

Philosophy

2015 Chief Assessor’s Report

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## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Argument Analysis

For argument analysis, understanding and using appropriate terms is helpful, such as: argument form, inductive and deductive arguments, premises, opinionative, analytical, empirical, metaphysical, (in)valid, (un)sound, and cogent. Some logical fallacies may also be included where appropriate. Assessment tasks should clearly indicate the terminology to be used by students.

To give students an opportunity to achieve highly against the specific feature RA2 of the reasoning and argument performance standard, one assessment task should encourage students to put arguments into ‘standard form’. Premises need not be direct quotations; and abbreviated summaries are acceptable.

For the specific features RA1 and RA3, at least one task should require students to analyse the argument of a philosopher for a particular position on a philosophical issue and then present their own argument for their position on the issue. They should analyse both arguments using appropriate terms, such as those listed above.

If these suggestions are carried out, students are more easily able to demonstrate their achievement against the critical analysis performance standard (specific feature CA1).

Given the above concerns, moderators were pleased with the range of tasks which allowed for students’ interests, abilities, and choices of presentation.

Assessment Type 2: Issues Analysis

As in previous years, a major concern for moderators was the setting of tasks which do not allow students to present evidence for the specific feature RA3. Such incomplete tasks simply ask students to analyse the positions of one or two philosophers without requiring them to formulate and defend their own position. While it is possible to meet the requirements of the subject outline with just one of the three tasks in this assessment type complying, students may not be given enough opportunity to practise and develop skills for this specific feature.

Another concern was the type of task which required students to give answers to a series of questions about a text. Such a task does not allow students to develop an appropriate essay style or challenge them to explore the performance standards for themselves. The task may be suitable as a formative task where scaffolding is provided.

Specific features KU1, KU2, and RA1 were generally well achieved because topics were within the scope of the subject outline, where each of the key areas have guiding questions for consideration.

For assessment types 1 and 2, the specific features C1 and C2 were generally well met.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Issues Study

Most students are now fulfilling the requirements of this assessment type, but there are still a small number who make the same mistakes that have been pointed out in previous reports.

Of particular concern is the choice of topic as framed in the student’s question. Students must choose a topic from one of the three key areas prescribed in the subject outline. These three areas provide plenty of opportunities for students to develop and pursue their own interests.

With some topics in the key area of ethics, there is the danger of the study becoming a social studies essay if positions are not discussed from a philosophical point of view. For example, on the question of abortion, it is not sufficient to consider pro‑choice and pro-life as philosophical positions without discussing the philosophical basis for these positions.

Some students did not provide evidence against specific feature RA3 because they analysed the positions of a number of philosophers without formulating and defending their own position. Such an approach is simply a catalogue of positions.

Personal or historical details of philosophers are generally superfluous.

Again, keeping to the word limit is still a problem for a few students. The limit of 2000 words maximum must be followed.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

When sending in moderation materials, students’ work should be clearly identified, but photographs of students should not be added, as they may be a distractor.

Each example of students’ work should have the assessment task attached for ease of moderation.

It has been clearly stated that manila folders are not to be used.

## General Comments

It should be pointed out that, in spite of the concerns mentioned above, the majority of students performed well. Of the entire group, 82% achieved results in the A and B bands.

If teachers are in any doubt regarding the subject outline, help is available on the SACE website.

Chief Assessor

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