2020 Outdoor Education Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the 2020 assessment cycle, gives 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, and the quality of student performance.

However, it was acknowledged that schools were impacted differently by COVID-19 restrictions throughout 2020, and hence the student’s ability to engage with natural environments was varied. Schools generally adapted to the circumstances well, providing their students with alternative experiences or ways to form connections with natural environments, and utilised the amended specific features and requirements where needed.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: About Natural Environments

Many varied tasks were prepared by schools and most were creative and allowed for student to demonstrate their learning and achievement at higher levels against the Exploration, Understanding and Analysis assessment design criteria. The best tasks were purposefully designed for the particular student cohort, and to address the specific features, and allowed flexibility in how the students responded.

Schools need to note that, whether 1 or 2 tasks are used, the total word count (or equivalent) is 1600 words or 10 minutes multimodal. For example, 1 task of 1600 words or 2 tasks of 800 words (or equivalent).

The more successful responses commonly:

* were linked to a practical or personal outdoor experience, e.g. a day trip or journey, where students could recognise firsthand, the different perspectives and issues impacting the natural environments considered, and provide a more unique, insightful and informed response
* were based on tasks that focussed on a few specific features, allowing greater depth and less scope
* used their own annotated photos/video to illustrate responses and provide further evidence, collected from the field where possible included feedback sheets for the audience to evaluate the presentation
* used a variety of primary and secondary evidence along with data e.g. personal observations, photos, videos, tables, charts and diagrams, interviews, and valid referencing
* displayed specific strategies as a result of the personal connection with the environment, where EUA3 was assessed
* focused more on using their own explorations of the natural environment as a catalyst for their responses
* used accurate referencing
* supported their observations with secondary research from credible sources e.g. sustainability strategies are referred to observation, management documentation and explained against ecological theory
* discussed a range of perspectives of the use of the natural environments considered
* used technical, environmental, ecological and or scientific terminology and language
* could describe personal actions undertaken in relation to their topic
* used tables to include information that supported the discussion, rather than a lot of new or critical information and/or analysis
* demonstrated a clear understanding of the topic through good analysis that focused on specifics rather than trying to cover a large breadth of information.

The less successful responses commonly:

* relied on internet research as a source of information and images, rather than personal observations
* did not relate theory or secondary sources to personal observations
* did not critically analyse environmental systems and issues
* lacked in-depth evidence and only included descriptions with little or no analysis
* included minimal reference to practical experiences or secondary references
* included student diagrams and pictures but did not reference, refer or mention them in the discussion
* lacked supporting evidence from primary or secondary references. photos or images etc.
* did not demonstrate a personal connection to the topic or discuss a range of perspectives
* were over the word/time limit without including important analysis or understanding.

Assessment Type 2: Experiences in Natural Environments

Students undertake two tasks that includes documented evidence collected and annotated when planning for safe and sustainable (PA1), outdoor activities or journeys in natural environments. They also need to reflect and evaluate their planning, leadership and collaboration with others (ERP1). Consideration of appropriate leadership styles, planning, risk assessment, decision-making, and use of interpersonal skills.

Students need to focus on both the development and application of outdoor skills (ERP2) and should aim to include personal photos, observations and assessment. One of their experiences should provide the opportunity to plan, lead, and facilitate an activity or journey. Students could use peer-assessment and self‑assessment, together with reflective practice to evaluate development of their planning, practical skills, risk management, self-reliance, leadership, and facilitation skills.

The more successful responses commonly:

* used their own photos and videos to provide evidence of practical skill development
* annotated photos and used video to illustrate how their skills had developed over the course
* included personal reflections relevant to the assessment design criteria features
* use of self or peer assessments to show evidence of skill development and evaluation
* annotated pictures and videos to display evidence of Planning and Application
* providing judgement and critical reflection rather than just describing their experiences
* detailed breakdown of skills to demonstrate an understanding and critical reflection of skill development
* focussed on 1 specific outdoor skill e.g. snorkelling, rather than everything — allows more in-depth and critical reflection, rather than superficial descriptions
* made use of annotations on task work and provided examples of planning and development
* demonstrated evaluation and reflection of experiences, from planning and development to application in the outdoors
* made their own assessment tools or referred to key performance indicators
* used specific examples of work to highlight high performance.

The less successful responses commonly:

* provided a recount of what they did rather than a critical reflection
* lacked connection between development of skill and application
* failed to evaluate their performance or highlight what they learnt or how they would use this experience to aid future performance
* rarely used observations, photos, teacher feedback or annotations/performance checklist to support own performance
* included large appendix comprising whole class’ planning materials without clarity about which aspects were contributed by the student and without discussion in the main body of the assignment about specific artefacts
* did not include annotations, discussion or voice overs with photos and videos to critically reflect on what was being displayed
* focused on a large range of skills, rather than deep exploration of one or two.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Connections with Natural Environments

Connections with Natural Environments task is more than a research task. It requires the student to discuss personal experiences (ERP3) and personal connections (EUA3). It was evident that this new focus provided scope for students to explore their personal interests over a wide range of topics and connect with natural environments in a variety of ways. Topics included coastal conservation, trail maintenance and the climate activism.

The more successful responses commonly:

* investigated a topic with a personal interest, connection and/or experience
* described in detail their topic or area of exploration, identifying why it was important to them and/ or future directions.
* related observed and personal benefits to health and wellbeing in a meaningful manner
* connected their exploration of topic and theoretical knowledge with personal experience, ideas or future directions e.g. beach clean-ups, climate rally and trail maintenance
* used a variety of communications methods, such as personal observations/ journal entries /photos with captions/ diagrams/ graphs / videos and linked them to discussion in the report.
* included reflection and evaluation relating to the development of personal connections with natural environments
* analysed how interaction would impact positively or negatively on the ecosystems and/or analysing how it would improve wellbeing
* were directly involved in implementing management strategies
* considered a range of perspectives drawn from a wide range of primary and secondary sources including primary data from stakeholder interviews and surveys
* wrote in first person and discussed their own thoughts, opinions, and feelings e.g. I found, I observed, I learnt, this lead me to believe, on reflection I now understand, my photo below demonstrates… etc.
* clear structure e.g. sub-headings used to guide their work.

The less successful responses commonly:

* focused on tourism or history topics that were not clearly aligned to outdoor education or the natural environment. Therefore, work did not meet the specific features
* chose topics that were too broad with little or no personal connection. Examples of this were: Solar Power, Great Barrier Reef
* focused on historical explanations of an issue rather than evaluating specific management strategies and making personal recommendations
* did not provide recommendations, strategies or solutions to their environmental issue
* linked strategies for sustainability or personal development in some way but did not go into depth
* had limited reflection on personal experiences/ personal development
* did not provide adequate evidence of exploration (e.g. photos, observations) and/or connection to topic
* relied on one or two secondary sources for their information
* did not address all Performance Standards required in the external assessment.