# VCAL Information Sheet
## VCAL Literacy Skills units

The VCAL Literacy Skills units are designed for use within the Literacy and Numeracy Skills strand of VCAL.

## Purpose

The purpose of the VCAL Literacy Skills units is to develop literacy skills and knowledge that allow effective participation in the four main social contexts in which we function in Australian society:

• family and social life

• workplace and institutional settings

• education and training contexts

• community and civic life.

Literacy (reading, writing, speaking and listening) occurs in all these contexts and different domains or areas of literacy practice correspond with these social contexts.

| Social context | Corresponding reading and writing domain | Corresponding oral communication domain |
|---|---|---|
| Family and social life | **Literacy for self-expression**, which focuses on aspects of personal and family life, and the cultures that shape these. | **Oracy for self-expression**, which focuses on spoken interaction involving exploring story and life experiences and the culture in which these are staged. |
| Workplace and institutional settings | **Literacy for practical purposes**, which focuses on forms of communication used in workplace and institutional settings and in the communication with such organisations. | **Oracy for practical purposes**, which focuses on spoken interactions involving giving support, advice or expertise. |
| Education and training contexts | **Literacy for knowledge**, which focuses on sociological, scientific, technological, historical and mechanical theories and concepts relevant to education and training. | **Oracy for knowledge**, which focuses on spoken interactions involving presentations of information principles, explanations and theories. |
| Community and civic life | **Literacy for public debate**, which focuses on matters of public concern, and the forms of argument, reason and criticism used in the public arena. | **Oracy for problem solving and exploring issues**, which focuses on spoken interactions involving giving opinions, evidence and information. |

## VCAL Certificate award level requirements

There are six VCAL Literacy Skills units, two at each of the three levels:

### Foundation

• Literacy Skills Foundation Reading and Writing Unit

• Literacy Skills Foundation Oral Communication Unit

### Intermediate

• Literacy Skills Intermediate Reading and Writing Unit

• Literacy Skills Intermediate Oral Communication Unit

### Senior

• Literacy Skills Senior Reading and Writing Unit

• Literacy Skills Senior Oral Communication Unit

Each unit has a nominal duration of 100 hours.

## Integrating curriculum

The Literacy Skills units are based on the concept that the application of literacy skills cannot be separated from the social context and that skills and knowledge are best developed when applied to real-life (social) contexts. In most real-life contexts we do not read, write, speak, listen to or complete mathematical tasks in isolation. We use a range of skills and knowledge to successfully complete a task.

Integrating learning outcomes across literacy and numeracy domains and across VCAL strands reflects the integration of skills and competencies in social and work activities. The Literacy Skills units recognise the connection between the curriculum areas and provide a structure for an integrated approach.

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY

State Government Victoria

# Reading and Writing units

For people to participate effectively in the four social contexts they need to have competence in the four reading and writing domains: Literacy for self-expression, Literacy for practical purposes, Literacy for knowledge and Literacy for public debate. Neither the social contexts nor the domains are autonomous; they overlap and each social context and domain contains traces of the other domains.
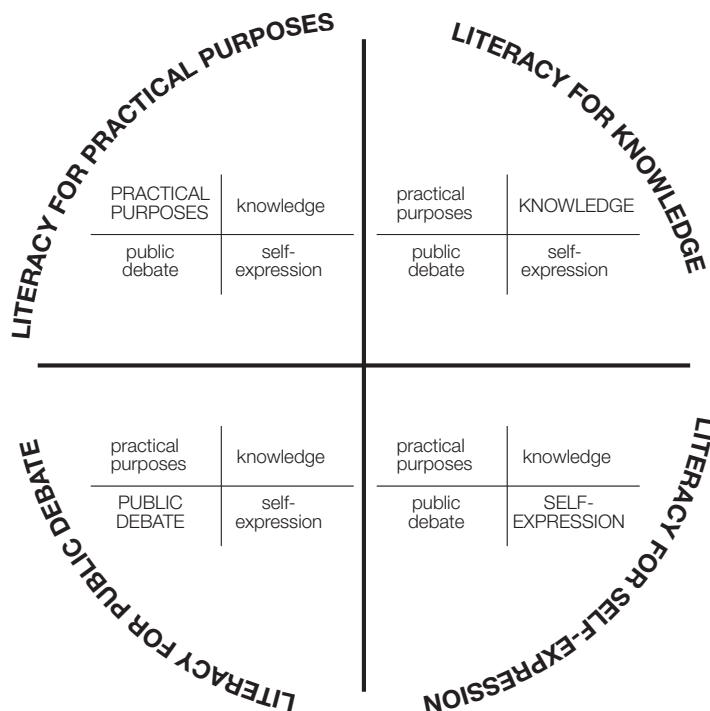


Some genres, or types of texts, are more likely to be found in certain domains. For example, instructions and procedures are genres more likely to be found in literacy for practical purposes, and a narrative is more likely to be found in the domain of self-expression. But a domain does not equal specified genres. Genres cross domains. For example, narratives may be found in the domains of knowledge and public debate, although they are most likely to be found in the domain of self-expression.

In the reading and writing stream, the domains provide a framework by which learners can become aware of genres and the social context or areas of social practices in which they operate, and learn the skills to use the genres. In the teaching situation, emphasis should be given to ensuring language activities are placed in a social context and that learners are given the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of that context.

## Learning outcomes

Each reading and writing unit has eight learning outcomes; four relate to reading and four to writing. The learning outcomes are based on the domains.

Although the learning outcomes address only one domain at a time, learners and teachers will find that most texts could be situated in more than one domain.

Learners are expected to show competence in all eight learning outcomes in Reading and Writing Foundation and Intermediate, but only seven in Reading and Writing Senior. At the Senior level, students are likely to have clear learning goals with specific reading and writing needs. Focusing on seven learning outcomes enables the teacher to tailor the program to meet these needs.

### For each learning outcome

In the reading and writing units, all the elements must be covered in one assessment task or activity, although activities or tasks may take place over a period of time. Completion of this task/activity will demonstrate achievement of the learning outcome.

## Elements

The elements give detailed information on the requirements for satisfying the learning outcome. The learning outcome is achieved when the learner can demonstrate competence in all the elements.

In these units the elements are grouped under headings that make the organising principles explicit. The elements for writing are grouped according to:

- writing process
- purpose
- structure
- length or complexity
- mechanics.

The elements for reading are grouped according to:

- purpose
- comprehension
- application
- critique.

# Writing elements

## Writing process

Planning, drafting and editing are a part of the process of writing. It is important that learners become aware that writing is a process and that the first product is unlikely to be the final product. Any number of drafts can be done by learners in producing the final product. However, in practice, learners may be restricted in the number of times they can draft a text, by the nominal duration of a module.

## Purpose

Written texts, in general, are more successful when a writer is aware of why they are writing and who they are writing for. Learners need to recognise the difference between private and public writing. The language used and the tone of the text will depend on the purpose of the text and the proposed audience. Learners undertaking the reading and writing units need to be aware that they too must make their writing appropriate for its intended purpose and audience.

## Structure

Texts must be organised to ensure that ideas and information are presented coherently and logically to suit the purpose of the text. This also needs to take into account that different types of texts are often structured in specific ways, i.e. reports, narratives, letters of complaint and instructions all have their own conventional structures.

## Length or complexity

As students become more proficient in expressing ideas and information on paper, it becomes increasingly important for them to present a range of ideas and information and convey abstract concepts. Learners move from writing one or two sentences to developing more coherent paragraphs, with topic sentences, linking devices and complex sentence structures. The elements grouped under this heading show this move from length to complexity in writing.

## Mechanics

This element deals with spelling, punctuation and grammar. By Senior level, learners are expected to have much more control over these mechanical tools and use them with considerable accuracy. However, this does not preclude them from using dictionaries, spell checks, etc.

## Learning Outcome 4 (Intermediate)

Writing for public debate

Writing argumentative or discursive text

### Elements

All elements must be met in the one assessment task or activity.

### Writing process

a) Use the process of planning, drafting and editing to produce written texts.

### Purpose

b) Use language and tone appropriate to text purpose and audience.

### Structure

c) Sequence and structure ideas and arguments to suit purpose.

### Length or complexity

d) Relate several ideas or pieces of information within a text rather than treating them as separate units.

e) Provide evidence and argue persuasively for a point of view.

### Mechanics

f) Spell, punctuate and use grammar with reasonable accuracy.

# Reading elements

## Purpose

As in the process of writing, being aware of the intended audience and purpose of a text is important in the reading process. This includes being aware of any unstated meaning, inferring purpose and the means used to achieve the purpose. Awareness of the purpose of a text also helps to set the text in its social context and allows learners to consider whether the purpose is achieved, and if so, how it has been achieved, thus developing critical awareness. Not all texts have unstated meaning or inferred purpose and where the assessment criteria ask learners to look at these, it is adequate for students to identify their absence.

## Comprehension

This element progresses to extracting information for a specific task and identifying views underlying a text at Senior level.

## Application

Being able to identify information about texts, what is contained in texts and then apply it to other texts and contexts is the focus of the element under this heading. This results in learners being able to compare and contrast information and ideas and to appreciate the social context of what they have read.

## Critique

Developing an opinion about texts and the content of texts is integral to making meaning out of texts. The elements grouped under this heading aim to enable learners to move from giving a personal opinion on a text to analysing and evaluating the content and effectiveness of the text.

## Learning Outcome 7 (Intermediate)

Reading for knowledge

Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading an explanatory or informative text.

### Elements

All elements must be met in the one assessment task or activity.

### Purpose

a) Identify the purpose of the text, including any inferred purpose.

### Comprehension

b) Identify the main ideas, supporting ideas and any examples.

c) Identify the means used by the author to achieve the purpose of the text.

### Application

d) Compare or contrast with other texts.

### Critique

e) Express an opinion on the effectiveness of the text for its audience and purpose.

In the **Reading learning outcomes**, additional information is given about the generic features and structure of texts. The types of texts in each domain are detailed, as well as strategies for learners to select reading material.

## Supporting information

Additional information is provided in the reading and writing units for each learning outcome. This includes:

- educational practices
- information on the content and knowledge underpinning the learning outcome; this information is grouped under the same organising principles as the elements to give guidance about what learners are able to do at each level
- assessment methods and examples of assessment tasks.

Look through the Curriculum Planning Guides: Literacy Skills Strand and Numeracy Skills Strand – Literacy Skills Units to find this additional information.

## The levels

### Foundation

The purpose of this unit is to enable students to develop skills and knowledge to read and write simple or short texts. Texts will deal with mainly personal and familiar topics but may include some unfamiliar aspects.

### Intermediate

The purpose of this reading and writing unit is to enable learners to develop the skills and knowledge to read and write a range of texts on everyday subject matters that include some unfamiliar aspects or material. At this level, once they have identified the audience and purpose of the text, learners use the writing process to produce texts that link several ideas or pieces of information. In reading, learners identify how, and if, the writer has achieved their purpose and express an opinion on the text, taking into account its effectiveness.

At the end of the unit learners will be able to read, comprehend and write a range of texts within a variety of contexts.

### Senior

This level focuses on developing skills for further study. The reading and writing unit aims to enable learners to develop the skills and knowledge to read and write complex texts. The texts will deal with general situations and include some abstract concepts or technical details. Learners will produce texts that incorporate a range of ideas, information, beliefs or processes and have control of the language devices appropriate to the type of text. In reading, the learner identifies the views shaping the text and the devices used to present those views. The learner will also express an opinion on the effectiveness and content of the text.

Learners who successfully complete this unit will be able to read, comprehend and write a range of complex texts across a broad range of contexts.

# Oral communication units

The oral communication units are designed to provide participants with knowledge, understanding and skills in spoken communication for different social purposes. The units reflect the theory that language use varies depending upon the social context and purpose of the interaction and uses this as its main organising principle.

In the oral communication units, the domains provide a framework by which learners can become aware of genres, social contexts and areas of social practices in which they operate.

## Learning outcomes

There are four learning outcomes in each oral communication unit. Learners must show competence in the four learning outcomes to satisfactorily complete this unit.

The learning outcomes are based on typical spoken interactions used to fulfil the broad social purposes.

Some genres (or oral texts) are more likely to be found in certain domains.

- Oracy for self-expression: focuses on spoken interaction involving exploring story and life experiences and the culture in which these are staged.
- Oracy for knowledge: reports, informative interviews, speeches, lectures, presentations and news broadcasts are most likely to occur in this domain.
- Oracy for practical purposes: oral texts are likely to include giving or responding to instructions or directions, exchanging goods and services, making appointments and job interviews.
- Oracy for exploring issues and problem solving: oral texts likely to occur in this domain include public meetings, discussions, debates and meetings.

## Elements

The elements for the learning outcomes in the oral communication units do not all have to be met in the one assessment task or activity. The emphasis is placed on developing oral communication skills in authentic situations; rather than a situation derived to fulfil the requirements of the learning outcome. Oral communication tends to be fluid in structure and purpose, where the interaction may move through several stages that serve different purposes. For example, students set the task of planning a trip for the class. They engage in negotiating, discussing, clarifying, organising, telling anecdotes, giving directions, problem solving, persuading and explaining. They may also talk to people outside the group and report back on the information gained.

With such tasks it should be possible to both teach and assess across the artificial boundaries suggested by the structure of the document, despite the need to record student achievement in a more delineated manner.

## Supporting information

Additional supporting information is provided for each learning outcome in the Curriculum Planning Guide: Literacy and Numeracy Skills Strand – Literacy Skills Units. This information provides:

- a range of teaching/learning strategies
- a description of the underpinning knowledge that students may be expected to draw on to achieve competence in oral communication
- assessment methods and examples of assessment tasks.

## Assessment

Assessment of oral communication presents particular challenges for teachers associated with the validity, reliability and transferability of a particular performance. Characteristics of the task, situation and individuals involved may all have an impact on the outcome. It is important to remember that oral communication is messy compared to the final product of writing and is developed in real time with a reliance on the immediate context being meaningful. Despite these difficulties, teachers are encouraged to be innovative in their approach to assessment and to use a range of different types of interaction for assessment purposes.

Students should be observed to demonstrate competence on more than one occasion and in different contexts, to ensure that the assessment is as consistent, fair and equitable as possible. Documentation of how students have demonstrated competence may include teacher observation checklists, informal notes, students' self-assessment, peer/group assessment, and/or recordings of performances.

### Assessment methods

The assessment methods used should be appropriate to the learner, his or her learning style and needs, the topic or field of study and the learning outcome.

Teachers are encouraged to use a range of assessment methods, including:

- observation and written documentation of oral communication episodes; this may be simplified by using checklists of key features observed
- recording of student interaction on video or other electronic medium
- documenting individual interaction with teacher
- documenting individual interaction with peers
- self-evaluation of their performance
- feedback from peers/audience.

## The VCAL levels

At different VCAL levels, learners are described as developing or increasing understanding or use of different aspects of oral communication. These include aspects of language use such as the ability to vary language to suit different audiences and purposes, aspects of non-verbal communication, including using visual supports to communication and a range of listening skills. Oral texts and interactions at each VCAL level vary in the level of support to be provided and the subject matter, with learners progressing to more broad-ranging and abstract themes.

### Foundation

At the end of this unit students will be able to use and respond to spoken language around everyday subject matter, which may include some unfamiliar aspects, for a range of purposes in a number of contexts that may be interrelated.

### Intermediate

The Intermediate Oral Communication Unit focuses on enabling learners to use and respond to spoken language, including some unfamiliar material within a variety of contexts.

### Senior

At the end of this unit learners will be able to use and respond to spoken language with complex and abstract content across a broad range of contexts.

For more information about the VCAL, contact the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority at:

www.vcaa.vic.edu.au (click on the VCAL link)