

2023 ASSESSMENT REPORT

TAS315119 FIRST NATIONS STUDIES

The markers congratulate all students and teachers who completed the Inquiry for First Nations Studies in 2023. They realise the effort required to develop a question, undertake research, and construct such a lengthy submission requires a significant commitment. In many cases this is the longest and most complicated assessment students have undertaken – well done to those who completed the course and to the teachers who supported them in their First Nations Studies journey.

Referencing and Academic Integrity (Criterion 1)

Many students made a significant effort to ensure their work was well referenced – both in text and in the bibliography. A few students included both a reference list and a bibliography; while this is not a task requirement, markers appreciate seeing both lists.

There were several submissions that were under-referenced. Please remember that every word, image, or idea that is not the student's own needs to be referenced. It isn't sufficient to put one reference at the end of the paragraph. Students need to follow the conventions of APA referencing.

Some submissions chose to include footnotes. While they can be useful, APA referencing style uses footnotes sparingly, if at all; and if they must be included these footnotes need to be specific and brief. Markers found it difficult to reward students who used lengthy footnotes, because in many cases the content should have been included in the actual report, and reading footnotes interrupted the content's structure and sense of cohesion.

It's also worth remembering that because we live in a world where AI is so accessible and the markers are taking work at face value, under referencing is of increased concern. Students and teachers are reminded that should an inquiry be reported to TASC for academic integrity breach concerns, students must be able to access all drafts and any other evidence of the planning and construction of their Inquiry. It's highly unlikely this evidence will be needed, but if concerns are raised, students will be glad they have this evidence on hand.

Formatting and Structure

Numerous submissions were well formatted and made a deliberate effort to meet the requirements outlined in the TASC External Assessment Specifications for this course – well done to these students and their teachers.

However, there were also a few submissions which did not meet the formatting requirements for the inquiry. Candidates are reminded these formatting requirements are to ensure markers can clearly read content. Of note are font choice (students are advised to select clear and plain text types), and line spacing

(1.5 is specified in the specifications). TASC External Assessment Specifications are available on the TASC website under 'Supporting Documents Including External Assessment Material'.

It's important to know many markers read these submissions on screen; with this in mind students and teachers are encouraged to consider how clearly the document can be read in this format. This year there were several submissions that did not use paragraphing – information was presented in large blocks of content, and this is harder to read on screen. In addition, a few submissions also lacked headings and sub-headings to structure content; again, it's important to consider how this impacts the communication of information. Headings ensure content is specific and guides readers towards the inquiry's findings and conclusion.

It's important to know the purpose of an introduction in this inquiry, the TASC Inquiry Specifications specifies to include question, hypothesis and main arguments. Some context is acceptable, but students do not need to describe the sections of the report or restate the findings (this should have already appeared in the Context Statement and appear later in the conclusion).

Students are also reminded the conclusion should not introduce new information.

Topics and Questions

The markers did see a range of topics, including how First Nations individuals and communities are using different mediums to achieve voice and revitalise culture, and effect change; some of which explored complex topics and theories. These inquiries were interesting to read and were rewarded in the awards given. However, often markers found themselves reading submissions that were well written and could be rewarded on criterion 1, 2 and 3; however, they often missed the mark on the content criterion 8 and 9.

In formulating questions, students need to ensure their question allows them to meet the requirements of both Criteria 8 and 9. This essentially means the Inquiry should firmly centre contemporary First Nations Peoples; focus on how First Nations people themselves are addressing issues, implementing change, responding to challenges or representing themselves in the present.

It's also important to make Lutruwita the focus; the other places are for comparison and analysis. Too often the experience of Lutruwita's First Nations people is either missed in the discussion or absorbed into a wider discussion relating to Australia or is limited. Markers realise this is often because it can be difficult to find detailed information for Lutruwita, but as a course requirement it cannot be overlooked.

Students are also encouraged to explore topics of specific interest to them; however, there are some topics that are being overdone, most notably: repatriation of remains and artefacts and assimilation. While the markers don't want to discourage students from developing questions based on interest, ideally students should try to consider how their focus and research may offer something new to the discussion.

Historical Context

Too many students are devoting too much of the limited word count to discussing the past, and there is a strong correlation between submissions which fail to adequately address criteria 8 and 9, and excessive historical context. The focus for this inquiry should be events since World War II, and while makers

appreciate students sometimes need this background context for themselves, or perhaps they feel the inquiry needs it to create a sense of cohesion, it means many students are running out of time and words to address content criterion 8 and 9. Students should prioritise the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ not just the ‘what’. So if students are arguing that a policy or initiative has resulted in reconciliation or cultural resurgence, it is important to explain how that effect has been achieved (analysis) and explain how we know this (evaluation).

In many cases some context may be included in a specific section – but do this very cautiously. In most cases, enough detail could be included in the introduction to orientate the reader.

Context Statement (see also Criterion 3, Element 1)

Students are reminded the Context Statement is the first piece in the folio after the cover page and contents page, and therefore needs to make a strong impression. It is also the part of the Inquiry which assesses criterion 3, element 1. Students and teachers are reminded that according to the TASC Specifications this should: rationalise and justify the topic chosen, introduce the question and summarise the inquiry findings.

More effective Context Statements provided a clear link between the student and the topic; these were more personal and offered something relevant to the individual student’s context, experiences and/or interests, in relation to the Inquiry focus. These statements often identified the student’s standpoint – who was conducting the research and how they were positioned in respect of the subject matter. To acknowledge one’s own privilege or unique perspective in relation to the content is welcomed, because it humanises the student and suggests they have some idea of how this may impact their own bias and findings. At the same time be careful of blanket statements like “the course has allowed me to understand the struggles of First Nations peoples”. Certainly, the course does help audiences to better understand the past, but such generalisations lack analysis and depth; rather the inquiry’s analysis of research and evaluation of that content should show the maker the candidate understands the situation in relation to their question.

It may be beneficial for students to use the Context Statement to outline which elements within criteria 8 and 9 their Inquiry will address. This may help students to fully understand the importance of targeting their focus to the ideas described in the elements, and mean the markers better understand how the students believe they are addressing these criteria. (See additional notes in criterion 8 and criterion 9 comments).

The word count for the Context Statement is 500 words maximum – a number of students exceeded this and were penalised in fairness to those who adhered to the specifications.

Criterion 1

Some submissions were beautifully crafted and offered markers a chance to genuinely engage with content. These students generally knew their audience and the purpose of the Inquiry. Concepts were well communicated, and arguments were well articulated, and markers rewarded this where possible.

However, there were also numerous submissions that were littered with typographical errors, including: teacher and student editing notes that had not been removed, lack of capitalisation at the start of sentences or for proper nouns (including peoples' names, titles of documents and texts, and organisations) and poor grammar or sentence structure. Makers appreciate that these submissions are not easy to complete in the time allowed, nevertheless its important students and teachers realise these editing issues impact readability and how well information is communicated. It is also such a shame when students have put so much effort into their research and write their report, only for it to lose meaning because of typos and other editing issues.

Please ensure book and film titles are italicised, along with titles of Acts.

Criterion 2

It was pleasing to note many candidates have obviously used this subject to develop their skills in First Nations Studies and this is excellent. In many cases they are using quality data and quotes to substantiate their content.

It's important to ensure quotes from First Nation people who are involved or impacted are included where possible. While APA does not favour the use of quotes (it prefers referenced paraphrasing), quotes are encouraged so students and markers both interact with the actual words of those who have been involved in or impacted by events.

Indigenous Studies is an emerging discipline and students are encouraged to make use of the writings of First Nations theorists to support their discussions. This has the added benefit of using First Nations opinions. In addition to this, too many students are relying solely on websites and are often reproducing the information found there. Information needs to be synthesised into a cohesive whole.

In some cases, evidence was not used especially well; for example, good quotes that were not referred to or introduced in any way – rather appearing in a sentence on their own with no context or detail connecting them to the discussion. This is a missed opportunity; such information should be embedded within the discussion to support the research and findings.

Subject and topic specific terminology was generally appropriate, although there were many missed opportunities to use the language of the course and criterion. Using terminology specific to the student's question, along with the criterion elements (8 & 9) relevant to the question and discussion to ensure content is doing what it needs to.

Often the terms 'colonialism' and 'colonisation' are being used incorrectly and interchangeably – students and teachers are encouraged to review the meaning of these terms and ensure this is remedied in 2024. The University of Saskatchewan provide a helpful document on [Terminology](#).

Another reminder is that 'Racial' is not a synonym for 'Racist'.

Markers this year saw a number of references to 'Cultural Reformulation' – this is a term that should be used with great care. While in some cases culture has had to adapt and evolve because of colonisation, the focus ideally should be cultural resurgence and/or cultural revival. Certainly in some specific instances reformation may be relevant to discussion, in most cases it should be used sparingly if at all.

Avoid representing First Nations people as “lost or less-than” (Watego, 2021, p.29). They are dynamic, living, contemporary cultures. The colonial systems that came with the first Europeans was premised upon ideas of white superiority. For many First Nations people, that colonial invasion is ongoing. As Cleland, (2008) states “The lived reality for many Indigenous Australians is that the colonial invasion of this continent is an unfinished project, one that still lives with us each and every day” (37). Cleland also draws attention, however, to how the evidence of the ongoing consequences of colonialism is “transformed into notions of disadvantage and dysfunction, which in many ways maintains a status quo of non-Indigenous ‘success’ and Indigenous ‘failure’. The colonial discourse that positioned and still maintains Indigenous Peoples of Australia as inferior and in need of non-Indigenous intervention and ‘help’ can be seen as a cycle with deliberate colonial ends.” (38)

Criterion 3

A reminder to students and teachers that element 1 of this criterion is assessed solely by the Context Statement.

Quite a few Inquiries tried to include references to alternate perspectives (contestability) and this was rewarded in this criterion where possible. However, students need to make sure the counter-voices they include are relevant and not taken out of context. In particular those from Jacinta Napijinpa Price which came from the Voice debate; and while the markers are in no way suggesting they agree with her comments, they are encouraging students to look more widely than the popular media for contestable opinions, and to ensure those they include are directly relevant to their question.

Also worth noting is the opinions of Keith Windshuttle and ‘The Quadrant’ magazine, of which Windshuttle is the editor. This is a conservative magazine and is often controversial as they reflect the ideas seen in Windshuttle’s ‘The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Van Dieman’s Land 1803-1847’ and ‘The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: The stolen generations 1881-2008’ - both of which aim to counter arguments presented by historians such as Lyndal Ryan and Henry Reynolds. Teachers are encouraged to inform students about the History Wars as this is a study in contestability between notable historians.

Students and teachers are encouraged to be careful in how they refer to the quotes and opinions from Keith Windshuttle, and similar figures and understand the full context of their words and ideas; they are rarely sympathetic to modern popular understandings of First Nations history.

Criterion 8

This is the first of the content criterion, along with criterion 9, and reflects on how the different places being studied have got to where they have in terms of First Nations rights, representation and reconciliation. Responses generally did a little better in this criterion than in criterion 9, as many students considered specific events that have affected positive change for First Nations people.

More successful submissions tailored content to relate directly to the chosen question – this was rewarded. However, a number of candidates launched a series of brief summaries of numerous events that had no depth of discussion or was more ‘shopping list’ of important events. While this did mean there was something that could assess this criterion, it lacked the detail required to give higher ratings.

Students and teachers are encouraged to carefully consider this criterion in their planning and development of the student's Inquiry question. It may mean early in their research they are already actively considering how to address this criterion in a meaningful way, that relates directly to their question, foregrounds the participation of First Nations individuals and communities, and use this content to answer their question.

Students and teachers are again reminded some questions are harder to find information on Lutruwita for. Allow time to review the question if students hit research roadblocks.

Criterion 9

There were a few students who managed to address both criterion 8 and 9 with depth. It is not an easy ask to find balance between three places, plus two content criterion; however, those who did this successfully were rewarded.

This is the second content criterion and is firmly embedded in what is happening in the present. However, because many questions were framed to reflect on the past, they often failed to include content that included what is happening now. Similarly, inquiries that spent too much time considering the past and/or data to emphasise the severity of specific situations (such as health outcomes, education, or over-representation in criminal justice systems), it meant how First Nations individuals and communities are working to improve these outcomes was lacking or missed.

It is strongly recommended students and teachers select one or two key concepts from one or two elements within the criteria to guide the drafting of the question. It's important to realise these points may appear in the question OR be a focus within the response, that leads to how the situation is changing or being improved by and with First Nations peoples and communities.

In the case of both criterion 8 and 9 markers appreciate there will be discussion around government and government departments, legislation, and other support organisations and institutions, First Nations individuals, communities and organisations should be foregrounded where possible.

Works Cited

Watego C (2021) *Another day in the colony*, University of Queensland Press, Australia.

Cleland, A 2018, "Maybe it is Rocket Science! Still Questioning What's Needed in Preparing Human Service Practitioners to Work Effectively with Indigenous Australian People", in C Fejo-King & J Poona (eds), *Emerging from the Margins First Australians' Perspectives of Social Work*, Magpie Goose Publishing, 37–53.