

# External Assessment Exam Development Manual

## *For Setting Examiners and Exam Critics*

Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification (TASC)

### **Important Information**

Setting Examiners and Exam Critics engaged by TASC are required to comply with the requirements outlined in this Manual, in accordance with the Statement of Duties for their role.

The TASC Assessment Team is the primary point of contact for all matters relating to exam development processes, timelines, and role expectations.

During the critique period, Exam Critics may liaise directly with the Setting Examiner regarding clarification of exam content, intent, or rationale. Matters that cannot be resolved, or that related to process, standards, or assessment integrity, must be referred to the TASC Assessment Team at [assessment@tasc.tas.gov.au](mailto:assessment@tasc.tas.gov.au).

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## Section 1 – Purpose and Authority

This Manual outlines the operational standards, responsibilities, and requirements for Setting Examiners and Exam Critics engaged in the development of TASC written exams.

Written exams are system-wide, high-stakes assessments. All exams must align precisely with approved course documentation and External Assessment Specifications (EAS), maintain assessment integrity, and support reliable and equitable outcomes for all students.

Once a draft exam paper is submitted to TASC, the exam and all associated development processes are owned and managed by TASC. While collaboration occurs with Setting Examiners and Exam Critics, TASC retains authority over final content, structure, formatting, and presentation. Amendments may be made where required to ensure clarity, accessibility, compliance, and assessment integrity.

## Section 2 – Roles and Responsibilities

### Engagement Status and Availability Requirements

Appointment as a Setting Examiner or Exam Critic is a sessional engagement with TASC and is separate from an individual's employment with a school or other organisation.

TASC responsibilities are in addition to normal teaching duties or other professional roles. Engagement in TASC activities may require attendance at meetings, participation in review processes, and responses to communications outside normal school teaching hours.

Meetings, review periods and key activities may occur during school holidays or non-teaching days where required to meet exam development timelines. Part-time teaching arrangements or individual timetable preferences do not limit the availability expectations associated with TASC roles.

Appointees must ensure they are able to meet required timeframes and participate in scheduled meetings as part of their engagement.

TASC will work collaboratively when scheduling Critic Meetings and review points; however, flexibility is required from all parties to ensure meetings occur within necessary timeframes.

Where meetings fall on teaching days, relief payments may be made to schools in accordance with TASC arrangements.

### **Setting Examiners are responsible for:**

- Developing the exam paper strictly in accordance with the current course document and External Assessment Specifications (EAS).

This includes ensuring the exam paper:

- aligns precisely with the course document and EAS
- provides balanced coverage of externally assessed criteria
- includes appropriate mark allocations that reflective cognitive demand of each question

- allows students across the full achievement range to demonstrate capacity
- can be reliably marked using the associated marking guide.
- Reviewing prior year feedback and addressing identified issues.
- Developing the associated marking guide/assessment tool.
- Work collaboratively with TASC at multiple stages of the development process, including during and after the Critic Meeting, during internal checks, following subject matter expert review (where applicable), and during final proofing. Feedback from Exam Critics, subject matter experts and TASC must be carefully considered to ensure alignment with course documentation, EAS, accessibility requirements and system-wide standards.
- Remaining contactable throughout the development, exam, and marking periods.
  - being contactable via Microsoft Teams, email, and phone during all scheduled exam development stages, including during the timetabled exam session for their course.
- Review, proofread and confirm that the final draft of the exam paper content accurately reflects the intended assessment design. At this stage, the Setting Examiner must determine how feedback from the second draft review, including input from Exam Critics and any TASC-appointed subject matter experts, has been addressed prior to submission for internal checks.
- Reviewing printer proofs to ensure accurate reproduction of approved content.

#### **Exam Critics are responsible for:**

- Remain contactable throughout the period of engagement via Microsoft Teams, email and phone, and respond promptly to communications from TASC to ensure the exam development process is not delayed.
- Reviewing draft exam papers for validity, clarity, alignment, and fairness.

This includes:

- completing the exam independently prior to the Critic Meeting
- noting the time taken to complete the paper
- assessing clarity, accessibility and alignment with EAS
- identifying inconsistencies in mark allocation or weighting
- confirming that students of varying achievement levels can demonstrate capacity.
- Providing structured written feedback using TASC templates.
- Participating in Critic Meetings.
- Reviewing final drafts to ensure changes have not introduced unintended issues.

All appointees must comply with all timeframes and milestone requirements communicated by TASC. Failure to meet required timeframes may delay the exam development process and may impact future appointments.

## Section 3 – Confidentiality

All information generated or accessed as part of the exam development process is the property of TASC and must be treated as strictly confidential.

Exam materials must not be discussed with any person not directly involved in the development process. This includes colleagues, students, school staff, family members, and any other third parties. The identity of Setting Examiners and Exam Critics is confidential and not disclosed by TASC.

### Dispatch and Receipt of Confidential Materials

Confidential materials will only be dispatched to a personal residential address or PO Box that has been nominated and confirmed with TASC in advance. Materials will not be sent to schools, workplaces or business premises.

Appointees must notify TASC immediately if their nominated mailing address changes.

Appointees are responsible for ensuring all confidential materials are received, stored securely and accessed only by the intended recipient.

If confidential mail or materials:

- are opened by a person other than the intended recipient;
- are lost, misplaced or damaged; or
- are not received within the expected timeframe,

TASC must be notified immediately. Failure to report a potential breach may be treated as a breach of confidentiality obligations.

Electronic and hard copy materials must not be retained beyond the authorised review period. All electronic copies must be permanently deleted and hard copies securely destroyed or returned to TASC. This prohibition includes storing electronic copies on personal devices, unsecured cloud services, shared drives, or backup systems.

## Section 4 – Exam Development Milestones and Process

All required timeframes must be met to ensure the overall exam development schedule is maintained.

### Milestone overview

Action	Responsibility	Date
First draft of the exam provided to TASC	Setting Examiners	Within five weeks of commence, and no later than 30 April
First draft distributed for review	TASC	At least two weeks prior to the scheduled Critic Meeting
First draft reviewed and feedback returned to TASC	Setting Examiners and Exam Critics	Within two weeks of receipt and prior to the scheduled Critic Meeting
Critic Meeting scheduled	TASC	April - June
Second draft provided to Setting Examiner and Exam Critics	TASC	Within three working days of the Critic Meeting (where further formatting is required, as soon as practicable)
Second draft reviewed and feedback and draft solutions/marking guides/marking tools returned to TASC	Setting Examiners and Exam Critics	Within two weeks of receipt and no later than 30 June
UTAS subject matter expert review (where applicable)	TASC	Concurrent with second draft review
Setting Examiners review and address second draft feedback and any UTAS feedback prior to Final Sign-Off Meeting	Setting Examiners	As soon as practicable
Final draft provided to Setting Examiner for confirmation of content accuracy	TASC	As soon as practicable
Final draft provided to Setting Examiner and Exam Critics for final review prior to TASC internal checks	Setting Examiners and Exam Critics	Within three days of receipt, prior to progression to internal checks
TASC internal checks and final approval undertaken. Setting Examiners must remain available to respond to any queries	TASC and Setting Examiners	Mid July – September*
Final print-ready copy provided to printing vendor	TASC	Mid July – September*
Printer's proof copy reviewed	TASC and Setting Examiners	Mid July – September*
Changes made to proof (if required)	TASC	As required
Final proof approved for printing	TASC	By 30 September*

*\*These processes occur on a rolling basis depending on the stage of each exam paper. All exam papers must receive final approval for printing by 30 September.*

## Exam Development Process

The development of each external exam paper must follow the structured sequence below. All stages must be completed in accordance with timeframes communicated by TASC.

Failure to comply with process requirements may delay the exam development schedule.

### Stage 1 – First Draft Submission

The Setting Examiner must:

- Prepare the first draft exam paper in accordance with the course document and External Assessment Specifications (EAS).
- Prepare the draft in a blank Microsoft Word document (no previous TASC templates are to be used).
- Include mark allocations, indicative working lines, logical question order and section structure.
- Provide a draft solutions/marking guide (to be refined following review stages).
- Submit the first draft digitally via Microsoft Teams and in hard copy via secure postal delivery, as directed by TASC.

The first draft must not be submitted in a previous TASC template and must not include custom formatting.

### Pre-Submission Draft Checklist (Setting Examiners)

- The exam aligns strictly with the current course document and External Assessment Specifications (EAS).
- All externally assessed criteria are appropriately represented and balanced.
- Previous years feedback has been reviewed and addressed where applicable.
- Mark allocations reflect the cognitive demand of each question and are correctly totalled.
- Estimated completion time has been reviewed and is appropriate for the exam duration.
- Draft solutions/marking guide have been prepared.
- Any images included are essential to the assessment task and high-quality.
- Alternative text has been provided for all images.
- All externally sources materials (images, quotations, data, etc.) have been referenced and provided to TASC.
- The draft has been prepared in a blank document (no previous templates used).

## Stage 2 – First Draft Review

TASC will distribute the first draft to the appointed Exam Critics and the Setting Examiner, together with the First Draft Feedback Form.

Exam Critics must:

- Independently review the exam paper.
- Attempt all questions under exam conditions to test clarity, demand and feasibility.
- Complete the First Draft Feedback Form.
- Return all marked-up materials to TASC within the timeframe specified.
- Ensure materials are received by TASC prior to the scheduled Critic Meeting.

The draft will be in basic formatting and not yet in final TASC template layout.

## Stage 3 – Critic Meeting

TASC will schedule and convene the Critic Meeting.

Attendance by the Setting Examiner and all appointed Exam Critics is mandatory unless otherwise approved by TASC.

During the meeting:

- First Draft feedback will be reviewed in detail.
- Required amendments will be determined.
- Mark allocations and weighting will be reviewed.
- Alignment with EAS and externally assessed criteria will be confirmed.
- Accessibility, clarity and student equity considerations will be reviewed.
- Estimated completion time and marking time will be reviewed.
- Solutions/marketing guides (if available) will be reviewed and discrepancies addressed.

An updated electronic draft will be developed during or following the meeting.

## Stage 4 – Second Draft Review

The revised draft will be securely distributed to the Exam Critics and Setting Examiner.

The second draft will be presented in standard TASC exam format.

Exam Critics must:

- Review the updated exam paper and solutions/marketing guide.
- Confirm that previously agreed amendments have been implemented appropriately.
- Identify any residual issues affecting clarity, alignment, accessibility or marking reliability.
- Return the marked-up second draft and completed Second Draft Feedback Form within the specified timeframe.

Feedback at this stage must focus on refinement, clarity, accuracy and alignment. It must not introduce new questions, new sections, or substantial changes to the agreed assessment design, unless required to correct a critical error identified during review.

## **Stage 5 – Subject Matter Expert Review (where applicable)**

Where required, TASC may provide the exam paper to an external subject matter expert.

The expert may:

- Sit the exam under timed conditions.
- Provide feedback regarding content accuracy, clarity, timing and level of demand.

Any resulting amendments will be coordinated through TASC in consultation with the Setting Examiner.

## **Stage 6 – Final Sign Off**

Following completion of all review stages:

- The Setting Examiner must review and confirm the final draft content reflects the intended assessment design.
- The Setting Examiner must confirm that feedback from Critics and subject matter experts has been appropriately considered and addressed.
- The final draft must be formally confirmed prior to progression to internal checks.
- Confirm that the final solutions/marking guide aligns fully with the finalised exam paper.
- Confirm that estimated marking times per question/section has been reviewed and is realistic based on the final version of the exam.

Setting Examiners and Exam Critics will be provided a short final review window to identify critical content errors only. This stage is not an opportunity to redesign questions.

## **Stage 7 – Internal Checks and Approval**

TASC will conduct internal checks, which may include:

- Accessibility compliance
- Policy and regulatory alignment
- Consistency of formatting and structure
- System-wide standards review

TASC retains authority over final content, layout and presentation of the exam paper.

Where required, TASC may implement minor wording or formatting changes to improve clarity, readability or compliance. Substantive content changes will be discussed with the Setting Examiner.

## Stage 8 – Printer Proof Review

The printer's proof copy will be provided to the Setting Examiner for final verification prior to print production.

The Setting Examiner must:

- Review the printer's proof immediately upon receipt.
- Confirm in writing that the proof accurately reflects the approved final content; or
- Clearly identify any reproduction errors requiring correction within the timeframe specified by TASC.

This stage is for verification of print accuracy only. It is not an opportunity to introduce new content, restructure questions, or revise the agreed assessment design.

Failure to respond within the specified timeframe may result in the paper proceeding to print based on the version provided.

The printer's proof copy must be reviewed immediately upon receipt. The Setting Examiner must confirm in writing that the proof is accurate or clearly identify required corrections within the timeframe specified by TASC.

## Section 5 – Written Exam Development Standards

This section outlines the standards and requirements that apply to the development of written external exam papers.

Setting Examiners must ensure that written exams are aligned with the approved course document and External Assessment Specifications (EAS), are accessible and equitable for all students, and enable reliable and consistent marking across the full range of achievement.

### Types of Assessment Items

External assessment instruments may include a range of item types depending on the course structure and approved External Assessment Specifications (EAS). These may include:

- Written questions or instructions requiring a written response
- Aural questions or instructions requiring a written response
- Written instructions requiring the creation of a product
- Written instructions requiring the performance of an activity

### Written Question Formats

The following guidance applies specifically to written questions requiring written responses in supervised exams. Common written question formats include:

- Essay or extended response questions
- Multiple choice questions
- Short answer questions
- Restricted response questions (e.g. True/False or matching)
- Questions requiring problem solving, diagrams or graphical responses

### Aural/Listening Components (EAL and Language Courses)

For EAL and language courses requiring an aural/listening component, the structure, timing and format must align precisely with the External Assessment Specifications. Audio scripts must adhere strictly to prescribed timings and replay conditions. Any deviation from approved structure or timing must be approved by TASC prior to development.

### Alignment and Validity

- All assessment items must align with the current course document and EAS.
- Each item must be mappable to externally assessed criteria.
- The exam must provide balanced coverage across criteria.
- Questions must not assess content, skills, or knowledge beyond those explicitly specified in the current course documentation.

Collectively, the exam paper must provide sufficient evidence to assess each externally assessed criterion.

Individual questions may assess more than one criterion where appropriate, but this must be intentional and defensible.

## Formatting and Accessibility

- Draft in a blank Word document (no templates).
  - previous TASC exam templates must not be used when drafting.
- Use Arial 12 font; avoid custom formatting.
- Clearly number sections and questions.
- Indicate marks and required answer space.

Marks allocated to each question must reflect relative cognitive demand and support an appropriate balance across criteria.

Question numbering must remain logical and consistent throughout the paper.

- All diagrams/images must be essential, high resolution, referenced, and include objective alternative text.
- Decorative and illustrative images that do not directly support the assessment task are not permitted.

Where images are not essential to the assessment task or where a defensible rationale is not provided, TASC may remove the image as part of the exam development process.

## Assessment Item Construction Requirements

### Alignment and Cognitive Demand

- Use command terms that align with the intended cognitive demand of the externally assessed criterion.
- The term *evaluate* must require students to make a judgement supported by evidence or reasoning. It must not be used where a descriptive response is sufficient.
- Ensure the type of question aligns with the learning objectives and criteria being assessed.
- Questions must allow for responses that vary in quality, particularly in short-answer and extended-response items.

### Clarity and Accessibility

- Provide clear, precise instructions so students understand exactly how to respond.
- Ensure language is accessible and minimise unnecessary linguistic complexity where reading ability is not being assessed.
- Avoid colloquial terms that may not be familiar to all students.
- Present items clearly using appropriate wording, layout and visual cues.
- Provide sufficient space for student responses.

## **Inclusion and Appropriateness**

- Remove language, symbols or content that may reasonably be considered offensive or discriminatory, unless essential for accurate representation of content.
- Avoid sexual, obscene or unnecessarily emotive stimulus material.
- Avoid highly emotional events that may trigger distress unless essential to the assessment.
- Develop contexts that are inclusive and avoid culturally specific or gender-specific material unless essential to the content.
- Avoid references to real business names or identifiers that may cause confusion.

## **Stimulus and Graphics**

- Stimulus material must clarify the task and not act as a distractor.
- If a quotation is used, the question must require meaningful engagement with it.
- Colour or graphics must only be included where essential to the assessment task. Graphics will normally be reproduced in greyscale unless otherwise approved by TASC.

## **Optional Questions and Structure**

- Optional questions must be limited and must be equivalent in scope and demand.
- Questions must not be simple restatements of course content. Students must be required to apply, analyse or interpret content.

## **Common Issues to Avoid**

The following issues frequently compromise exam quality, equity, or reliability and must be avoided:

- Questions that are overly long, multi-layered or unnecessarily complex, limiting students' ability to demonstrate understanding within the allocated time.
- Optional questions that are not equivalent in scope, cognitive demand or mark allocation, resulting in students effectively completing different assessments.
- Decorative, illustrative or non-essential graphics that do not directly support the assessment task or criteria. Images must have a clear and defensible assessment purpose.
- Questions that assess recall only where the externally assessed criterion requires analysis, interpretation, evaluation or application.
- Questions that unintentionally cue the answer, include ambiguous wording, or allow multiple interpretations where only one is intended.
- Stimulus material that distracts from the task, is unnecessarily lengthy, or introduces irrelevant information.
- Mark allocations that do not reflect the relative cognitive demand or weighting of the task.
- Linguistic complexity that exceeds what is necessary for valid assessment of the intended knowledge or skills.

## Section 6 – Employment and Payment Arrangements

All employment and payroll matters are administered by the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) on behalf of TASC.

Payment for Exam Critics is authorised only after all required feedback has been submitted to TASC, including feedback on the final draft review where applicable. Payment will not be authorised until all review documentation and feedback have been received in full.

Payment for Setting Examiners is authorised following confirmation of the final print proof and completion of all required exam materials, including the associated marking guide/assessment tool, to the satisfaction of TASC. Payment will not be authorised prior to confirmation of the final print proof.

Payments are processed in accordance with DECYP payroll cycles. Payments are not immediate and processing times will vary depending on submission timing within the payroll schedule.

Further employment information is available on the [TASC Employment webpage](#).