



CS DESIGNING AN ASSESSMENT PROGRAM for the Stage 6 English Preliminary courses

This article contains a step-by-step process for designing an assessment program for the Preliminary courses, including guidelines for task design. Some of the steps will be illustrated with material from the English LIGs and a sample assessment program devised for purposes of illustration. English faculties can use these steps to design their Preliminary assessment program or, if that is already in place, to evaluate both the process and the content of their assessment program. The material published here can also assist schools as they prepare to design their HSC teaching and assessment programs.

The introduction of a standards-referenced approach to assessment and examination, and the centrality of teaching syllabus outcomes through content, require that the Preliminary assessment program be developed along with the teaching program.

The following steps are a way of developing a Preliminary assessment program.

Step 1: Map the Preliminary course outcomes

When preparing and evaluating the Preliminary teaching program, teachers should map all the Preliminary course outcomes against the different sections of the syllabus. In particular it is essential to ensure that all outcomes are taught. It is also important to identify:

- where certain outcomes are more effectively addressed through the content of either the Area of Study or one of the electives
- which outcomes are integral to all content.

In doing this it is also important to consider:

- the number of times an outcome is addressed; some outcomes might appear to be addressed only once, and

- how the design of the areas of study and electives will determine the number of times an outcome is addressed.

It is clear, for example, that outcomes 1, 2 and 6 of the Preliminary Standard and Advanced courses can be effectively addressed in the area of study. The mapping of the outcomes should look for other connections between outcomes and the area of study and the electives.

With this information in hand, programmers can then make choices about which outcomes will be most appropriately addressed in the content of particular parts of the course, and which can recur throughout the course. Preliminary Standard outcome 12, for example, "A student reflects on own processes of responding and composing", could be regularly addressed through learning journals that form part of all sections of the course.

If the mapping exercise shows that an outcome is addressed only once in the teaching program, it is essential to provide students with enough opportunity to work towards that outcome, and to gather enough evidence to be able to provide the students with feedback about achievement of that outcome.

Where an outcome is addressed several times, as is frequently the case with English, teachers have more opportunities to gather evidence and record students' achievement of the outcome, and to provide students with feedback about their progress towards achieving the outcomes. At the same time, care needs to be taken not to diffuse the energy of the program by explicitly addressing the same outcome too often or by including too many outcomes in any one part of the program.

Step 2: Brainstorm and research the appropriate range of tasks that could be used in English

By the end of Step 1, the English staff needs to have agreed which outcomes are being primarily addressed through the content in each part of the course. The next step is to decide what types of tasks work best in assessing these outcomes.

It would seem apparent that the best profile of a student would emerge from using multiple sources of assessment. If we rely on only one or two measurements from only one end or the other of the continuum (from formal to informal types of tasks), then it is likely that the result will be an



incomplete or biased profile. (J. Tognolini, *Assessment*, November 1999, a paper published on the professional development web site at <http://www.newhsc.schools.nsw.edu.au/>)

In the interests of developing a valid and reliable assessment program, students need to be given a range of appropriate types of assessment tasks. Only 30% of HSC assessment instruments can be examination-type tasks. It is therefore sensible to use a range of types of tasks in the Preliminary course now, both to trial possible instruments and to commit the English faculty to an assessment program that is fair to all students.

Some examples of non-examination type tasks for English include:

- research and investigations presented orally or in writing
- multimedia presentations, interviews, seminars, debates
- oral, audiovisual or dramatic presentations and analyses
- role-play
- group presentations
- portfolios and longer projects
- reflective learning journals.

Later in this article, examples of types of assessment tasks are provided for closer analysis.

Step 3: List the assessment components and weightings

Place the Board of Studies Assessment components, weightings and tasks for the Preliminary English

courses (see pages 113, 117, 121, 125 of the Stage 6 English syllabus) in an assessment grid. The sample grid below (Fig. 1), which is for a Preliminary Standard course, will be further developed through the following Steps 4-7.

Note also that the syllabus requires “a balance among:

- (i) the assessment of knowledge and understanding outcomes, and skills outcomes
- (ii) syllabus components and language modes
- (iii) types of assessment tasks.” (Stage 6 English syllabus, pp. 113, 117, 121, 125).

The weightings in the grid (45% for the area of study and 55% for the electives) vary slightly from the suggested syllabus weightings of 40% for the area of study and 60% for the electives. Such variation is possible in the Preliminary course because the weightings are “suggested”, not mandatory as they are in the HSC. In this particular case, the weightings were adjusted because there are only two electives in this teaching program, whereas in the HSC students will be doing three modules. Therefore, this English faculty decided that more time will be spent on the area of study than will be the case in the HSC and so allowed slightly greater weighting for assessment of the area of study.

Step 4: Group outcomes for assessment

There are between 13 and 14 outcomes listed for each of the three main Preliminary English courses and there should be no more than six assessment tasks set for each course. Therefore, it follows that each assessment task must assess more than one of the outcomes, and some tasks will assess more than one mode. Therefore, the next step is to

Component	Weighting	Outcomes	Modes and marks	Tasks
Area of study	45 marks			
Elective A	30 marks			
Elective B	25 marks			
	100 marks			

Fig. 1: Sample grid for a Preliminary Standard course



decide which outcomes and modes can be grouped together.

Identify the outcomes in your teaching program that can be assessed using a similar assessment task. Outcomes 5, 7 and 9 of the Standard and Advanced courses, or outcomes 5, 8 and 10 of the ESL course might be assessed in group activity tasks. In contrast, outcomes 6 and 11 of the Standard and Advanced courses or outcomes 9 and 12 of the ESL course might be better assessed in an individual task of some kind.

Because each group of outcomes will be assessed in the one task, check that the number of outcome groupings and, therefore, the number of tasks, is manageable. The syllabus indicates that five to six tasks are considered sufficient to assess the components of the course (Syllabus pp. 114, 118 and 122).

Check that all outcomes are included.

The grid (Fig. 2) demonstrates one way of grouping the outcomes.

Step 5: Decide on the types of tasks to be used

This is a follow-up to Step 2, in which the types of tasks most suitable for English were identified. Now, when choosing the types of tasks for this program, ask the following questions:

- What type of task will best assess students' achievement of these outcomes?
- What modes are being assessed?

- Does the range of tasks chosen allow students to demonstrate achievement of outcomes in a variety of ways?

- Do the types of tasks fit the overall teaching program? The closer the assessment tasks are in content and design to the teaching program, the clearer students will be about what is being assessed and what they are required to do, and the better chance they will have to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes being assessed.

Step 6: Design the assessment tasks

Having chosen the types of tasks, the next step is actually to design the tasks and attend to the details of content and presentation. When designing the assessment tasks check that:

- the task is assessing what the assessment program requires it to assess
- the instructions are clear, explicit and unambiguous. The clearer the purpose is throughout the process, the better chance students have of showing what they know and can do. Unless the purpose of the task is to assess students' ability to decipher instructions, the task should be simply and clearly expressed and free from difficult or ambiguous words and culturally embedded meanings. Wherever possible, students should have the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about what is required
- the task gives all students the opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of the outcomes being

Component	Weighting	Outcomes	Modes and weightings	Tasks
Area of study	45 marks	1, 2, 4, 5, 6		
		4, 7, 9, 12, 13		
Elective A	30 marks	1, 2, 4		
		3, 8, 11		
Elective B	25 marks	1, 3, 4, 7, 10		
TOTAL	100 marks			

Fig. 2: Grouping the outcomes



assessed. The task should have a clear and strong focus on these outcomes

- the task challenges students and allows for a range of demonstrated achievement
- the task is fair. The issue of fairness covers many aspects. It should be a task that students can undertake in the time allowed. All students should have had sufficient access to learning to be able to be assessed within the cohort, whether it is the class or the course group. The task should be stated clearly and the students should be able to respond in supportive and equitable circumstances
- the task is explicit about what is being assessed
- the task validly measures what it is intended to measure and the inferences drawn from the students' responses are logical and reasonable and relate to the marking guidelines
- the marking guidelines reflect the outcomes being assessed and students' demonstrated achievement of what is being assessed.

In the sample assessment program, the instruction for designing the area of study speaking task (Task 2) (see below) includes the description:

Speaking task involving group research and presentation of a close study of particular types of text, negotiated with the group and teacher. This should include a component of reflection on processes of responding to the text, composing the presentation and processes involved in the selection of and learning about the text.

This description makes explicit the connection between the design of the assessment task and the outcomes to be assessed. It would be a valuable exercise for an English faculty to design and discuss a task that fitted this description.

The following assessment tasks were included in a sample Preliminary Standard elective in the second LIG. Teachers might like to evaluate and perhaps revise these tasks in light of the above points, and also to determine to what extent the tasks assess the three nominated outcomes.

The elective focused on the opening episode of the television series, *Sea Change*. It addressed outcomes 3, 4 and 11.

ASSESSMENT TASK 1

“Design a ten-second montage of your school that would create the image of an ideal school. Include in the design the images you would use, the order in which you would place the images, and the music and sound effects you would use with the images. Then follow the same process to design a ten-second montage that would create the image of a far-from-ideal school.”

ASSESSMENT TASK 2

“In groups, analyse the representation of one of the following aspects of life in *Sea Change* and present your findings (in an oral or written mode as outlined by your teacher). The aspects of life to be chosen from are:

- Dwelling and travelling: homes and transport in the city and country
- Eating: eating habits in the city and country; eating as a means of social and personal communication
- Talking and listening: oral communication in city and country.”

Step 7: Allocate the weighting for each task

Ensure that you follow the Board of Studies weightings on the modes and the requirement that no more than 30% of tasks are examination-type tasks.

It is also a requirement of HSC assessment that individual tasks should not be worth less than 10% nor more than 30% of the total assessment.

In our sample assessment program, the weightings allocated to the tasks take into account the total weightings recommended by the syllabus for each mode. The weightings also ensure that each task fits into the 10%-30% range.

So, by the end of Step 7, the grid is complete and the tasks have been designed.



Component	Weighting	Outcomes	Modes and weightings	Tasks
Area of study	45 marks	1, 2, 4, 5, 6	Viewing/representing and listening (30)	1. Viewing/representing and listening task (30 marks)
		4, 7, 9, 12, 13	Speaking (15)	2. Speaking task (15 marks)
Elective A	30 marks	1, 2, 4	Reading (15)	3. Reading task (15 marks)
		3, 8, 11	Writing (15)	4. Writing task (15 marks)
Elective B	25 marks	1, 3, 4, 7, 10	Reading and writing (25)	5. Reading and writing task (25 marks)
TOTAL	100 marks			

Mode	Component	Weighting
Listening	Area of study: 15	15
Speaking	Area of study: 15	15
Reading	Elective A: 15 Elective B: 10	25
Writing	Elective A: 15 Elective B: 15	30
Viewing / representing	Area of study: 15	15

Fig. 3: Completed grid

Step 8: Decide on the timing of each task

When drawing up the timetable for assessment bear in mind:

- the school calendar of events, including the timing of assessment tasks in all subjects
- the scope and sequence of the teaching program in each of the English classes
- the amount of time needed to ensure that all students have sufficient and equal opportunity to address the outcomes.

More information on task design can be found

- in the publication of the Office of the Board of Studies, *The New Higher School Certificate: Assessment Support Document*,
- at www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au
- and in the new HSC cross-sectoral bulletin, *Internal Assessment in the New Higher School Certificate*.