**Advice from BOSTES for HSC students about examinations**

This document provides important advice about the HSC examinations. Each year there are some students whose results are not as good as they could be because of simple, easily avoidable factors. For example, students who answer questions from more than one option, write responses in the wrong place, or submit a project that doesn’t meet technical requirements can disadvantage themselves.

You are advised to find out what the rules and requirements are for each of your examinations and what to expect in each examination. In addition to this document you should read other important HSC information, such as:

* the syllabus document for each course that you are studying
* [*Assessment and Reporting* documents](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/) for each HSC course on the Board’s website
* [advice for students sitting different types of HSC examinations](http://studentsonline.bos.nsw.edu.au/go/exams/preparing_for_your_written_exams/) in *Students Online*
* feedback on last year’s examinations in the [*2014 Notes from the Marking Centre*](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc_exams/2013/)
* [2015 HSC Rules and Procedures](http://studentsonline.bos.nsw.edu.au/go/seniorstudy/hsc_rules_and_procedures/) – issued to all HSC students
* [*How Your HSC Works*](http://studentsonline.bos.nsw.edu.au/go/seniorstudy/how_your_HSC_works/) – a brief description of the entire HSC process.

**Preparing for exams**

HSC examinations are intended to be rigorous and to challenge students of all abilities.

* Looking at previous examinations is a really good way to prepare but **don’t assume that exactly the same topics or types of questions will be asked every year** – question topics and formats may change!
* Practising doing old exams is useful but remember that **you have to answer the question that is asked**, not one that you may have prepared for.
* Remember that the Preliminary course is assumed knowledge for the HSC course.

**In the examination**

Things to remember:

* Questions may be asked that require you to respond by integrating your knowledge, understanding and skills developed through studying the course.
* Read the questions carefully, look for key words and identify the aspect of the course to which these relate.
* The mark allocated to the question and the answer space (where this is provided on the examination paper) are an indication of how much you should write in your answer – writing way more than is needed won’t necessarily result in more marks, and you may run out of time to do the rest of the exam.
* Be familiar with the key words in the Board’s [Glossary of Key Words](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/glossary_keywords.html) but remember that some HSC questions may start with words such as ‘how?’, ‘why?’ or ‘to what extent?’ and use verbs that are not included in the glossary, such as ‘design’, ‘translate’ or ‘list’.
* If a question contains stimulus material – such as artwork, quotations or maps – it will be needed to answer the question, so consider it carefully.
* In the case of multiple-choice questions, read **all** the alternatives first and then choose the best possible alternative – if you change your mind, there are instructions on the multiple-choice answer sheet about how to change your answer.
* Write your answers in black pen – pencil may be used where it is specifically directed but make sure that it can be read. Highlighters may be used to highlight text (but NOT during reading time!) but liquid paper is not allowed in the exam room – it wastes time and may smudge and make your work unreadable. If you make a mistake, cross it out. Please note: any part of your answer that you have crossed out will NOT be marked. Remember it is in your interest to ensure that all your answers are clear, legible and easy to read.

Remember, making the best attempt you can is a better strategy than not attempting the question at all.

**Where to write your answers**

You should ensure that you read all the instructions on examination papers and writing booklets and write your answers to questions in the appropriate places. **Remember:** your hard work and preparation will be wasted if the markers cannot find your answers!

In almost all examinations, markers only mark one section or question – they don’t mark a student’s entire paper. Your answers to different questions or sections will be sent to different markers, so it is really important that you answer in the correct spaces or booklets, and label your answers correctly and clearly. Don’t leave large amounts of unnecessary space between one question and the next.

If you don’t write your answers in the correct spaces or booklet, they may be accidentally overlooked by markers.

Depending on which examination you are doing, you may be given:

* a personalised multiple-choice answer sheet
* a question/answer booklet
* a personalised question/answer booklet
* a personalised writing booklet
* a generic (non-personalised) writing booklet.

‘Personalised’ examination material has your student number, centre number and, generally, your name pre-printed on the front cover. **Do not use another student’s personalised answer sheets or writing booklets**. If you use another student’s personalised answer sheet, question/answer booklet or writing booklet, your work will be recorded as the other student’s work. If you need more space, ask for an extra generic writing booklet.

**If a personalised writing booklet is pre-printed with the question number, you must use the booklet for that question** **only**. For example, in Mathematics, writing booklets are labelled Question 11, Question 12, etc. Don’t use the Question 12 writing booklet to complete Question 11 if you have run out of room in the Question 11 booklet, as you may be marked against the wrong marking guidelines, and consequently not gain marks.

In some personalised question/answer booklets and writing booklets, there are areas where it says ‘**Do not write**’. These areas may be at the bottom of the page or at the edge in the centre of a multi-page booklet. **Anything you write in these areas will NOT be marked**. If you need more space to write, ask for an extra writing booklet.

If you run out of space when answering a question on the examination paper, you should ask for an extra writing booklet and clearly indicate on the examination paper where the answer is continued.

In 2015, the following examinations will have personalised question/answer booklets and/or personalised writing booklets.

* Ancient History
* Biology
* Business Studies
* Chemistry
* Drama
* Economics
* English ESL Paper 1
* English ESL Paper 2
* English Standard and Advanced Paper 1
* English Extension 1
* History Extension
* Information Processes and Technology
* Mathematics
* Mathematics Extension 1
* Mathematics General 2
* Modern Hebrew Continuers
* Modern History
* Music 1
* Music 2
* Personal Development, Health and Physical Education
* Physics
* Society and Culture
* Software Design and Development
* Textiles and Design
* Vietnamese Continuers
* Visual Arts

**Extra writing booklets**

If you use extra writing booklets during the examination, you need to label these carefully so that it is absolutely clear which question is being answered.

If you use an extra writing booklet for a question, you must clearly indicate that you have done so. If you don’t, the marker may not realise that you have written more, and your full answer may not be marked. You should also write how many writing booklets you have used for a question by labelling each and every writing booklet with the total number of booklets used for that question. For example, if you use three booklets for a question, you should indicate this in the boxes provided on the front cover by writing ‘1 of 3’ on the first booklet, ‘2 of 3’ on the second booklet, and ‘3 of 3’ on the third booklet. You should also tick the box on the last page of the writing booklet to indicate that you have continued your answer in another writing booklet. A [sample of the writing booklet](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/2012-hsc-sample-writing-booklet.pdf) is available on the Board’s website.

**Examinations with options or electives**

A number of examinations have questions that relate to options or electives. **Only** answer the questions that relate to the option or elective that you have studied. If you answer questions from more than one option or elective, your responses will be marked but you will ONLY receive marks for the option with the highest mark. Don't waste time doing more than you need to.

**Examinations with question restrictions**

In the Studies of Religion examinations there are particular requirements about the questions you may answer. If you do not comply with these requirements your response may not be awarded marks.

In Section III of the Studies of Religion examination, you must answer a question that is on a different religious tradition from the question(s) you answered in Section II. If you answer two questions on the same religious tradition you will only receive marks for one of the responses.

**Entry for Vocational Education and Training (VET) examinations**

If you wish to sit the HSC examination in a VET framework subject you must ensure that you have been entered for the examination by your school.

Each year a number of students arrive at school to sit a VET examination for which they have not been entered. In some cases, there are no papers available for them or even a presiding officer, and this results in a delayed start to the examination. Often, the students in this situation are studying the VET course at the local TAFE or through a private provider.

If you are doing a VET course and you want to receive an HSC mark (which can be counted towards the ATAR), you **must** be entered for the relevant HSC examination, in addition to the 240-hour course. Make sure that your Year 12 adviser or other appropriate staff member at the school has entered you for the examination.

Check your course entry details on *Students Online* to ensure that you have been correctly enrolled. If you find incorrect information about your VET examination arrangements you should immediately notify your school principal or Year 12 adviser.

PLEASE NOTE: The following VET frameworks – Automotive, Hospitality, and Information and Digital Technology – have separate examination papers for each stream. You must enrol in the examination for the stream that you are studying.

Automotive has two different examinations:

• Mechanical Technology

• Vehicle Body.

Hospitality has two different examinations:

• Kitchen Operations and Cookery

• Food and Beverage.

Information and Digital technology has three different examinations:

• Digital Animation

• Networking and Hardware

• Web and Software Applications.

It is your responsibility to confirm that you have been enrolled in the correct examination.

**Language oral examinations**

Read the [*HSC Oral Examinations – Advice to Students*](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/languages-oral-exam-advice-to-student.html) document on the BOSTES website carefully, to prepare for your oral examination.

If you are doing a Beginners, Continuers or Heritage languages course, you will be required to do an oral examination in August/September. The examiner will ask you questions about the topics you have been studying from the syllabus, as they relate to your personal world. Neither the number of questions nor the number of topics covered by the examination is predetermined. However, you can expect to be asked a range of questions sampling the content of the course. The questions the examiner asks may relate to something you have just said, or they may introduce a new topic.

Oral examinations are recorded onto a computer. In the unlikely event that there is a technical difficulty at the time of the examination, you will have the opportunity to re-sit the examination before you leave the examination centre.

If you are studying a CCAFL Continuers course or Modern Hebrew or Vietnamese, you will also be expected to take part in a Discussion based on your in-depth study. In your Discussion you will be expected to refer to at least three texts, one of which will be a literary text such as a novel, play, film or poem.

If you are studying a Heritage language course, your oral examination consists of an interview between you and the examiner about your Personal Investigation. In order to assist the examiner, you will need to provide information about the topic of your Personal Investigation on the Heritage Languages Interview Sheet at least two weeks before your scheduled examination. A copy of the form is available for your teacher to download from the Board’s interactive website for schools, *Schools Online*. A copy is also available on the Board’s website at the Heritage [language] syllabus page.

You should be aware that examiners will interrupt you if they would like to ask another question, or if you embark on what appears to be a pre-learned monologue. Only relevant material will be considered by the markers.

**Major projects and performances**

Make sure you follow the requirements for major projects and performances. If you submit a project that contravenes the rules in terms of size, scope and types of materials used, or submission by the required date, you will not gain full marks. The requirements are detailed in the *Assessment and Reporting* document related to each syllabus.

**Certification of projects**

The supervising teacher and the principal must certify that your project was developed under the teacher’s supervision, is your own work and has been completed by the due date. If either the teacher or the principal is unable to certify your project, a non-certification report form is provided to BOSTES. All non-certification cases are investigated and penalties may be applied.

If your supervising teacher cannot certify the authenticity of your project, or if you do not acknowledge where you may have received outside assistance, you may receive either a reduced mark, or zero.

More advice exists on the Board’s website in the document [*HSC examinations: projects, submitted works and performances – information for teachers*](http://studentsonline.bos.nsw.edu.au/go/exams/practical_and_performance_exams/practical_exam_certification/).

**If you are too unwell to attend an examination or sick during an examination**

Illness/misadventure provisions exist to support you where your examination performance is affected by circumstances beyond your control.

If you are ill before the examination, you should see a doctor, and get a medical certificate. You should not attend an examination against your doctor’s advice.

If you feel unwell just before or during an HSC examination, it is vitally important that you tell either the exam supervisor or a teacher. You should try to see a doctor on the same day. If you delay seeing a doctor then he or she may not be able to witness and confirm your symptoms. An illness/misadventure appeal may be declined in the absence of independent expert advice.

You should never put yourself in danger in order to attend an HSC examination. If you are isolated by flood or bushfires, for example, try to contact BOSTES and your school to see if other options exist, such as sitting for the examination at a different centre. If not, you should remain wherever you are safest and be assured the appeals process will apply.

A report from your exam supervisor or teacher may corroborate and strengthen your illness/misadventure appeal.

**Cheating – don’t do it!**

If you fail to comply with the rules and procedures as specified in the [*HSC Rules and Procedures*](http://studentsonline.bos.nsw.edu.au/go/seniorstudy/hsc_rules_and_procedures/), action will be taken against you by BOSTES. Students who are found to have breached the rules may receive zero marks for a part or all of the examination and may put their HSC credential at risk.

Cheating or malpractice includes:

* copying in an examination from another student
* bringing unauthorised material such as written notes, phones or electronic devices into the examination
* reproducing someone else’s words in an examination without acknowledgement (plagiarism)
* memorising and copying an essay from a website or another person
* handing in work that someone else did and saying it is your own
* making up journal entries for a research project
* using information from the internet or elsewhere (eg books, journals, DVDs), and not acknowledging the source.

**Make a serious attempt at all your examinations**

The HSC rules require you to attempt a range of question types across the examination, not just the multiple-choice section. Every year, there are some students who do not receive a Higher School Certificate because they did not make a serious attempt in one or more of their examinations.

BOSTES does not accept explanations like ‘I didn’t understand any of the questions’ or ‘I found the course to be too difficult’.

The examination is an opportunity for you to demonstrate what you have learned throughout the course. Read and respond to the questions, and plan to remain for the duration of the examination.

**Changed examination specifications in 2015**

In 2015, the revised VET curriculum frameworks Automotive, Hospitality and Tourism, Travel and Events will be examined for the first time. The [curriculum framework and sample questions](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/information-digital-technology.html) are available on the BOSTES website.

Also, the following revised syllabuses will be examined for the first time: [Society and Culture](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/society-culture.html) and [Community and Family Studies](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/community-family-studies.html). The revised syllabus and specimen examination materials are available on the BOSTES website.

The examination specifications for [Design and Technology](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/design-technology.html) have been slightly amended. The changed examination specifications are available in the HSC syllabus section of the BOSTES website.