Assessment Type 2: Research Outcome

Moderators were very pleased to note that the quality of research outcomes has improved over the past four years. They also commented favourably that more research outcomes demonstrated consideration of audience and purpose. Some examples included a scientific report following a set format, pamphlets, graphical and visual presentations that suited their message, multimodal pieces, or a letter to someone suffering body image issues. It was reported that students are doing more than just taking the option of presenting a written report, no matter what the research question or intended audience.

There were some issues with word count. It was clear that some schools were still using previous versions of the subject outline where the maximum word count was only 1500 words. Teachers are again reminded to ensure that they keep up to date with the current subject outline. On another note, some students chose to submit work that exceeded the word count(e.g. 2400 words). This disadvantaged them and affected their marks because the conclusion detailing what they had discovered was generally in the last 400 words and was not read.

As in other years, well-refined questions tended to correlate with a better quality research outcome. If the scope of the question was too large, or too convoluted, or too wordy and not specific or refined, the outcome tended to become superficial and present as a screed of generic information and/or facts. Other issues arose with those candidates who chose to present their research outcome as an artefact, with some students sending in a ‘book’ as well as a 2000 word substantiation, presuming that both would be assessed/moderated. Teachers are reminded that the outcome is a maximum of 2000 words in its entirety.

Research outcomes that failed to maintain a high grade given by the teacher were those that veered away from the question and/or failed to answer it. Moderators also stressed that students need to consider the best form for their outcome. For example, a written report does not suit everyone’s outcome and, for some classes, may detract from the potential of the students presenting their key findings. Moderators also requested that schools don’t present all student work on one disc or USB, because each candidate in the sample is required to have their outcome moderated separately.

As a general rule, students who had successful conclusions tended to address findings of all key points, make connections, and answer the actual research question.

Synthesis of knowledge, skills, and ideas to produce a resolution to the research question (S1)

This specific feature was modified in 2014, requiring that the synthesis of knowledge, skills, and ideas lead to a resolution or an answer to the research question. In general, moderators believed that this was often not accomplished successfully because the resolution of the question was only provided in the conclusion, rather than being a consistent focus throughout the outcome.

Moderators observed that the most successful research outcomes:

* were provided by those students who read widely and gained information from a variety of sources, and then were able to articulate what they discovered in their own words. This showed that they had meaningfully engaged with the information and could question or accept information and confirm it with broad research from multiple perspectives
* targeted an appropriate audience in relation to their chosen question
* demonstrated creativity in the presentation of their findings.

In less successful responses, students:

* outlined a set of facts with little critique (valid or reliable sources/findings), insight, or synthesis (comparing sources)
* included a very general introduction — often in the format of their proposal or evaluation — and, as a result, wasted some of their word count
* did not conclude their outcome and therefore did not explicitly attempt a resolution to the research question
* included many irrelevant details or failed to answer the question fully. These students often presented quoted information that was not used effectively to answer the question.

Substantiation of key findings relevant to the research outcome (S2)

This specific feature invites students to support their key findings with evidence from their research. Moderators remarked that the more effective responses:

* used an extensive range of both primary and secondary sources
* showed a clear link between their key ideas/findings and sources of information
* used in-text referencing or footnoting to reference the sources
* provided explicit substantiation for their pamphlet or product, if this was the chosen mode. Some students chose to present their outcomes in a multimodal/oral presentation (e.g. photostories, videos, prezi, powerpoints, google slides, glogster etc.), or used the notes section. These students clearly substantiated their key findings when they incorporated their sources or embedded them within the presentation (e.g. source reference on a powerpoint). This demonstrated that students can achieve at a very high level even when choosing a different mode of presentation for their outcome.

While students presented many outstanding products, the substantiation of the development of the product was not always clearly articulated; in many cases it was implied rather than being overtly explained. Moderators noted some issues to be addressed:

* When the outcome is a substantiation of a product, the elements of that product — the findings, or what has been learnt — need to be explained and supported by evidence.
* Less effective responses provided little evidence of substantiation, apart from a bibliography. Using a limited range of sources affected several students, because their key findings were based on only a few sources. This was also a problem in some research outcomes that included a product (e.g. a film, brief novel, photo-story, PowerPoint etc.) without any explicit evidence of substantiation or synthesis.

Expression of ideas (S3)

On the whole, moderators thought that students’ communication skills were good. A student being able to clearly articulate their findings showed that they had a good understanding of the ideas behind their work. This clarity of expression also meant that the reader did not need to question or query the focus and/or findings of the research.

Teachers are reminded, however, that expression of ideas is more than just correct grammar and punctuation. The use of sub-headings, graphs, and diagrams all helps with the clarity of a piece.