**VCE Psychology 2017–2021**

School-based assessment report

This report is based on the School-based Assessment Audit and VCAA statistical data.

All official communications regarding the *Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Psychology Study Design* are provided in the *VCAA Bulletin*. It is recommended that teachers individually subscribe to the *VCAA Bulletin* to receive updated information regarding the study. The *VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook* and *Important Administrative Dates* are published on the Administration page of the VCAA website.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Responses to the School-based Assessment Audit for VCE Psychology indicated that the majority of audited schools have made a successful transition to the reaccredited *VCE Psychology* *Study Design 2017–2021*. School-based assessment enhances the validity of student assessment by providing opportunities for non-routine and open-ended psychology contexts and applications to be explored in greater depth and breadth than is possible in an examination.

**The audit process**

The School-based Assessment Audit enables the VCAA to check that assessment tasks are compliant with the VCE assessment principles and the requirements of the study design.

Schools should ensure that all requested materials are submitted for the audit. Materials potentially required for submission are listed in the *VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook*. If materials are not submitted as requested, a judgment cannot be reached by the Audit Panel as to whether the school concerned has satisfied VCAA requirements for school-based assessment.

The majority of audited schools designed and used tasks that met the requirements of the reaccredited study design and the VCE assessment principles. A number of schools proceeded to the second stage of the audit process due to issues related to the use of unmodified materials that are available in the public domain, such as commercially produced tasks, past VCAA examination questions and materials sourced from teacher networks. All materials in the public domain must be modified so that they are unique to the school.

Schools that had not finalised their assessment tasks at the time the audit questionnaire was completed were required to outline planned activities for assessment. Further information was then requested to be submitted at a later stage if the information provided was insufficient to determine whether VCAA assessment requirements had been met and/or to give teachers more time to complete the audit.

Most schools reported that the questionnaire was a useful undertaking as it provided an opportunity to evaluate their teaching of the study. The online *VCE Psychology* *Advice for teachers* was also identified as a useful resource for planning classroom activities, formative assessment and summative School-assessed Coursework (SAC) tasks.

**Assessment planning**

All schools provided an assessment timetable to students at the beginning of the school year, or occasionally during the previous year’s orientation program to assist them in planning for assessment. In many schools, SAC tasks were used for both formative and summative purposes.

Prior to each SAC task being undertaken, students should be given a clear and accurate statement of:

* the outcome being assessed
* the task type
* the requirements and conditions of the task
* the contribution of the task to the final outcome score.

Most schools provided students with the assessment rubrics that would be used to assess the SAC task prior to the task being undertaken. Although most teachers reported using VCAA performance descriptors to assess student work, these are not mandated and in some cases, school-developed marking schemes may be more appropriate.

**Task development**

A range of methods were used to develop SAC tasks. In most cases, practical work and activities undertaken by students at the school were used as a basis for developing school-specific assessment tasks.

A significant proportion of audited schools used unmodified commercially produced materials, materials from teacher networks, and/or past VCAA examination questions to develop SAC tasks. Although all schools checked these materials against the requirements of the *VCE Psychology Study Design,* schools are reminded that any materials available in the public domain must be significantly modified to minimise the risk that authentication issues will arise. Tasks developed collaboratively with teachers from other schools must also be modified so that the tasks are unique to each school. In cases where it was not clear to what extent publicly available materials had been modified, schools were asked to provide these original materials alongside their own modified SAC tasks as further evidence. Schools are advised that modifying previous years’ tasks may be insufficient to ensure student work can be authenticated, as contexts may be too specific to develop alternative questions. Modification of publicly available tasks may be possible through mapping of key knowledge and key science skills and then using other knowledge/skills as the basis of new questions/tasks.

A number of audited schools did not return SAC tasks to students as they intended to modify these for use in the following year. Returning SAC tasks to students enables valuable feedback to be provided as well as enabling students to refer to the tasks for examination revision purposes. Schools should have access to completed assessment and either store it, or advise students to retain it until the end of the academic year that the work was undertaken.

Overall, SAC tasks addressed a wide range of key knowledge from the reaccredited study design and required students to demonstrate relevant key science skills. Many schools described how assessment tasks were developed to ensure that higher order/more complex questions were included and weighted appropriately. Reference was made to the use of Bloom’s taxonomy and inclusion of questions of varying cognitive demand, from questions requiring simple recall ranging through to analysis, evaluation, synthesis and application questions involving unfamiliar scenarios. Teachers also used multiple-choice questions, scaffolded questions and open-ended questions to differentiate student performance. In some schools, the VCE assessment principle of balance was applied through the deliberate selection of different task types across Units 3 and 4. Assessment rubrics reflected differentiated student performance in both the key knowledge and key science skills.

A key finding of the audit was that many schools selected assessment tasks that largely mimicked the format of the external examinations. Teachers are advised to select a suite of assessment tasks across each unit that provide a range of opportunities for students to demonstrate, in different contexts and modes, their knowledge, skills and understanding of the content as outlined in the study design.

A further key finding was that a number of schools were over-assessing students. Although all elements of each outcome must be met by students in order to be awarded an ‘S’, a representative section of the outcome is sufficient as the basis for SAC task development. Each task should be approximately 50 minutes in duration. Although more than one task may be set for each outcome, many schools chose to only set a single task.

Materials required for SAC tasks were, in general, similar to those required for the external examination. Access to pre-written notes in students’ logbooks or from external excursions were also permitted in situations where the school kept the student work prior to the SAC task. Students were also provided clear instructions as to what materials could not be used during SAC tasks.

**Authentication**

All schools audited indicated that SAC tasks were completed under teacher supervision, making authentication of student work less problematic. Where SAC tasks involved preparatory data generation and/or laboratory work (such as ‘annotations of activities or investigations from a practical logbook’ or ‘a report of a practical activity’), students were often required to keep their logbooks at school, ensuring their work could be authenticated. Schools with multiple classes and more than one teacher indicated marking consistency was achieved through the use of a prepared answer sheet, discussion and/or cross-marking. For schools with only one Psychology class, marking validation was often achieved by working with another Psychology teacher, either within the school or at a different school, to mark a sample of ‘top’, middle’ and ‘low’ student work. These practices are important to ensure an accurate student rank order is attained.

Schools need to be aware of the authentication requirements set out in the *VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook*. Any work set over an extended period of time should include a process for authentication of student work. Most schools provided details about the procedure used to authenticate student work that included how logbooks were used by students and monitored by the teacher. It is recommended that particular attention is paid to authentication for Unit 4 Outcome 3 and that as much work as possible is observed, completed in class, initialled and dated by the teacher on a regular basis.

**Practical work and field work**

Practical work is a central component of learning and assessment. Practical work in Unit 3 included: teacher-led activities; practical demonstrations; monitored logbook activities; use of primary and secondary data to draw conclusions and generalisations; student-directed investigations; and simulations. Schools reported clear processes for ensuring that all activities complied with relevant ethical guidelines and codes of conduct, as well as being compliant with health and safety requirements.

Most schools followed the recommendations in the study design related to hours of practical work to be undertaken in each area of study. Schools allocating only a few hours to undertaking and reporting on the student-designed investigation in Unit 4 Area of Study 3 were advised to review their timelines so that explicit teaching of relevant key knowledge and key science skills as well as the provision of student feedback occurred in future. A few schools undertook significantly more practical work than is indicated in the study design. This is a school-based decision. Most schools provided a comprehensive set of practical activities that covered a wide range of key knowledge and key science skills. Logbooks were used extensively.

Most practical work was undertaken in the classroom or, less frequently, in a school laboratory. Some schools reported undertaking excursions or incursions, typically related to investigations related to sleep. External resources were also used for investigating physical and psychological responses to stress, and examining mental health through artworks. In some schools, students were introduced to the idea of field work, the generation of primary data, and the collection of secondary data through a number of data-generating activities in class, such as using other students in the class as experiment participants. This allowed for preparation for the student-designed practical investigation in Unit 4, which often involved students in other classes at different year levels, as well as family and friends. An eyewitness report scenario was established in a number of audited schools. Interviews and surveys were also reported by some schools.

Schools are reminded that practical activities and fieldwork involving human subjects require ethical consent to be obtained from participants and debriefing procedures to be followed. Further advice regarding the ethical conduct of experimental investigations is provided in the *VCE Psychology Study Design*.

All audited schools had in place thorough and appropriate processes related to authentication of student work, and student redemption of an ‘N’ outcome.

**Student-designed practical investigation**

The audit showed that most schools based the student-designed practical investigation on Unit 3. This reflects prior practice in content choice in previous study designs, and it is anticipated that as schools become more familiar with the reaccredited study design, a greater choice of student topics will be encouraged. Schools are reminded that they must use the terminology of the reaccredited study design (e.g. ‘practical investigation’ and not ‘research investigation’ or ‘empirical research activity (ERA)’ used in previous study designs).

All audited schools provided appropriate timelines for staging the various aspects of the investigation, from design of the investigation through to data analysis and evaluation, and the presentation of findings in a scientific poster.

Each student should be assessed on their individual capacity to design, undertake and report on an investigation. Teachers must approve all student investigations to be undertaken. Not all planned student investigations can proceed due to issues including ethics, safety, equipment availability, time constraints and/or management of large student numbers. For further advice, see the *VCE Psychology Advice for teachers*.

A number of audited schools provided students with a booklet to scaffold student investigation planning and progress as an adjunct to the student logbook and/or to provide an overview of the scientific investigation process to be followed.

Many of the student investigations related to the topics of ‘learning’ and ‘memory’ and correlated to familiar investigations in the previous study design’s assessment tasks. In most cases, the investigation questions identified the independent and dependent variables. Schools are advised to assist students to develop investigable questions and ensure the scope of the question is not so broad or open-ended that a number of dependent variables could be identified.

In general, schools approved investigations that were variations on a theme. This approach minimised impact on school resources while allowing some element of student choice in developing an investigation question through selecting their own independent and dependent variables. In other schools, a generic question was used to encourage students to develop more specific questions, enabling students to operationalise variables to generate a question of interest. In all schools, the same assessment rubric was used for all students, irrespective of the specific investigation question, to ensure comparability of task scope and demand.

Although survey questions may be appropriate, these do not allow for the level of experimental design and data analysis that is enabled by investigating questions that include independent, dependent and controlled variables. Since students are expected to investigate their own questions, there should be parity in the cognitive demands associated with undertaking the investigation and analysing the generated primary data.

Schools are reminded that the task involves the generation of primary data, and this must be feasible within the provided timelines. Some investigation questions proposed by students may be better suited to a secondary data analysis task since the generation of primary data would be too time consuming and/or the scope of the question too broad. Schools must ensure that questions developed by students are safe and meet all ethical guidelines, and that investigations are aligned with key knowledge in Units 3 and/or 4.

Schools are advised that assessment of a student’s capacity to design experiments may assist in identifying where proposed investigations are not practicable, or safe, to run. In such cases, students may be directed to investigate an alternative research question, and subsequent assessment will be based on the alternative investigation. The original assessment of experimental design will hold.

**VCAA reports**

A number of VCAA reports are available to assist in informing teaching and assessment practices. Schools used Examination Reports, Statistical Moderation Reports and School-assessed Coursework Reports to improve the learning outcomes of students and to create assessment tasks that met the VCE assessment principles. The reports were used at the individual teacher level and, in many cases, at the departmental, faculty and/or school level.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 3: How does experience affect behaviour and mental processes?

There are two outcomes in Unit 3. For Outcomes 1 and 2, teachers may select one or more tasks from a set of nine assessment tasks for each outcome. Schools generally chose one, sometimes two, tasks for each outcome. Students may also undertake the Unit 4 Outcome 3 task as part of Unit 3.

Schools are advised to carefully consider the number and length of the assessment tasks developed across the unit, ensuring that the VCE assessment principles are met. When developing assessment for Outcomes 1 and 2, schools are reminded that not all the key knowledge and key science skills listed in the study design have to be assessed in the SAC tasks for an outcome. That being said, the tasks developed should be rigorous enough to provide all students with the opportunity to demonstrate the highest level of performance. A mix of task types and question styles can help achieve this aim.

Area of Study 1: How does the nervous system enable psychological functioning?

Of the nine task types, most schools chose a ‘test’ or ‘visual presentation’. The ‘reflective learning journal or blog’ was not selected by any audited school. Many schools used a combination of a test and a visual presentation to assess students for this outcome since it enabled comprehensive coverage of the outcome and enabled students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a variety of formats. Most schools demonstrated a strong focus on the use of assessment tasks for formative as well as summative purposes, with extensive feedback being provided to students regarding misunderstandings and identified areas for improvement.

Audit findings related to each of the assessment task types used for Outcome 1 are summarised below:

* **annotations of at least two practical activities from a practical logbook**

Students select two activities from their logbook to annotate and analyse, using key terminology and making links to relevant psychological and biological perspectives dependent on their selection. A generic set of questions related to key knowledge and key science skills could be applied by students as prompts to annotate their selected activities so that students can be assessed fairly while still having a choice of context.

* **evaluation of research**

Schools generally used published reports and research articles to answer a series of questions in relation to the psychological concepts related to stress and the research methodology of the selected experiment. Case studies were also used as the stimulus material for this assessment task.

* **a report of a student investigation**

The student investigation should involve the generation of primary data. This was not a commonly selected option since teachers favoured this task for Unit 4 in order to design a balanced assessment program for the year.

* an analysis of data including generalisations and conclusions

This task type requires students to draw graphs from generated primary data and/or provided secondary data. Data may be derived from investigations including experiments, others’ research and surveys. One school’s approach to this assessment task involved students undertaking a practical activity prior to the SAC task and recording results in their logbooks. They were then provided with a set of deliberately flawed results from a theoretical student based on the same experiments and asked to evaluate the results, including evaluation of investigation methodology. A common issue across audited schools for this task was that there were no requirements for students to either draw a graph, or to make generalisations and draw conclusions from the data.

* **a visual presentation**

Visual presentations included annotated diagrams and visual representations (flow charts, concept maps) of nervous system functioning and models of stress (biological and psychological). Typically, schools used the ‘lock-and-key’ mechanism of neural transmission and the ‘spinal reflex’ as contexts for students’ visual presentations, which involved producing a poster created from unlabelled diagrams and key psychological terms. Some students were provided with a list of concepts that they then had to explain using a visual presentation. In other tasks, students were required to produce visual representations of the information provided from a specific scenario. Schools are reminded that all publicly accessible materials must be modified significantly to ensure that authentication issues do not arise.

* **media analysis/response**

Relevant contemporary research and media/journal articles related to psychology should be used in order to avoid authentication problems. Articles were often provided to students prior to the assessment task so that students familiarised themselves with the context and did not spend the majority of the assessment time reading new material. A set of between four and eight questions relating to key knowledge and key science skills formed the assessment task, which was completed under supervision.

* **a response to a set of structured questions**

This task related particularly to nervous system functioning and often required students to label divisions of the human nervous system, compare and contrast nervous system functioning, use an annotated flow chart to explain the spinal reflex, apply knowledge to scenarios, and annotate diagrams depicting a synapse with excitatory or inhibitory effects. Generally, three or four questions formed the basis of this task. No multiple-choice items should be included in this task type.

* **a test**

Tests typically mirrored the external examination, and were comprised of a series of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Generally, the questions were scenario-based. Often, a single extended response question was also included, generally used to differentiate between high-performing students. Schools with cohorts of low literacy level students often used scaffolded questions. Schools focused on the assessment of both key knowledge and key science skills. Reading time was included in the assessment time, and typically tests were comprised of nine to 20 multiple-choice items, and four to eight short-answer questions.

**Area of Study 2: How do people learn and remember?**

Of the nine task types, most schools chose ‘annotations of at least two practical activities from a practical logbook’ and a ‘response to structured questions’. Some schools combined two task types into one; for example, ‘analysis of data including generalisations and conclusions’ was combined with a short set of linked ‘test’ questions. Other schools used shortened multiple tasks to reduce student assessment pressure; for example, a ‘flow chart’ was combined with a ‘response to a set of structured questions’, and a ‘test’ with ‘data analysis’. In this instance where two ‘examination’ type tasks are combined, schools must ensure that assessment balance is achieved across other unit outcomes.

Audit findings related to each of the assessment task types used by audited schools for Outcome 2 are summarised below:

* **annotations of at least two practical activities from a practical logbook**

Typically, the practical activities that formed the basis of this assessment task were the three types of learning specified in the study design: classical conditioning; operant conditioning; and observational learning. Other linked activities included: investigations of short-term memory; comparison of methods of retrieval; comparison of maintenance and elaborative rehearsal; serial position effect; and reconstructive nature of memory.

Schools are reminded to use the reaccredited study design for this task to ensure it is valid, rather than using the previous study design’s assessment task, which related to annotations of at least five practical activities.

* **evaluation of research**

Some interesting tasks were set by schools using research reports related to the reconstructive nature of memory, and the Rosenzweig, Bennett and Diamond experiment (1972) on environmental effects on brain growth and brain chemistry.

* **a report of a student investigation**

The student investigation should involve the generation of primary data. Scientific reports focused on memory and the construction of a testable hypothesis, operationalisation of variables and development of a method. Analysis and evaluation of primary data was expected in addition to conclusions being drawn in relation to the generated data.

Schools are reminded that the assessment task is the write-up of the report itself. The planning and undertaking of the investigation itself is preparatory work for the assessment task and should not be included in the time specified for the SAC task. Schools reported collecting logbooks following the undertaking of the investigation, with students being re-issued their logbooks at the time that the report was written, always under supervised conditions in the classroom.

Schools used this task as a way to introduce and provide feedback to students about scientific inquiry in preparation for the practical investigation task for Unit 4 Outcome 3.

* **analysis of data including generalisations and conclusions**

This task type requires that students generate and analyse graphs from primary and/or secondary data. Schools typically provided previously conducted research as stimulus material (with only the introduction, method and results). Students were then required to evaluate the research in line with theory and draw generalisations and conclusions. Many tasks focused on the provision of data related to memory research and secondary data related to Watson and Rayner’s Little Albert experiment.

* **a flow chart**

Schools applied this task in the context of memory process – usually the multi-store model of memory – or to a scenario relating to the fallibility of memory and eye-witness testimony.

* **media analysis/response**

Relevant contemporary research and media/journal articles related to psychology should be used in order to avoid authentication problems. Court cases involving eye-witness testimonies were often used as the basis of assessment tasks.

* **a response to a set of structured questions**

In some audited schools, this task could not be distinguished from a ‘test’ task. This task should not contain any multiple-choice questions. Short case studies provide ideal stimulus material as the basis of assessment tasks. Both key knowledge and key science skills should be targeted, and scenarios with limited reading requirements should be provided to ensure that the VCE assessment principles are followed.

* **reflective learning blog/learning journal related to selected activities or in response to an issue**

In one school, students were given no longer than 10 minutes at the end of selected lessons to respond to a general question relating to a variety of stimulus materials related to different aspects of learning across a few lessons, including a media article, a YouTube clip, an excerpt from a research report, and a recorded interview with a psychologist. Subsequently, students were required to respond to previous responses from other students, providing a short analysis and evaluation related to the accuracy of the statements.

* **a test**

As with Outcome 1, tests typically mirrored the external examination and were comprised of a series of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Generally, the questions were scenario-based and covered both ‘learning’ and ‘memory’ topics. Schools with cohorts of low-literacy-level students often used scaffolded questions. Schools focused on the assessment of key knowledge and related key science skills. Reading time was included in the assessment time, and tests were typically comprised of nine to 20 multiple-choice items, and four to eight short-answer questions.

***(If conducted during Unit 3):* Unit 4 Outcome 3 (Area of Study 3: practical investigation)**

Some schools audited chose to schedule the practical investigation assessment task for
Unit 4 Outcome 3 during Unit 3, despite most schools reporting that Unit 3 would form the basis of the investigation. The audit found that the schools offered topics and managed the assessment task similarly to how the ‘Research Investigation’ was run in a previous study design. In all schools audited, learning and memory were the contexts for the student-designed investigation. Schools are reminded to use terminology from the reaccredited study design; ‘research investigation’ and ‘ERA’ are not appropriate terminology.

Different approaches were used to support students to develop their own questions. Most teachers set a general question that students used to develop their own more specific investigation question. Another common approach was that students were initially assessed on their capacity to design an investigation related to a general area of interest, and then worked in pairs on an agreed investigation question to generate data. Students then worked individually, under supervision, to analyse, evaluate and report on their data to reach an investigation conclusion.

Schools are advised to check the VCAA's *Advice for teachers* resource, which has an extensive list of possible topics. However, schools are reminded that these must be modified prior to use as an assessment task as they are available in the public domain.

Schools that undertook this outcome during Unit 3 used it for formative and summative purposes, particularly in developing students’ capacity to design their own investigations and to critique the investigations of others, including published research.

Unit 4: How is wellbeing developed and maintained?

For Unit 4, students are required to demonstrate the achievement of three outcomes. Outcomes 1 and 2 allow schools to choose from a set of eight task types. While the Unit 4 Outcome 3 task may be undertaken across Units 3 and/or 4, almost all audited schools completed this outcome at the completion of Unit 3 and before commencing Unit 4.

For Outcomes 1 and 2, teachers may select one or more tasks for each outcome. Most schools chose one task for each outcome, and some chose two tasks.

**Area of Study 1: How do levels of consciousness affect mental processes and behaviour?**

Of the eight available task types, six task types were selected by schools. Most schools chose a ‘test’ or ‘response to a set of structured questions’. The ‘annotations of at least two practical activities from a practical work folio’ and the ‘reflective learning journal or blog’ were not selected by any audited schools.

Audit findings related to each of the six assessment task types used by audited schools for Outcome 2 are summarised below:

* **comparison of different states of consciousness**

This task generally involved students examining case studies or scenarios related to two different states of consciousness. Students were often required to compare and contrast different aspects of consciousness in a provided table. Alternatively, students were required to respond to a set of questions related to the case studies. It was unusual to find comparisons of more than two states of consciousness. Schools are reminded that if they choose to use commercially produced tasks, these must be significantly modified so that they are unique to the school. This helps to reduce the risk of authentication issues and ensures accurate ranking of student performance on the task.

* **a report of a student investigation**

The student investigation should involve the generation of primary data. Schools are reminded to be mindful of the choice of investigations, particularly those that may have associated ethical issues. Schools are reminded that any experiments using human subjects require ethical principles to be followed at all times when undertaking such investigations.

* **analysis of data including generalisations and conclusions**

This task type requires students to generate and analyse graphs from primary and/or secondary data. Some schools provided students with constructed graphs that required interpretations and conclusions to be drawn by students; however, this type of task is better suited as a ‘response to a set of structured questions’. The skill of being able to construct graphs from raw data is important in science and is an essential feature of this task type. Data recorded by students about their own sleep patterns, for example, could be used as the basis for the development of a SAC task of this type.

* **media analysis/response**

Multimedia as well as research reports were used by schools as the stimulus material for this task. Students then either wrote a report that utilised specific headings, or responded to a set of questions. Schools are reminded that, ideally, selected media resources should be contemporary, preferably sourced in the same academic year, and should not be re-used in subsequent years to avoid issues with authentication.

* **a response to a set of structured questions**

In some audited schools, this task could not be distinguished from a ‘test’ task. This task should not contain any multiple-choice questions. Short case studies provide ideal stimulus material as the basis of assessment tasks. Both key knowledge and key science skills should be targeted, and scenarios with limited reading requirements should be provided to ensure that the VCE assessment principles are followed.

* **a test**

Tests generally comprised a series of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The questions were mostly scenario-based and covered a broad range of key knowledge and key science skills. Bloom’s taxonomy was often used to ensure that different cognitive levels were assessed in the task. Reading time was included in the assessment time, and tests were typically comprised of nine to 20 multiple-choice items and four to eight short answer questions.

**Area of Study 2: What influences mental wellbeing?**

Of the eight task types, most schools chose a ‘test’ or ‘media analysis’. The ‘annotations of at least two practical activities from a practical work folio’, ‘report of a student investigation’, and the ‘reflective learning journal or blog’ were not selected by any audited schools.

Audit findings related to each of the five assessment task types used by audited schools for Outcome 2 are summarised below:

* **analysis of the development of specific phobia or the maintenance of mental health**

This was generally approached through real or imaginary case studies with students required to use a biopsychosocial model to explain the development of a specific phobia. In some cases, a set of questions was constructed, while in other cases students were required to compare and contrast aspects of the model by completing a provided table and analysing the results.

* **analysis of data including generalisations and conclusions**

This task type requires students to generate and analyse graphs from primary and/or secondary data. A common approach was for students to collect data related to the public’s perceptions of mental illness through surveys prior to the SAC. Teachers then collated the class’s results and presented the raw data to students for analysis. This was followed by some key questions on key psychological concepts, and the strengths and limitations of surveys.

* **media analysis/response**

Relevant contemporary research, media/journal articles and films related to psychology should be used in order to avoid authentication problems. Schools selecting this task type often allowed students some time out of class to read the article prior to setting the SAC task. Students were subsequently required to apply their knowledge of psychological concepts to the case studies by answering a set of short-answer questions to demonstrate their understanding.

If provided with the article prior to the SAC, students were able to define the unfamiliar scientific terms used in the selected research report and record their results in their logbooks to ensure equity in terms of students’ literacy levels. Students could bring their logbooks into class when undertaking the actual SAC task, which often involved a response to a set of questions.

Schools are reminded that if they are using commercially produced tasks that utilise media articles, they must substantially modify the scenario and/or provided questions and answers so that the task is unique to the school. This allows for equity across the task.

* **a response to a set of structured questions**

This task type was generally structured like the external examination. Including a ‘multiple-choice’ section in this task makes the assessment invalid. Schools should check the *VCE Psychology Advice for teachers* for more details about this task type.

* **a test**

Tests typically mirrored the external examination and comprised of a series of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Generally, the questions were scenario-based and covered a broad range of key knowledge and key science skills. Reading time was included in the assessment time and tests were typically comprised of nine to 20 multiple-choice items and four to eight short-answer questions.

**Area of Study 3: Practical investigation**

The Unit 4 Outcome 3 student practical investigation was undertaken by most schools at the end of Unit 3, before the commencement of Unit 4.

Many schools audited restricted the student choice of investigation topic to ‘memory’ rather than taking up the reaccredited study design feature of offering a broad range of student topic choices. Available school resources generally affected the extent to which schools offered students a choice of investigation topic. Schools generally chose a particular aspect of memory and students developed their own variations; for example, investigations of the serial position effect included questions such as ‘How does time delay / word length / recall method impact on the serial position effect?’

In many cases, the investigation involved participation by students at the school, or involvement of friends and family members. Schools are reminded that correct protocols and procedures must be followed in obtaining consent from participants.

Most schools scheduled the investigation between the completion of Unit 3 and the start of Unit 4. Between eight to 10 hours was allocated by most schools to this task. The same assessment rubric was used to ensure comparability of task scope and demand.

Audit concerns for Outcome 3 included:

* giving students a topic and possible variables, thereby not providing students with opportunities to work independently to design their own investigations
* lack of opportunity for students to investigate their own topics of interest
* some proposed investigations were either unsafe or did not meet ethical guidelines
* some proposed questions did not involve the generation of primary data
* student questions and investigations where variables had not been controlled
* some investigation questions did not identify the variables being investigated
* too much time spent on researching background information related to topics outside the scope of the study design
* student questions that could not be investigated in the allocated timeframe
* student questions that could simply be answered with ‘yes’ or ‘no’
* too much time spent on poster production
* differences in the cognitive demands of the tasks
* some student investigation questions did not rely on practical experimentation to find an answer
* submission of multiple drafts.

Schools may provide data to students in situations where, after designing and running their own investigation, students do not generate a viable set of data that can be analysed.