



# Effective teaching practices at Balgowlah Boys Campus

A What works best case study and practical guide

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



Collaboration

Explicit teaching

Effective feedback

## | About this resource

This resource is a What works best case study and practical guide that explores evidence-based practices implemented at Balgowlah Boys Campus to lift student achievement. Since 2011, Balgowlah Boys Campus has demonstrated substantial and sustained improvement in student results in English in NAPLAN value added and the HSC.

The publication is in 2 parts. Part 1 is a case study that explores the school's journey in developing their approach in English and describes how it is being adopted in other faculties. Part 2 is a practical guide that provides greater detail about the school's explicit approach to teaching writing in English.

### When and how to use

School leaders and teachers can read, consider, discuss and implement themes and strategies highlighted in the case study and practical guide as part of school-developed High Impact Professional Learning (HIPL).

The appropriate time to use this resource may differ for each school, leader and teacher.

#### School leaders can:

- unpack the case study and practical guide as part of whole-school professional development and/or stage or grade team meetings
- encourage teachers to share key findings during professional development
- access the What works best resources and reflect on how What works best practices are currently being implemented in their own school to lift student achievement
- access their school's What works best Scout report to facilitate discussions with staff about areas for improvement at a classroom and whole-school level.

#### Teachers can:

- read the case study and practical guide and reflect on current practice
- consider which practices could be implemented in the classroom to lift student achievement, and discuss their thoughts with colleagues
- reflect on the impact of implementation.

**Alignment to system priorities and/or needs:** School Excellence Policy ([nsw.gov.au](http://nsw.gov.au)), School Success Model

**Alignment to School Excellence Framework:** Teaching domain – effective classroom practice, learning and development

**Alignment with other existing frameworks:** What works best – collaboration, explicit teaching, effective feedback

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**To be reviewed:** CESE publications are prepared through a rigorous process. Resources are reviewed periodically as part of an ongoing evaluation plan.

### Contact

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## About What works best

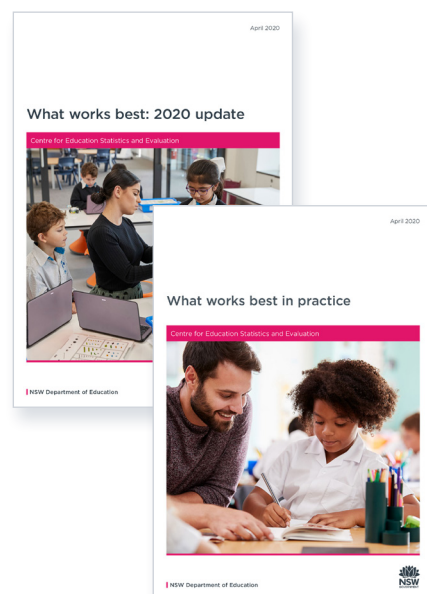
**What works best** is produced by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE). First published in 2014 and updated in 2020, it includes 8 evidence-based practices to help improve NSW student performance.

This case study and practical guide explores what a number of these practices look like at Balgowlah Boys Campus, with a particular focus on **collaboration, explicit teaching and effective feedback**.

For more information about What works best, read these CESE publications:

- [What works best 2020 update](#)
- [What works best in practice](#).

You can also visit the [What works best webpage](#) on the NSW Department of Education website.



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## Acknowledgements

CESE would like to thank the staff and students of Balgowlah Boys Campus for their participation in this case study. Particular thanks to Paul Sheather (Principal), Benjamin Seldon (Deputy Principal), Chris Boylan (Acting Deputy Principal), Aimee Jan (Head Teacher, English), and Thomas Brecht, Victoria Pomfret and Chris Falkland (English teachers) for so generously sharing their time, knowledge and resources, and for allowing us to observe the school's approach in action. Special thanks also to the students who agreed to be photographed for this study and those who shared samples of their work.



## Introduction

Balgowlah Boys Campus is a government comprehensive secondary school for boys in Years 7 to 12, located in the north-east of Sydney. It is one of 5 schools that constitute the multi-campus Northern Beaches Secondary College. The school has an average Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI)<sup>1</sup> of 24, indicating that it serves a relatively advantaged population, and a current enrolment of 1,176 students. Enrolments have grown considerably over the past decade, with the student population more than doubling since 2011. Approximately 25% of students come from a language background other than English, and 1% identify as Aboriginal. Balgowlah Boys Campus has a full-time equivalent teaching staff of 80, with a mixture of early-career and more experienced teachers.

Since 2011, Balgowlah Boys Campus has demonstrated substantial and sustained improvement in student results in English in NAPLAN<sup>2</sup> value added<sup>3</sup> and the HSC.<sup>4</sup> In 2011, 32% of students in Year 7 and Year 9 at the school achieved a result in the top 2 bands for NAPLAN reading and numeracy, while in 2021, 53% of students achieved a result in these bands. The school has also demonstrated gains in NAPLAN average scores from Year 7 to Year 9 (value added), with results in Year 7 consistently below the average of the school's statistically similar schools group (SSSG),<sup>5</sup> and results in Year 9 generally equal to, or above, the average of this group.<sup>6</sup> Since 2013, results in the Year 9 reading, spelling, and grammar and punctuation domains have been consistently above, or well above, the SSSG average.

- 1 A school-level index of educational disadvantage with a mean (average) of 100 and a standard deviation of 50. Higher values indicate greater levels of need.
- 2 National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy – an annual Australia-wide assessment of the literacy and numeracy skills of students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.
- 3 A measure that indicates the progress students have made in their learning over a period of time, after adjusting for the characteristics of the students. In this paper, it refers to progress in learning between Year 7 and Year 9.
- 4 Higher School Certificate – the credential awarded to secondary school students who successfully complete senior high school level studies (Years 11 and 12 or equivalent) in NSW, as well as some schools in the Australian Capital Territory and internationally.
- 5 A group of up to 60 schools that serve students who are identified as having similar levels of socio-educational advantage.
- 6 NAPLAN is generally held in the first half of the school year and is therefore unlikely to reflect major changes as a result of programs introduced at the start of Year 7.

The school has also seen improvement in HSC English. In English standard in 2011, Balgowlah Boys Campus students had an average score 7 points lower than the SSSG, while in 2021, it was 9 points higher. In English advanced, the school has been several points higher than the SSSG since 2011 and has had an average course mark of 87 or higher since 2015. Balgowlah Boys Campus is now one of the state's most consistently top-performing schools in HSC English, having placed in the top 10 since 2016,<sup>7</sup> and placing second overall in 2020.<sup>8</sup> The school's results are particularly notable because of the fact that it is a comprehensive school, rather than a selective school.<sup>9</sup>

Balgowlah Boys Campus attributes much of its success in English to:

- the efficacy of its explicit approach to teaching writing
- a sustained, intensive focus on teacher collaboration, especially in faculty groups
- providing students with regular feedback on their work that is timely, specific and actionable.

**Part 1** of this case study explores the school's journey in developing and establishing the approach in English, and describes how it is being adopted in other faculties. It also looks at the evidence supporting the school's approach. An analysis of student achievement data at Balgowlah Boys Campus is provided in Appendix 1.

**Part 2** of this case study provides greater detail about the school's explicit approach to teaching writing in English. A collection of the school's resources, as well as samples of student work and teacher planning documents, are provided in Appendix 2.

### What has worked best to improve student achievement in English at Balgowlah Boys Campus

- Strong school leadership with a well-defined vision, and strong instructional leadership to implement change
- An explicit approach to teaching writing that is introduced early, and practised and refined regularly as students progress through their schooling
- A strong focus on teacher professional learning and collaboration – especially in faculty groups – to ensure that all teachers are skilled in the approach and consistent in their practice
- Providing students with regular feedback on their work that is timely, specific and actionable

7 Based on the percentage of HSC examinations sat in English advanced, extension 1 and extension 2 that achieved a Band 6 or equivalent result.

8 The latest round of HSC results was released just prior to the publication of this paper, with Balgowlah Boys Campus placing 36th in the state for English advanced, extension 1 and extension 2 in 2021 and 7th in the state for English studies, English EAL/D and English standard.

9 Further information and analysis about the school's results in NAPLAN and the HSC is provided in Appendix 1.

## Part 1: Overview of the school's journey and approach

In 2009, Paul Sheather took up the role of Principal at Balgowlah Boys Campus. At the time of his appointment, the school had been going through a challenging period and enrolments were low, with local parents often choosing to send their children to school elsewhere. He identified that many students were underperforming academically, with results in the English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA)<sup>10</sup> particularly concerning for the school. Paul observed that there was poor morale among staff, the majority of whom were employed on a casual or temporary basis, and generally low expectations for student success. Paul made it a priority to turn the school around, with a vision to create a strong learning culture that would lead to improved outcomes for all students and produce confident and articulate young men.

### Making literacy a whole-school priority

Paul and the school leadership team (including then Deputy Principal, David Pickering, and Relieving Deputy, Peter Sims) made an early decision to prioritise the development of literacy skills for all students, both because this had been identified as an area of particular need, and because competence in literacy is necessary for learning in all key learning areas (KLAs). As a first step, the team began to investigate what was happening in other schools, and together with the then Head Teacher, English (now Deputy Principal), Ian James, they identified, developed and trialled a literacy program for students in Years 7 to 10 that is still in place today.

At the time, the school was combining the daily roll call with Drop Everything and Read (DEAR),<sup>11</sup> and a decision was made to extend roll call from 16 minutes to 20 minutes and re-purpose it for the explicit teaching of literacy. The program has been refined and extended over time and now also includes numeracy. It is known as ELAN (English Literacy and Numeracy).

<sup>10</sup> A former NSW-based assessment for students in Year 7. ELLA was replaced by NAPLAN in 2008.

<sup>11</sup> A program that encourages reading by dedicating time each day for students to read a book of their choice.



“It’s been no coincidence that two of my deputies have been head teachers of English, because it’s been about privileging literacy in the school since I got here.”

**Paul Sheather, Principal**



Following the introduction of the intensive literacy classes, the school started to see improvement in Year 9 NAPLAN scores, with results in writing, reading, spelling, and punctuation and grammar all improving over the next few years.

Buoyed by the early success of the literacy program, Paul and the leadership team turned their attention to what could be done to further improve students' literacy and decided to focus on writing, with the natural place to start being the English faculty. Around this time, several members of the faculty had participated in HSC marking for the first time and identified a need to improve the way students wrote analytically. They returned to school and stressed to students the importance of discussing the author's literary **technique** and what the technique **does** when they are analysing text. Head Teacher (now Deputy Principal and Instructional Leader) Benjamin Seldon had previously used sentence scaffolds when teaching English as a second language to students in Japan, so he created a simple scaffold to support and guide students' analytical writing: '**This** (the literary technique) does **that** (the effect of the technique)'. When students were reluctant to add anything further, the scaffold was extended to force them to expand on their responses: '**This** (the technique) does **that** (the effect of the technique), doing **that** (additional effect) and doing **that** (additional effect)'. The scaffold became known as 'This does that'.

The next step was to help students to explore and deconstruct the text they wished to write about and to organise their ideas in such a way that they could be dropped into the scaffold. The resulting technique became known as Bubble Theory, in reference to the circle – or 'bubble' – drawn on the whiteboard to anchor the text at the centre of the analysis.

Teachers at Balgowlah Boys Campus use Bubble Theory and its sentence-building component, 'This does that', to model and workshop each part of the writing process, gradually withdrawing support as students develop proficiency. The approach is explicit, systematic and highly interactive, has a strong focus on building a rich repertoire of vocabulary, and includes a lot of repetition to embed content. It is introduced in Year 8 and practised and refined through Stages 5 and 6 so that by the time students reach Year 12, it is second nature and they can focus their attention on the ideas they wish to convey rather than how they are going to convey them. A detailed description of the Bubble Theory approach to teaching writing at Balgowlah Boys Campus is provided in Part 2 of this paper (page 22).

Benjamin worked with members of the English faculty to develop and refine the approach and ensure that there was consistency of implementation across the faculty. As it became embedded in their practice, students' confidence in their writing increased, achievement in NAPLAN continued to grow, and HSC English results began to improve, which was a clear indication to the school that the approach was working. Paul is quick to acknowledge that NAPLAN and the HSC are imperfect measures of students' learning and achievement, but also observes that they are useful sources of data for school leaders and teachers, who are constantly looking for ways to evaluate and improve their practice.



## Focusing on teacher collaboration and professional learning

Teacher collaboration and professional learning are key elements in the success of the school's approach. Teachers realised early on that in order for the approach to be effective, there would need to be a high degree of consistency across the English faculty in terms of what was taught and how, so that the messaging to students was clear and consistent, regardless of which teacher they had.

The English staff work together very closely to agree on the detail of almost every aspect of their planning and teaching. School leaders facilitate this process by prioritising faculty planning time in weekly staff meetings and in professional learning sessions held in Weeks 3, 6 and 9 of each term, as well as on staff development days. English teachers also plan and collaborate informally, as time permits. Paul acknowledges that the school doesn't often send teachers to external professional learning courses or engage guest presenters, preferring to focus on developing and refining their approach in-house.

As the approach has been introduced to other KLAs in the school, teachers increasingly collaborate across faculties to share expertise, ideas and resources, with staff regularly observing each other's lessons and sharing ideas from their subject area either in person or via videos posted to the school's Canvas platform. Deputy Principal, Chris Boylan, notes that discussion about the school's approach to writing is 'everywhere' and demand for professional learning in the approach continues to be strong, with a recent survey of professional learning preferences showing that the 2 most requested topics were explicit instruction, and modelling and scaffolding. Further detail about teacher collaboration and professional learning at Balgowlah Boys Campus is included in Part 2 of this paper.

“I think we've got a really good mentoring team in English, but also across the school. I run a lot of cross-KLA TPL, so I'm supporting the Head Teacher of Art, I've worked with the Head Teacher of Science, and so I think what I've started to notice is that mentoring process.”

**Aimee Jan, Head Teacher, English**

## Establishing effective feedback practices

The success of the writing approach at Balgowlah Boys Campus is also underpinned by effective feedback practices. Feedback to students on their work is regular, timely, specific and actionable, identifying not only what they are doing well, but also what they can improve and exactly how to get there. Regular feedback also benefits teachers, who monitor student responses closely to gauge how they are progressing with their learning and what should be taught next.

Feedback can be verbal – especially via the highly interactive 'question and answer' (Q&A) step of the school's approach – or in writing. Staff prefer to give feedback on a larger number of short writing tasks than a smaller number of longer tasks, such as essays. They are candid about the fact that they spend a lot of time commenting on students' work. However, they find that allocating regular time to shorter pieces across each term is more efficient than spending a significant amount of time marking whole essays towards the end of a topic, when students may not have had sufficient opportunities to refine their work. Further detail about the provision of feedback at Balgowlah Boys Campus is included in Part 2 of this paper (page 29).



## Building on the success of the English faculty

Balgowlah Boys Campus is now extending the English faculty's explicit teaching approach to other KLAs to build teacher capacity across the school. Human society and its environment (HSIE) was one of the first to adopt it, followed by science and the creative and performing arts. Personal development, health and physical education (PDHPE) and technological and applied studies (TAS) are just starting on the journey.

Benjamin has worked closely with the head teachers in each faculty to unpack what the elements of Bubble Theory look like in each KLA and to tailor the 'This does that' scaffold for specific subject areas.

An important part of the approach is that each faculty has its own list of subject-specific verbs and that teachers consistently model a variety of these. This is because all subjects require students to talk or write about what 'something' does, whether it is a metaphor, a historical source, a type of joint used in timber, a physical activity, or an artist's use of colour or texture. History, for example, often describes cause and effect, using verbs such as 'contribute', 'affect' and 'undermine'. A student's capacity to use different verbs to recall and explore syllabus content empowers their writing and is critical for their learning.

Since focusing on the explicit teaching of writing, the HSIE faculty has seen improvement in student HSC results. Principal, Paul Sheather, is pleased with the school's decision to introduce consistent explicit teaching practices in writing beyond the English faculty, but recognises that the full impact is yet to be seen because the approach is cumulative and will take time to implement effectively.

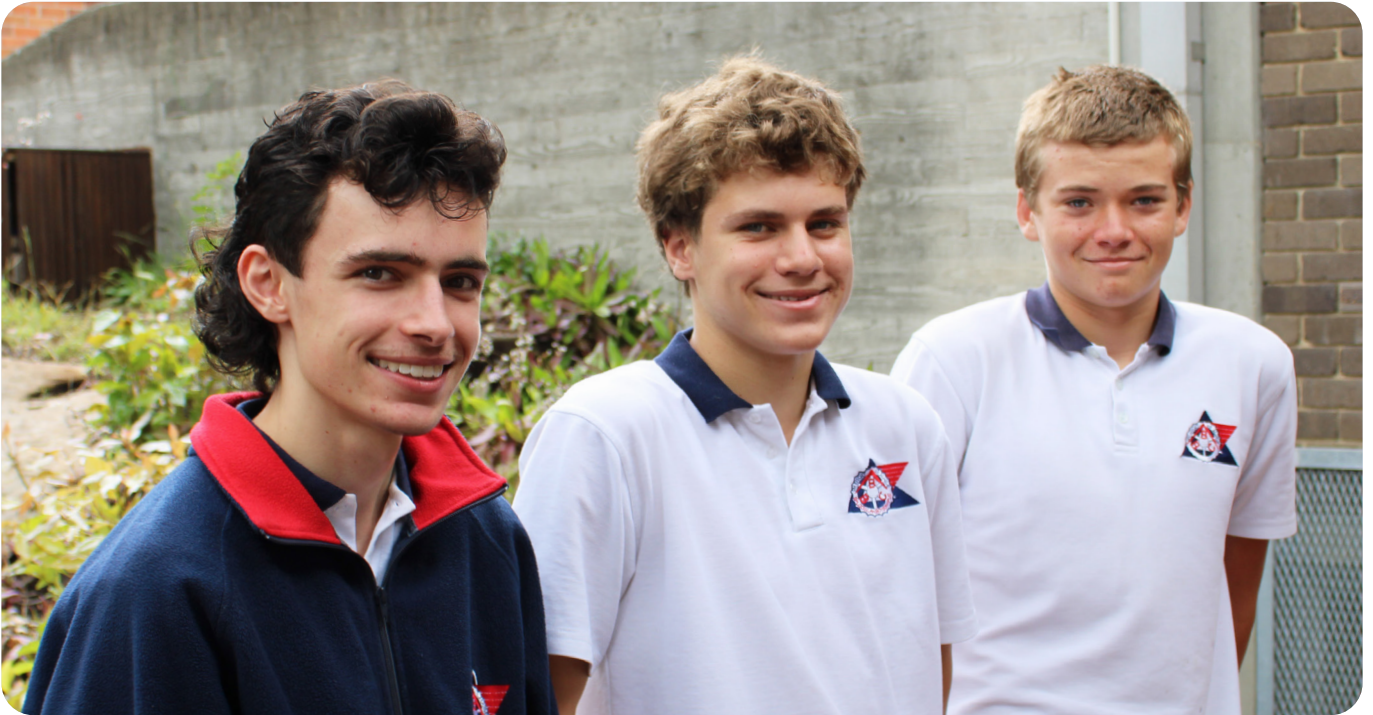


“In science and PDHPE, it's ... about clarity and simplicity. That's the scaffold – 'This chemical reaction involves this, leading to this and doing that.'”

**Benjamin Seldon, Deputy Principal**

For the English faculty, the next phase in their journey is to continue to refine and improve their practice. Head Teacher, Aimee Jan, explains: “I don't want to sustain, I want to evolve. My goal is to continually improve. Any 1% that I can do to make this process better is my goal ... sometimes we make a wrong decision, but we'll make sure when it comes around again the change is made.”





## Bringing teachers on the journey

Paul is candid about the fact that staff members haven't always been equally enthusiastic about the school's approach and one of the early barriers to implementation was resistance from teachers who didn't feel comfortable delivering literacy classes. The school did a lot of teacher professional learning in the early days to address this concern, and continues to do so today.

Benjamin also notes that in the early days, as head teacher, he was doing a lot of the preparation and writing of exemplars for colleagues in the faculty in order to lighten their load, but that once teachers began to see the quality of students' work improve, they started to embrace the change. He also notes that once results started to improve in one faculty, staff in other faculties became curious about what was going on, and were keen to investigate new ideas in their own KLAs.

“It was really about the success of the strategies, promoting that success and constantly throwing the data up at the staff, saying ‘How good was that!’”

**Paul Sheather, Principal**

Paul also notes that in the early days of developing and embedding the approach, a large proportion of teachers at the school were employed on a temporary or a casual basis, and that those who were not ‘on board’ with the direction the school was taking often sought employment elsewhere. The most powerful factor in ensuring teacher buy-in to the approach, however, was the improvement in results, first in NAPLAN and then the HSC. Paul remarks that it was “immediate and obvious and no-one could argue the case that it wasn't the best for student learning”. As the improvement was sustained, scepticism among teachers started to wane and commitment to the approach began to grow.

Paul has made use of the opportunities available to the school to support their approach – for example, in terms of the Beginning Teacher Support Funding program, but notes that ultimately, the desire for change must come from the teachers themselves. School leaders must work out the best way to engage and support their teachers in their context, as there is no silver bullet.

As of 2021, the school's approach to teaching literacy and numeracy is firmly embedded in the Balgowlah Boys Campus culture. The question for staff is no longer **whether** to adopt the approach, but how best to tailor it to their subject area.

## Using an approach supported by evidence

The Balgowlah Boys Campus approach to teaching writing developed organically via trial and error, but is supported by the evidence of what works best to improve student outcomes.

Research shows that students who experience explicit teaching practices – practices that involve teachers clearly showing students what to do and how to do it, rather than asking them to discover or construct information for themselves – perform better than those who do not (CESE 2020a:11-15). Explicit teaching has been shown to benefit all students (that is, across all year groups and ability levels) when learning new or complex concepts and skills, and is consistent with the principles of cognitive load theory. Cognitive load theory proposes that explicit models of instruction, accompanied by practice and feedback, can be used to optimise the load on students' working memories and maximise their learning (Clark et al. 2012).

The explicit teaching of writing is also supported by research, with the use of explicit teaching techniques for developing and improving the writing of students seen as effective teaching (NESA 2018). Writing can improve how students perform in other subject areas, as well as have an influence on future success (Graham 2019). Furthermore, research shows that teaching students writing strategies such as sentence-combining is seen as an effective and evidence-based method for improving and enhancing the quality of student writing (Andrews et al. 2004; Graham and Perin 2007; Saddler and Asaro-Saddler 2009).



“I think ‘collaborative’ is a word that probably gets bandied around a fair bit, but I guess you sort of understand the true meaning of that word in this faculty. Everything is actually meaningfully collaborative – from the creation and sharing of resources to the pedagogical discussions. It’s not a tokenistic nod towards that word. It’s a genuine embrace of what it means to be truly collaborative that has underpinned the success of the school, because it just gives consistency to the boys.”

**Chris Falkland, English Teacher**

Teacher collaboration is also highlighted in the literature, with high-quality teacher collaboration shown to be critical to improving teacher quality and student outcomes (Goss and Sonnemann 2020; Reeves, Pun and Chung 2017; Ronfeldt et al. 2015; Sharratt and Planche 2016). Collaboration increases teacher efficacy, which, according to Hattie (2017), is the number one factor that influences student achievement. For teacher collaboration to be meaningful and productive it needs to be carefully planned, implemented and sustained. The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (Department of Education and Training 2018) highlighted the need for schools to create the conditions and culture to support meaningful teacher collaboration, and identified peer observation and feedback, coaching, and mentoring as examples of collaboration that are particularly effective.

The evidence also shows that feedback is an important classroom factor that impacts students' academic outcomes (De Boer, Timmermans and van der Wef 2018). Hattie and Timperley (2007) state that feedback is one of the most powerful influences on student learning and achievement. Feedback in the classroom is most effective when it focuses on students' performance on specific tasks, clearly identifying for students where and why mistakes have been made, and emphasising opportunities to learn and improve (CESE 2020b). This type of feedback supports all students with the development of self-efficacy, providing motivation for continued effort and engagement (CESE 2020b).

For further information about effective teaching practices, refer to the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) evidence paper [What works best: 2020 update](#).

## Developing skills in all forms of writing

Teachers at Balgowlah Boys Campus regularly receive questions about their approach to teaching writing – in particular, the fact that it appears to privilege an analytical form of writing over more creative and discursive forms. Benjamin confirms that a deliberate decision was made to focus on explicitly teaching students how to critically analyse and deconstruct a text and then represent this effectively in writing, in recognition of the very particular structure, vocabulary and register required for this form of writing. He stresses, however, that the knowledge and skills students acquire through the process – how to build complex sentences and paragraphs, and the acquisition of a rich and varied vocabulary – are equally applicable when composing more imaginative and creative texts. He notes that 'This does that' allows teachers and students to access literacy with confidence in a lively way, catering to diverse student needs and giving all students an increasingly academic register in their writing through modelling, the Q&A process, feedback and guided instruction. The school views their approach as a toolkit that allows students to articulate their ideas with confidence, clarity and accuracy – whichever form of writing they are engaged in.

“People say ‘But if you’re teaching explicitly, how can they apply that to something else?’ Because it’s the confidence of putting sentences together that they gain from that, and then they draw on the language, they draw on the structures ... and they apply them in different situations.”

**Benjamin Seldon, Deputy Principal**

Members of the English faculty at Balgowlah Boys Campus are passionate about their subject and aim to instil in their students a love of the language and its literature, as well as providing them with a command of the language and an ability to express themselves in a sophisticated manner. While this case study focuses on a very particular teaching approach, it represents only part of the school's English program, which encompasses the breadth and depth of the curriculum, including supporting students to make meaning in ways that are imaginative, interpretive and creative. The ultimate aim of the English program in the school, as envisaged by Paul at the start of his tenure, is to improve the educational outcomes of all students and produce confident and articulate young men. The evidence to date suggests that they are well on their way.



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## Resources

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### Bubble Theory resources

For more information on how to teach writing using Bubble Theory and 'This does that', watch Benjamin Seldon on YouTube:

- [Seldon Method: Teaching HSC English @ Balgowlah Boys Campus Part 1](#)
- [Seldon Method: Teaching and writing HSC English P2. @ Balgowlah Boys Campus](#)
- [Seldon Method: Teaching writing HSC English @ Balgowlah Boys P3 Bubble Theory](#)

For more information on the use of Q&A in Bubble Theory, watch Benjamin Seldon on YouTube:

- [Explicit teaching: Seldon Bally Method – Bubble Theory in semi-action – YouTube](#)

For more information on teaching students to build paragraphs, watch Benjamin Seldon on YouTube:

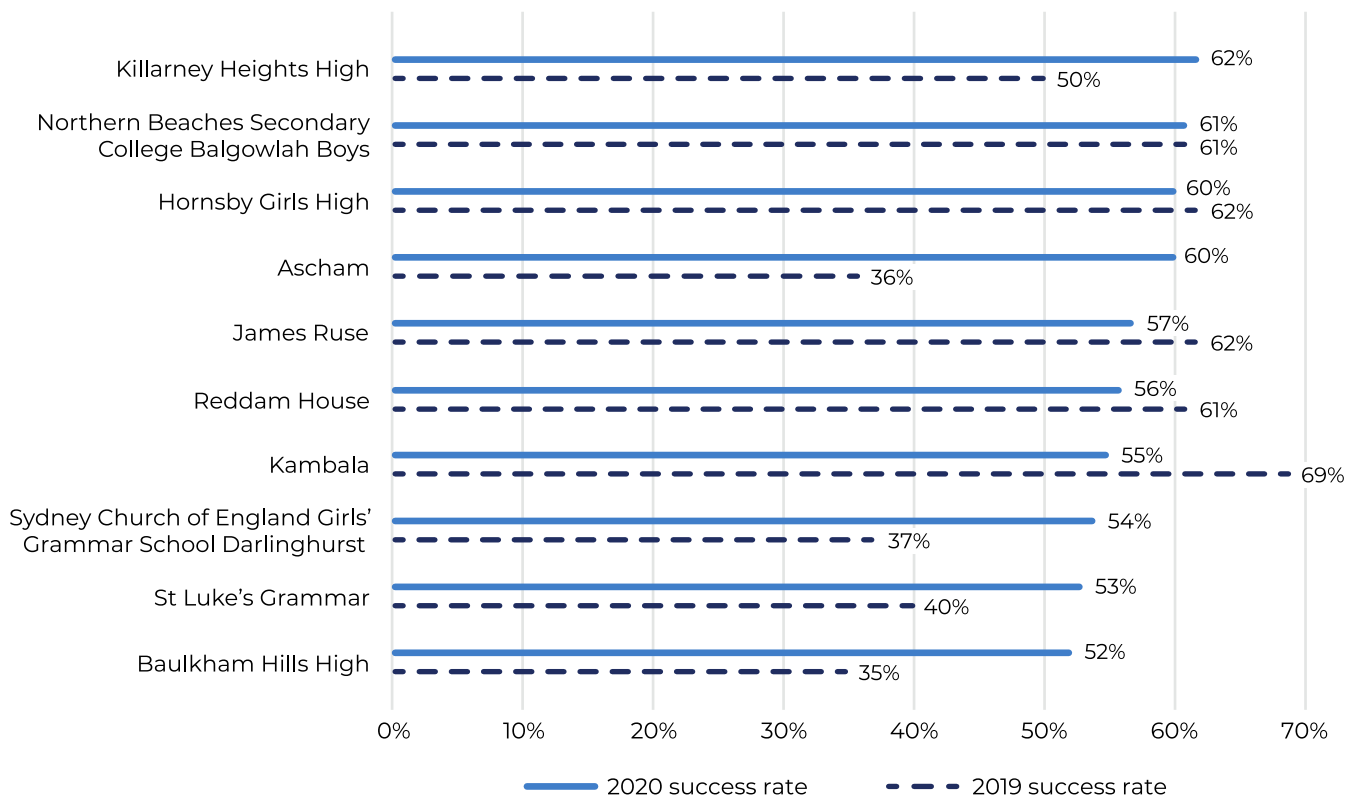
- [Seldon method in paragraphs](#)

# Appendix 1: Student achievement at Balgowlah Boys Campus

Balgowlah Boys Campus is one of the state's top performing schools in HSC English. In 2020, it placed second out of all schools in the state, including academically selective and independent schools. It has been ranked in the top 10 since 2016.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 1**

**Top 10 schools for HSC English, 2020**



**Source:** NSW Education Standards Authority

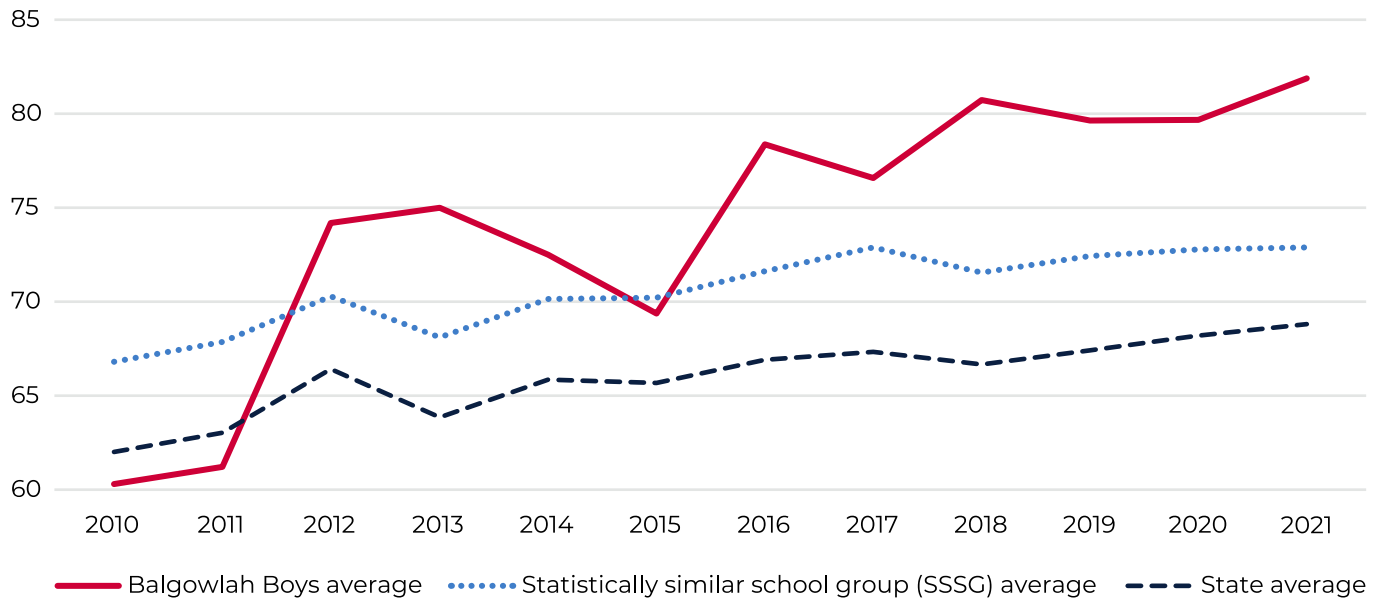
**Notes:** Based on the proportion of examinations sat in English advanced, extension 1 and extension 2 that achieved a Band 6 or equivalent result. A minimum of 20 course entries were needed in order to be included in the rankings.

<sup>12</sup> The latest round of HSC results were released just prior to the publication of this paper, with Balgowlah Boys Campus placing 36th in the state for English advanced, extension 1 and extension 2 in 2021 and 7th in the state for English studies, English EAL/D and English standard. The school attributes the lower-than-recent-years ranking in 2021 in English advanced, extension 1 and extension 2 to the impact of COVID learning from home, an impact felt over 2 years for the 2021 Year 12 cohort. The school's approach relies heavily on face-to-face teaching in relation to use of the whiteboard and the frequent and intensive interaction between teachers and students. Staff are reviewing their practice to understand how this can be addressed in the future.

In the English standard course in 2011, Balgowlah Boys Campus students had an average score 7 points lower than the SSSG, while in 2021, it was 9 points higher (Figure 2). In English advanced, the school has been several points higher than the SSSG since 2011 and has had an average course mark of 87 or higher since 2015 (Figure 3).

**Figure 2**

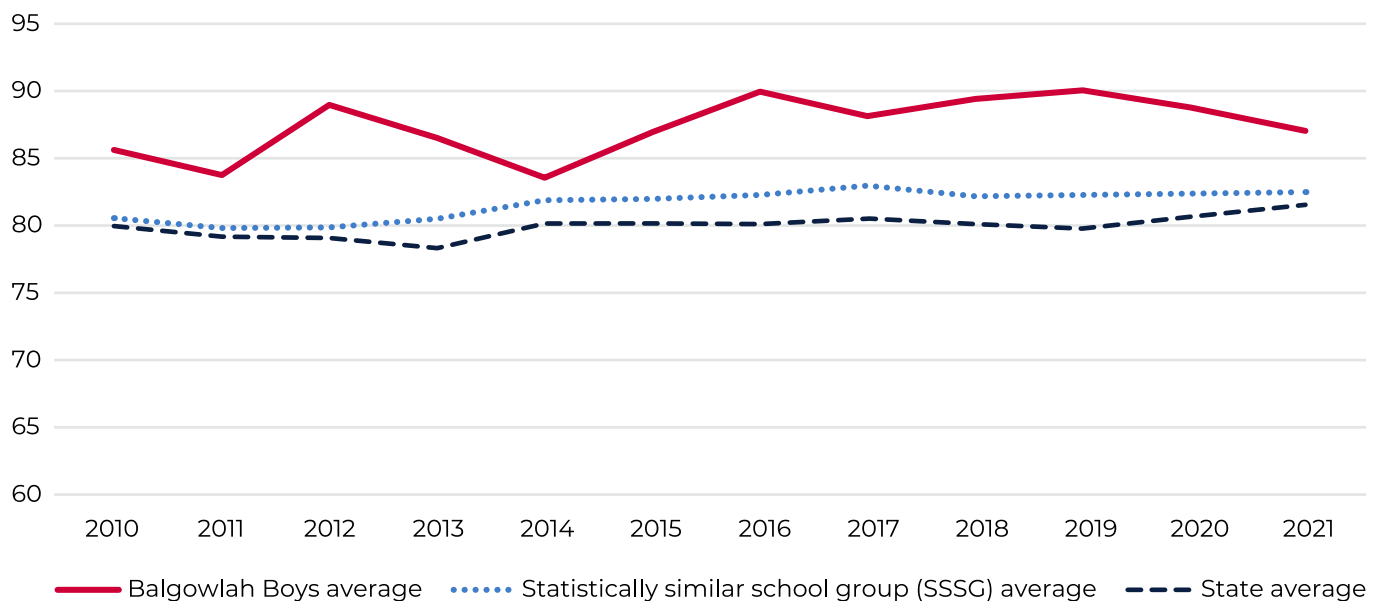
**Balgowlah Boys Campus average HSC English standard course marks, 2010 to 2021**



Source: NSW Department of Education

**Figure 3**

**Balgowlah Boys Campus average HSC English advanced course marks, 2010 to 2021**



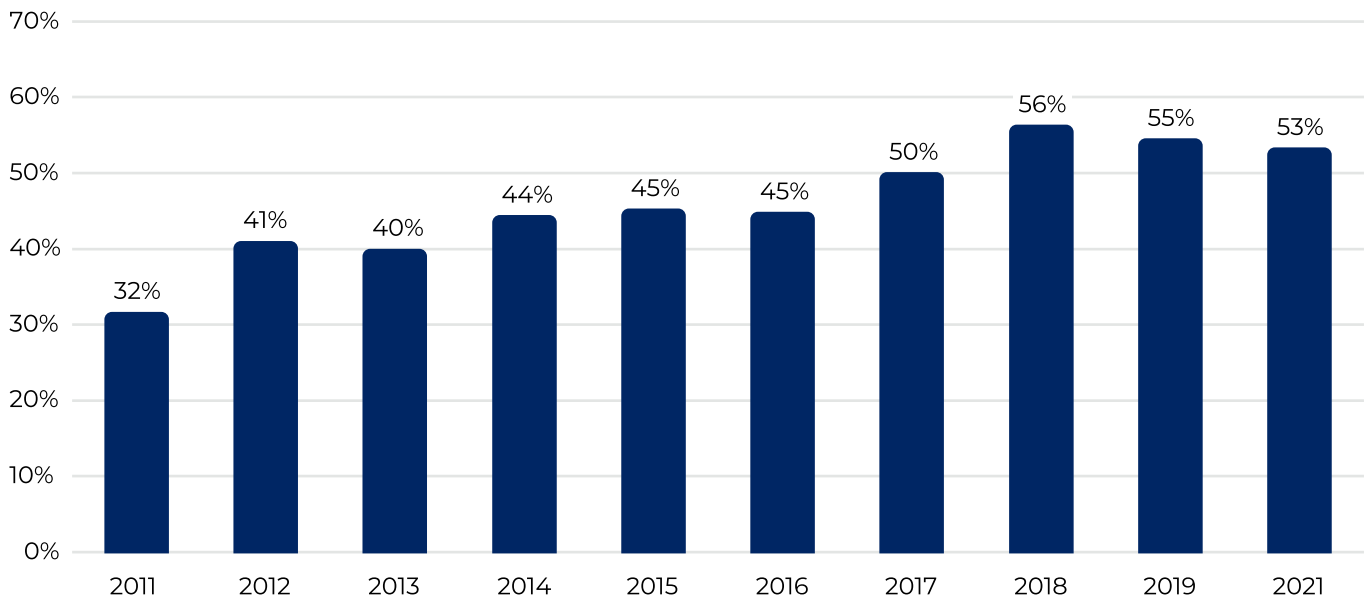
Source: NSW Department of Education



Balgowlah Boys Campus has also shown substantial and sustained growth in NAPLAN, with a significant increase in the proportion of students achieving in the top 2 NAPLAN bands for reading and numeracy between 2011 and 2021 (Figure 4). It has also been one of the state's most consistently top-performing schools for growth between Year 7 and Year 9 in NAPLAN in both literacy and numeracy, achieving significantly above both the state and SSSG average (Figure 5).

**Figure 4**

**Average percentage of Year 7 and Year 9 students in top 2 bands (reading and numeracy), 2011 to 2021**

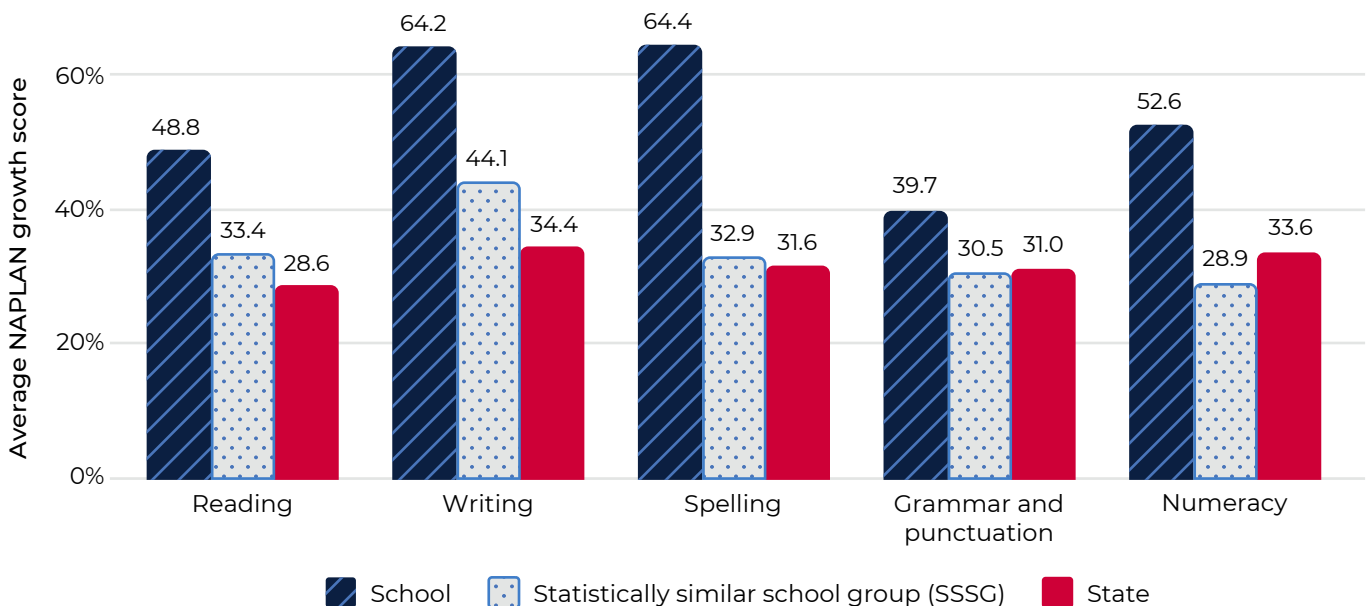


Source: NSW Department of Education

Note: NAPLAN was not held in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure 5**

**Year 9 NAPLAN average scaled growth – school compared to SSSG and state, 2021**



## Part 2: In detail – explicit teaching of writing in English

The approach to teaching writing in English at Balgowlah Boys Campus has 2 main components:

- developing student proficiency in grammar, spelling and punctuation
- developing student proficiency in writing.

### Developing student proficiency in grammar, spelling and punctuation

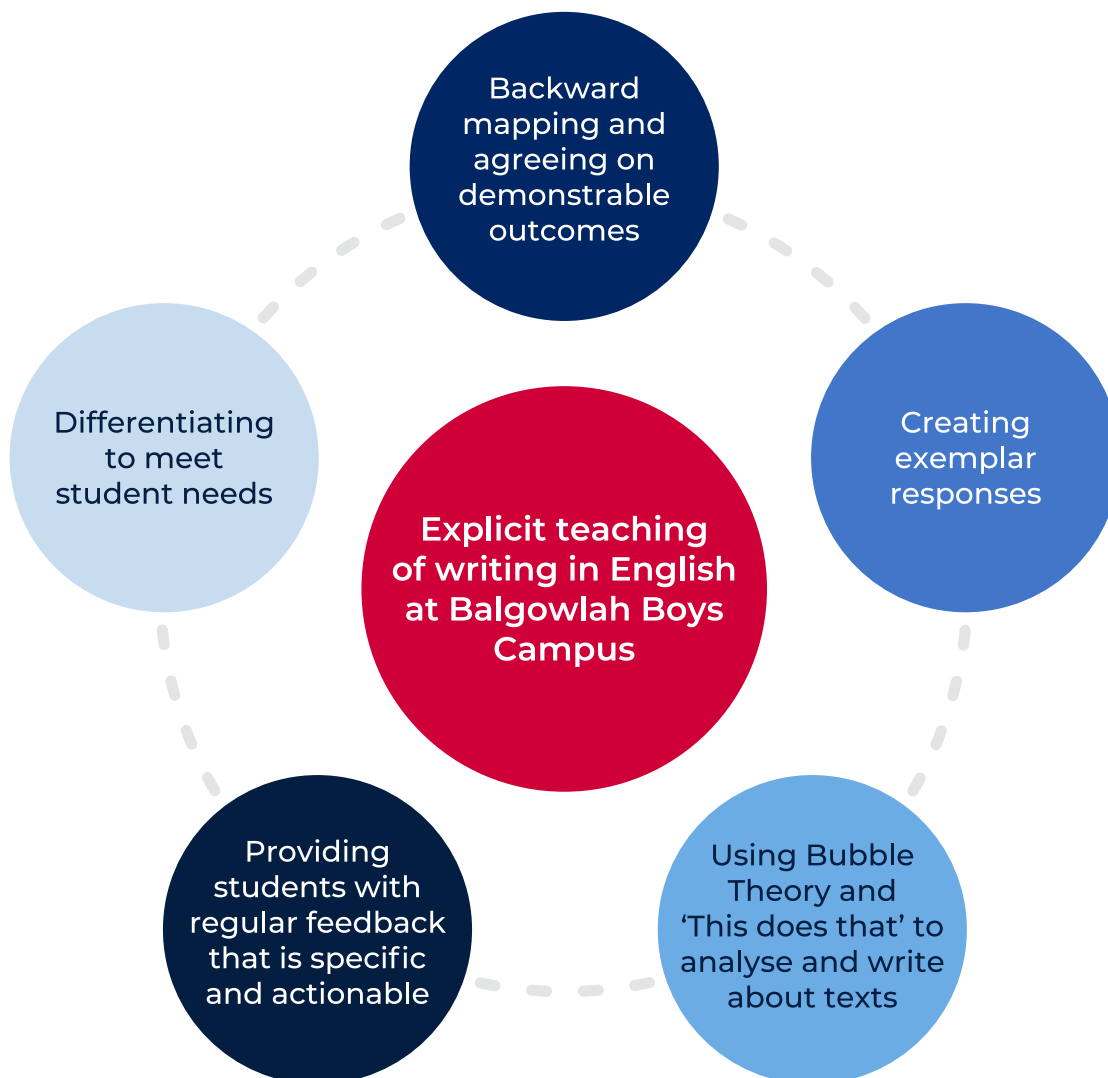
English Literacy and Numeracy (ELAN) classes operate for all students in Years 7 to 10, 4 days a week (there is no ELAN on sport days), and are organised in year groups, with classes formed alphabetically according to surname and no more than 18 students per class. Each term, 5 weeks are devoted to literacy, and 5 to numeracy. Each year group has its own workbooks for literacy and numeracy, and students move through them at their own pace during the ELAN class, with the support of a teacher. ELAN classes are taught by all teachers at the school (as part of their teaching load), with the exception of head teachers, who are freed up to replace staff who are away, or support students as needed. Support for students is also available from selected Year 10 students, who act as peer tutors.



The head teachers of English and maths are responsible for the literacy and numeracy booklets used by students and update them as needed – for example, to address an area in which students may have performed poorly in the previous year’s NAPLAN. The literacy booklets focus on grammar, spelling and punctuation only, and were originally modelled on similar booklets used at another school. Principal, Paul Sheather, describes the first few years as ‘a bit hectic’, as the school refined their approach and modified the booklets to meet the needs of their students.

## Developing student proficiency in writing

Teachers and school leaders at Balgowlah Boys Campus describe the school’s approach to teaching writing as simple, explicit and highly interactive. It is also systematic, places a strong emphasis on building a rich repertoire of vocabulary, and includes a lot of repetition to embed content. Key steps in the approach are outlined below.



## Backward mapping and agreeing on demonstrable outcomes

Staff in the English faculty recognise that learning to write proficiently is a cumulative process that takes years to develop, so they plan for students to hone their skills over the course of high school. The first step in their process is to identify the knowledge, understanding and skills students will need by the end of Stage 6 and ‘backward map’ to plan what needs to be taught in Stages 4 and 5 to get them there. Backward mapping applies to everything from skills and content to textual elements and exam components.

English faculty members devote a significant amount of time and energy to coming to a consensus on the essential teaching content for each unit of work. This is then expressed as ‘demonstrable outcomes’ – detailed and explicit statements that articulate what students must know and be able to do by the end of the unit of work. A demonstrable outcome addresses questions such as ‘What is the nature of the content we want students to learn?’, ‘How much detail do we need to teach?’, ‘How is it best expressed?’ and ‘Which particular vocabulary is best used to articulate it?’. Examples of demonstrable outcomes include:

**Stage 4:** The use of personification, describing a ‘stingy ray of sunlight’ as it ‘struggles feebly down between the houses tall’, highlights the oppressive nature of the city/urban environment, evoking an austere atmosphere characterised by suffocation and confinement.  
(Clancy of the Overflow, by A.B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson)

**Stage 5:** The author’s use of simile, describing the children as they gather on the sand and put “‘hands up” like at school’, demonstrates their willingness to replicate social order, reflecting the lingering and positive influence of learned institutional behaviour on the psyche.  
(Lord of the Flies, by William Golding)

**Stage 6:** The gentle adverbs and assonance, describing the metaphorical ‘convoys of dead sailors’ that ‘softly and humbly ... sway and wander’ into shore, create an eerie and mystical tone, evoking a ghostly and haunting image of dead soldiers making their way to their final resting place, while reminding us of their lost humanity.  
(Beach Burial, by Kenneth Slessor)

All members of the faculty contribute to this process and it is intensely collaborative, with faculty members often recording their ideas separately and then coming together to compare what they’ve produced. School leaders observe that discussions between faculty members can be robust as they ‘agonise over the best way to define a topic’, but by the end, they have an agreed and documented set of essential content for all students to learn, and all teachers are working toward the same outcome. Other content can be – and is – introduced according to student interest and teacher preference, but the core content is non-negotiable.

Demonstrable outcomes then drive the development of the scope and sequence for each year group. School leaders emphasise the importance of having very explicit demonstrable outcomes so that all members of the faculty know exactly where they’re headed, and everyone is heading in the same direction. English Head Teacher, Aimee Jan, likens the process to using Google Maps to get somewhere – you can’t plan how best to get to a destination if you don’t know what the destination is.

## Creating exemplar responses

Once essential content has been confirmed and the scope and sequence has been written, faculty members collaborate to write exemplar (or model) responses for assessment tasks that will be set for students at the end of a unit of work, or the term. Exemplar responses are created using the 'This does that' scaffold and reflect the demonstrable outcomes. Teachers produce a number for each assessment task, differentiating them for students of varying abilities.

**“This [the exemplar] helps us develop a clear, visual, concrete idea of what student writing should look like. If we don't know, the students won't know, and we can't help them get there.”**

**Benjamin Seldon, Deputy Principal**

Exemplar responses may be written by individual teachers or as a group, but it is expected that all members of the faculty will write exemplar responses, because school leaders believe that it is only once teachers have grappled with what constitutes a 'full marks' response themselves that they can teach students how to do it. Where exemplars are written by individual teachers, they are then shared with colleagues for feedback and will frequently go through multiple drafts before all are satisfied that the response hits the mark. Aimee comments that in the process of jointly producing the exemplars, teachers will often disagree about the meaning of a particular piece of text and be introduced to new ideas or perspectives, giving them greater confidence that they have thoroughly explored the text and are well prepared for potential questions from students. The exemplar-writing process also ensures that all teachers, including early-career teachers, know how to create high-quality written responses. Exemplar responses are then used by teachers as a reminder of the content to be taught, including particular vocabulary.

Aimee notes that the process of sharing their work can be confronting for teachers at first, but that successive head teachers have worked hard to develop a culture in which faculty members feel comfortable collaborating to refine and improve their practice. She leads by example, sharing her own exemplars for feedback from colleagues. Aimee and other experienced members of the faculty also actively support less experienced colleagues via informal mentoring arrangements. This has led to increased confidence among the team.

**“The other thing that I found incredibly helpful [when] making my transition into full-time teaching was the approachability of the senior teachers. If I needed any clarification on anything, anyone was willing to sit down and help me through it, whether that took 5 minutes or 5 hours.”**

**Thomas Brecht, English Teacher**

## How teachers use exemplars to inform lesson planning

### Step 1: Apply the ‘This does that’ scaffold to create an exemplar response

Teachers write exemplars, which are differentiated according to student ability. Exemplars can be written together as a group, or individually, with teachers then coming together to refine and improve the responses.

### Step 2: Develop questions for key words and phrases in the exemplar to support the eliciting process

Teachers write questions for key words and phrases in the exemplar and use these questions to guide the Q&A process with students in the classroom. They often keep the questions in hand during the lesson as a reminder of the particular language and concepts they want to elicit from their students.

### Step 3: Create a whiteboard plan to organise thoughts and plan for explicit instruction

Teachers create a whiteboard plan that includes specific details for the brainstorming and ‘bubbling’ process that they will complete with students in the classroom (refer to Appendix 2, page 33 for an example of a whiteboard plan).

### Step 4: Collaborate with colleagues by sharing the exemplar response and whiteboard plan, and actioning any feedback

Teachers then share their exemplar response and whiteboard plan with colleagues. The success of this step depends on having a safe environment in which teachers feel comfortable sharing their work, discussing differences of opinion and giving each other honest and constructive feedback.

## Using ‘Bubble Theory’ and ‘This does that’ to analyse and write about texts

English teachers at Balgowlah Boys Campus use a very particular approach when teaching students how to analyse and write about a text. It is referred to as ‘Bubble Theory’, and incorporates a sentence-building scaffold known as ‘This does that’. Bubble Theory is taught to, and used by, students from Years 8 to 12. It is introduced once students are familiar with a text, having read the book or watched the film and explored some of the nuances of the work, and when they are preparing to put their ideas down in writing. Initially it involves a lot of modelling and support from the teacher, but uses ‘fading’ scaffolding that transitions to increasing student autonomy. It follows the model ‘I do, we do, you do’ and includes a number of key steps.

## Step 1: Select a key piece of text and introduce Bubble Theory

The first step in Bubble Theory is for teachers to identify one of the key ideas they want to explore in the text and identify an excerpt that illustrates that idea, as students will need to draw on specific elements of the text when writing about it. The text excerpt is written on the whiteboard, and a circle, or 'bubble' (hence the name), is drawn around it. Deputy Principal and Instructional Leader, Benjamin Seldon, stresses that the whiteboard is a key protagonist in the process. He notes that teachers need to explicitly model how words go together, as well as introduce formal language and a formal register, otherwise students will often fall into a kind of informal playground dialect that is inappropriate for a formal piece of writing such as an essay for the HSC.

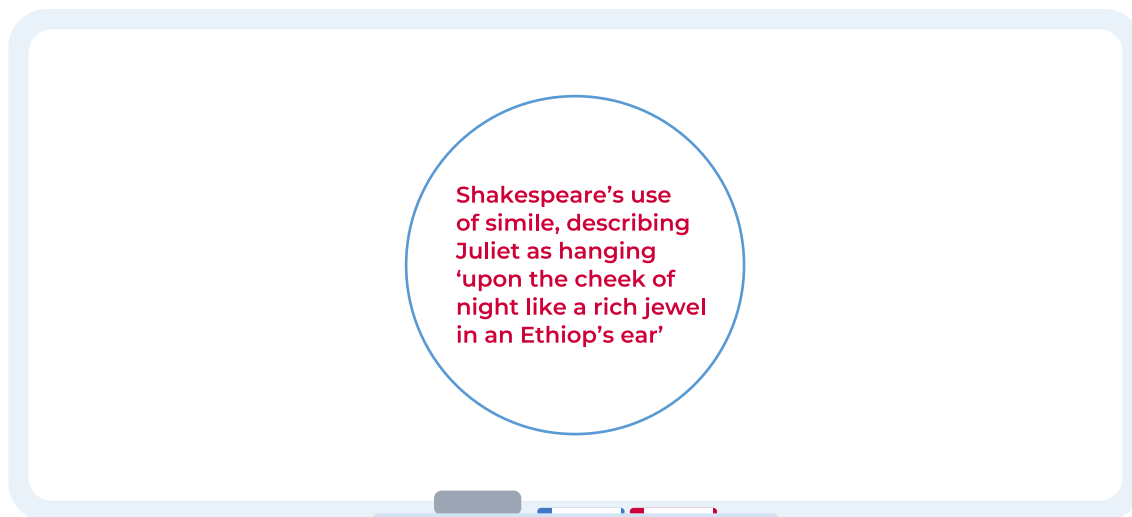
With the text excerpt on the whiteboard, the teacher invites students to identify what kind of literary technique is being used in the excerpt (simile? metaphor? symbolism?) and once identified, it is added to a very particular scaffold: 'The author's use of (technique) ...'. Teachers drill the use of this sentence stem until students are thoroughly familiar (and usually quite bored) with it.

Teachers at Balgowlah Boys Campus emphasise the need for students to inject the author into their analysis of a text. They stress to students that it is essential that they describe how the author's use of language achieves a particular effect, otherwise, they note, students tend to simply describe what's happening.

Benjamin notes that when students are first introduced to the scaffold, it may be enough to use 'The author's use of' + technique (for example, 'The author's use of simile ...'), with the author's name and an example added at a later date, once students are familiar with it.

**For example, Stage 4: Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare**

**Author + technique + example**

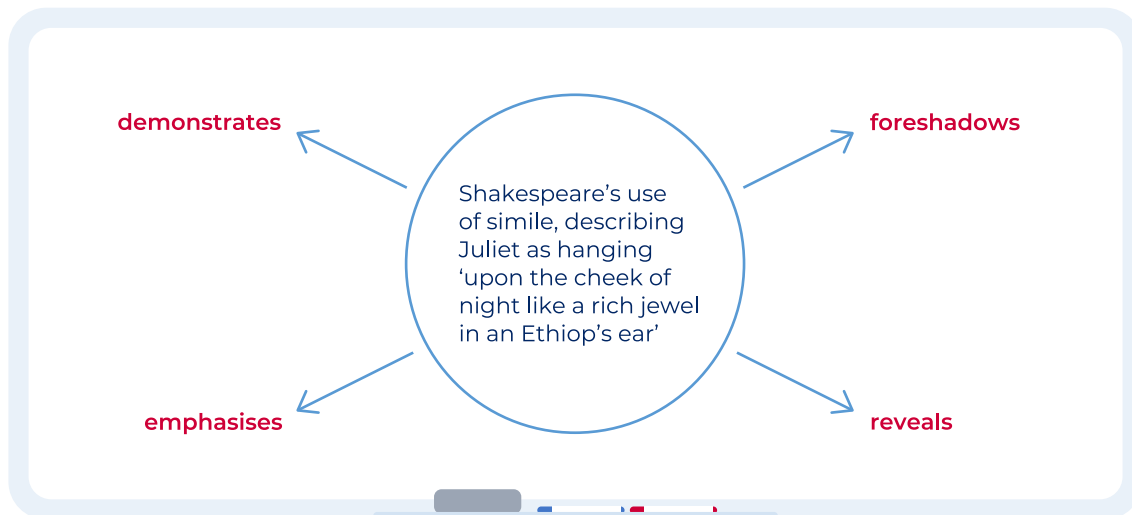


## Step 2: Populate the whiteboard with specific verbs to extrapolate meaning and guide student responses

The next step is to draw a number of arrows radiating out from the ‘bubble’ and populate them with the particular verbs the teacher wants students to learn. This will guide student responses to the excerpt written in the bubble.

Explicitly modelling for students how to use a variety of verbs provides them with the means to put together their ideas in sentences. The English faculty at Balgowlah Boys Campus has a list of suggested verbs and phrases on display in each of their classrooms (refer to Appendix 2, page 32 for a sample list of verbs). Verbs such as ‘suggests’, ‘implies’ and ‘demonstrates’ are used frequently in Stage 4. In Stages 5 and 6, teachers introduce more sophisticated verbs and encourage students to experiment with them in their writing: ‘invokes’, ‘privileges’ and ‘foreshadows’ are later followed by phrases such as ‘positions the audience to ...’ ‘creates a lens of ...’ and ‘acts as a pivot between’. Benjamin stresses that complex vocabulary must be taught and used often to embed it in memory – students don’t come up with verbs such as ‘posits’ on their own.

For example:



## Step 3: Use ‘question and answer’ (Q&A) to build on the verb stems

Once the verbs are in place, the teacher workshops with the class what effect the technique in the bubble has on the text – in the current example, what the simile demonstrates, emphasises, foreshadows and reveals.

The process is highly interactive, with the teacher standing at the whiteboard giving prompts, asking questions, responding to student feedback and working with students to build on the selected verbs to create clauses, which are written on the board. Writing dot points or single words on the whiteboard at this stage is not sufficient, because it doesn’t explicitly model how to translate ideas into writing.



Teachers at Balgowlah Boys Campus tend to begin by asking questions that elicit **descriptions**, only later shifting the attention to **analysis**. The process can be fast- or slow-paced, depending on the needs of students.

For example:



**Table 1**

Example verbs, prompts and questions used by teachers

Verb	Potential prompts and questions for use by teachers
Demonstrates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What impact does Juliet have upon Romeo? Is it a calming impact?</li> <li>• What's a word starting with 'd' that means 'to change things up'?</li> <li>• What does Juliet have a disruptive impact upon? Romeo's brain? His heart?</li> <li>• What is the word starting with 'p' that refers to the inner world of the mind and emotion together? ... It begins with 'p-s-y'? We call that the psyche. 'Psyched out the opposition' means what? How do we write that effectively?</li> </ul>
Emphasises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What fundamental or basic idea is Romeo emphasising? Is it Juliet's socioeconomic status? Is he talking about her house? Is it how ugly she is, or how beautiful? What is the noun for that? Is it a common beauty?</li> <li>• What word starting with 'u' means rare and special? How do we spell that? How can we write that out?</li> </ul>
Foreshadows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does 'foreshadow' mean?</li> <li>• What happens to the couple?</li> <li>• Do they hate each other? What is the word beginning with 'i' that describes this? What adjective can we give it?</li> <li>• Is it a dull and stale infatuation?</li> <li>• So, let's put that together using 'foreshadows'.</li> </ul>
Reveals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does this language reveal about Romeo? Does it reveal his sensible mindset?</li> <li>• Is he a sensible guy or does he have a tendency for something else? What's a word starting with 'p' that means tendency, or inclination for?</li> <li>• Is it at a decent level or a little too much? So, let's write 'reveals Romeo's _____ for romantic ... what?'.</li> </ul>

For more information on the use of Q&A in Bubble Theory, watch Benjamin Seldon on YouTube: [Explicit teaching: Seldon Bally Method – Bubble theory in semi-action – YouTube](#).

### Step 4: Create a bank of words that students can draw on as they craft written responses

The next phase in the process is to build a bank of additional vocabulary, relevant to the text, that students can draw on when turning these ideas into sentences. This is important, because the formula relies on students using a range of verbs to explore syllabus content. The process continues to be highly interactive as teachers work to elicit and model the use of particular words they want students to use in their written responses.

Getting to the target vocabulary involves the use of questions, suggestions and hints, and teachers often write the first few letters of a word on the board as a prompt. The process is most effective when questions build on students' background knowledge, prior experiences and current vocabulary. Student contributions to the bank of words are strongly encouraged, and recorded as they arise. Teachers stress the need to confirm the correct spelling and pronunciation of each new word, and to model appropriate usage. They write the word on the board and then enunciate it syllable by syllable – an important step that allows students to make connections between written and spoken language.

Teachers then provide examples of the new word in a range of contexts that are relevant to students, so that they can refine their understanding of the meaning of the word. As a final step, the teacher calls on students to create their own examples of the word in a sentence, in order to ensure that they've understood, and to start the process of embedding it into memory. Teachers reinforce to students that a lot of the success they will have over the years will depend on their capacity to draw upon a variety of verbs, so they start to model that process very early on in Year 8.

For example:

**Table 2**

#### Vocabulary-building prompts and examples

New vocabulary	Potential prompts and questions for use by teachers	Examples of the word in a sentence
<b>Infatuation</b>	<p>What is a word starting with 'i' that means fascination, obsession or crush?</p> <p>What word would you use to describe being smitten with someone, or a feeling of fondness or desire that is not long-lasting? It starts with 'i-n-f'.</p>	<p>Tom is infatuated with Kate Middleton. Is this a fair statement? Why/why not?</p> <p>Last year in history you learnt about Antony's infatuation with Cleopatra. Is 'Romeo and Juliet' a tale of love, or infatuation?</p>
<b>Mediocre Mediocrity</b>	<p>What is a word starting with 'm' that means average or ordinary?</p> <p>What word would you use to describe a person who is a middle-of-the-road basketballer? It starts with 'm-e-d'.</p> <p>What is a word used to describe a person who is neither leading the pack in a race, nor coming last?</p>	<p>Some of the Lakers' players were good during the match, some were mediocre, and some were dreadful.</p> <p>The Sydney Kings lost because of the mediocrity of their star players.</p> <p>While some celebrities got their big break on reality TV, others have fallen into mediocrity.</p>

## Step 5: Bring it all together in writing with ‘This does that’

Using the whiteboard, which is now filled with well-crafted ideas, the teacher uses ‘This does that’ to build sentences with students. ‘This does that’ is a scaffold that allows students to join clauses together (the school likens it to building with Lego) to construct increasingly complex sentences. It is taught to, and used by, students from Years 8 to 12.

The teacher explicitly guides students through the use of the formula, first modelling, then creating sentences together, then withdrawing support as students develop proficiency. Students then bring the sentences together into paragraphs using a paragraph scaffold developed by the school (refer to Appendix 2, page 34 for the paragraph scaffold). Teachers use the same explicit approach when guiding students through the paragraph-building process, introducing them to contextual segues – that is, broader, conceptually-driven sentences that lead into the language deconstruction.

For more information on teaching students to build paragraphs, watch Benjamin Seldon on YouTube: [Seldon method in paragraphs](#).

Benjamin stresses that the key to success with the approach is to drill the scaffold almost to the point of boredom, only then talking about segues, continuity and variation.

“You go through this process with the kids in Year 8, and they put their sentences together, and I might spend a whole lesson where we write them about 3 different times, just in different ways, and they get sick of it ... and I say ‘Is that easy?’ and they say ‘Yeah, that’s pretty easy’ and I say ‘That’s great, because let’s have a look at Year 12. This guy got Band 6. Can you see what he’s doing?’ And they go ‘Yeah, he’s doing exactly what we’re doing.’ I say ‘That’s it. Basically what you’re doing now is all you have to do for the HSC’, and from that moment on ... they go ‘Man, I’m in’ and they punch their ticket right then and there.”

**Benjamin Seldon, Deputy Principal**

Setting aside time for students to produce multiple drafts of their writing is also critical, as it allows them to refine their ideas and the concepts, and improve the manner in which they are expressed. It also creates opportunities for teachers to provide feedback that is specific and actionable so that students can improve their work.

### How it works

- ‘This’ – refers to the literary technique, or the author’s use of the technique.
- ‘**does**’ – refers to the connecting verb, or main verb.
- ‘**that**’ – refers to the effect of the technique, or what it does.

The simplest expression of the formula would be in a sentence such as:

- The simile **emphasises Juliet’s beauty**.

or

- Shakespeare’s use of simile **emphasises Juliet’s beauty**.

Students are drilled in the fact that the connecting verb, or main verb, ends in an ‘-s’, and are encouraged to circle it, or ‘count it off’ in their writing, because as subordinate clauses are added to build more complex sentences, the additional verbs will end in ‘-ing’. Teachers at Balgowlah Boys Campus use metalanguage sparingly, preferring to ‘keep it simple’ by talking about ‘s verbs’ and ‘i-n-g verbs’.

The teacher may then choose to model how the addition of an adjectival phrase can make the sentence richer:

- Shakespeare's use of simile emphasises the unique quality of Juliet's beauty.

Once students are very familiar with the formula, the next step is to take the remaining '-ing' clauses from the bubble diagram and insert them into the scaffold to build more complex sentences:

- This does that, doing that.
- Doing this, this does that, doing that.
- Doing this, this does that, doing that, and doing that.

Students are drilled in the fact that these clauses will contain verbs ending in '-ing' and encouraged to circle them, or 'count them off' as they do with the '-s verb':

- Shakespeare's use of simile emphasises the unique quality of Juliet's beauty, demonstrating the powerful and disruptive impact she has upon Romeo's psyche.

Benjamin stresses that there is lots and lots of repetition involved in mastering this approach and that it's important to model it over and over again.

For example, Stage 4: Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

### Table 3

#### Examples of the 'This does that' scaffold in action

Scaffold	Examples
This <u>does that</u> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The simile <u>emphasises</u> Juliet's beauty.</li> <li>or</li> <li>• Shakespeare's use of simile <u>emphasises</u> Juliet's beauty.</li> <li>or</li> <li>• Shakespeare's use of simile <u>emphasises</u> the unique quality of Juliet's beauty.</li> </ul>
This <u>does that</u> , <u>doing that</u> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shakespeare's use of simile <u>emphasises</u> the unique quality of Juliet's beauty, <u>demonstrating</u> the powerful and disruptive impact she has upon Romeo's psyche.</li> </ul>
<u>Doing this</u> , this <u>does that</u> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Describing</u> Juliet at the Capulet ball, Shakespeare's use of simile <u>emphasises</u> the unique quality of Juliet's beauty.</li> </ul>
<u>Doing this</u> , this <u>does that</u> , <u>doing that</u> , and <u>doing that</u> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Describing</u> Juliet at the Capulet ball, Shakespeare's use of simile <u>emphasises</u> the unique quality of Juliet's beauty, <u>demonstrating</u> the powerful and disruptive impact she has upon Romeo's psyche, and <u>revealing</u> his predilection for romantic excess.</li> </ul>
Putting it all together and building complex sentences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Describing</u> Juliet at the Capulet ball, Shakespeare's use of simile, <u>suggesting</u> she hangs 'upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel', <u>emphasises</u> the unique quality of Juliet's beauty, <u>demonstrating</u> the powerful and disruptive impact she has upon Romeo's psyche, and <u>revealing</u> his predilection for romantic excess.</li> </ul>

For more information on how to teach writing using Bubble Theory and ‘This does that’, watch Benjamin Seldon on YouTube:

- [Seldon Method: Teaching HSC English @ Balgowlah Boys Campus Part 1](#)
- [Seldon Method: Teaching and writing HSC English P2. @ Balgowlah Boys Campus](#)
- [Seldon Method: Teaching writing HSC English @ Balgowlah Boys P3 Bubble Theory.](#)

## Providing students with regular feedback that is specific and actionable

Allowing students frequent opportunities to practise the technique and receive feedback on what they are doing well and what could be improved is essential to the school’s approach.

During lessons, feedback to students is often verbal, and occurs most intensely during the Q&A process. This feedback is particularly effective because it is delivered during, or soon after, the learning task. It forms a type of dialogue between the teacher and students, with the dual advantage that the teacher can ensure that students have understood and are able to action the feedback, and that it can be heard by other students, who can learn from the mistakes or achievements of their peers. Regular verbal feedback also helps students to organise their thoughts and clarify any misconceptions before they begin the writing process. The added benefit for teachers of this type of feedback is that it is less labour-intensive than written feedback.

Feedback in the English faculty is also provided in writing. Teachers use short, regular writing tasks to give students frequent opportunities to practise applying the ‘This does that’ scaffold in a low-stakes way, and to allow multiple opportunities for them to develop a polished piece of writing about a specific text. Teachers then use these pieces of writing to deliver specific, actionable feedback about their work and ask that students address all comments and re-submit their responses. The feedback provided can relate to any aspect of the writing, including the kind of language used, the structure of responses, or how students are connecting ideas and concepts. Teachers comment that student first drafts are often ‘a sea of red pen’ or track changes and that students now expect it, and are keen for as much feedback as possible.

Students at Balgowlah Boys Campus are also asked to provide feedback on each other’s work. This can be delivered verbally or in writing, and allows students to clarify what they have learned in conversation with their peers. It also frees up the teacher to move around the room and monitor student understanding.

Teachers note that regular feedback to students on their writing ensures that they have frequent, low-stakes opportunities to refine their writing during the year and are never in a position where they are receiving major feedback for the first time just prior to, or in response to, an assessment task. This gives students confidence that they can produce high-quality written responses and perform well in assessments.

## Differentiating to meet student needs

As a comprehensive school, Balgowlah Boys Campus has students of all abilities. One of the major benefits of the school's approach to teaching writing is that it can be used with all students, adjusting the level of scaffolding to meet individual needs. For example, teachers tend to use a table rather than 'bubbles' with students who need additional support or who are first learning how to use the 'This does that' scaffold (Table 4). The table breaks down the formula and provides students with a clear structure that they can use to talk or write about the impact of a technique. Teachers add columns to this table to extend students as they develop proficiency and confidence in their ability to apply the formula.

**Table 4**

**Breaking down the 'This does that' scaffold to meet student needs, Stage 4 example**

Differentiation options	Technique	Example	Connecting verb 1	Effect of connecting verb 1	Connecting verb 2	Effect of connecting verb 2	Connecting verb 3	Effect of connecting verb 3
Basic	Romeo's use of simile	describing Juliet hanging 'upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear'	captures	her rarefied/ unique/exquisite/ glorious beauty.				
Advanced	Romeo's use of simile	describing Juliet hanging 'upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear'	captures	her rarefied/ unique/exquisite/ glorious beauty,	suggesting	she stands out amidst the mediocrity of those around her.		
More advanced	Romeo's use of simile	describing Juliet hanging 'upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear'	captures	her rarefied/ unique/exquisite/ glorious beauty,	suggesting	she is almost luminescent amidst the mediocrity of those around her,	and revealing	Romeo's intense/romantic infatuation with Juliet.

Teachers also adjust the Q&A process to cater for the needs of students in their classes. If students are progressing quickly, teachers will generally introduce a wider variety of techniques, examples and vocabulary in a particular unit of work. If they are progressing more slowly, teachers may choose to spend longer on the initial Q&A process and be more selective about the range and number of techniques, examples and vocabulary, as they prefer that students demonstrate confidence and proficiency in one area before moving on to new content. Teachers have found that this approach has led to increased expectations in lower ability students about what they can achieve in English, and increased confidence in their ability to produce high-quality responses about specific texts they have studied.

The school also caters for the needs of students by offering a range of English courses for the HSC, capping each class at 20 students. In the Year 12, 2021 cohort, the school ran classes for English EAL/D (one class), English studies (2 classes), English standard (2 classes), English advanced (3 classes), English extension 1 (2 classes) and English extension 2 (1 class). With the introduction of the school's writing approach and subsequent improvement in HSC results, teachers have found that students are now quite aspirational. They want to do well, and know exactly what it takes to get there.

“So it’s really about teachers knowing their students and then being able to still use the scaffolds and the explicit writing strategies, but adapt them to their class ... The great thing with the tables is that you can continue adding columns, so you can have extension connector effects.”

**Aimee Jan, Head Teacher of English**

## Appendix 2: Teaching resources – Balgowlah Boys Campus

The following resources were developed by staff at Balgowlah Boys Campus to support student learning in English.

### Key verbs and phrases used for writing in English

English teachers at Balgowlah Boys Campus display lists of key verbs and phrases such as the following in their classrooms to assist students with their writing. Verbs such as 'suggests', 'implies' and 'demonstrates' are used frequently in Stage 4. In Stages 5 and 6, teachers introduce more sophisticated verbs: 'invokes', 'privileges' and 'foreshadows' are later followed by phrases such as 'positions the audience to ...' 'creates a lens of ...' and 'acts as a pivot between'.

**Table 5**  
**Key verbs and phrases used for writing in English**

Basic	Advanced	Extended
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• suggests</li> <li>• emphasises</li> <li>• captures</li> <li>• implies</li> <li>• reveals</li> <li>• evokes</li> <li>• articulates</li> <li>• expresses</li> <li>• communicates</li> <li>• demonstrates</li> <li>• highlights</li> <li>• accentuates</li> <li>• infers</li> <li>• conveys</li> <li>• reflects</li> <li>• establishes</li> <li>• reinforces</li> <li>• represents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creates</li> <li>• constructs</li> <li>• recalls</li> <li>• invokes</li> <li>• explores</li> <li>• examines</li> <li>• evaluates</li> <li>• reminds</li> <li>• locates</li> <li>• posits</li> <li>• privileges</li> <li>• provides</li> <li>• challenges</li> <li>• informs</li> <li>• manufactures</li> <li>• encourages</li> <li>• demands</li> <li>• confirms</li> <li>• promotes</li> <li>• champions</li> <li>• distorts</li> <li>• questions</li> <li>• provokes</li> <li>• admonishes</li> <li>• signals</li> <li>• frames</li> <li>• foreshadows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positions the audience to ...</li> <li>• presents a vision of ...</li> <li>• creates a lens of ...</li> <li>• draws the audience into ...</li> <li>• acts as a pivot between ...</li> <li>• hints at ...</li> <li>• serves as a symbol of ...</li> <li>• speaks to ...</li> <li>• recoils from ...</li> <li>• invites (us to consider) ...</li> <li>• lends the text ...</li> <li>• regresses from ...</li> <li>• shifts away from ...</li> <li>• carries with it a ...</li> <li>• offers (a foreboding vision of) ...</li> <li>• draws the audience into (an awareness of) ...</li> <li>• appeals to ...</li> <li>• operates as ...</li> <li>• responds to ...</li> <li>• lays bare ...</li> <li>• dramatises ...</li> </ul>



## Whiteboard plan example – Stage 5 – Lord of the Flies

English teachers at Balgowlah Boys Campus create whiteboard plans to organise their thoughts and plan for explicit instruction. Each whiteboard plan includes specific details for the brainstorming and 'bubbling' process. The following whiteboard plan was created for a Year 9 class studying William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

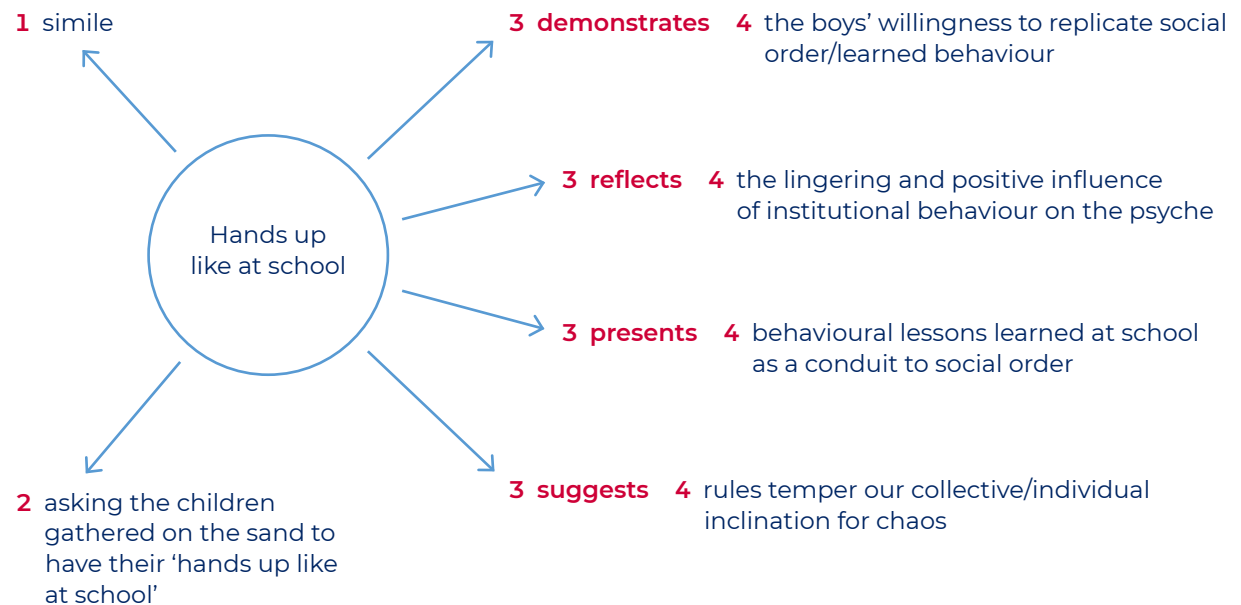
### Brainstorm

- What technique is this?
- Does the text present putting up hands in a positive or a negative way?
- Is the suggestion here that this learned behaviour has harmed or helped the students?
- What sort of impact has the school institution apparently had on the children on the island?
- What comment is being made about the rules in this situation? Are they positive or negative?
- What word starting with 'p' do we use to refer to the inner emotional psychological world?

### Components

- 1 technique
- 2 context and embedding the quote
- 3 **connecting verbs**
- 4 effect

### The author/<character's name>'s use of ...



## Analytical paragraph scaffold used for writing in English

English teachers at Balgowlah Boys Campus explicitly teach students the 'rules' of writing analytical paragraphs and give them opportunities for guided and autonomous practice. The faculty's analytical paragraph scaffold (following) is introduced in Stage 5. It has 4 key components.

### 1. Conceptual opening sentence/topic sentence

- This sentence needs to be a contextual summation of the idea from the text that you will be discussing.

### 2. Link the text to the conceptual opening sentence/topic sentence

- Here, you connect the conceptual/topic sentence to the text you have studied.
- Useful phrases include, for example:
  - Set against [x], (author's name and text), does this, doing this, and doing this.
  - or
  - Arising from the author's contemporary concerns with socio-political evolution and change, Orwell's 1984 explores the implications of totalitarianism, censorship and conformity as a mechanism of collective/societal control/class separation.
  - or
  - Whitman's poem 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry' recognises/presents/represents/examines ...
  - or
  - Recognising this [x], Whitman's poem 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry' explores ...

### 3. Representation and meaning (known as 'language deconstruction')

- This will be approximately 65 to 70% of your paragraph.
- Here you explore and discuss the way language reflects your topic sentence/thesis idea.
- **Context + technique + example + connector verb + effect**
- Analysis: 'This does that' formula/Bubble Theory
  - You will need to ensure your writing has 'flow' and variety. Static responses with all sentences starting, 'The author's use of ...', will be judged poorly.
  - You need to have a decent amount of textual representation; 5 to 6 examples is best. Three will usually not suffice.

### 4. Summary of paragraph/wrap-up

- Consider how the text refers to the question you have been asked and link it back.
- Useful phrases include:
  - In this way ... / Thus ... / In the process ... / Consequently ...
- Multi-clause sentences here are **essential**. For example:
  - In this way, Whitman explores [x], recognising [x] and insisting/demanding [x] our [x]. Note the increasing use of modality of the verbs, as well as the use of 'our' or 'we' to globalise the response and take it **outside** the world of the text.
- You **must not** finish your paragraph with representation/analysis.



## Student work samples – Balgowlah Boys Campus

The following student work samples show how the school's approach translates into practice. The samples are unedited, so contain some errors, with only minor changes made for design purposes.

### Student work sample – Stage 4 English

#### Unit of work

Australian poetry

#### Outcome

EN4-1A – A student responds to and composes texts for understanding, interpretation, critical analysis, imaginative expression and pleasure.

#### Task

Explain and analyse Banjo Paterson's representation of the Australian outback in contrast to city life in the poem, Clancy of the Overflow.

#### Teacher comment

This is a work sample by a student in the top Year 8 class. The task was an accumulation of the representation and deconstruction taught explicitly in class in the previous 2 weeks. We worked through 5 of the 6 language examples as a class, 'bubbling out' ideas and making sentences using 'This does that'. This often involves the students writing out the sentence in 2 or 3 different ways, including starting with a gerund (-ing) or the main subject ('The poet's use of ...').

We then work together as a class to compose a topic sentence, a transition sentence ('Paterson contrasts this with his description of Australian city life'), and a concluding summary sentence.

After this, we map out on the board the paragraph plan and talk to the students about using segues and such to create flow and continuity. For example, 'This is reinforced through ...', or 'Simultaneously ...'. This is a critical and important conversation as this requires students to realise that 'is', for example, becomes the 's verb' and the previous 's' shifts to an '-ing verb'. For example, 'The poet's use of metaphor conveys ...' becomes 'This **is** reinforced through the poet's use of metaphor, conveying **ing** ...'.

The following text includes some errors, including misspelling of the poet's name and the student's use of 'benevolence' instead of 'malevolence'. We encourage students to experiment and use new and complex language and this student is using the sentence scaffold well, so it's a good result.

### Student response

In the poem "Clancy of the overflow" Patterson juxtaposes the majesty, freedom, and tranquillity of the Australian outback with the congestion, decrepitude, and quotidian monotony of the 19th and early 20th century urban existence. **Foregrounding** a tone of longing for the freedom of the outback, the author utilises **sibilance**, describing "stocks slowly stringing", **imagining** a world of red sunsets, clear skies, and campfires, and evoking the harmonious lifestyle of relaxation, peace, and freedom. Patterson **simultaneously personifies** the, "kindly voices of the bush" and the "murmur of the breezes", **conjuring** a tone of peaceful intimacy, trust, and romance, and giving voice to the welcoming **benevolence of the Australian wilderness**. This celebration of the bush **climaxes** in the author's representation of, "the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars", accentuating the impact of nature on our livelihood, foregrounding the vivid beauty of the stars, operating as an emotional **apotheosis** in the text. Patterson Contrasts this with his description of Australian city life. Crafting a **juxtaposition** between the freedom of the country and dullness of the city life through personification, describing "a **stingy ray of sunlight**" as it "**struggles feebly**" down the office wall. This imagines a world of cramp and dark office space, inferring that the darkness engulfs the light, suggesting that urban life is claustrophobic, suffocating, and dreary. This is reinforced through Patterson's use of **assonance**, describing "**eager eyes and greedy, stunted forms and weedy**", ejecting a tone of selfishness and pity, imagining a world of shallowness, chaos, and ignorance, hinting at the diminution of man trapped in the shadows of urban dystopia. **Simultaneously Patterson uses metaphor**, describing "the language uninviting of the gutter children fighting", evoking a tone of cynicism, imaging a world of benevolence, apprehension, and chaos, highlighting the repulsive and savage acts to one another. In this way, Patterson reminds about the freedom and romance of the outback and warns us of the claustrophobia and suffocation of urban life.

### Teacher notes

6 techniques – 'sibilance', 'personifies', 'climaxes', 'juxtaposition', 'assonance' and 'metaphor' – are pieced together in paragraph form like blocks (the student has used different colours for each).

5 of the 6 techniques are explored in class. This might take 4 to 5 lessons.

The teacher explicitly introduces new verbs such as 'foregrounds', 'imagines', 'conjures'.

3 techniques – 'sibilance', 'personifies' and 'climaxes' – from stanzas 3 and 4 celebrate the outback.

'Apotheosis' was introduced explicitly in class with examples of how to use it.

3 examples of negative quotes contrast the negativity of city life with the bush – 'stingy sunlight' as it 'struggles feebly', and 'eager eyes and greedy, stunted forms and weedy'.

A 'technique sentence' was written by each student on their own, to demonstrate their capacity to explore language.

The concluding sentence was modelled by the teacher.

## Student work sample – Stage 6 English

### Unit of work

Discovery

### Outcome

EA12-1 – A student independently responds to, composes and evaluates a range of complex texts for understanding, interpretation, critical analysis, imaginative expression and pleasure.

### Task

Compose a creative response that represents an element of discovery.

### Teacher comment

For the following task, students were asked to draw upon their personal understanding of the concept of discovery and compose a reflective creative text.

We are quite specific with our expectations of creative work and encourage the students to follow a scaffold. This involves:

- description of setting with a focus on light and colour
- introduction of character and complication
- the reflection of past events / memory
- resolution (often open ended).

This means there is very little physical movement in the creative text. Exploring memory in the bulk of the description helps the student both create a reflective tone and engage in description.

The Year 12 student who wrote the following sample has excellent language control and uses the sentence scaffold and its many variations very effectively to engage the reader.

### Student response

In the barely lit darkness of the shed, a weak filtered light tentatively pierced through rust holes in the corrugated iron walls and roof, creating beams of golden light that seemed to stand or lean in awkward angles across the floor. Heavy in the soft heat, the air moved with thick dust; particles that danced and swirled in orchestrated silence amid the warm luminescence of the tendrils of light, briefly incandescent with fire before being lost in shadow.

The relics of an almost forgotten past cluttered the floor and walls of the room, peering forth from over filled boxes and falling off over filled shelves. In the half light, it was difficult to make sense of the cornucopia of mouldy magazines, ancient newspapers, and various fragments of early 90s retro furniture that had wearied from neglect. An old Grey Nicholls bag deformed by half broken wooden stumps and a bat poked into my foot; the pink rubber handles torn and flaccid like broken skin. My brother and I had played with it long ago, one summer perhaps, before, like all things, we had moved on.

I had moved away and my brother, Jack, had left too, in a different way.

In the corner, the top of a long silver board case sat in the darkness, winking in reflected silver and gold from a fluorescent logo that betrayed its identity. I moved slowly, conscience of the long undisturbed silence, gently picking up the silver canvas case and laying it across the cluttered table that filled the middle of the room, teasing down the rusted zipper with care.

'Hmmm' I grunted almost inaudibly to myself, or to the room. I wasn't sure, or didn't notice

The once radiant glow of a foam and fibreglass surf board was stained by an auburn tinge, sunburnt from over exposure to the searing summer sun. The fibreglass had depressions and cracks running all through the deck, each with their own memory. The wax had mostly melted from the surface, with only a few coffee-coloured clumps surviving. And there, written in faded led and running down the stringer on the foam were the words 'Hayden & Jack 2003'. His old board. Or ours, because we had made it together.

\*\*\*

I was 10 years old when my brother and I shaped my first ever surfboard. Sitting in the corner for weeks in intrigue, I watched him closely, fascinated and lulled by the grace of his movement around the table and how he treated his craft with the same precision as a surgeon operating on a patient. I remembered when he produced the fresh foam blank from the rack, lay it on the table and declared that it would be made for me. His imposing figure belied his tender craftsmanship. He never said much to me while he was at work, but he never needed to. His attention to detail meant that the entire process was entirely absorbing, and I understood that. Occasionally he would nod his head as a means of calling me over to the bench, and I would drift over to the table slowly in an attempt to hide my thrill at being summoned. The jobs he gave me were insignificant, but we both knew it wasn't about my actual contribution. By holding his sander, passing him the saw, or finding a spare rag, it meant that this project was something we did together, and that's all that really mattered to me. He had been a numinous figure for me growing up, and I had forever lived in complete reverence. I had desperately tried to emulate everything he did, everything he said, everything he liked, and everything he hated. I had desperately chased his approval, yet I was never sure of what form that would come in, or how I wanted it. Perhaps I never really did want it so that I always had something to strive for.

\*\*\*

The tepid orange glow from the late afternoon sun washed some colour over the room, bringing with it a new energy that was revitalising. Forty five minutes of sunlight left. 'Golden hour', he had called it, 'my favourite time of the day'. I realised there would be time for just a few waves, Even without him.

I held board, closed the door to the shed, and set off towards the water as the ailing sunlight continued to fade.

I wouldn't go surfing with Jack anymore, ever. But that was the way the world worked, sometimes, however hard that was to confront, or accept. But that didn't mean he wasn't there, in some other way, in memory, like the board, a part of all things. Like the ocean, undulating quietly in my subconscious....

'Our favourite time of day', I mused, as I paddled out just one last time.



## Teacher work samples – Balgowlah Boys Campus

The following annotated excerpts from faculty planning and assessment documents for science and visual arts illustrate how teachers in different subjects integrate the school's approach to teaching writing into their practice.

### Teacher planning document and assessment task – Stage 4 science

#### Strand

Living World

#### Unit of work

Ecosystems

#### Outcomes

SC4-14LW – A student relates the structure and function of living things to their classification, survival and reproduction.

#### Content

LW1 – There are differences within and between groups of organisms; classification helps organise this diversity (ACSSU111).

- f. Students explain how the features of some Australian plants and animals are adaptations for survival and reproduction in their environment.

#### Teacher comment

##### Teaching approach

As a lengthy written response is required to adequately address the demonstrable outcome for this unit of work, a decision was made to split the content of the unit into 4 parts and teach one part per week. Teachers then developed a question for each part that would elicit the essential teaching content and worked with students to produce an exemplar response. The 4 exemplar responses, when combined, address the demonstrable outcome for the unit of work. The following table shows the exemplar response for each part of this unit of work. (Note: the table originally included additional columns for activities such as practical lessons, but has been amended for this case study).

| Table 6

## Year 8 – ecosystems – Term 1, Weeks 6 to 9

Week and focus area	Teaching content	Writing response as a class (scaffolded)
Week 6 Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abiotic/biotic components of an ecosystem</li> <li>Ecological niches</li> </ul>	<p><b>Describe the relationship between the abiotic and biotic features of Australia's environment.</b></p> <p>Australia's natural environment consists of a large range of interacting ecosystems/biomes that vary in abiotic factors, including high temperatures and low rainfall across a large proportion of the continent, leading to the evolution of unique species adapted to withstand the harsh Australian environment.</p>
Week 7 Adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structural/behavioural/physiological adaptations</li> <li>Food chains (before food webs lesson)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Explain why adaptations are important to the continuity of a species.</b></p> <p>An adaptation is an inherited feature of an organism, evolving over several generations, providing an advantage in its environmental niche and enhancing the organism's chance of survival and reproduction.</p>
Week 8 Animal adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adaptations of the kangaroo</li> <li>Impact of introduced species (after food webs skills lesson)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Explain how the breeding cycle of the female kangaroo helps the animal to survive in the Australian environment.</b></p> <p>The breeding cycle of female kangaroos involves pausing the growth of the embryo, suspending the pregnancy until favourable conditions are established and increasing the chance of the offspring's survival.</p>
Week 9 Plant adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adaptations of the eucalyptus</li> <li>Impact of introduced species (after food webs skills lesson)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Explain how the waxy cuticle of a eucalyptus leaf helps the plant to survive in the Australian environment.</b></p> <p>The waxy cuticle of eucalyptus trees covers the leaves of the plant to reflect solar radiation, reducing water loss through transpiration from the surface of the leaf and increasing the tree's chances of survival in dry conditions.</p>

**Assessment**

The half yearly assessment for Year 8 included a question designed to elicit the demonstrable outcome. Teachers decided to scaffold the answer, providing a guide for students and allowing for greater success across the cohort. The question, marking scheme, exemplar answer and student sample response are included below.

**Question 8**

Explain how the features of some Australian plants and animals are adaptations for survival and reproduction in their environment. (12 marks)

**Marking scheme**

- Describes adaptations as inherited features and/or evolving over time (1 mark)
- Outlines adaptations as causing an organism to be suited to its environment (1 mark)
- Outlines an adaptation as increasing chance of reproduction/survival (1 mark)
- Describes the Australian environment (1 mark)
- Outlines the effect of environment on Australian species (1 mark)



- Gives cause/effect of waxy cuticle (causes reflection of sunlight, reducing water loss) (2 marks)
- Outlines that this results in the survival of the plant (1 mark)
- Gives cause/effect of breeding cycle (pausing the growth of the embryo, suspending pregnancy until favourable conditions) (2 marks)
- Outlines that this results in increasing offspring survival (1 mark)
- Logical and cohesive response using correct structure (1 mark)

**Exemplar answer**

An adaptation is an inherited feature of an organism, evolving over several generations, providing an advantage in its environmental niche and enhancing the organism’s chance of survival and reproduction.

Australia’s natural environment consists of a large range of interacting ecosystems/biomes that vary in abiotic factors, including high temperatures and low rainfall across a large proportion of the continent, leading to the evolution of unique species adapted to withstand the harsh Australian environment.

The waxy cuticle of eucalyptus trees covers the leaves of the plant to reflect solar radiation, reducing water loss through transpiration from the surface of the leaf and increasing the trees’ chances of survival in dry conditions.

Additionally, the breeding cycle of female kangaroos involves pausing the growth of the embryo, suspending the pregnancy until favourable conditions are established and increasing the chance of the offspring’s survival.

**Student response**

8. Explain how the features of some Australian plants and animals are adaptations for survival and reproduction in their environment. (12 marks)

*First paragraph: Explain why adaptations are important to the continuity of a species. (3 marks)*

Adaptations are an inherited trait, created through generations of breeding that provide a species with an advantage in its ecological niche, enhancing chances of survival and reproduction. 3

*Second paragraph: Describe the relationship between the abiotic and biotic features of Australia’s environment. (2 marks)*

Australia is made up of interacting biomes/ecosystems that vary in abiotic features including high temperatures and low rain fall, facilitating in the evolution of unique species well adapted to Australia’s harsh environment. 2

*Third paragraph: Explain how the waxy cuticle of a Eucalyptus leaf helps the plant to survive in the Australian environment. (3 marks)*

The waxy cuticle of a Eucalyptus leaf blocks the leaves protecting them from solar radiation, and reducing water loss by covering the leaves and lowering transpiration helping the trees survive the harsh australian environment. 3

*Fourth paragraph: Explain how the breeding cycle of female kangaroos helps the plant-<sup>animal</sup> to survive in the Australian environment. (3 marks)*

Female kangaroos have the ability to pause their pregnancy, suspending the growth of the embryo, waiting until better conditions are established to give birth, further improving the offspring’s chances of survival. 3

(+1)

## Teacher planning document – Stage 5 visual arts

### Unit of work

Theory component of a contemporary art practice unit called Bally Now, in which students explore key artists in the contemporary art scene.

### Outcomes

A student:

- 5.7 applies their understanding of aspects of practice to critical and historical interpretations of art
- 5.8 uses their understanding of the function of and relationships between artist – artwork – world – audience in critical and historical interpretations of art
- 5.9 demonstrates how the frames provide different interpretations of art
- 5.10 demonstrates how art criticism and art history construct meanings

### Task

Explain how the work of William Kentridge reflects his world experience. Refer to specific examples of Kentridge's artworks as evidence.

### Teacher comment

The following document was prepared ahead of a lesson that used explicit paragraph and writing structures to compose a response to a conceptual framework question. In the lesson, we explored the ways that Kentridge engages audiences with multiple concepts and ideas from his work. We discussed 2 of his artworks (below), 'bubbled'/created mind-maps together, and then explicitly co-constructed a response to the question.

### William Kentridge response – conceptual framework



Felix in Exile (1994)



Stereoscope (Soho Crying) (1998-99)

### Paragraph structure scaffold

1. Topic sentence
  - (main point/argument/context/address question)
2. Image deconstruction paragraph 1
  - (context – answering question/argument: technique/idea/concept + example + connector + effect/meaning (connector + effect can be repeated))
3. Segue into image deconstruction paragraph 2
4. Conceptual wrap/evaluation (Thus ... / Positioned thus ... / In this way ... / Ultimately ...)

## Topic sentence

Responding to his own personal and world experience with the trauma of racism and inequality, contemporary South African artist William Kentridge combines traditional and cutting edge film-making practices, as well as powerful and evocative symbolism in his films *Felix in Exile* (1994) and *Stereoscope (Soho crying)* (1998-99), communicating the social and political milieu of post-apartheid South Africa.

## Deconstruction 1

Presenting highly evocative images of South African post-apartheid experience, Kentridge powerfully employs a process of erasure and redrawing with charcoal in his moving imagery, reflecting social tensions and the marginalisation of sections of the South African community as a result of colonialism. His process of erasure, where he keeps the traces of previous drawings, is symbolic of the passing of time and memory as well as the erasure of culture within the community.

## Deconstruction 2

Simultaneously, Kentridge also uses powerful and evocative symbolism in the form of the characters of Soho and Felix, alluding to the influence of the bourgeoisie on the lives of everyday people, and highlighting the extreme inequality between the white and black community. His symbolic depiction of the artist as two vastly contrasting characters in the form of the striped-suited businessman Soho and the hunched, naked, desolate figure Felix is symbolic of the artist's attempt to reconcile the horrifying past of his country, allowing him to make sense of own place within this cultural, social and political narrative.

## Conceptual wrap

In this way, Kentridge highlights his own distinct and personal history of South Africa, in particular the legacy of apartheid and colonialism, confronting audiences with a powerful representation of South African experience via the use of evocative imagery, symbolism and an innovative combination of traditional and contemporary animation practices.

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