects – we were assured the changes were not going to be too big, and the exam wasn't changing, so students would be fine – it seems pretty unkind to me to set such a difficult paper for a cohort who have only had one year of the new Study Design (and for teachers who have all been working their hardest to learn the differences and adapt).*
- *The length of the texts for both Section A and B is a real concern to me – they were each a full three pages. That is so much for students to read and interpret in such a short time, especially considering most students will complete Section B in about 45-50 mins – it feels really unfair that they had to break down and analyse such a long and complex mixed mode text. I remember how relieved we all were in 2020 when we had 2.5 pages of text total for both sections – it felt so accessible, compared to that the six pages this year feels like an insurmountable task.*
- *Many of the questions were worded in overly confusing and awkward ways – I echo previous statements that if my students wrote like that I would have asked them to clarify and say what they mean!*
- *There was too much reference and reliance to old material, both in the stimulus material, and in the essay topics that seemed to point towards concepts that we don't cover anymore. I*



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*agree that most students would likely have chosen Q7 – it would have seemed like a life raft for many in that exam.*

- *I am really concerned about how Q1 can be marked equitably. Many of my students came out and said they left it blank because there wasn't a vocal effect in the text. We revised that part of the Study Design last week to make sure we had the categories and features absolutely right!*
- *Overall, I was left feeling like this wasn't an accessible paper. The last few years we have been pleased to see exams that offered complexity for our top end and an accessible entry point for our low end. I don't feel that this year's paper served either – it was too complex for the strugglers, and it left the top end questioning their own knowledge and feeling like they weren't able to show what they have learned this year. I look forward to hearing further reflections, and to see how this is handled in the marking.*
- I think we are being very nice with our concerns here when really, we should be asking for a please explain from VCAA.
  - The SAQs were poorly worded, and a range of guesses seemed to be the best approach from many of our students.
  - The transcripts were overly long and the multimodal transcript for the AC spooked some students. Why do this when it is has not appeared on practice exams from NEAP, VATE or VCAA?
  - The stimulus for the expository essays did not support the prompts like they have traditionally.
  - When my best two students emerge from the exam in a state of heightened anxiety, I am wondering what impact it will have on their mental state for their other exams.
  - This is a wonderfully challenging subject supported by the most professional and caring cohort I've witnessed in my 40 years in the game. Let's be sure to challenge VCAA to provide an explanation for an exam that disappointed our very hard-working students. They deserved an exam that tested their aptitude for the subject.
- It's reassuring that VATE is prepared to raise teachers' concerns about the English Language paper with VCAA. I hope that those who set the exam are able to take the feedback on board at a professional, rather than a personal, level. Most of the points I would have liked to raise on the network were voiced by others, but I was concerned by the following issues:
  - A lack of clarity in **Q5** – how do students answer a question that they cannot decode.
  - An apparent contradiction between Stimulus B for Q9 and the new Study Design, which no longer includes 'politically correct language'. This seemed unnecessarily confusing.
  - The overly-long texts for Sections A and B. Asking students to read six pages of text (plus SAQs and essay questions) under exam conditions, then retain enough to write about it, was ridiculous.
  - Additionally, the text for Section B was visually confusing and poorly laid-out.
  - A total dissimilarity between the paper and VCAA's own practice exam.
  - Like many other teachers across the state, I attended the VCAA briefing about the new Study Design, listened carefully and took notes. I also spent a lot of time familiarising myself with it this year, especially while rewriting resources.
- I liked Section B. It was a text of dual modes, yet a consistent register. Usually, students get a consistent mode with a shifting register, so this year's text was just a challenge in a different respect. The nod to Indigenous culture was also lovely and demanded students show their knowledge of navigating taboos, showing respect, and creating inclusion – all worthy purposes in the text, and in their own lives. I have added this comment because I felt the reaction from the network was quite harsh, and unfair in relation to Section B. While many students would not have been prepared for this, many others would. And that is the nature of exams! Section B was also the only section of the exam that did not include previously unseen worded questions. It is for this



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reason that Section B was also the most accessible, as the wording of questions in Sections A and C was clumsy and unclear; the questions required even expert teachers to re-read them several times to understand what was being asked. Unfair to students in timed conditions.

- Some feedback on the English Language exam in 2024:

#### Pros

- Made efforts to incorporate concepts that were new in the new SD for 2024 into the exam, especially in the SAQs (particularly well done in SAQ 4)
- Rich AC text allowed students a range of language features to discuss
- Essay **Qs 7 and 8** were straightforward and allowed for a range of responses.

#### Cons

- **SAQ1** – not being aligned with the Study Design meant it was confusing, and also not much of a range to draw from in the text. Disheartening for students to start with.
- **SAQ3** – ‘justify’ command word for a 2-mark question that also requires an example, politeness, and tenor. Seems too much to do for only two marks.

#### Thoughts

- **SAQ5** – while turn taking strategies can display individual and group identities, other language that better conveys identities exists widely throughout the text. It seems strange to ask students to analyse identities but exclude much of the language that strongly conveys this. Many students would have made a commendable attempt at this question, but I fear that scoring full marks will be exceptionally rare/difficult, and wonder whether a slight expansion – such as including topic management – might result in some students being able to better display their ability to analyse a text for identity.
- Essays – **Qs 7 and 8** contain language taken directly from the Study Design and/or is easily understood, ‘changing’, ‘purposes’, etc. Q9 uses a concept with links to status and power – ‘social standing’ – requiring a higher level of comprehension to initially understand. I quite like this, but it requires confidence in students to pick in a prompt, and I simply think the vast majority of students will avoid and also struggle to score well in this question.
- AC – I like the text, I think it is rich in language. At the same time, the text being multimodal added a layer of complexity that was perhaps unnecessary given the AC question changed this year.

#### Overall

My overriding thought is that the exam is complex, difficult, time-consuming, and in some cases, lacking in understanding of how to allow students to express their knowledge of the course. The level of difficulty is not in itself a negative, but given that this is the first year of a new Study Design, having two texts of 70+ lines, with complex SAQs and a multimodal AC, means that many students will run out of time to display what they know, or will spend lots of time puzzling out answers to questions (like Q1) that were not well-conceived, or will finish rushed, without the time to consider a full analysis of language. This kind of approach lacks empathy for students and an understanding of the course as a whole. Students will be less likely to choose English Language if the exam is made too difficult for them to expect to succeed in. Last year, the score required for an A+ was 66% – can we consider setting students up for more success?

- My main concerns are the following:

#### Section A

- **Q1**: Vocal effects – not in the textbook and not a big focus of the course generally. This is not an accessible question as a 2-mark question. The answer ‘breathiness’ is something that is not widely taught or discussed.



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- **Q2:** The question is poorly written as it doesn't use the language of the Study Design 'establishes Alcott's contributions' is very vague and language not commonly used in EL
- **Q5:** Just strange. I thought that turn taking strategies was a poorly chosen aspect to examine identity. There are more salient features.
- Section A overall seemed like a very specific way of teaching short answer that is limited to one teacher or school setting.

#### **Section B**

- Although having a multi-modal text is legitimate, it is a far cry from the sample exam.

#### **Section C**

- **Q8** is just convoluted and poorly written. Too many things to unpack there in such a small amount of time.
- I think if you look closely you'll see that the Study Design says vocal effects including whispers and laughter – this does not mean that they are the only ones, rather that they are some examples of what vocal effects include. I think we have to be less literal and read outside the square – in any case in my view, 'including' means that there are others, not that these are exclusively the only vocal effects. So, it should get marked as any vocal effect that appears in the text, not just the two that you are quoting.
- I would like to contribute a few points for the review of the English language 2024 exam.

#### **Section A**

- **Q1** seemed a little bit unfair in that what it was asking wasn't clearly represented in the given transcript and didn't feel representative of the dot points in the Study Design metalanguage list. I think this could have been paralinguistic features to give it more breadth for responses.
- **Q5** felt like the concepts of turn taking and identity didn't align effectively. Again, I think this was narrow in nature and could have been more holistic of discourse and pragmatics to give students more breadth for a 5-mark question which is marked holistically in terms of quality of response.
- I really liked **Q3** and it felt very reflective of practice exams and consistent with content we had covered through the year.
- I also liked **Q4**, but we were given advice that when receiving questions about function that line numbers would be given, e.g. line function between lines 3-16. I think maybe this could have strengthened this question a bit, but I thought it was a fair 4-mark question and again very reflective of the Study Design.
- Overall, the wording of questions was at times confusing and they did take a couple of reads for even myself to understand their marking scheme and how much information was required.
- I do think 3 x 2-mark questions felt like there was less holistic marking, and then the 4-mark and 5-mark left a big jump from the 2 mark questions. I would have liked to see some 3-mark questions to allow students to reference more than 1 example and discuss it more effectively.

#### **Section B**

- I really liked Section B's text, and my students were really happy with it. I think the multimodal text allowed them to really showcase their learning of different modes and concepts from the study. It was also great to have an indigenous text reflective of Unit 4.

#### **Section C**

- Again, was very happy with the essay questions themselves, most students thought they were really achievable. I do think the stimuli material maybe needed more diversity. I think when there's a picture prompt and/or current trending meme content it allows lower level



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students to connect in with the stimuli a bit more as quotes can be overwhelming for some students to process so many cognitively under time pressure.

- Overall, I wasn't unhappy with the exam, I thought it was fair and if my kids are walking out feeling happy and a sense of accomplishment then that's what matters. I do think section A was probably the only part where even myself as a teacher had to reread questions a few times to figure out what they were asking and how much information was needed.
  - I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this and review this though and that our responses seem to be valued as this is the only way for continuous improvement as an education team so thank you for allowing us to contribute to your review process.
  - I realise it's not a huge curveball, but in a year where there were already so many new factors, I think it's pretty important to be as certain as possible to ease teacher and student concerns. I spent a long time working with students about the best ways to answer more complex questions and unpacking larger mark allocations and honestly, the SAQs were not clear, so many of my students reported feeling unsure and really struggled with them.
    - In **Q1** it asked for a vocal effect – the Study Design lists these as a sub-category under Paralinguistic features:
      - ⇒ vocal effects, including whispers, laughter
      - ⇒ non-verbal communication, including gestures, facial expressions, eye contact
      - ⇒ creakiness, breathiness

The way this is formatted, the only vocal effects that can be mentioned seem to be breathiness or laughter. Since there's no other consistent outlining of what else constitutes a vocal effect, how were students supposed to understand the difference between an audible intake of breath (line 39 of Text 1) or aspiration; breathiness (line 52) These are the only places these two effects occur in the text, and therefore if the audible intake of breath at line 39 doesn't count as a vocal effect for the purposes of this question, why is it indicated with a symbol in the transcript? And, if breathiness is considered a vocal effect, why is it listed separately to the first dot point?

  - **Q5** asks how turn taking strategies help to construct each speaker's individual identities and group membership, and yet Dylan Alcott is the only speaker who has any additional information provided about who he is – unless this question is only referring to Koslowski's identity as a radio host/interviewer (which does not necessarily include their personal identity – we don't even know if Sam is male or female, let alone anything else.)
  - Also – the multimodal text would have been far better as Text 1. Why throw more curve balls at a group already tackling new and often unclear metalanguage (tenor/social distance 'illuminating' crossovers, field/domain and purpose/intent lacking clear definitions), a new Study Design they didn't have last year and different structures to the essay questions and stimulus pages?
  - It feels unfair. They are very young and we have to remember this is their first time, even if it isn't ours. We all know that best practice involves helping students (read: children) to feel at ease and confident going into exams. That's how we get the best work out of them, and isn't that what we're supposed to be aiming for?
- To summarise my key points:
  - Section A **Q1** was unreasonable and damaging to students' confidence as none of the explicitly listed vocal effects from the Study Design were present in the text, forcing students to go beyond the listed features to make up an answer, despite previous examination reports clearly stating that students should focus on using appropriate metalanguage as it is listed in the Study Design.
  - Section A **Q5** attempts to relate turn taking and individual identity and group membership – this is quite a stretch and overly challenging for students.



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- The texts for Section A and B were (collectively) too long. There needs to be a cap on the length of the texts to ensure that students are not expected to read too much in the limited time given.
- The essay questions were poorly balanced. Almost all of my students (a trend I suspect will be followed across the state) chose **Q7** as it was clearly the easiest, despite the two clauses of the prompt feeling rather disjointed. None of my students chose **Q9** as it wanted far too much and likely threw students off by asking about 'the concept of social standing' when this isn't explicitly mentioned in the Study Design.
- Throughout the exam, many of the questions were awkwardly or confusingly worded, and lacked the accessibility and clarity found in previous exams (which were still perfectly able to distribute the marks – if anything, the English Language Exam was already too hard before this year, with an A+ sitting at a very low 67% or higher in 2023!).

- **Section A**

- **Q1** asks for a vocal effect, which according to the Study Design, includes whispers and laughter. There were no whispers and laughter. It is presumed that the question was seeking the 'breathiness' indicated on the transcript, but according to the Study Design, breathiness is a separate paralinguistic feature category, it is not a 'vocal effect'.

Even if this error is taken into consideration in the marking of the question, this does not offset the potential broader negative effects on exam performance. Imagine from the student's perspective, not being able to find a vocal effect in order to answer the very first question of the exam – potentially reading and rereading the 75-line text and using up precious time in the process, trying to find the answer that simply is not there. Having such a problematic first question can only have undermined the confidence and mindset of students as they then continued with the rest of the exam.

- **Q5** reads like the exam writing team could not agree on what they wanted to target, so compromised by including multiple ideas. Looking at the VCAA sample exam, and the previous five years of VCAA exams, the 5-mark question typically has a maximum of two elements to analyse e.g. politeness linked to two audiences (VCAA sample exam), register linked to two social purposes (2023), two features linked to negotiating social taboos (2021). Sample questions provided in textbooks (written by the Chief Assessor and other senior English Language teachers), similarly reflect this style.

The 2024 5-marker required analysis of individual identity linked to the two speakers, but then also linked to group membership in the wider community – essentially, double the task of a usual 5-marker.

Furthermore, the link between turn taking and 'group membership in the wider community is unclear and abstract.

- Again, even if this is taken into consideration with marking, we need to acknowledge the compounding negative impacts for students after just completing Section A of the exam: an answer that actually wasn't there for Q1, and a task that was overly complex for a 5-marker in Q5 – likely by this point many students are running behind time and feeling a state of understandable distress.

- **Section B**

- We are all keen to understand the rationale behind including a mixed-mode text, particularly given that the challenge and difficulty was already increased for this cohort with the significant changes to the Study Design.

There has not been a mixed mode text in the last eight years of exams. The trial exams available for purchase (e.g. via NEAP, VATE, etc) also did not include mixed mode texts. So even students who have diligently completed multiple past exams and purchased exams would have not been prepared for this task. Similarly, there was nothing mentioned in the new



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Study Design professional development sessions that indicated there would be such a change to the analytical commentary task.

It is also noteworthy that the 'examination specifications' provided by VCAA directs staff to the published sample examination to 'provide an indication of the format of the examination' and this too did not contain a mixed mode text.

Given all of the above, how can the choice to include a mixed mode text not seem like a deliberate attempt to trip up unsuspecting English Language teachers and students – teachers who had diligently engaged in all of the available professional development, purchased the textbook written by the Chief Assessor, studied the sample exam, etc, were still understandably left feeling like they failed to prepare students adequately for the analytical commentary task.

Lastly, it needs to be acknowledged that having a mixed mode text automatically increases the level of complexity of the task. It would be difficult for students to meaningfully analyse both sections of the text in the time available. Even if this is considered in the marking – imagine the compounding negative experience of students completing this exam, by the time they've completed the problematic Section A, and are now facing analysing a text type they have not seen before on a past exam.

- **Section C**

- **Stimulus**

It has always been communicated that the stimulus material is there as a tool to help and support students to complete their essays. For example:

'Section C will consist of essay questions **supported** by stimulus material' (VCE English Language 2024-2028 examination specifications)

'Stimulus material is designed to provoke thought and guide discussion for the essay topic ... the stimulus material provided is a valuable resource.' (*English Language Year 12*, Insight Publications, by Dennis, Gleeson, Francis & Stewart)

The stimulus in the 2024 exam did not seem to be selected with the above intent. The vast majority contained abstract or unclear links to the essay question, AND/OR elevated vocabulary that would not necessarily be accessible to all students AND/OR presented in a complicated way that required effort in order to interpret it.

It seemed as if 'interpreting the stimulus' was an additional level of complexity added to the 2024 expository essay task, rather than the previously communicated intent of it being there to support and aid students in completing the essay task.

It is acknowledged that some complexity or challenge is needed in **some** stimulus to help differentiate the 'top end', but the balance was not right. More stimulus than not contained this level of complexity, making it inaccessible to many.

Examples of this complexity/challenge:

- ⇒ Q7, Stimulus A – 'capital' in the context of 'identity capital'
- ⇒ Q7, Stimulus B – includes the word 'function' not with the same meaning from the Study Design, which then required an asterix disclaimer in order to clarify. Why include this when there are so many other quotes available – even with a disclaimer, it simply adds unnecessarily to the level of complexity and increases the chances of misinterpretation.
- ⇒ Q7, Stimulus D – quote based on 'bilingual school'. Unit 4 refers to the role of identity in 'shaping contemporary **English** in Australian society' – not use of other languages. This stimulus seems more aligned to the Unit 1/2 Study Design. Not a clear link to the essay question, so again, not a 'support' for students in forming their response.
- ⇒ Q8, Stimulus A – There is a level of complexity to interpreting this data, which is difficult under the timed conditions.



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- ⇒ Q8, Stimulus C – ‘matured’
- ⇒ Q9, Stimulus A – The link to essay question is not easily understood
- ⇒ Q9, Stimulus C – ‘infantilized’, ‘barbarized’, ‘inferior cultural tastes’

- **Questions**

- ⇒ Q8 asks students to consider how ‘our choice of variation ... may both support **and contradict** our purposes’. At best this seems like another example of an additional unnecessary layer of complexity and at worst, it contradicts the content of the Study Design. Nowhere in the 2024 English Language Study Design is there reference to contradicting purposes and intents. Indeed, key knowledge includes:

‘the use of informal language **for** various purposes and intents’

‘the use of formal language **for** various purposes and intents’

‘the role of language **in conveying** a perceived national identity’

‘the ways in which people draw on their linguistic repertoire **to gain** power and prestige’

‘...as a means of **demonstrating** group membership and belonging’

In essence, the Study Design specifies key knowledge related to how language supports various aims, but nowhere about contradicting them.

- ⇒ Q9 uses the expression ‘social standing’. Yes, top students will be able to link this to other wording they have seen in the Study Design and supporting textbooks (like ‘relationship hierarchies’) But arguably many students would not have come across this specific phrasing before. Why use a synonym rather than the language of the Study Design? Again, it seems to add an unnecessary level of complexity that makes the task inaccessible for many.

- **General feedback**

- The combined length of both texts made the exam difficult and not comparative to previous years. Indeed, it appears that there is a trending increase in the length of the texts students are expected to engage with, even though the exam length has remained the same.
  - ⇒ 2024 Exam – Sect A = 75 lines; Sect B = 73 lines = 148 (+ mixed mode)
  - ⇒ VCAA Sample – Sect A = 49 lines; Sect B = 73; TOTAL = 122
  - ⇒ 2022 Exam – Sect A = 70 lines; Sect B = 52 lines; TOTAL = 122
  - ⇒ 2020 Exam – Sect A = 35 lines; Sect B = 30 lines; TOTAL = 65
  - ⇒ 2018 Exam – Sect A = 31 lines; Sect B = 64 lines; TOTAL = 95
- It would be helpful to understand what efforts are made to consider the exam as a whole, after the contributors submit their respective sections. One of the main concerns with the 2024 exam is that each section was disproportionately challenging (when compared to VCAA sample exam and/or previous exams) and then when they are all added together, this challenge is greatly compounded. Are VCAA staff given the task of completing the exam, sight unseen, in 2 hours and 15 minutes? If not, how can we know that the task is fair and achievable and how can we ask students to complete it. We hope that our feedback is helpful in ensuring that future exams are a fair task, accessible to all who have diligently engaged with the key knowledge and skills from the Study Design.



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- I have been reading the comments about the English Language exam in the network forum with interest and some concern. I'd like to start by saying that I did feel the exam was a tough one for the students for a few reasons:
  - The volume of reading material was quite high. Both discourses were relatively lengthy, and the second one had the increased complexity of being multi-modal, including the images which were indicated in the body of the text with line numbers.
  - The quantity of 2-mark questions was interesting. I had prepared my students for any permutation of questions from two marks up to five – but felt that having 3 x two mark questions which were themselves quite challenging was an interesting choice.
  - The vocal effect question in **Q1** was probably a concern. Vocal effects are in the Study Design, and I believe my good students would have been able to tackle it – but I agree that perhaps the Study Design needs greater clarity here. I also felt that this as the first question would possibly have derailed many students – and for some, under heightened conditions, they may never have been able to get back on track.
  - The use of the term 'social standing' in **Q9** of the essay was interesting. This is not a term in the Study Design, and there was no 'footnote' definition as there has often been for like terms in the past.
- All of that being said, I would like to balance these concerns with the following:
  - There was not anything in the exam that was not reasonably within the scope of the Study Design. Any teacher and student who had carefully considered the changes and done due diligence should have been prepared for the exam with which they were confronted.
  - The layout, structure etc of the exam was well publicised via the sample exam published on the VCAA website, and was also replicated in the sample exams published by various commercial providers (VATE included). Students should have already been quite familiar with the layout, structure, and wording, within the 'standard' elements of the exam.
  - While the exam could be considered a tough one, I also think there was something in there for everyone to tackle and was not beyond the reach of low students, or too narrow for high-achieving students. The essay questions were broad and varied and offered something for everyone, and the stimulus were also broad and offered scope.
  - A tough exam will be tough for everyone – and this is why we have moderation, cross-marking and bell curves. I trust that our Chief Assessor and fellow assessors will fairly and conscientiously mark the exam, and that the 'toughness' will be accounted for.
  - The first exam of a new Study Design is always a bit of an unknown, and teachers should be aware that they need to prepare their students to tackle this unknown. Critical thinking and on-the-spot problem-solving is as much a part of external examinations as discipline-specific knowledge and skills. Even so – as before – moderation and bell curves help to make this all come out in the wash!
- I find the reaction and response within the network to be incommensurate with the concerns themselves. Exams are written by people, and for the first year of a Study Design, they are not being written by someone who has ever taught that design. It's a tricky gig to balance challenge and accessibility with fidelity to the intent of the Study Design and the expectations of teachers and students.
- Adding my comments to the exam feedback already given by others. I agree that overall I found the English Language exam overly difficult due to:
  - questionable metalanguage in **Q1** Section A
  - unprecedented question in turn taking strategies constructing identity in **Q5** Section A



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- long, complex multimodal text in Section B
- difficult wording in **Qs 8 and 9** in Section C
- stimulus throughout Section C that often lacked relevance.
- I'm definitely feeling for the exam-writing team that put much effort into the preparation of the paper and I'm sure had every intention of writing an accessible paper.
- Below is what my colleague and I have identified so far as concerns with this year's exam.

#### **General concerns**

- This was the first year of a new Study Design with some significant changes, which did not have a staggered two-year implementation process (the students sitting this exam had only 12 months of this new Study Design).
- This exam suggests that the VCAA objective is to *trick* rather than *test* students.
- The premise of a common assessment across the state as being something that all students could access was not evident in this exam.
- The concept of the exam being low-entry, high-ceiling was not reflected. An accessible paper allows all students to demonstrate their knowledge, at a low level or sophisticated one.
- An exam does not need to be exceptionally verbose, convoluted or challenging in order to discriminate between student ability, nor create an accurate bell curve.
- There is always student concern about the graded distribution for Section B and Section C, where students and teachers are confused by the lack of scripts in the 15 band. Exams as confusing, inconsistent and inaccurate as this one are off-putting to high-achieving students in Year 11 or those who would like to pick up the subject in Year 12.
- Six pages of text for students to process in reading time was not appropriate.
- The layout of essays across two pages is unhelpful.
- How did this exam pass through [this process?](#)

#### **Section A**

- Three pages of text
- The transcription key employed terms not in the Study Design
- **Q1:** the transcription key employed terms not in the Study Design
- **Q5:** turn taking being used to 'construct' is both complicated and confusing. This question asked too much of students to identify two turn taking strategies, two individual identities and two examples of group membership.
- The questions were convoluted and required a high level of unpacking in order for students to understand.

#### **Section B**

- Three pages of text
- The text was multi-modal
- The text included images with line numbers
- The text included blank lines with line numbers
- The transcription key did not include reference to the hyperlinked text in the written component of the text.
- Line 5 and 6 referred to 2 lines and 3-5 lines respectively



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- This section of the exam had changed significantly with the four guiding dot points, why would a more unfamiliar and lengthy text be employed for the analytical commentary?

### Section C

- The topics were convoluted
- The stimulus material did not relate well to the topics
- The stimulus material was outdated
- Some of the language used in the stimulus material referred to concepts no longer taught i.e., political correctness, or referred to a different concept from what is in the Study Design albeit identified with an asterisk (see next dot point)
- The need for an asterisked clarification of *function* in the Burrige quotation speaks to the confusing nature of the paper
- The topics were not comparable – it will be interesting to see the distribution of numbers of students selecting each one.
- Here are my concerns regarding the VCAA 2024 English Language exam:
  - There was no indication in any of the professional learning material or VCAA information – or student revision lectures/material – regarding just how different the exam would be in implementing the new Study Design. Because of this, teachers – both experienced and new – were not able to confidently anticipate and prepare their students for the 2024 exam.
  - Considering this is the first year of the Study Design, it is reasonable to expect that the questions on the VCAA sample exam, would have suggested the immense shift students had to deal with.
  - The length and complexity of the exam – the texts, the length of the questions and the stimulus material combined – are concerning; it was difficult to finish reading and understanding all of it in the reading time, and then have to deal with it during writing time. While dual modes are certainly allowed, the formatting, length of the text and the background information, compounded the distress many students experienced.
  - The complex wording of the SAQs is particularly concerning considering the requirements of each question. It wasn't necessary to overcomplicate and confuse the wording of SAQs in order to discriminate between top and lower-end responses; essentially it didn't allow for students to fairly and equitably show their year's learning. The concern remains as to how some questions will be fairly marked – especially as many students reported they simply didn't understand what was expected of them.
  - Most concerning is the effect this exam will have on the subject uptake overall. Many students who would normally have selected this as a subject, and perhaps as their only English subject, will not – and many teachers may advise it so, too. This may result in a sense of elitism within the VCE study for the only mandatory requirement of the VCE. The 2024 exam wasn't accessible to a wide range of student experience and demographic.
  - It is expected that any communication provided by the VCAA would be made publicly available and not only to those who participate in professional learning days; is it not possible that these sections of any future English Days be recorded and published. There has been some commentary about what might have been said, and when you are not present, or cannot be present, it raises doubts and questions as to who can access these essential communications.