

National Newsletter: English

Information and resources for middle leaders in secondary schools | Term 4 2015

Kia ora tātou

This term's newsletter has a focus on assessment that we hope will be of use as you think about the needs of current students and as you begin your planning for 2016.

Valid assessment- equality vs equity

"...the design of each school's curriculum should allow teachers the scope to make interpretations in response to the particular needs, interests, and talents of individuals and groups of students in their classes." (NZC page 37.)

One of the great benefits of NCEA is its flexibility. There is flexibility in the standards that may be offered within a course, or to individual students; in the contexts for the assessment; the mode of assessment, and then all of those things will look different within or across schools. What that means in practice is that, for most schools, Term 4 is a very short, but frenetic term with senior classes. Some students need to complete internal assessments while others are ready to focus all their attention on external examinations. Some students are aware that they don't have enough credits in English or have matured in their learning and are looking for further assessment opportunities, while in other schools this is a school-wide expectation in the form of 'summer school' for students below a certain threshold of credits.

In the document [Effective Practice in Schools](#) NZQA talk about students having fair and equitable access to appropriate assessment when:

"Your teachers differentiate assessment activities to provide equitable access for students who use special assessment conditions, have English as a second language, have low literacy and/or numeracy, are gifted and talented or accelerated, need supported learning, or arrive or leave during the year."

What does that mean in an English class? Processes that departments have put in place in order to ensure fairness can actually create inequality. For example, setting a five period time limit for completing formal writing may seem fair in that everyone has the same amount of time but it is not equitable because not all students are the same and therefore they will have different needs in terms of time.

One of the biggest fears that teachers express is that the freeing up of criteria will lead to students abusing the system and plagiarising work. Students are less likely to do this if they taught what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Also, when teachers genuinely know their students as learners then the final piece(s) of work submitted for assessment should not come out of the blue.

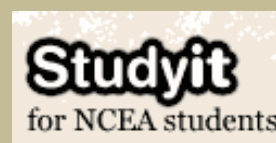
When teachers and students are developing their own 'tasks', then the assessment schedules would be specific to that work. In that way there shouldn't really be a need to 'benchmark' the work against anyone else's work but rather against the requirements of the standard and the relevant level of the curriculum. This could mean that not all of the students would need to work on the same assessment at the same time or for the same length of time.

Useful assessment links

Support for 2.7

Nigel has developed and shared on You Tube a resource to support the teaching of AS91104 (2.7), although, the clip actually gives a clear overview of the standard at all 3 levels:

[Assessing Connections](#)



Students can find what they need to know to succeed in all English achievement standards, or get general study tips, without having to join the Studyit site by searching the 'find what you need to know' section on the homepage. They can also register, which allows them to submit essays and questions anonymously that will be answered by teachers. They can also search previously submitted essays and get encouragement from other students using the site.



The information on this website helps school leaders and teachers in gathering, analysing, interpreting, and using information about students' progress and achievement. The emphasis is on the formative use of assessment to improve students' learning and teachers' teaching as both respond to the information it provides.

<http://assessment.tki.org.nz/>

Unpacking an externally assessed standard

Some candidates are still relying on regurgitating previously written and rote-learned essays. Although it is good practice to use previous examination questions to prepare for the examination, candidates must be aware that the questions change every year. It is therefore essential that students are able to answer the question as it is asked in the examination, which often requires them to adapt to small changes in styles of questioning across all three papers. This explicit linking often saw candidates move to the higher grades. Rote learned essays that make no attempt to answer the question do not meet the standard required to achieve. (2014 assessment report, English level 1)

Despite the framing of questions in a way designed to produce original responses, there are still a number of candidates entering the examination with a pre-prepared response that sets the candidate up to not achieve. Candidates who are able to discuss purposes and audiences, ideas, structure and language features will be well-prepared. Candidates should also keep the writer's purpose at the forefront of their minds. Finally, analysis is the key at Level 2: descriptions are not sufficient to achieve. Candidates should think carefully about what it is they are being asked to analyse. (2014 assessment report, English level 2)

Several of the external standards have overall pass rates over 80%, however, as the above excerpts from the assessment reports show there is some specific exam readiness required in order to ensure that all candidates have the greatest chance of success.

Resources to look at when planning a unit of work around an externally assessed achievement standard

The standard itself is always the first place to start because, in the end, this is what students are assessed against. For example, Explanatory note 2 for AS 91472 (3.1) states: "*Respond critically* involves developing the focus and scope of an argument when discussing specified aspect(s) of the text(s), and integrating a range of relevant points. The argument is communicated clearly and coherently, in a structured written answer that follows the conventions of an essay format." Therefore, even the best argument ever, if it does not follow the conventions of an essay format, cannot achieve.

[The assessment specifications](#) are published early in the year and summarise the key elements (the format, resources etc) of each standard. There are usually no surprises in English, but it is important to check these every year.

[Assessment reports](#) are published towards the middle of the next year and are a summary of what the markers saw, across all of the scripts. They are a very useful summary of what did and didn't go well and common issues that the examiners saw. They also often mention texts that were successful or unsuccessful that year, with those particular questions. It can be a useful exercise to unpack the bullet points for each achievement criteria with students as they provide a good general checklist of do's and don'ts.

Students need specific exam literacy so looking at [previous exam papers](#), [exemplar scripts](#) and [assessment schedules](#) is useful as they show the sorts of questions that are asked and the way they are worded and the criteria for Achieved, Merit and Excellence. Level 1 students need to know, for example, that they must cover both parts of the question, *describe* and *explain*, for AS90849 or AS90850.

The exemplar scripts are both graded and annotated. They can be used with students to help them to see what other real students produce under exam conditions and what the marker has seen in the answer. It should be noted that due to copyright restrictions the previous exam papers for the unfamiliar text papers are published without the extracts. One way around this is to ask the exam supervisors to collect up any resource booklets the students leave behind at the end of the exam. The other way is to access the documents using your school's NZQA log-in.

Other useful links

Video resources

In 2014 Trish Holden and Cynthia Orr produced two short videos to support teachers. To access the videos go to:

[Information literacy standard](#)

[Purpose and Audience](#)



English Online

<http://englishonline.tki.org.nz/>

Literacy Online

[Secondary Literacy](#)

ESOL Online

<http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/>

Pasifika Online

<http://pasifika.tki.org.nz/>

This site is a gateway to the latest educational information, resources and research on what works for Pasifika students to inform teaching practice.

Inclusive education

<http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/>

This site provides New Zealand educators with practical strategies, suggestions and resources to support learners with diverse needs.

Te Mangōroa

<http://temangoroa.tki.org.nz/>

A resource for English-medium schools, it is a portal to stories, reports, statistics, and reviews from across TKI and other sites that reflect effective practices to support Māori learners to achieve education success as Māori.

Unpacking an internally assessed standard

There are tensions between learning and assessment. The [recent ERO national report on student well-being](#) emphasised that schools need to find ways to manage assessment loads for students. So, term 4 is a good time to check that everyone in the department has the same understanding of the standards that will be assessed next year. As next year's courses are planned and before starting the teaching and learning, from which assessment against one or more NCEA Standards will occur, it is important to un-pack the standard(s) by looking at all of the associated documentation. This will also be beneficial when it comes to internal moderation of completed work.

The [English senior secondary teaching and learning guide](#) is good place to start when designing quality teaching and learning programmes.

An assessor must distinguish between what is to be covered in the learning programme and what is to be assessed by the standard. The emphasis in a standard is on what is required to make a valid assessment judgement, rather than what is required to be learned, or how work must be done in detail. (Assessment of Standards, NZQA.)

There are a number of resources to look at when planning a unit of work around an internally assessed achievement standard. **The standard** read alongside the appropriate strand of **The Curriculum** provides the definitive statement of the requirements of the assessment through *the title, achievement criteria and explanatory notes*. Alongside this sit the **conditions of assessment**, that outline the conditions required in the assessing of all work against a particular standard to ensure fairness for all students. When we talk to colleagues from other schools we may find that they have different parameters set around, for example, when and where students can complete work for assessment or how much time is allocated. This is because each school has its own assessment policies. In the end, each teacher must be absolutely confident that the work submitted for assessment is the student's own but how they achieve this is up to them.

Standards specify what a candidate for assessment needs to know, do, and understand. Whether it is by task or evidence, assessment can use a variety of methods and approaches (appropriate to the learner and the context) that give the learner the opportunity to show evidence of achievement/competence. (Assessment of Standards, NZQA.)

The Moderators have also provided **further clarifications** for each of the standards, which elaborate on aspects of the standard that have emerged as issues. These clarifications should be considered both when developing the unit and when it comes to assessing the student work.

There are **exemplar TKI tasks**, which at NCEA levels 1 and 2 also include [vocational pathways tasks](#). These tasks show possible approaches to assessment for each standard and provide excellent guidance as to the sort of tasks that allow students to access the range of grades from Achieved to Excellence through one single assessment, but their use is not mandatory. If you are using them then you should adapt them to your own students.

However, if you want to get adventurous and develop your own assessment tasks the (B) tasks are more generic and provide a clear framework through which to structure your task or task(s). If you want to completely go it alone, on the next page is a useful structure that you may wish to follow:

What's new?



There are new student exemplars available for the level 2 standards.

To keep up to date with any changes and development you can follow English NZQA on Facebook.



There are new tasks available focusing on sporting contexts for a number of the level 1 and 2 standards. They can be found at [Resources for Internally Assessed Achievement Standards in English](#) on TKI. They are (C) tasks for 1.5, 1.6 and 1.11. At Level 2 it is the (D) task for 2.4 and a (C) task for 2.8 and 2.10.



2016 conference: re:generation

2016's conference will be hosted in Christchurch/Otautahi and take place Wednesday 13th to Friday 15th July.

Big Days Out

A number of regional subject associations are offering a BIG day of professional development in term 4. The following are confirmed:

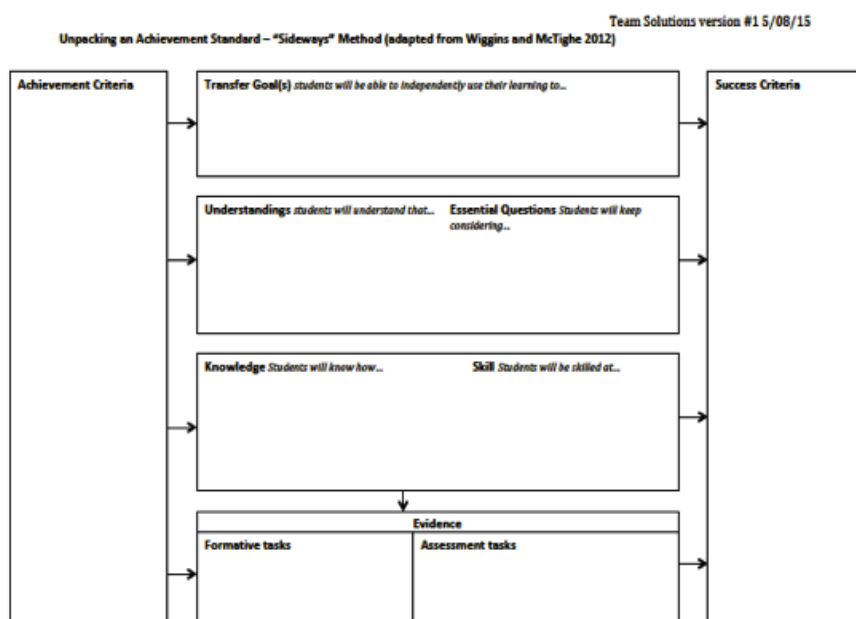
SAATE – 11 November at Ormiston College

AATEL – 13 November at Auckland Girls'

OATE – 27 November at John McGlashan College

Contact your local association for further details or find out if one will be held in your area.

You can access information about NZATE at their website: <http://nzate.co.nz/> or on Facebook



[Downloaded copies of this template are available on Google Drive at:
[Term 4 2015 newsletter](#)]

The Essential Questions, in particular, can provide a useful checklist for students as they are preparing their work for assessment. They can also help teachers when they are developing an **assessment schedule** specific to the task.

All tasks should be **internally moderated** to ensure that students have the opportunity to achieve that range of available grades and that the task follows the conditions of assessment for that standard.

Once the students have produced work to be assessed then all of the previously mentioned resources can assist teachers to make their judgment. However, NZQA also provide **exemplars of student work**. These annotated exemplars are an extract of student evidence, with a commentary, to explain key aspects of the standard. They are intended to assist teachers to make assessment judgments at the grade boundaries.

When you are struggling with work at a grade boundary it is worth asking the question, 'What more could a student reasonably be expected to do?' If you cannot provide an answer then perhaps you should award the higher grade.

Teachers need to **moderate** grade decisions before reporting results. This should not mean that all work needs to be looked at again but rather that the grade judgments on a sufficient sample of student work are verified so that the school is confident that teacher judgments reflect the achievement criteria and are, therefore, nationally consistent for all grades. The more confident that everyone, teachers and students, are with the requirements of a standard and the assessment task before the teaching and learning sequence occurs, the less likelihood there should be for surprises when it comes to marking.

It is very useful to keep your own set of annotated exemplars for each standard that can be used (with the permission of the original students) as exemplars for the next group of students tackling that standard and as benchmark samples for the department.

Downloadable A3 sheets that contain the relevant strand of the curriculum, the achievement standard, conditions of assessment and clarifications can be accessed at: [Term 4 2015 newsletter](#)

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All schools should receive both a digital and hard copy of this newsletter. Newsletters can also be accessed through the [Secondary middle leaders](#) portal on TKI

If you are receiving this newsletter in error please let us know. If you are aware of anyone whom you think would benefit from receiving it (particularly any new heads of department in your area) we would appreciate hearing from you.

Suggestions for improvements and possible content for future newsletters are welcome.