

2025 ASSESSMENT REPORT

TAS315119 FIRST NATIONS STUDIES 3

General Comments

Markers were again impressed with the variety of topics selected by students for their First Nations externally assessed inquiries. There is always a risk that students are reluctant to extend themselves, but this year there were again new and interesting topics selected that reflect unique individual student interest. It was also lovely reading so many respectful and well-considered submissions. There is strong indication that teachers are helping students to recognise privilege (their own and others), and this enables students who do have positions of privilege to identify this and show how this may influence their research and interpretations of findings. Consequently, many submissions overtly relied on evidence and sources developed by First Nations People and communities to support the inquiry findings.

For the 2025 external inquiries in First Nations Studies, Lutruwita PLUS two other places needed to be discussed. Generally, markers were impressed by the balanced discussion evident in most folios this year between the three places chosen. Something to note for 2026 is the requirement to discuss Australia, Lutruwita/Tasmania (*where possible*), and at least one other place. The slight shift reflects an awareness that many topics are hindered by a lack of data and evidence available for Lutruwita/Tasmania.

An interesting addition to many submissions was an Acknowledgement of Country, while not a requirement of the submission, this addition sometimes complimented the inquiry focus and was a nice nod of respect. However, students and teachers are reminded that these Acknowledgements must be included in the total word count and are not mandated.

Folio Component

Criterion 1

Many submissions were well-communicated; however, the markers noted numerous instances of under-referencing. In some cases, this saw sections or sub-sections of the submission with few or no intext references. Students and teachers are reminded that markers must ensure equity across the course, and when a submission lacks references, it is difficult for markers to know the work is not AI generated or from elsewhere. Markers prefer teachers and students err on the side of over-referencing than under referencing. It is also important to remember that referencing comprises three elements of Criterion 1; a solid reminder to invest time in this key part of the submission.

Most inquiries made use of the maximum word count. For many stronger submissions this allowed for quality depth of discussion, including solid use of evidence, contestability and evaluation and analysis. However, less successful submissions were sometimes wordy and less edited. These inquiries were also historical context heavy, and this does nothing to meet the Criteria 8 and 9 content criteria for the submission.

A reminder about external inquiry word count, as stated in the External Assessment Specification for this course, appendices are included in the word count. This year some submissions seemed intent of obscuring word count by using the appendices to add content that was not included in the final word count. Similarly, some candidates included text heavy images and tables throughout the submission to add information that was also not included in the word count. The word count is set at 4000-6000 for all students to ensure equity in that every student has the same chance to discuss their chosen topic with supporting evidence. Students are reminded that the external assessment word count has been carefully determined for this course, and they must adhere to it.

A reminder for those who want to include texts, tables, etc. in the appendices: this year there were some texts included that were not referred to anywhere in the inquiry discussion. Any resource deemed important enough to include in the appendix should also be important enough to refer to within the discussion. These resources should all be labelled and referenced.

Many students used images within their submissions and these often supported markers to better engage with the topic. For example, inquiries exploring art, music clips, film, fashion, social media, etc. often benefited from these inclusions. However, images must be APA in-text referenced and include a caption. The images should also be directly relevant to the discussion. In many cases the use of images was used to complement the information to enhance understanding and felt connected to the discussion.

Criterion 1 assesses how well the content is communicated, therefore its readability. This year numerous submissions did not include paragraphs and because these submissions are not meeting basic English communication requirements, they are penalised on this criterion. These inquiries are lengthy, contain numerous parts and each explores a unique question; with this in mind, students and teachers are encouraged to prioritise readability. Information broken into suitable chunks allow readers to pause and process content and is as important as spelling and grammar to ensure content is clear.

Students and teachers are reminded that while it is excellent to fully engage with the research process through emails and interviews, these must be referenced in accordance with APA referencing (in-text and reference list). Please be careful how this is done; for example, if a student name will appear in the reference/email, please use their TASC ID instead of their name.

Criterion 2

While many students referred to First Nations People using suitable and respectful language, there was a tendency in some submissions to include adjectives such as 'proud', 'great', 'strong', etc. If a First Nations person refers to themselves or their community as this, it is reasonable to use the language, but if the adjective is the student's description, it does not fit the formal register required for this submission. It is better to let the evidence speak for itself, as this will show the First Nation person's perspective and attitude.

While it is expected students use full name or last name when referring to academics or experts (both First Nations and Non-First Nations), when referring to elders or other local community members it is preferred to find out how they like to be referred to. If this information is not available, use their country/people and then name, for example Arrente and Kalkadoon woman Rachel Perkins, or Palawa Elder Uncle Rodney Dillon.

This criterion also focusses on the development of a convincing argument and use of sources. Many candidates drew from a range of resources, including interviews and academic sources. However, there was also some missed opportunities, as excellent quotes were sometimes included but were not attached to any of the content. This meant this evidence did little to further the student's discussion or evaluation of evidence in relation to their question. Please ensure quotes are embedded within the discussion to support the argument/research – avoid having them 'floating' disconnected from the other information.

In terms of report structure there was a trend this year to identify three or four key people/examples and hang the whole discussion on these examples. While this works well for an essay, it tended to limit the scope of discussion, particularly in relation to evidence for Criteria 8 and 9. This reduced the effectiveness of comparison and contrast and hindered the complexity of analysis and opportunities for effective evaluation. Also, when only using three examples, students often made generalised statements about First Nations People from that place, as if the single example from the country represented all – this is a falsehood. Rather than starting narrow, markers recommend that students begin wide and then narrow their discussion using a range of specific examples. Evidence to back up and support observations is essential.

Students and teachers are reminded to review spelling for words that refer to places and people in this course. This year markers noted both Lutruwita and Palawa were often misspelt. Such oversights make a submission feel unedited and disrespectful. Markers also noted several prominent Palawa people's names spelt incorrectly often in some submissions. Such errors must be removed during the editing process.

Many candidates supported their discussion with well-considered quotes from a range of relevant First Nations People. In other cases, their words or ideas were paraphrased and referenced effectively. This was excellent to see, to ensure those who have been and continue to be impacted by the past and present in this space are heard. But more than this, it is also important students show they realise First Nations People should have a voice in matters that directly reflect their lived experiences, activism, ideas and progress. As noted earlier, this reflects an increasing sense of respect included within the submissions — well done teachers and students in this space!

Criterion 3

Criterion 3 explicitly assesses the content of the Context Statement. Students and teachers are reminded that this is the only opportunity to humanise the student and offer the marker a sense of their connection to the topic. The only part of the submission that can be written in first person, this year the markers read some insightful and self-aware Context Statements that clearly met the requirements of the Statement which is to introduce the question, explain why this topic was chosen, and then summarise inquiry's findings. Stronger folios are also able to identify the specific element/s of Criteria 8 and 9 that are being addressed. Markers also noted more students explained their perspective; for example, they identified their privilege or other relevant things that influence the lens through which they interpret the topic and findings.

Teachers and students however are encouraged to remind themselves of the difference between the purpose and content of the Context Statement and the Introduction. This year markers noted Introductions were often a rehashing of the Statement. Introductions need to introduce the topic, perhaps offer some context to the topic, and give a sense of the direction of the inquiry (basically a longer version of an essay introduction). The Introduction should adopt the necessary formal

register (as should the rest of the submission), similar to that used on a formal essay; therefore, topic-specific language and terminology should be used, it should be written in third person where the writer is not an active participant and those quoted are introduced according to their preference.

Some Context Statements this year included information that alluded to specific schools. Teachers and students are reminded to be cautious of this content; anonymity is important for marking!

Markers this year noticed a lot of questions were over ambitious or favoured only one of the two content criteria. Students and teachers are reminded that question design and inquiry structure is vital to getting the balance of discussion and ensuring both Criteria 8 and 9 are addressed.

Generally, stronger folios were structured around themes or ideas connected with the question. For example, a question that focusses on land handbacks might include a subheading about 'land activism (C8)' where the three places were discussed comparatively in terms of successes, failures, events, legislation, etc, then moves onto a new section. The next section could be titled 'Community on country' where the candidate comparatively explored how different peoples in these places are engaging with/managing/being present on land. Structure that focussed more on a theme/concept rather than place studied facilitated a more organic comparison and allowed for greater evaluation which students were rewarded for. On the contrary, weaker folios continue to break content up according to place, therefore denying a smoother opportunity to compare First Nations Peoples lived experience in relation to the question.

Candidates and teachers are reminded that the inquiry is a report, therefore headings and subheadings are important. Markers have noted that effective structure is key to ensuring content is logical and supports exploration of the chosen question and meet the needs of Criteria 8 and 9. This should be part of early planning and adapted as research is undertaken. Within the sub-sections, it might be worth considering the following structure: introduce the idea explored in that part of the inquiry, offer evidence to support the idea, and link back to the argument/question.

Students are encouraged to look wide for topics – assimilation, land, and the repatriation of artefacts and remains tend to be researched often. With the amendment made to the course for 2026, hopefully it will enable a greater range of topics that cater to student interest and offer a point of difference.

Contestability is overtly referred to in this criterion in Element 2. Stronger submissions made a deliberate effort to show differing opinions about their topic but then countered these opinions with well-articulated evidence that highlighted the weakness in the counter argument. Markers realise this is a skill many students do not have and that some topics lend themselves to discussion around contestability more easily. Nevertheless, it is part of the criteria and students and teachers are encouraged to find a way to include this in the external submission.

More successful inquiries were able to identify and include multiple perspectives relevant to their topic, including quotes from respected historians and First Nations academics and other First Nations People that highlight contrasting interpretations or opinions related to the same topic. Strong submissions were then able to acknowledge the complexity and range of opinions but also use this contrasting evidence to inform their findings. However, to meet the requirements for this criterion element, ideally diverse and differing First Nations perspectives should be prioritised over problematic non-First Nations ideas and opinions.

Criterion 8

For both Criteria 8 and 9, students and teachers are recommended to review analytical and evaluative language to support more analysis and evaluation in these submissions.

A reminder that students do not need to meet every element of this content criteria. Students are instead recommended to focus on one of the five elements and do it well. More successful submissions were able to structure questions around a key idea such as self-determination, truth telling or atonement, rather than trying to do everything. Markers do not expect every submission to address all points in all elements – just choose one or two and do it well. Stronger submission did this effectively, these students understood the inquiry is a significant document that has a lot of moving parts, including the discussion of three places, contestability, evaluation and analysis. Keep the focus for this criterion tight and embed the concept into the question or the content structure so it doesn't get lost in the broader discussion.

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) is a good example of a First Nations organisation that has affected positive change through activism and other mechanisms, but they do not represent, nor do they speak for, all First Nations Peoples across Lutruwita; there are numerous organisations i.e. Tasmanian Regional Aboriginal Communities Alliance (Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation, Flinders Island Aboriginal Association Inc, Six Rivers Aboriginal Corporation, Weetapoonna Aboriginal Corporation, etc.). Palawa are not a single homogenous group of peoples and reference to multiple organisations and programs reinforces the students understanding in relation to this.

There was a heavy reliance on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in this year's submissions. While it is important to know the UNDRIP, some student's efforts to incorporate this one document felt like a stretch that did not fit their discussion. Teachers and students are reminded that there are many international instruments and organisations that can be successfully referred to in submissions; for example, *The Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge was agreed among members of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO)*; *the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWIGA)*; *United Nations Permanent Forum*, etc.

Generally, Criterion 8 was addressed well this year. It is evident that teachers are supporting students to develop questions that can adequately incorporate both content criterion (C8 and C9); however, for both criterion, candidates are reminded that these criteria need to be addressed equally. In numerous cases one of the criteria was explored more than the other and, in some cases, either C8 or C9 felt a little tacked on.

Criterion 9

Many of the observations noted for Criteria 8 also apply to Criteria 9. Students and teachers are encouraged to identify a focus from Criteria 9, but are reminded not to try to do too much. Instead, they should keep the focus targeted and do it well. This is the principle more successful candidates adopted this year, and they reaped the benefits as their discussion was not spread too thin.

A number of students explored inquiry questions relating to media this year; however, markers would encourage this to be focussed (to define the parameters of what is meant by 'media' in the individual inquiry) and this focus to be identified early in the submission. Those whose question

never tailored what was meant by 'media' tried to do too much, often dipping into television, social media, print media, podcasts, etc. and the discussion lacked depth. While those who focussed on television or specific social media platforms tended to have a more clearly directed discussion.