The Reading Resilience Toolkit: Developing a skills-based approach to reading in higher education

An Office of Learning and Teaching Project
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Version for peer review, presented at Monash Conference Centre 27 April 2012.
1. Welcome to the reading resilience toolkit.

This toolkit offers a suite of teaching resources and strategies developed by tertiary educators and trialled in classes to enhance students’ skills in reading resilience.

We designed this toolkit for lecturers and tutors in literary studies but from discussion with colleagues in other fields we identified that reading resilience is a cross-disciplinary problem. We welcome and encourage people from other disciplines to use and adapt this material. If you do use or adapt the Toolkit resources please acknowledge the toolkit as instructed by the creative commons license below.

In this toolkit you will find resources to help course coordinators, lecturers and tutors in developing teaching approaches that enhance students’ engagement with the primary texts (novels, short stories, autobiographies, poems and plays) of a literary studies subject. You can read about how to use the toolkit in the section ‘What is the Toolkit?’.

The toolkit is the result of teaching-led research undertaken across five Australian universities:

- Australian National University
- Flinders University
- University of Queensland
- Charles Sturt University
- Monash University

The project ran from 2010 to 2012 and was funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. The researchers involved in the project were:

- Rosanne Kennedy (Project Leader), Australian National University
- Kate Douglas, Flinders University
- Anna Poletti, Monash University
- Judith Seaboyer, University of Queensland
- Tully Barnett, (Project Officer), Flinders University

Throughout the toolkit you will see text boxes; they contain comments by our students regarding the techniques outlined in the toolkit.

Version for peer review, presented at Monash Conference Centre 27 April 2012.
2. What is reading resilience?

Imagine a classroom where all the students have finished the book that you’re studying. It is possible!

Reading resilience is the capacity to undertake and discuss the complex and demanding work of interpretation required by literary and rhetorical texts. This skill requires a repertoire of analytical techniques that can be deployed with confidence and flexibility. Reading resilience addresses a serious problem agreed upon by many literature educators: students in contemporary undergraduate literature courses struggle to read and comprehend texts that draw on literary language and techniques and unfamiliar subject matter. This toolkit of strategies, designed to develop confident and articulate advanced reading skills, introduces a new approach and provides resources to address problems in delivering undergraduate literature curricula.

Traditionally, the ability to read and comprehend a range of complex texts has been recognised as a foundation skill and required outcome for students in literary studies. It also has wide applicability outside the university, in the worlds of business, education, government and politics. Due to a range of factors, it is increasingly difficult to engage students in reading demanding texts (Clausson, Chace, Gallop, Scholes).

Robert Scholes, recent President of the Modern Language Association and a leader in the field of literary pedagogy, contends that this decline in reading skills has slipped under the radar. He states that while teachers ‘normally acknowledge … that writing must … continue to be taught from high school to university and perhaps beyond … we do not see reading.’ He further contends that ‘if we could see it, we would be appalled’ (166).

Another colleague bluntly summarises the experience of many university teachers: students are increasingly skilled in visual literacy, but ‘display less and less patience with [non-visual] texts, especially long ones’ (Tabachnik 26). The erosion in reading skills is not only a significant loss in its own right – students’ failure to complete assigned reading is affecting curriculum development in literary studies in ways that are not always clearly articulated.

Many students today begin the undergraduate literary studies curriculum with underdeveloped reading skills. In the past dozen years a range of factors has affected levels of reading proficiency demonstrated by students when they arrive at university – the student body is more diverse, more students have English as a second language and students spend more time engaging in electronic communication than in reading. As Miriam Marty Clark notes, the lack of reading skills ‘is a serious problem for faculty across the academic disciplines, but it’s especially perplexing in English’ (327).

Humanists often argue that one function of humanities courses is to ‘value add’ by improving student proficiency in reading. Yet literature teachers face new and distinctive challenges in designing curriculum to improve reading skills. For instance, many students work in paid employment and find reading a time-consuming task – when time is short, reading does not get completed. Reading skills, such as textual analysis, have traditionally been taught in face-to-face tutorials, where everyone focuses on the same text. Yet there has been a decline in the face-to-face model as new technologies lead to an increase in distance-learning methods, even for students who are not formally pursuing distance education (Mary Poovey). Moreover, class sizes have increased dramatically in the past ten years, making it more difficult to fund sufficient staff to run small tutorial
groups. Such factors present challenges for teaching literature and for developing responsive curricula at a time of dramatic change in Arts faculties in general. The Reading Resilience Toolkit is designed to respond to the challenges affecting literary studies today, challenges that will continue to be significant in the future.

**References / Further reading: the Pedagogy of Reading**


3. What is the toolkit?

The toolkit comprises resources that may be applied or adapted in teaching programs to specifically address and enhance students’ reading practices. Each toolkit resource described here is explained through detailed examples that have been successfully trialled in teaching.

**Aims**

The Reading Resilience Toolkit aims to:

- Recognise the changing climate for teaching literary studies (reduced teaching hours, fewer resources for teaching, increased teaching loads and varied cohorts of students). This changing climate presents a plethora of teaching challenges for the 21st-century classroom.
- Acknowledge a problem: students often do not complete set readings and this impacts negatively on teaching and learning.
- Address this problem via a set of teaching and learning strategies designed to support students’ reading. These include, for example, teaching and learning materials such as examples and templates of reading guides, assessment models such as a reading task, marking rubrics, comment banks and tips for building success in reading.
- Provide benchmarks of the skills and knowledge that literary studies students should have at different levels of their studies and measure these skills and knowledge through assessments.

“I love the reading tasks. Never have I responded to an English subject so well.”
4. Introducing reading as a practice

Teaching reading resilience requires starting a conversation with students about reading as a practice.

Most teachers and students probably imagine they know what is meant by the term ‘reading’ in university contexts. It’s an axiom – it’s organic and learned through the simple experience of following words on a page and making links between these words and our knowledge of literary ideas and concepts. We suggest that teachers and students delve a little deeper into reading as a practice and invest more consciously in reading as a critical and cultural act that must be learned and reconsidered as literature education evolves.

Here are some strategies you can use for introducing reading as a practice.

- Set readings on reading as practice in week 1 (see 4.1)
- Survey students about their current reading practices (see 4.2)

“A different and engaging way of learning and thinking about English as a subject. Far more discussion based style of learning (which is really enjoyable).”
4.1 Readings on reading

Consider setting aside the first week of your course to discuss with your students what reading is, what your expectations of them are in regards to reading, and how they read. The following readings can be used to frame this discussion.

J. Hillis Miller on ‘How to read literature’


Read from page 120 (“Reading, like being in love, is by no means a passive act”) to page 123 (“the sovereign power [texts] have when they are read allegro.”)

This reading, when set in the first week, can be used to discuss and emphasise:

- That reading in literary studies is a mixture of aesthetic appreciation and analysis (recognising how “the magic is wrought” (122))
- The energy and positive effort required to read well
- That reading as a practice combines fast (allegro) and slow (lento) reading

Virginia Woolf on ‘How should one read a book?’


The first four paragraphs of this essay provide a frame for discussing:

- The otherness of literature, ie, that we often encounter material in literature that challenges our understanding (this is developed further in Attridge)
- The necessity of training and refining the power to read
- That we should come to the text with an open mind, as free as possible from preconceptions.

Derek Attridge on ‘Reading and responding’


This reading is useful for introducing students to reading as an encounter with the unfamiliar; it:

- introduces the idea of reading as an act of hospitality, where the reader has the imaginative courage to rethink in order to fight against the mind’s tendency “to assimilate the other to the same”
- questions the importance of being able to identify with characters and plots by suggesting that difference and Otherness are fundamental to literature and cultural change
- proposes that reading involves a suspension of habits, a willingness to rethink old positions in order to apprehend the work’s “inaugural power” (80).
References / Further reading: Reading Journals


Looker, P. “Learning through Structured Reflection.” UNSW Compendium of Good Practice in Learning and Teaching. n.2 69-81; February 2005.


Version for peer review, presented at Monash Conference Centre 27 April 2012.
4.2 Reading practices survey

A reading practices survey can be used to facilitate discussions about students’ reading habits and practices. The survey can be administered anonymously at the beginning and the end of semester and the results discussed in class.

The benefits of using the survey include:

• giving the lecturer/tutor a sense of students’ reading habits and practices at the beginning of the semester
• gathering information that can be used as the basis for a discussion about reading and workload
• allowing students to learn from each others’ experiences and strategies
• reinforcing the fundamental importance of reading to the study of literature

• Appendix 1 Reading practices survey

“One of the best things about this unit is that preparation is required: reading a text before a lecture is useful.”

“The reading tasks force us to read all the texts which has meant that I’ve engaged more with the material than I would in other classes.”
5. Reading guides

Reading guides are an intervention into a problem we have found in teaching literature – students encounter many distractions as they attempt to read set texts, including film/television adaptations and a plethora of web summaries. Students have (informally) confessed to routinely using such materials to help them read a text. For example, a student may begin reading a text, find it difficult to understand and look to web summaries for plot or theme descriptions. Or students might watch screen adaptations or read web summaries as a substitute to reading the text – a means to get by in class and in assessment tasks without reading the book.

What is a reading guide?

Ideally, a reading guide is a simple and accessible one-stop shop introduction to a set text, which circumvents students’ tendencies to look to other materials to help them with their reading, and supports them in becoming more resilient readers. A reading guide:

- is a one- or two-page document – it must be succinct and accessible to appeal to students, and offer more than competing web summaries
- is concept driven, guiding students towards the most important material (the material to be covered in class) – it can include subheadings and bold text to emphasise key literary concepts
- aligns with other teaching materials to prepare students for assessment
- provides brief but important introductory information about the text – for example, interesting facts about the author, the text’s publication and literary context
- offers information about the text’s contemporary relevance – for example, about recent television adaptations or allusions to the text in popular culture
- identifies relevant literary concepts that will be used in the discussion of the text
- includes brief summaries about the text’s structure, style, language and themes
- gives students a task to complete prior to class
- suggests related books students might like to read to enhance their learning

What does a reading guide do?

The reading guide aims to demystify the text. It should not overwhelm with information but instead function as a ‘taster’ to encourage students to engage deeply with the text. A reading guides is designed to be read before or while students read the set text. It’s therefore important that course convenors consider the best ways to circulate the reading guide to students before they start classes (for example, via email upon enrolment and in course outlines).

Assuming that students have read the reading guide prior to class, teachers are able to hit the ground running with particular discussion points that will already be familiar to students. The material in the reading guide must be referred to in class; otherwise its currency is lost.

Sample reading guides

- Appendix 2: Rousseau’s Confessions
- Appendix 3: Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home
6. Reading tasks

The reading task is both a practice and an assessment tool. It is based on some fundamental principles:

- reading is a skill that is refined through practice; it is not a passive act
- students will become more resilient readers through regular practice of reading and reflecting on their reading
- resilience can be developed by providing reading guides and key concepts that enable the students to respond critically to a text (rather than ‘from the gut’)
- giving regular, formative feedback on student responses will engage and motivate students to read and write regularly
- students will develop tools and skills for critical analysis through the cumulative build up of short responses throughout the semester
- this cumulative knowledge will enhance their ability to apply critical concepts to texts, and to make meaningful connections between texts
- through practice, students will develop skills for reading more quickly and also more thoughtfully.

What is a reading task?

To satisfy the reading task component of the assessment, students must write short responses (roughly 300 words) on each of the texts they read in a course. For instance, they may be writing 300 words on eight texts, so they will be submitting responses in eight weeks of the term.

These short responses are typically in response to questions the lecturer sets, or to questions raised in the reading guide, or to a question the student raises. Questions may ask students to reflect on some technical component of the narrative (e.g. voice, structure, point of view, use of language), or may provide students with a critical concept from literary criticism or theory to consider in relation to the text, or ask students to make critical comparisons between texts.

To get credit for their responses, students must submit them before the tutorial.

What does a reading task do?

The reading task:

- enforces the message that reading is a key component of the course
- helps students develop the habit of completing the reading
- engages students in regular, sustained, written reflection on a text

Sample reading tasks

There is no master model for the reading task. Rather, we developed a range of models to suit our individual teaching styles and institutional requirements. These included:

- the lecturer posting questions online each week, to which students responded, thereby creating online forums
- having students develop reading blogs
• asking students to hand in their responses in hardcopy
• having students respond to other students’ posts
• having students write reading responses in-class

See the section ‘Models of reading tasks’ for more information.

“Through the reading tasks I have learnt to write concisely and to read quickly but thoroughly.”
6.1 Models of reading tasks

The weight you give to reading tasks will need to be considered in relation to other factors, such as your pedagogical style and aims; school, faculty and university assessment policies regarding invigilation; word limits; assessment return expectations and so on. You might also want to consider the size of your class and whether it is team taught (see ‘Implementing reading tasks in large and small classes’).

Following are four examples of assessment items and weightings that incorporate reading tasks.

- Example A: Attendance, reading task and essay
- Example B: Reading task, attendance and exam
- Example C: Reading task only
- Example D: Reading task, essay and tutorial activities

"This is the first time that I read all the texts in a course."
Example A: Attendance, reading tasks and essay

Assessment summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Worth</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial activities, contribution to Flinders Learning Online (online discussion forums)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four reading tasks + Students were given time in class to read and comment on the responses of their peers. They were instructed on comment etiquette beforehand.</td>
<td>4 x 400 words</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Paper 1: Week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paper 2: Week 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paper 3: Week 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paper 4: Week 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term in-class test</td>
<td>1000 words</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Completed in class, Week 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major essay</td>
<td>2000 words</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>4 pm, Monday 11 June</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment detail

This assessment supplied students with questions for each task.

Rationale

Using reading tasks alongside more traditional assessment such as the essay plan and research essay allows students to develop their reading resilience skills and apply them to a longer piece of assessment in a single subject. This weighting and use of the reading tasks rewards good time management throughout the semester and enhances tutorial discussion as students come to class prepared to offer their thoughts on the text. Mandating that students comment on each other’s work fosters interactions between the cohort that leads to peer assisted learning outcomes.

- Read about the experience of someone who has taught this model in Appendix 4
Example B: Reading task, attendance and exam

**Assessment summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment item</th>
<th>Percentage of total grade</th>
<th>Due date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Participation; Reading Tasks, Research Essay</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>Variable; from Week 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance is compulsory. Six of nine tutorials must be attended for a pass.</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>Variable; from Week 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation involves coming to class prepared, sharing ideas with your colleagues, and working with and encouraging others to express their ideas. This will be discussed in the first tutorial.</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Variable; from Week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class joint presentation with buddies. (You will be graded on the merits of your contribution though it must be clear you have worked together.)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Variable; from Week 2. Due by midnight on the Sunday before the scheduled lecture for the books you have chosen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six 300-word* guided online reading and writing exercises on set novels, with some reference to required secondary materials. Each guide will be posted a week before the lecture to which it applies. You must write on at least one of the first two novels scheduled, after which you may choose any from the remaining six.</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4 pm, Friday 14 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research essay outline 150–200 words.* You and your buddies will workshop your essay outlines in the lecture in Week 10. The outline itself (100–150 words) will be worth 5%, and your written response to a buddy’s outline (50 words) will be worth a further 5%.</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4 pm, Monday 13 June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research essay, 2000 words.* Late submissions will be penalised at the rate of 2 marks out of 40 a day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Word counts must be adhered to, plus or minus 10%. Quoted material is not included in the word count.

**Assessment detail**

**Reading tasks**

**Task Description:** The reading tasks for each of the eight set texts (*Saturday, The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Freedom, Vertigo, In a Strange Room, Generosity, The Lacuna, Persepolis*) will consist of two (2) multiple choice questions, one (1) affective response, and one (1) critical reading exercise. The reading exercise for each text is due by midnight on the Sunday preceding the first lecture on the relevant text.
Rationale

This assessment combination requires and rewards consistent work throughout the course of the semester and, like Example C, uses constructive alignment principles to focus teaching and learning on reading and discussing texts. "Constructive alignment" refers to the pedagogical theory that approaches curriculum design by starting with the intended learning outcomes, and then tailoring activities and assessment to help students achieve those outcomes (see Biggs: http://www.johnbiggs.com.au/constructive_alignment.html). The skills and techniques honed and developed in the reading tasks -- setting up, sustaining and supporting an intellectual argument; incorporating key theoretical approaches; engaging with key concepts -- are brought together in a final critical essay.

- Read about the experience of someone who has taught this model in Appendix 5

"The tutorials were exciting because everyone had read the texts."
Example C: Reading task only

Assessment detail
Students use the Reading Guide and the prompt questions supplied as the basis for each task entry. Six entries were 675 words (15%), and one entry was 450 words (10%) to equal 100%.

Submission suggestions
You may choose to have students submit their reading tasks BEFORE or AFTER the lecture / tutorial, although as explained earlier, the reading task works most effectively when it is used to organise and structure the individual student’s response to texts prior to class discussion.

Students submit reading tasks at the start of the tutorial, or at 5 pm the day before tutorials, or before the lecture on the set text. Reading tasks should be due the week the text is discussed in class as outlined in this Schedule example:

Unit schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Topic 1: Introduction: Literature and national identity Anderson, Imagined communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Topic 2: Rewriting ‘The Drover’s Wife’</td>
<td>Reading task on ‘The Drover’s Wife’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Topic 3: Young and Free: Nationality, Gender and the Generations Literature and the public sphere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Topic 3: Fiction: My Brilliant Career Miles Franklin</td>
<td>Reading task on My Brilliant Career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Topic 3: Fiction: Loaded Christos Tsiolkas</td>
<td>Reading task on Loaded (in class test)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Topic 3: Non-fiction: The First Stone Helen Garner</td>
<td>Reading task on The First Stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Topic 4: Fiction: Diary of A Bad Year JM Coetzee</td>
<td>Reading task on Diary of A Bad Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Topic 4: Gender and Genre: Intimate Publics Berlant, Intimate publics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topic 4:</td>
<td>Reading Task on <em>Manhattan Dreaming</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Fiction: <em>Manhattan Dreaming</em>, Anita Heiss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Poetry: <em>The Monkey's Mask</em>, Dorothy Porter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Revised reading task</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rationale**

This assessment weighting uses constructive alignment principles to focus students’ attention on the set texts as the core material of the subject. Using only the reading task focuses student attention on continuous work throughout the semester, rewards good time management, and puts the focus of teaching and learning on reading and discussing texts rather than preparing for assessments. In this example, undertaking one reading task in class as an open book test satisfies requirements for invigilation mandated by the University.

Not using traditional assessment strategies such as the essay, exam or presentation, provides the opportunity for students to focus explicitly on developing their reading skills. Students will have the opportunity to develop and exercise the skills related to essay and research-oriented assessment tasks (development and presentation of argument, research skills etc.) in other subjects.

- Read about the experience of someone who has taught this model in Appendix 6
**Example D: Attendance, reading task and essay**

**Assessment summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Dates due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Online reading tasks (one task on each of the 8 key texts) | 8 x 300 words  
2400 words total | 40%   | Ongoing, but due before the tutorial in which the text is discussed |
| Tutorial presentation (on a critical concept) |                             | 5%    | Once in semester                                   |
| Final essay                                | 1750 word                   | 45%   | Friday, 8 November                                 |
| Tutorial activities and participation.     |                             | 10%   | Ongoing: marks based on engaged participation      |
| Total                                      |                             | 100%  |                                                    |

- Read about the experience of someone who has taught this model in Appendix 7
Implementing reading tasks in large and small classes

Large classes

You can use reading tasks in large courses that involve a mixture of tutors and full-time staff. They provide excellent opportunities for mentoring new staff in responsive and creative teaching practices.

To achieve this, you need to use strategies that you would use for every large course:

• Meet with all course staff to talk through the assessment strategies and expectations
• Have a markers meeting after the first round of marking to ensure consistency in expectations
• Have a meeting around the middle of semester to gather feedback on how tutorials are travelling and to work collectively in developing responses to them
• Encourage tutors to form a supportive community of practice around teaching which meets throughout the semester.

Your colleagues may feel that reading tasks take more time to mark than traditional assessments such as essays and exams. However, this isn’t the case. With effective use of the rubric and comment bank, our experience is that reading tasks don’t necessarily result in an increased marking workload.

When using the reading tasks in team-taught classes, you need to do the following.

At the start of semester:

• Explain the concept of reading resilience and its importance in the course.
• Acknowledge that there is a trade-off in the workload: rather than there being large piles of marking at set times in the semester, the formative and ongoing assessment increases teachers’ ability to respond to student learning as the semester progresses. Tutorials are also more self-sustaining when reading tasks are handed in before class.
• Explain that non-traditional assessment can cause anxiety in students and that tutors need to be prepared to answer questions (often more than once).
• Give tutors reading task samples.
• Make sure that every tutor agrees to and understands the importance of the return dates you set for the reading tasks: timely feedback is vital to the success of the formative assessment model.
• Make sure everyone who is marking in the course uses the rubric for every task they mark.

Throughout the semester:

• Actively monitor how long it takes tutors to mark reading tasks at the start of semester and offer mentoring to help them develop their skills in time management and giving effective feedback.
• Make sure that all tutors are returning work at the set deadlines.

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Small courses
You can also use reading tasks in small courses taught by you as subject coordinator without the assistance of tutors.

If students are submitting their work in hard copy, be aware that you may be creating a ‘closed circuit’ between yourself and the students, which can lessen the impact of the reading task’s potential to create a community of practice around reading. Consider including peer review or buddy systems where students read others work throughout the semester. Or put the tasks online in forums or blogs and make commenting compulsory.

It can be difficult to maintain the workload if you are preparing all lectures, tutorials and doing all the marking. You might consider marking the reading tasks in batches and returning them at set points in the semester (i.e. in weeks 3, 6, 9, 12).

“The use of reading tasks to discuss the individual texts caused me to develop my critical thinking skills as I needed to read the text with an analytical headset.”
7. Assessment rubrics

We designed assessment rubrics to help mark reading tasks efficiently. These rubrics assess reading tasks on the basis of criteria such as:

- understanding of the text
- evidence
- response to the question
- initiative
- written expression
- structure
- argument.

Two models of rubrics are offered below. For examples of how individual lecturers have used the rubrics to assess student work, see Models of reading tasks.

- Appendix 8: Sample marking rubrics for reading tasks

“The Reading Tasks kept me constantly engaged and motivated.”
8. Creating a community of practice in tutorials

Tutorials can be thought of as communities of practice because they bring together students to learn in a collective environment where they work together to do something better. The practice at the heart of the literary studies tutorial, when viewed as a community, is engaged, responsive and critical reading of literary texts (See Wegner: [http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm](http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm).) It’s good pedagogical practice, and very useful for overall topic evaluation, to involve students in forms of self-assessment, peer review and evaluation during the semester. We suggest that you and your students join together to create and use a rubric as follows:

**Students mark each tutorial**

- Was the discussion stimulating?
- Was there evidence that all students had read the text?
- Did students make connections between the texts and concepts, or between the different texts they were reading?
- Students might rank tutorials from favourite to least favourite or challenging to least challenging.
- How did the students find the books or the tutorial learning activities?
- What worked? What didn’t work?
- What aspects of the tutorial enhanced their knowledge and skills?

**Students evaluate their own performance in tutorials**

- Did the student complete the readings?
- Did the student encourage someone else to speak in a tutorial?
- Did the student talk to another student rather than just to the tutor?
Appendix 1: Reading practices survey

Your identity will not be provided to your tutor. At the same time in order to maintain a longitudinal nature of this survey we need to link your responses across time. Therefore please separate part above  sign and place it in the envelope. Sealed envelope will be given to neutral data entry assistant that would link your responses but provide your tutors with unidentified data.

First Name ........................................................................
Surname ........................................................................
Student ID Number ............................................................
Uni Email Address ................................................................

1101

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1101 Reading Resilience Exit Survey

Please answer the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Over the course of my English study at University, I have not completed a set text because…</th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>7 or more times</th>
<th>6-7 times</th>
<th>4-5 times</th>
<th>2-3 times</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I found the language, plot or characters confusing</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ran out of time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something in the book offended or upset me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found the book boring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not identify with the story and / or characters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Reading Guide on Rousseau’s *Confessions*

*Reading Guide*

**Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions, Books One and Two***

In reading an excerpt from Rousseau’s *Confessions* we are encountering a foundational text in the history of life writing. In her discussion of the *Confessions*, literary critic Linda Anderson illuminates the important role Rousseau played in defining life writing in secular culture. Unlike St Augustine, who wrote his *Confessions* in A.D. 397 and addressed them to God, Rousseau wrote his *Confessions* for the public audience to whom he felt he needed to justify and explain himself. This was a significant shift, and the use of life writing by public figures as a means of ‘setting the story straight’ or offering their perspectives on intellectual and political debates continues to this day (see, for example, Clinton). (Information about Rousseau as a public and intellectual figure can be found at: http://www.iep.utm.edu/rousseau/).

In the opening pages of her discussion, Anderson makes some important points about the *Confessions*, the most important of which is how Rousseau has influenced the question of truth in autobiographical writing:

> Truth for Rousseau becomes conflated with truthfulness, the non-verifiable intention of honesty on the part of the author. Truth, therefore, can never be established once and for all, but can only be presented in terms of the constant reiteration of avowals and disclaimers by Rousseau himself (44).

Here, of course, we see the historical forebear of Steven Colbert’s “truthiness” (see Miller, 538) and the inception of the problem that has defined autobiography as a genre since Rousseau. As a Romantic, Rousseau valued the individual, emotional perspective on the world, and the world, above the objective position put forward by Enlightenment thinking (look up the entry on Romanticism in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* if you need a refresher on either movement): “There is, for Rousseau, no higher form of knowledge than feeling” (44), and whether or not feeling, and the knowledge that stems from it, is knowledge worth sharing is central to the controversies and disappointments stemming from the rise of “confessional culture” (see Miller, 541).

Anderson’s discussion also highlights other genre traits introduced by Rousseau, which have equally defined life writing in literary and popular culture. She notes his “prolonged and insistent” focus on communicating the “truth” about himself (46), and his belief in the fullness of his knowledge of himself, which he believes he can simply transfer into writing. Rousseau is not writing to get to know himself better, he is writing to communicate all he knows to be true about himself to his audience (44–46), and this approach dominated life writing for a number of centuries (see Smith and Watson). There is also Rousseau’s unshakeable belief in his own uniqueness, his difference from others (47), which as Miller and Anderson observe, is perhaps Rousseau’s most influential legacy to the generations of life writers following him, such as the disgraced James Frey.
This model of life writing, founded on self-knowledge, the communication of truth, and uniqueness, remains dominant; however, Anderson – referencing Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida – points out that a counter view of life writing has emerged in light of the influence of post-structuralism. (Post-structuralism is associated with theorists including Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler). Such a view examines how the self is *constructed* through the act of life writing, despite the author’s insistence that his writing is merely communicating what he knows about himself.

This approach is exemplified in Paul de Man’s suggestion that it is actually the opportunity to *expose shame* that motivates Rousseau when he tells the story of the stolen ribbon, rather than a desire to confess his role in Marion’s dismissal from her position. In this approach, the act (and the pleasure) of confession – a kind of exhibitionism – is the true motivation for the writing, and the communication and depiction of Rousseau’s “real” self is merely the ruse for such an eliciting pleasure.

**Discussion question**

Consider the question of self-knowledge. Develop a position on whether life writing communicates a self that exists outside the text, or constructs a version of the self through the writing process itself.

Are you swayed by de Man’s argument that Rousseau is not actually confessing, but constructing an opportunity to draw pleasure from revealing shame? Is the ‘real’ focus of all life writing actually the “drama of the self”? (see Anderson, 49–51)

**Writing exercise (optional)**

Think of an event or moment from your childhood which has the potential to be shaped into an ‘exemplary’ narrative, a story which epitomises something about you, or which represents a key moment in your development (where you learned something, lost a belief forever, or had your ideas challenged or changed). Using Rousseau as a model, write up this event into an anecdote of development of a few hundred words in length.

Write about the ribbon incident from Marion’s perspective.

**Works cited:**


Appendix 3: Reading Guide on Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*

**N.B.** Words in bold are literary critical or theoretical terms you should familiarise yourself with and use in your own criticism; see Chris Baldicks’s *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

Bechdel’s *memoir* is a *graphic novel* (a long narrative told in the form of comics) and tells the tale of her attempt to understand and come to terms with her relationship with her father.

As a form, graphic memoir fits into the emerging subgenre of *life writing*. Relationships between parents and children, or between siblings, is a popular and recurring theme in memoirs, and *popular and literary autobiographies*. (If you liked *Fun Home*, you might like Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*.)

Ariela Freedman notes that not only does Bechdel ‘[position] her memoir at the intersection of image, narrative, autobiography and history [but she also] makes an additional play for high literary status by larding her book with the *influence* of *canonical modernist literature*, not only through frequent and explicit *citation* and reference but also by subtler formal, thematic and textual gestures. In telling her story, Bechdel explicitly places the graphic narrative in irreverent, iconoclastic dialogue with literary modernism. In repeatedly citing, revising and challenging writers including Joyce, Fitzgerald and Proust, she is inviting the reader to read her book alongside theirs and making a space for herself on the shelf of modernist literature’ (126).

*Fun Home* announces its interest in the relationship between Bechdel and her father on its opening page: ‘Like many fathers, mine could occasionally be prevailed upon for a spot of “airplane”’ (3). However, it also includes many visual motifs that are central to the story, such as: the place of literature (note the presence of a copy of *Anna Karenina* during the moment of ‘perfect balance’ between Alison and her father), the rarity of physical contact between father and daughter, and the house’s ornate interior decoration—‘embellishment in the worst sense’(16)—which is a source of tension throughout.

Examine each frame in the opening page. Reading graphic novels requires the reader to negotiate the relationship between text and image within each frame, and the relationship between frames. It is important to recognise that ‘[i]n comics, the images are not illustrative of the text, but comprise a separate narrative thread that moves forward in time in a different way than the prose text, which also moves the reader forward in time’ (Chute and DeKoven 769). It is the dynamic interaction between text and image that makes comics a particularly evocative form of life writing; however, it does require the reader to ‘slow down enough to make the connections between image and text and from panel to panel’ (770). Like all texts, graphic novels require the reader to be actively engaged in the making of meaning, but perhaps only comics require us to learn to read relationships between different modes of representation (text and image) in the telling of a story.

Points to consider for tutorial discussion and in-class presentations:

*Version for peer review, presented at Monash Conference Centre 27 April 2012.*
• Why does Bechdel juxtapose the child’s voice with the mature voice of the now-adult narrator?

• Have you read other texts that similarly juxtapose the perspective of the child and of the adult? Discuss the differences and/or similarities between one of these texts and Bechdel’s (Jane Eyre is one example and Atonement is another.)

• If you haven’t read Anna Karenina, for the purposes of this exercise it’s okay to look up a plot summary of Tolstoy’s semi-autobiographical canonical nineteenth-century realist novel—try the Wikipedia entry. Discuss why Bechdel might have chosen it as an intertext.

• If you look up the myth of Icarus on Wikipedia, you will see how often it has been appropriated in modern art, including literature. Discuss why Bechdel might have chosen it as an intertext.

• Taking into account what you have read about comics in Chute and DeKoven, discuss the word play in the full title of Bechdel’s text: Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic.

• Think about how the graphic novel works on the page compared to the other texts we have read this semester. Take a page you find particularly interesting and be prepared to analyse its structure in terms of the relationship of one frame to another, the function of the gutter, etc.

• Discuss the role of memory in Fun Home.

Works cited:
Appendix 4: A reflection on teaching assessment Example A

What we did

• Formative assessment that covered the entire semester. The students wrote something almost every week. This set the expectation that students would engage consistently with the topic’s reading and practise their writing over a longer period.
• The in-class test was essentially an invigilated version of the reading journal.

Teaching and learning benefits

• Students are given diverse forms of assessment to measure different skills and knowledge.
• This assessment model explicitly values reading, and aims to measure and give credit for reading as part of the topic’s assessment.
• Students gain ongoing, formative feedback that encourages (and indeed, enables) the students to use feedback to improve their critical reading and writing.
• Essentially having two different formats for the reading journal -- prepared entries and a test -- accommodates students with different skills and abilities. For example, some students who do not perform well on the prepared entries perform better on the test. Why? Perhaps the test conditions require students to focus for one to two hours on a writing task and they do not spend this much time on the prepared entries.
• This model uses short writing tasks to encourage students to build skills for essay writing.
• Having students read and comment on the reading journal entries of other students has clear learning benefits, with many students reporting how much they learned from doing this and wishing it was something they were able to do more often (for example, in other topics).

Challenges

• The topic’s ongoing writing and marking commitment proves (initially) to be a challenging workload for students and teachers. However, with encouragement (for students) and training (for teachers), this is soon overcome and students and teacher report that the workload is manageable and appropriate.

What I would do differently

• When I ran a similar topic before this one, I asked students to comment on the reading journal entries of other students in small groups, in their own time, and it formed part of the assessment. I found that there was a large disparity between the quantity and quality of comments depending on the culture of the small group the students had been placed in. Realising this, I instead created time for students to write comments during class time. This was not assessable but, because students reported that they gained a lot from reading the work of other students, I wanted to keep this component while also reducing the workload for students.
Appendix 5: A reflection on teaching assessment Example B

Context
I trialled reading resilience strategies with an advanced-level undergraduate 21st-century literary fiction course of 65 students.

Teaching and learning benefits
• Lectures and tutorials were exciting places to be because students had read the text! In 12 years of teaching, I had never before lectured to a class in which, every week, almost every student was ready and able to respond to or ask questions.
• Because students were so well prepared, tutorials developed into communities of practice. I gave up, at first a little nervously and then delightedly, the role of the ‘One Who Knows’ for a much richer learning and teaching experience.
• The arts undergraduate program can be fragmented and alienating, but students reported that working with engaged rather than resistant colleagues led to friendships that extended beyond the course itself.
• The formative nature of the assessment meant that students could work at and hone reading and writing skills in the course of the semester and put them into practice in a final research essay.
• Students developed oral skills of discussion and argumentation that will serve them well in other areas of study, as well as in their lives after they leave the university.

Challenges
• Student resistance to reading exercises:
  • While some students took to regular reading exercises like ducks to water, others were resistant. Initially some lacked the confidence to read and/or interpret complex texts without the lecturer’s imprimatur. The first two exercises need to be supported with tutorial practice.
  • Others enrolled with no intention of reading all the texts and freely admitted that they were used to limiting their course reading to those texts on which they would be assessed.
  • Distinguishing an exercise from an essay: The reading tasks/journal entries are as different from the standard research essay as a piece of flash fiction is from a Victorian novel. Because this wasn’t immediately apparent to my students, in the first weeks we returned from time to time to the marking rubric and the specific techniques and skills they were practising.

What I would do differently
For two reasons, I would reduce the number of texts from eight to six.

• Students chose six texts from eight on which to write. Despite the pleasure they reported experiencing from being in a tutorial for which everyone was prepared, some students did not read the texts on which they were not assessed.
• Some students found the reading load of eight novels, of which several were substantial, difficult to manage.
Appendix 6: A reflection on teaching assessment Example C

Context
This subject is an upper level (second and third year) Australian literature subject, with an enrolment of 55 students.

Teaching and learning benefits
When an anonymous evaluation of the course was run in week four, students reported that:

- the quality of tutorial discussion was vastly improved by the requirement to write and submit work prior to discussing it
- they appreciated the ongoing nature of the assessment, both in terms of how it interacted with the rest of their workload (one less essay to write in ‘peak’ assessment periods) and how it encouraged them to have a continuous relationship with subject content over the course of semester
- they were happy with the level of feedback.

From a teaching perspective:

- tutorial discussion was easier to initiate and sustain as students were prepared
- engagement throughout the semester was consistent across the group
- students were able to discuss the texts comparatively as the subject progressed
- the marking rubric reinforced core skills in literary analysis: close reading, attention to literary techniques, use of evidence
- the formative and ongoing nature of the assessment allows for tailored feedback and encouragement in skill development.

Challenges
For teaching staff:

- a majority of students did not read the one text that did not have a reading journal assigned to it
- students require more support and guidance regarding assessment expectations outside the essay format (extensive discussion of rationale and rubric in first class and reinforcement after return of first journal entry)
- late assessment or requests for extension need to be considered carefully in light of the emphasis on continuous work throughout the semester.

For students:

- learning a new form of writing: some students (both weaker and stronger) found the format took some getting used to—while they may be confident essay writers, a short piece of textual analysis, written often, was new
- this mode of assessment requires consistent application throughout the semester—students who had placement, illness or other commitments that would normally allow them to ‘skip’ a week or two’s content need to remain engaged in course.
**What I would do differently**

- have a reading journal entry attached to every text on the course
- return marked journals at set times in the semester (for example: weeks three, six and nine)
- use blog system so that students can read each others journal entries.

This mode of using the journals can be added to by:

- rostering-on students to lead tutorials—based on their reading journals
- peer marking or reflection—students can exchange reading journals after class based on a buddy system that runs throughout the semester.
Appendix 7: A reflection on teaching assessment Example D

Context
This subject is an upper level (second and third year) literature subject, focused on autobiography and autobiographical fiction.

What I did
Students were required to read eight literary texts for the unit. In addition, they were provided with a number of secondary readings introducing critical concepts and analyses. The lecturer posted 6–8 questions online on each set text, on the class website, using the ‘forum’ mode. Students were required to respond, online, to one question (300 words) on each text. As students added their responses, a thread on each question would develop, with some students building on other students’ observations.

Teaching and learning benefits
• An archive of responses to questions on each text developed over the course of the semester; this archive was a valuable resource for students, lecturers and tutors
• Students received ongoing, formative assessment which enabled them to develop their analytic skills
• Regular postings on each text enabled lecturer to be actively engaged with students’ learning and enhanced lecturer’s ability to respond to student learning
• Regular postings created a ‘community of practice’ in the tutorials
• In their final essays, students drew on the concepts and analytic frameworks they used in their online responses, which enabled them to develop their analytic skills
• Standard of the final essay was significantly improved over classes in which reading journals were not used

Challenges
• Students who posted online responses early in the week had an advantage; later students needed to find a new angle to avoid simply repeating what had come before.
• How to assess students who rehashed ideas that had already been discussed?
• Whether to require students to read the other forum posts in the thread—how to assess this?
• Deciding whether lecturer should respond to online posts during the posting period – for instance, to raise questions or re-orient the discussion – this can be time-consuming, and since the forum is open to all members of the class, comments on individual posts need to be thoughtful and sensitive

What I would do differently
• Discuss the marking rubric for online posts in the first tutorial, discussing the importance of grounding responses in evidence from the text
• Require students, once in the semester, to assess another student’s post.
Appendix 8: Sample marking rubrics for reading tasks

Assessment for online responses: Contemporary Life Writing

The course aims to teach students how to read and think critically about a range of texts type in the genre of autobiography, with a particular focus on the construction of the gendered self, sexuality, ‘truth’ and the individual v the relational self. In order to develop skills of reading critically and in an engaged manner, important for both gender and literature students, the assessment for the course is ongoing, rather than the a midterm and final essay.

The aim of the ongoing assessment is to encourage students to keep up with the reading, and to develop a cumulative body of knowledge that builds up over the semester, and that can be used to read each new text.

Online Reading Journals: (8 x 300 words: each post is worth 5% of your overall mark). Rules for this component of the assessment:

1. Students are required to post once on each of the set texts for the course: JJ Rousseau, Harriet Jacobs, James Joyce, Sylvia Plath, Alison Bechdel, Sally Morgan, Ruth Kluger, Raja Shehadeh

2. Each week (by Wed at latest, but often earlier) I will post a number of questions on the text that is set for the following week. The questions are designed to link the reading to concepts we have been discussion.

3. Students are required to respond to one of these questions by, at the latest, 1 hr before their tutorial on that text. This will give the tutor time to read the posts before class and use them to help focus class discussion. The aim of posting before the tutorial is lay the groundwork for an informed discussion during the tutorial. Maximum post: 300 words.

4. Students may post again on the same text after the tutorial, or respond to other students’ posts either before or after the tutorial: maximum post: 150 words

5. Each weekly forum will be closed on Sunday 5pm of the week in which the text was discussed in lecture/tutorial. Students should have moved on the next topic.

6. Lateness: I recognize that students will be overwhelmed with work at various points during the semester. I will grant everyone one ‘late’ post in the course of the semester – ie, a post after the tutorial (but it must be up by the Sunday following the tute or you won’t get credit for it). You only get one ‘free pass’ so save it until you need it!

7. In order to give you timely feedback, tutors will provide assessment (including mark and comments) on the online pots at three points during the semester:
   (1) after their first two posts (on Rousseau and Jacobs)
   (2) after Joyce, Plath and Bechdel
   (3) after Morgan, Kluger and Shehadeh.

Below I have included an assessment rubric, which indicates how posts will be assessed.

Rubric for Assessing Forum Posts
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Excellent (HD)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Very Good (D)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Good (C)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Fair (P)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding of text</strong></td>
<td>Posts demonstrate detailed understanding of texts, and include insightful use of or reflection on concepts</td>
<td>Posts demonstrate sound understanding of texts, and use of critical concepts</td>
<td>Posts show adequate understanding of texts but don’t use critical concepts appropriately in response to texts</td>
<td>Posts demonstrate limited engagement with texts and critical concepts; Superficial response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence</strong></td>
<td>Posts consistently use insightful evidence from the text (quotes &amp; page references) to support points</td>
<td>Posts include some appropriate evidence from the text (quotes &amp; page references) to support points</td>
<td>Posts use little or weak evidence (specific examples) from the text, or fail to reference examples</td>
<td>Posts consist of general comments on the text unsupported by specific examples, or fail to reference examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responds to the Question (Relevance)</strong></td>
<td>Posts are consistently relevant to the question and make insightful connections to other material in the class</td>
<td>Posts are relevant and make some connections to other material in the class</td>
<td>Posts are mostly relevant to the question, but are basic</td>
<td>Posts have limited relevance and deviate from the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initiative</strong></td>
<td>Posts extend discussion and introduce new ideas or approaches</td>
<td>Posts keep discussion moving</td>
<td>Posts mostly follow established themes and ideas</td>
<td>Posts show limited or no initiative, and repeat earlier ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written expression</strong></td>
<td>Posts are exceptionally clear and concise.</td>
<td>Posts are mostly clear and concise.</td>
<td>Posts are mostly clear but are disorganise or wordy, and/or have errors.</td>
<td>Posts are confusing, or off topic, and/or have grammatical/other errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of primary text</td>
<td>Excellent (HD)</td>
<td>Very Good (D)</td>
<td>Good (C)</td>
<td>Fair (P)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entry demonstrates detailed understanding of text, including analysis of relevant literary techniques</td>
<td>Entry demonstrates sound understanding of texts, with reference to relevant literary techniques</td>
<td>Entry shows adequate understanding of texts, with little or no reference to literary techniques</td>
<td>Entry demonstrates limited engagement with texts; no reference to literary techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of concepts</td>
<td>Entry includes thoughtful uses of or reflection on concepts</td>
<td>Entry includes use of or reflection on concepts</td>
<td>Entry refers to concepts correctly but does not meaningfully utilise them in response to text</td>
<td>Entry refers to concepts but does not demonstrate adequate understanding of them in discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Entry consistently provides and analyses well chosen evidence from the text (quotes &amp; page references) to support points</td>
<td>Entry uses appropriate evidence from the text (quotes &amp; page references) to support points</td>
<td>Entry uses weak evidence from the text</td>
<td>Entry consists of general reference to specific examples, or fails to reference examples appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Entry is consistently relevant to the question and makes insightful connections to other material in the class</td>
<td>Entry is consistently relevant and makes connections to other material in the class</td>
<td>Entry is relevant to the question</td>
<td>Entry is of limited relevance to the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Entry demonstrates initiative in extending discussion and introducing new ideas or approaches to text</td>
<td>Entry demonstrates initiative in keeping discussion going, with some introduction of new ideas</td>
<td>Entry demonstrates some initiative but mostly follow established themes and ideas</td>
<td>Entry demonstrates limited initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written expression</td>
<td>Entry expresses ideas in an exceptionally clear and concise manner</td>
<td>Entry expresses ideas in a clear and concise manner</td>
<td>Entry is mostly clear but shows weaknesses in organisation or conciseness</td>
<td>Entry expresses ideas clearly in some points and not in others</td>
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Comments: