

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT SPECIFICATIONS REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES

Purpose

This document informs the preparation and development of External Assessment Specifications to ensure a consistent approach in the structure and design of Written Exams for TASC accredited Level 3 and Level 4 courses.

External Assessment Specifications (EAS) describe the requirements that must be met by setters and critics when preparing external assessments.

The audience for this document are those involved in the development of External Assessments, such as the Setting Examiner and Critics, providers of externally assessed courses, and students.

This document currently only relates to Written Exams. A review of the requirements and guidelines for Folios, Practicals Work, Performances and Oral Exams is planned.

Written Exams

The Structure of the Paper

Written Exams are structured using sections, parts and questions.

Sections

Sections are the primary breakdown of the Written Exam. They are used to group questions that assess specific criteria/ion or address specific course content or a combination of both.

- There will be a maximum of five sections.
- Sections will be identified by sequential capital letters.
- Each section should have a short title
- Each section of the Exam will be printed separately using either:
 - an Exam Paper presenting the questions to be responded to and a General Answer Booklet or Course Specific Answer Booklet for the students' responses, or
 - a Question and Response Booklet which includes both the questions and designated spaces for responses.

Parts

The division of a section into parts is optional and will only be required:

- to group questions that require a response to a single stimulus material
- when students are required to choose one or more questions from a group of questions
- to group questions that assess specific criteria/ion or course content

Parts will be identified with sequential Arabic numbers.

Questions

Questions form the basic assessable elements of the Exam Paper and describe something that the student is asked to do. They may be in the form of a question, such as ‘What is the definition of osmosis?’ or an instruction, such as, “Define osmosis.”

- Questions are identified using sequential Arabic numbers.
- Questions may be broken into items and sub-items, which will be identified firstly using lower case letters and subsequently with roman numerals. For example, Question 9(a)ii.
- If a question is compulsory, then all items and sub-items of that question will be compulsory.
- Where optionality exists, all items and sub-items of that question will then be compulsory.

Length of the Exam

The External Assessment Specification (EAS) will indicate the length of time for the Written Exam.

All Exams will have an additional 15-minute preparation time during which students can take notes on the note paper provided and highlight any key words in the exam booklet during the allocated time.

The EAS will include the recommended allocated time for each Section. It may also include a recommended time for Parts and Questions.

If specific sections of the exam paper are to be collected during the Exam period, this will be explained in the EAS and the Exam instructions.

Permitted Materials

Each EAS will specify what materials can be accessed by students during the Exam, and identify;

- those materials that the student is allowed to bring to the Exam
- those materials that will be provided to the students at the Exam Centre.
- if materials are only permitted for part of the Exam, such as the calculator-free section of mathematics exams.

If students are permitted to bring calculators to the Written Exam then the capacity of the instrument, or a list of acceptable models, will be provided.

If Information Sheets are provided to students as part of the Written Exam they will be clearly indicated in the EAS and published on the TASC website before the commencement Term 2.

The presentation and level of detail included in such Information Sheets should not:

- provide explicit information that a Setting Examiner could reasonably expect to assess a student's knowledge of or familiarity with during the Written Exam.
- be of a length or complexity of arrangement that it takes students an unreasonable length of time to locate relevant information in it.

Choice of Questions

The EAS will specify whether questions in each Section and Part are optional or compulsory. However, the starting point for all Written Exams is that all questions are compulsory.

Where students are offered a choice of questions, this should be justified by the specialisation and detail required in the response.

If a choice of questions is offered:

- the alternatives should not provide students with substantially the same questions
- alternative questions will be of a similar level of complexity and require the same resources, such as dictionaries, calculators, information sheets
- the extent of choice in the paper should be limited so that the student can read all the relevant stimulus material needed to make all decisions during the allocated preparation time.

Where a Course Document indicates that providers can select elective course content which is externally assessable, students will be offered a choice of discrete questions so that they can respond to the elective material that they studied.

Stimulus Material

Stimulus material is used to provide students with specific information which reflects content studied in the course to support their response to a question or a group of questions.

- The EAS will set limits on the type and format of stimulus material. This could include a description of possible stimulus material for each Exam, such as a scenario or story, case study, statistical data, or financial records and an indication of length.
- The stimulus material will be directly relevant to the questions or tasks that it applies to and is an appropriate topic and level of sophistication for a student audience. For example, in 2020, it was recommended that Exams should avoid questions related to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The stimulus material will enhance the student's understanding of the question and not be included as decoration.
- Questions and stimulus material should value diversity and avoid depicting only traditional stereotypes.
- Exam items are written in language that does not exclude certain groups of students and the terms used have no inherent bias.

Stimulus material should be selected to be sufficiently clear to be reproduced in black and white. The reproduction of coloured material will only be approved where it is essential and relevant to the Written Exam, such as depicting national flags, advertisements or graphic novels.

Stimulus material can be real or hypothetical. Where the material is not created by the setting examiner or another employee of TASC, then it will;

- be confirmed that the reproduction is authorised by the owner or permitted under current copyright law
- be confirmed that the material can be published on the TASC website under the Fair Dealing exception to copyright law
- clearly identify the source of the material.

If the stimulus material is hypothetical but designed to represent a potential real-world situation, such as a business operation or environmental disaster, then the material will be credible and internally consistent.

Assessment and Marking

Criterion to be assessed

Each external Exam will assess at least five (5) criteria.

The EAS will state that either all elements of the criterion are to be assessed or identify the specific elements that are to be assessed.

The criterion and, where relevant, the elements to be assessed will be identified for each question.

Where a question, item or sub-item is used to assess multiple criteria, there will be provision for each criterion to be separately assessed.

Rating Scale

The assessment of TASC-accredited courses is criterion-based using an alpha-rating scale. Where appropriate, questions should be assessed against specified criteria using an extended alpha-rating scale.

Where the nature of the question and the response requires it, such as for closed questions or short answers with a limited range of acceptable responses, the assessment can use a numeric rating.

As a guide marks should be assigned in the Exam paper based on approximately one mark per minute of the recommended time. The allocation of marks, and therefore recommended time, for questions should reflect the complexity of the question or task.

Note: the following information is provided on all numerically rated course External Assessment Specification documents as a guideline for Setting Examiners, teachers and students:

Exam papers are designed so that the number of marks allocated to a section, part or question corresponds to the recommended time allocation for it. This is so that a student knows, for example, when answering a 10 mark question that the question has been designed for students to spend approximately 10 minutes reading, thinking and then answering the question. Students may find that they spend less or more time on certain questions throughout the exam.

Final results will be awarded as a rating of A, B, C, t or z for each criterion. Numeric and extended-alpha ratings will be converted to alpha ratings. These ratings are used in determining the final award according to the algorithm for Award Requirements in the Course Document.

The relative weighting of each question to the total assessment of the Written Exam will be identified. If no weighting is indicated, they will be regarded as of equal weight.

Marking Tool

A set of solutions or a marking tool will be provided to Markers at the marking meeting following the external Written Exam. This marking tool may be amended during the assessment process. This marking tool may include other resources, such as checklists, worked solutions or exemplars.

The marking tool will prescribe the assessment of the students responses and must be in keeping with the criterion, elements and standards as described in the current Course Document.

Only the authorised marking tool issued by TASC will be used in the final external assessment marking.

Guidelines for Questions

Scope and Standard of Questions

The external assessment will include items that, separately or together, give opportunities for students to demonstrate the standards from rating C to rating A. Where possible, items and sub-items in each question should be ordered by level of difficulty from lowest to highest.

Questions will address a broad range of the course content and assess the externally assessed criteria.

Questions will not assess content outside of the Course Document or assume knowledge and skills not covered or assumed in the delivery of the course.

Plain English

All instructions and questions will be concise and written in Standard Australian English (except the non-English components of Language Exams) and comply with the Department of Education's The Good Writing Guide.

Complex or specialised terminology will only be used when directly relevant to the course content. Idiom, dialects, and slang will not be used unless directly relevant to the question.

Only abbreviations, symbols or acronyms which are common knowledge or directly included in the Course Documents can be used.