

Assessment and Reporting in Biology Stage 6

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This document contains the NSW Education Standards Authority requirements for assessing and reporting achievement in the Year 11 and Year 12 courses for the Higher School Certificate, and provides details of the HSC examination in this course. From time to time, changes are made to HSC assessment and examination requirements. Such changes will be made available through updates to these materials. Please note that the version on the NSW Education Standards Authority website is always the current version.

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Phone: (02) 9367 8289

Fax: (02) 9279 1482

Email: mila.buraga@nesa.nsw.edu.au

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NSW Education Standards Authority
GPO Box 5300
Sydney NSW 2001 Australia

educationstandards.nsw.edu.au

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Introduction to Assessment in Stage 6

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) promotes a standards-referenced approach to assessing and reporting student achievement.

Assessment is the process of gathering valid and useful information and making judgements about student achievement for a variety of purposes.

In Stage 6, those purposes include:

- assisting student learning
- evaluating and improving teaching and learning programs
- providing evidence of student achievement and course completion in Year 11 and Year 12 courses
- providing data for the end of school credential, the Record of School Achievement (RoSA) or Higher School Certificate (HSC).

Schools are required to develop an assessment program for each Year 11 and Year 12 course. NESA provides information about the responsibilities of schools in developing assessment programs in course-specific assessment and reporting requirements and in Assessment Certification Examination (ACE).

Assessment for, Assessment as, Assessment of Learning

Assessment is an essential component of the teaching and learning cycle. Assessment for, assessment as and assessment of learning are approaches that enable teachers to gather evidence and make judgements about student achievement. These are not necessarily discrete approaches and may be used individually or together and formally or informally.

Assessment is most effective when students:

- are involved in setting learning goals
- know and understand assessment criteria
- are able to monitor their own learning and reflect on their progress
- receive feedback that helps them understand how to improve their learning.

School-based Assessment in Stage 6

All teaching and learning activities are considered important for understanding course content and developing knowledge, understanding and skills in a subject. School-based assessment involves a range of informal (formative) assessment and formal (summative) assessment to provide information about student achievement of syllabus outcomes. Informal and formal assessment assists teachers to make judgements about student progress. A range of assessment activities and tasks provides opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of syllabus outcomes in different ways.

Informal assessment

Teachers use informal assessment opportunities throughout the teaching and learning cycle to gather evidence about how students learn and what they know. Informal assessment includes activities undertaken and anecdotal evidence gathered throughout the teaching and learning process in a less prescribed manner than formal assessment.

These activities provide evidence for teachers and inform feedback to students in relation to improving their learning. Informal assessment may include a range of strategies such as questioning, class discussion, observations and student self-evaluation.

Formal assessment

Formal school-based assessment provides opportunities to gather evidence about student achievement of syllabus outcomes in different ways to the HSC examinations. Formal assessment tasks are those which students undertake as part of the school-based assessment program, reflecting specific course requirements, components and weightings.

A formal assessment task may contain more than one part. The task notification should detail the requirements for each part, including that all parts are to be submitted and/or completed together.

Tests of limited scope (ie include a small number of content areas or topics or modules) will continue to be relevant and appropriate methods of formal assessment. These types of tasks are not considered as formal written examinations.

A formal written examination is defined as a task such as a Half Yearly, Yearly or Trial HSC Examination completed during a designated examination period. It is undertaken individually, under supervised examination conditions and includes one or more unseen questions or items. A formal written examination is used to gather evidence about student achievement of a range of syllabus outcomes, at a point in time. A formal written examination is often in the format of an HSC examination and typically draws from most or all content areas or topics or modules completed at that point in time. Schools are able to schedule more than one written examination to provide opportunities for students to prepare for and experience examination conditions. However, only one formal written examination can contribute to a formal assessment schedule.

Evidence gathered through formal assessment assists teachers to report on student achievement in relation to syllabus outcomes and standards at a point in time, and is often used for grading or ranking purposes. The components and weightings and the prescribed nature of some tasks ensure a common focus for school-based assessment in a course across schools, while also allowing for flexibility in the design of some tasks at the school level.

Further guidance and advice can be found on the NESA website.

Year 11 Biology School-based Assessment Requirements

The components and weightings for Year 11 are mandatory.

Component	Weighting %
Skills in working scientifically	60
Knowledge and understanding of course content	40
	100

The Year 11 formal school-based assessment program is to reflect the following requirements:

- three assessment tasks
- the minimum weighting for an individual task is 20%
- the maximum weighting for an individual task is 40%
- only one task may be a formal written examination
- one task must focus on a depth study or an aspect of a depth study with a weighting of 20–40%
- the depth study task must assess:
 - the Working Scientifically skills outcomes:
 - Questioning and Predicting
 - Communicating
 - a minimum of two additional Working Scientifically skills outcomes
 - at least one Knowledge and Understanding outcome.

Information about the depth study task in Biology

A depth study may be a single investigation/activity or series of investigations/activities. The depth study may be designed for the course cohort or a single class or be determined by individual students.

While the depth study may be undertaken in a single module of the course or across modules, the formal assessment of a depth study, or aspect of the study, must only occur once. The design of the assessment task must provide opportunities for all students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills of the outcomes using a common marking criteria and guidelines regardless of their area of investigation.

A range of task types may be used when assessing a depth study or an aspect of a depth study. In many cases, a report that explains the process undertaken throughout the depth study with an analysis of the final product or result will be an appropriate format for an assessment task. Other examples include written reports, oral presentations, digital or multimedia products, data analysis, practical investigations or fieldwork.

The following examples provide two possible approaches for the formal assessment of the depth study.

Example 1: Depth Study – Report

A report after the completion of a depth study assesses a student's knowledge, understanding and skills at a key point in time. A report may be relevant to an experiment, fieldwork or in-class investigation.

A report may require students to:

- outline the process of formulating a question or hypothesis for investigation
- describe and justify methods used including any modifications made during the investigation
- analyse data and communicate the results of the investigation.

Example 2: Depth Study – Fieldwork Presentation

Fieldwork involves students undertaking their own research to solve a problem or investigate an issue at a specific location. The collection of site-specific evidence assists students to develop a final presentation.

A presentation may require students to:

- describe the context of the site
- explain the relevance of the site to the investigation's question or hypothesis
- process and analyse field data
- communicate the results and conclusions of the fieldwork.

Year 12 Biology School-based Assessment Requirements

NESA requires schools to submit a school-based assessment mark for each Year 12 candidate in a course. Formal school-based assessment tasks are based on course requirements and components and weightings that contribute to the determination of the final mark for a course. The mark submitted by the school provides a summation of each student's achievement measured at several points throughout the course.

The marks submitted for each course group at a school should reflect the rank order of students, and must be on a scale sufficiently wide to reflect adequately the relative differences in student performances. The actual mark should not be revealed to students as it is subject to moderation and may become confusing for students when they receive their results. Students must be informed that they can obtain their Assessment Rank Order Notice from Students Online after the last HSC examination at their centre and within the period of time for appeals.

The school-based assessment marks submitted to NESA for Year 12 must not include measures of outcomes that address values and attitudes or reflect student conduct. Schools may decide to report on these separately to students and parents.

The collection of information for the Year 12 school-based assessment mark must not begin before the completion of the Year 11 course.

The components and weightings for Year 12 are mandatory.

Component	Weighting %
Skills in working scientifically	60
Knowledge and understanding of course content	40
	100

The Year 12 formal school-based assessment program is to reflect the following requirements:

- a maximum of four assessment tasks
- the minimum weighting for an individual task is 10%
- the maximum weighting for an individual task is 40%
- only one task may be a formal written examination with a maximum weighting of 30%
- one task must focus on a depth study or an aspect of a depth study with a weighting of 20–40%
- the depth study task must assess:
 - the Working Scientifically skills outcomes:
 - Questioning and Predicting
 - Communicating
 - a minimum of two additional Working Scientifically skills outcomes
 - at least one Knowledge and Understanding outcome.

Information about the formal written examination in Biology

This task may assess a broad range of course content and outcomes. Schools may choose to replicate the timing and structure of the HSC examination.

Information about the depth study task in Biology

A depth study may be a single investigation/activity or series of investigations/activities. The depth study may be designed for the course cohort or a single class or be determined by individual students.

While the depth study may be undertaken in a single module of the course or across modules, the formal assessment of a depth study, or aspect of the study, must only occur once. The design of the assessment task must provide opportunities for all students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills of the outcomes using a common marking criteria and guidelines regardless of their area of investigation.

A range of task types may be used when assessing a depth study or an aspect of a depth study. In many cases, a report that explains the process undertaken throughout the depth study with an analysis of the final product or result will be an appropriate format for an assessment task. Other examples include written reports, oral presentations, digital or multimedia products, data analysis, practical investigations or fieldwork.

The following examples provide two possible approaches for the formal assessment of the depth study.

Example 1: Depth Study – Report

A report after the completion of a depth study assesses a student's knowledge, understanding and skills at a key point in time. A report may be relevant to an experiment, fieldwork or in-class investigation.

A report may require students to:

- outline the process of formulating a question or hypothesis for investigation
- describe and justify methods used including any modifications made during the investigation
- analyse data and communicate the results of the investigation.

Example 2: Depth Study – Fieldwork Presentation

Fieldwork involves students undertaking their own research to solve a problem or investigate an issue at a specific location. The collection of site-specific evidence assists students to develop a final presentation.

A presentation may require students to:

- describe the context of the site
- explain the relevance of the site to the investigation's question or hypothesis
- process and analyse field data
- communicate the results and conclusions of the fieldwork.

HSC Examination Specifications

The external HSC examination measures student achievement in a range of syllabus outcomes.

The external examination and its marking relate to the syllabus by:

- providing clear links to syllabus outcomes
- enabling students to demonstrate the levels of achievement outlined in the performance band descriptions
- applying marking guidelines based on criteria that relate to the quality of the response
- aligning performance in the examination each year to the standards established for the course.

The specifications will apply to the *Biology Stage 6 Syllabus* commencing with the 2019 HSC examination program. Examination questions may require candidates to integrate knowledge, understanding and skills developed through studying the course.

The Year 11 course is assumed knowledge for the Year 12 course.

Biology HSC Examination Specifications

The examination will consist of a written paper worth 100 marks.

The time allowed is 3 hours plus 5 minutes reading time.

NESA approved calculators may be used.

There will be approximately equal weighting given to Modules 5 to 8. Questions relating to Working Scientifically Skills will be integrated throughout the examination.

The paper will consist of two sections.

Section I **(20 marks)**

There will be objective-response questions to the value of 20 marks.

Section II **(80 marks)**

Questions may contain parts.

There will be 20 to 25 items.

At least two items will be worth 7 to 9 marks.

Adjustments to Assessment for Students with Special Education Needs

It is a requirement under the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* for schools to ensure that students with special education needs can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students.

Some students with special education needs will require adjustments to assessment practices in order to demonstrate what they know and can do in relation to syllabus outcomes and content.

These may include:

- adjustments to the assessment process. Some examples include additional time, rest breaks, the use of a reader and/or scribe or specific technology
- adjustments to assessment activities. Some examples include rephrasing questions, using simplified language or alternative formats for questions
- alternative formats for responses. Some examples include writing in point form instead of essays, scaffolded structured responses, short objective questions or multimedia presentations.

Schools are responsible for any decisions about adjustments to course work and formal school-based assessment tasks throughout Year 11 and Year 12. Decisions regarding adjustments should be made in the context of collaborative curriculum planning. To access adjustments for the HSC examinations, an application for Disability Provisions must be submitted to NESA.

Providing adjustment does not restrict a student's access to the full range of grades or marks.

Examples of adjustments to assessment for students with special education needs can be found in course support materials. Additional advice is available on the NESA website.

Science Life Skills

Students undertaking the Science Life Skills course will study selected outcomes and content informed by a collaborative curriculum planning process. Assessment should provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge, understanding and skills to a range of situations or environments. Students undertaking Life Skills courses are not required to complete formal assessment tasks. Teachers are best able to determine the progress of the student.

Students may demonstrate achievement in relation to Science Life Skills outcomes independently; with adjustments or with support. The type of adjustments and support will vary according to the particular needs of the student and the requirements of the activity.

Additional information about Life Skills eligibility, programming, planning and assessment is available on the NESA website.

Reporting in Stage 6

Year 11

Schools are responsible for awarding a grade for each student who completes a Year 11 course (except Life Skills and VET courses) to represent their achievement. These grades are determined by the student's performance in relation to the *Common Grade Scale for Preliminary Courses*. Teachers make professional, on-balance judgements about which grade description best matches the standards their students have demonstrated by the end of the course.

Teachers are required to ensure that the grades awarded are consistent with published standards. This means that the grade a student receives in one school can be compared to the same grade anywhere in NSW. To ensure judgements are consistent with statewide standards, teachers compare their student work with work samples on the NESA website that are aligned to the A to E common grade scale. The grade awarded is reported on the student's Record of Student Achievement (RoSA), a cumulative credential that allows students to accumulate their academic results until they leave school.

Year 12

The use of both school-based assessment and external examinations of student achievement allows measurements and observations to be made at several points and in different ways throughout the Year 12 course. Taken together, they provide a valid and reliable assessment of students' demonstration of the knowledge, understanding and skills described for each course.

Students who leave school prior to the Higher School Certificate examinations will receive a RoSA. It records grades for their completed Stage 5 and Year 11 courses and any participation in Stage 6 courses that were not completed.

The HSC credentials received by students report both the school-based assessment and external examination measures of achievement.

Typically, HSC results comprise:

- a moderated assessment mark derived from the mark submitted by the school and produced in accordance with NESA requirements for school-based assessment
- an examination mark derived from the HSC external examination
- an HSC mark, which is the average of the moderated assessment mark and the examination mark
- a performance band, determined by the HSC mark.

For the HSC, student performance in a Year 12 course is reported against standards on a course report.

The course report contains:

- a level of achievement for the performance band descriptors
- an HSC mark located on the performance scale
- a school-based assessment mark
- an examination mark.

The course report also shows graphically the state-wide distribution of HSC marks of all students in the course. The distribution of marks is determined by students' performances against the standards and not scaled to a predetermined pattern of marks.