

# 2024 ASSESSMENT REPORT

## TAS315119 FIRST NATIONS STUDIES

### Folio Component

Making this year was an enjoyable experience. Markers saw a range of new and interesting questions and it was clear many students genuinely engaged in the course content. It was also excellent to read many studies that focussed on the present, quoted from First Nations People directly involved in the topic, and referred to quality academic material to support discussion and substantiate findings.

While in the past students have often neglected discussion of Lutruwita/Tasmania, this year most submissions offered a balanced discussion of Lutruwita PLUS two other places.

### Criterion 1

This criterion focusses on communication and referencing. Students who crafted an error free, well-articulated and well-structured argument were rewarded. These students had spent time editing and refining their submission and content was clearly communicated. Along with this, students who accurately used APA referencing correctly were rewarded.

However, several submissions were poorly edited, confusing, or lacked effective structure. This often impacted how markers engaged with content and whether the student adequately addressed their question. Markers appreciate that these submissions are laborious and sometimes overwhelming as many students will have never constructed anything like the First Nations Studies Inquiry before. But this is more reason to plan and use a structured research, writing and editing schedule in the lead up to the TASC due date.

In terms of structure – it can be helpful after students have developed their question to create a draft contents page that can be adapted and updated as needed, as this can help students to structure and pace their research and ensure they are mindful of how the content flows leading to their findings/conclusion. Structure is key to the success of such lengthy and complex tasks. Discussion and planning are important early in the research process to ensure the question and structure can address the following: answer the question, address content Criteria 8 and 9, and include comparison and contestability. This year it was clear students who had a clear plan and structure were more successful in achieving this as well as presenting well-reasoned findings in relation to their focus.

Again, students and teachers are reminded to consult the External Assessment Specifications document to ensure submissions meet formatting requirements. In far too many submissions contents pages were missing, and cumulative word count was missing from every page (students need to be reminded this is not merely a tally of the words on the single page). Students are encouraged to use the Word contents page generator – this is excellent and allows for easy updating of page numbers on the contents page.

A quick reminder again about Academic Integrity. If the content was learned or found elsewhere, it needs a reference. Transparency is important in a course like this where markers are reading a huge range of responses – don't leave the marker searching for in-text references. It should be clear where the information came from. Across most inquiries, there was generally a good effort made to reference accurately. Markers were able to reward submissions that had a clear and correctly referenced Bibliography. In-text citations are essential in academic research, in the context of First Nations Studies, in-text references reassure markers that Academic Integrity has been taken seriously by both students and teachers.

## Criterion 2

This criterion focusses on appropriate use of terminology relevant to the course and question, consideration for a range of interpretations and evidence, and the development of an argument that leads to logical and well-articulated findings.

This year several inquiries used topic specific terminology very well. These submissions showed a genuine engagement with the course content, not just from their own research, but these candidates applied relevant terminology introduced throughout the year in all Units.

Students and teachers are reminded that the term Indigenous is generally not considered suitable in the Lutruwita/Tasmania context, unless a person has self-identified as such. As a collective term in general, First Nations Person or People is encouraged in the context of the course.

A reminder to use carefully considered headings and sub-headings to structure content and support the development of the argument in relation to the question. These headings can also connect to elements within Criteria 8 or 9. Students are also reminded to not overuse headings and subheadings as this can interrupt the development of content.

A reminder that Palawa and Pakana and Lutruwita are now spelt with a capital letter. Similarly, First Nations People/s should also be capitalised.

Several submissions misspelt Lutruwita; make sure key words are correctly spelt.

## Criterion 3

### Topics and Questions

Again, it was refreshing to read several Inquiries that explored a range of original and interesting topics. Some of the more notable were those that explored the impact of climate change on First Nations People and their responses to these threats, the indigenisation of media, film, music and/or fashion; and how First Nations communities are practicing ancestral and cultural systems of law in the present.

While not mandated, when developing a question it is a good idea to compose the questions with 'how' or 'why' – questions framed like this tend to better set up student research.

Make sure the questions are about topics specific to First Nations People. In several submissions this year the focus was governments or other institutions, rather than making First Nations stakeholders the focus. Questions need to privilege First Nations agency and autonomy, rather than being exploitative. Questions that foreground First Nations Peoples and their concerns and achievements, better allow students to quote from First Nations People involved in the topic, and this can be rewarded in Criteria 2 and 8 and/or 9.

Be cautious of questions that tend to focus explicitly on either Criteria 8 OR Criteria 9 elements. Questions that preference one criterion over the other hobbled ratings, as it often led to the other criteria being penalised for lack of evidence or discussion. Also, some questions set students up to focus more on the past (or on activism – which is C8) and this meant C9 was either missing or severely neglected.

Where relevant it was good to see a post-Voice Referendum world acknowledged for Australia and Lutruwita/Tasmania.

### Context Statement (Criteria 3, Element 1)

It is always refreshing to read context statements written with a professional but personal voice. This is the one chance for students to show markers why this topic is of particular interest to the student. Questions that explore themes and ideas that are personal to the student (such as those noted above in relation to the topics chosen) often allow greater opportunity to make this personal connection to the topic.

Several students overtly explained how the question and inquiry connected to Criteria 8 and 9. This was something markers haven't seen before, but it showed how students believed their question and/or findings were relevant to the course. It also seemed to help students ensure they were aware of how they needed to craft their response to address these criteria.

Many teachers encouraged students to recognise their own bias and privilege in relation to their question, consequently a few students were able to identify this in their Context Statement. This enabled students to show markers that they have come to understand that individual context influences the inquiry process.

Teachers and students are reminded to check the External Assessment Specification document. The Context Statement must: explain why the topic was chosen, explicitly introduce the question, and summarise the findings. Many candidates focussed on why they chose the questions but forgot to introduce the question or summarise their findings – this was penalised in Criteria 3 Element 1.

### General

Element 1 of this criteria explicitly assesses the Context Statement. The other elements consider contestability, and use of evidence to support argument. See notes above regarding the Context Statement.

This year some students explored different opinions and perspectives effectively. These students tended to develop questions that allowed for different opinions or dipped into recent historical observations and events (from about the 1990s onwards), that are being challenged. Some examples included: reference to Keith Windshuttle's books or essays, Peter Sutton and Keryn Walshe's book 'Farmers or Hunter-Gathers: The Dark Emu Debate', online forums i.e. the Hobart City Council [Truth Telling Discussion Forum](#), plus numerous other writers, interviews (i.e. Q+A), documentaries etc. Those who tried to include some degree of contestability were rewarded.

However, there were also a significant number of submissions that did not include contestability. In many cases these submissions were heavy in confirmation bias, as content merely supported existing and/or accepted interpretations of events, movements, etc. All students and teachers are encouraged to overtly consider how differing opinions and perspectives can be mentioned or explored within the inquiry.

It should be noted that some questions lend themselves to discussions around contestability – this should be kept in mind when crafting questions, and when undertaking research.

It was excellent to see students including quality quotes from relevant First Nations stakeholders to substantiate claims and support discussion. This is vital in this course, to ensure submissions reflect First Nations opinions and experiences, in relation to the question.

In the past discussion about Lutruwita/Tasmania has at times, been neglected, and meant studies felt unbalanced. This year it was excellent to see Lutruwita was included in all submissions, and in none did it feel like an afterthought. Well done to students and teachers!

Some evidence used by students didn't feel especially relevant to the topic. Consequently, this gobbled up valuable word count, and did little to answer the question, nor to address Criterion 8 or 9. 'Fluff' is not welcome in these submissions to meet the minimum word count and is penalised by the markers. All evidence must be relevant to the submission.

Students are encouraged to use the word count carefully! It may seem like a huge total (4000-6000 words), but in truth by the time students have answered the question, included contestability, made comparisons between Lutruwita and two other places, addressed content to meet Criterion 8 and 9, plus provided evaluation and analysis, it can get tight.

## Criterion 8

This is the first of the two content criteria assessed in the external inquiry. Both Criteria 8 and 9 are firmly embedded in the recent past and the present and encourage candidates to explore how First Nations People are engaging with local and international networks to address the consequences of the past.

Students and teachers are reminded that inquiries do not need to address all elements. Rather questions should be tailored to ensure they can meet one or two elements very well. Inquiry content structure should be carefully considered to ensure this content is given priority (this is the same for Criterion 9), and to show how it relates to answering the question.

This year students who knew how their question directly connected to this criterion were more successful. They used the overall structure of the submission to highlight the evidence relevant to their question, and this was also reflected in their findings and evaluation. In many of these cases key concepts of this criteria were interwoven with relevant examples, and often quotes were used to emphasise how key First Nations stakeholders interpret or feel about these ideas and examples.

Less successful candidates tended to pick a term or two from the criterion and drop it here and there within their discussion, rather than using the concept to facilitate exploration of the topic leading to a sophisticated conclusion in relation to the question.

Similarly, these students often gave numerous examples that had little or no detail, resulting in more description and less analysis or evaluation. Students need to be aware to not offer too many short examples that offer no depth, and too few longer examples that claim to represent a broad range of people, but do not.

## Criterion 9

This is the second content criterion that is assessed in the external inquiry. While the last criterion is largely embedded in the recent past (activism, referendums, development of UNDRIP, etc.), this criterion is firmly embedded in the present. This is a student's chance to show how First Nations stakeholders are engaging with the world now.

Discussion should be focussed on First Nation-ran organisations, leaders within a range of political and social movements, elders, and so on; but more than this, students who are able to evaluate and analyse the impacts of these initiatives are more successful. Inquiries that offer this analysis and/or evaluation show an appreciation for First Nations People in the present, as they continue to challenge the consequences of the past, but also gain agency through the revitalisation and sharing of culture and identity, or reconnect and strengthen community, or engage with Country in positive ways.

Many students addressed this criterion well as they did include modern content that is relevant to the present. Often these students crafted question that allowed them to focus on the now, and they quoted from a range of First Nations stakeholders.