Big History

Assessment advice

# Assessment

Big History is a department approved elective course and is not eligible for credentialing on the Record of School Achievement (RoSA).

The scheduling of assessment activities and the weightings applied should reflect the school's organisation of the course. Students should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their maximum level of achievement relative to the course performance descriptors.

Where activities or tasks are scheduled throughout a course, greater weight for grading purposes would generally be given to those activities or tasks undertaken towards the end of the course.

# General performance descriptors

Schools may choose to use general performance descriptors to describe performance at each of 5 grade levels.

Table 1 – performance descriptors for the A–E grade scale

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Grade | Performance descriptors |
| A | The student has an extensive knowledge and understanding of the content and can readily apply this knowledge. In addition, the student has achieved a very high level of competence in the processes and skills and can apply these skills to new situations. |
| B | The student has a thorough knowledge and understanding of the content and a high level of competence in the processes and skills. In addition, the student is able to apply this knowledge and these skills to most situations. |
| C | The student has a sound knowledge and understanding of the main areas of content and has achieved an adequate level of competence in the processes and skills. |
| D | The student has a basic knowledge and understanding of the content and has achieved a limited level of competence in the processes and skills. |
| E | The student has an elementary knowledge and understanding in few areas of the content and has achieved very limited competence in some of the processes and skills. |

# Areas for assessment

The areas for assessment provide a framework for structuring an assessment program, and may be used for reporting student achievement. They can be used as organisers for assessment of student achievement.

Good assessment practice involves designing quality assessment activities that enable students to demonstrate their achievements. Teachers can use the areas for assessment when designing an assessment activity, to ensure it is assessing performance in relation to a grouping of outcomes.

In designing the assessment schedule for a course, teachers may find it useful to map each planned assessment activity to one or more of the areas for assessment. This allows teachers to ensure that assessment can occur across the year in a manageable way.

# Useful assessment strategies

In developing and selecting activities for the purpose of assessing and reporting, teachers will use a range of different approaches.

## Inquiry-based research assignments and projects

Assessment activities might include independent research tasks to investigate issues and processes, a web-based research assignment, or the development of a media portfolio.

When this strategy is used for assessment purposes, students could be assessed on their ability to:

* gather and analyse information
* research information
* communicate information.

## Presentations

Assessment activities might include prepared and impromptu oral presentations, group presentations, poster presentations, prepared digital recordings (video or audio) and displays.

When these are used for assessment purposes students could be assessed on their ability to:

* participate in scenarios
* communicate information effectively using oral and graphical forms.

## Peer assessment

Big History requires the active involvement of students in the learning process. Opportunities exist for individual and collaborative work. Activities involving peer assessment might include evaluating the contributions of individuals to a group task and reflecting on peer presentations.

## Self-assessment

Big History requires students to become self-directed learners. Opportunities exist for students to reflect on their progress towards the achievement of the course outcomes. This reflection provides the basis for improving their learning. Developing self-assessment skills is an ongoing process that becomes increasingly more sophisticated and self-initiated as students progress.

# Additional information

The information below can be used to support teachers when using this assessment advice for Big History.

## Rationale

This course is designed for students curious about seeking answers to big questions regarding the history and development of our universe, including the origin of our species. It promotes reasoned predictions of future events. Collaboration among students, teachers, scholars and scientists is the foundation of Big History. It places human history in the broader context of the universe’s history.

Throughout history, humans have collaborated in creative endeavours leading to a dynamic body of knowledge which is continually refined and contested as evidence evolves. This knowledge provides explanations for various phenomena and enables sense to be made of the development of human society.

In Big History, students will develop deep knowledge, understanding and skills that will allow them to create new ideas and translate their ideas into practical applications. Through engaging with varying sources and perspectives, students will develop problem-solving, research and critical thinking skills, and demonstrate respect for differing viewpoints. Through the integrated study of the cosmos, life and humanity, students will use empirical evidence to develop a deeper appreciation of the evolution of knowledge systems and the complex relationship between evidence and ideas.

Big History addresses the need for students to use interdisciplinary understanding to solve problems and develop critical thinking skills to assess the validity of claims of knowledge. The course will build upon the learning across the curriculum content, including the general capabilities priorities from the NSW syllabus documents, that encompass the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to assist students to live and work successfully in the 21st century.

## Aim

This course aims to develop students’ understanding of the history of the universe from the ‘Big Bang’ to the modern day and beyond, through an exploration of the themes and patterns that can help us better understand the world we live in. Big History will develop students’ ability to synthesise complex information, hypothesise and develop arguments, develop key critical thinking skills and enhance their reading, writing and research skills in a multidisciplinary way.

## Purpose and audience

This assessment advice provides performance band descriptors which align with the A–E grading scale. It also outlines a range of assessment strategies and how they could be applied to the course. This resource is for teachers and leaders when planning for assessment and reporting of the Big History course.

## When and how to use this document

Use the assessment advice to guide the development of an effective assessment schedule, formative tasks and summative tasks which allow all students to demonstrate their achievement of course outcomes. This assessment advice should also be used when designing reporting processes for the Big History course.

# Support and alignment

This resource has been designed to support schools with successful implementation of new curriculum, specifically the NSW Department of Education approved elective course, Big History © NSW Department of Education for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2021.

The resource is produced to assist schools with promoting and implementing the course for the first time. As the course may be taught by teachers from a range of key learning areas, the resource is designed to support teachers from a variety of KLAs.

**Resource evaluation and support**: all curriculum resources are prepared through a rigorous process. Resources are periodically reviewed as part of our ongoing evaluation plan to ensure currency, relevance and effectiveness. For additional support or advice, or to provide feedback, contact the Teaching and learning 7–12 curriculum team by emailing [secondaryteachingandlearning@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:secondaryteachingandlearning@det.nsw.edu.au).

**Differentiation**: further advice to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, EAL/D students, students with a disability and/or additional needs and High Potential and gifted students can be found on the [Planning, programming and assessing 7–12](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/planning-programming-and-assessing-k-12/planning-programming-and-assessing-7-12) webpage. This includes the [Inclusion and differentiation advice 7–10](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/planning-programming-and-assessing-k-12/planning-programming-and-assessing-7-12/inclusion-and-differentiation-advice-7-10) webpage.

**Assessment**: further advice to support formative assessment is available on the [Planning, programming and assessing 7–12](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/planning-programming-and-assessing-k-12/planning-programming-and-assessing-7-12) webpage. This includes the [Classroom assessment advice 7–10](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/planning-programming-and-assessing-k-12/planning-programming-and-assessing-7-12/classroom-assessment-advice-7-10-). For summative assessment tasks, the [Assessment task advice 7–10](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/planning-programming-and-assessing-k-12/planning-programming-and-assessing-7-12/assessment-task-advice-7-10) webpage is available.

**Professional learning**: relevant professional learning is available on the [Teaching and Learning 7–12 statewide staffroom](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/statewide-staffrooms).

**Consulted with**: Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnerships, Inclusion and Wellbeing and EAL/D.

**Alignment to system priorities and/or needs**: [School Excellence Policy](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2016-0468).

**Alignment to the School Excellence Framework**: this resource supports the [School Excellence Framework](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2016-0468) elements of curriculum (curriculum provision) and effective classroom practice (lesson planning, explicit teaching).

**Alignment to Australian Professional Teaching Standards**: this resource supports teachers to address 5.1.2, 5.5.2.

**Creation date**: 1 December 2021

**Evidence base**:

The range of assessment strategies outlined in the advice encourages ‘a variety of assessment methods each lesson to check for students’ understanding and inform what should be taught next’ (CESE 2020b:22). The assessment strategies outlined are student-centred, providing ‘students with opportunities to reflect on their progress to inform future learning goals’ (CESE 2020b:22).

The assessment advice complies with NESA’s assessment advice, outlined on NESA’s ACE website, NESA official notices and department memorandums. They:

* include statements of school procedures for allocating grades in Year 10
* set out requirements to retain student work samples to support grade allocation as required by NESA for the RoSA (NSW Department of Education 2021).

The assessment strategies outlined provide teachers with important information about whether students learned what they intended. Wiliam (2013:15) claims ‘the term formative should apply not to the assessment but to the function that the evidence generated by the assessment actually serves’.

# References

AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2017) ‘[Feedback Factsheet](https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/improve-practice/feedback#:~:text=FEEDBACK-,Factsheet,-A%20quick%20guide)’, AITSL, accessed 16 November 2022.

CESE (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation) (2020a) [*What works best: 2020 update*](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/research-reports/what-works-best-2020-update), NSW Department of Education, accessed 16 November 2022.

CESE (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation) (2020b) [*What works best in practice*](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/practical-guides-for-educators-/what-works-best-in-practice), NSW Department of Education, accessed 16 November 2022.

NESA (NSW Education Standards Authority) (2022) ‘[Proficient Teacher: Standard descriptors](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/teacher-accreditation/meeting-requirements/the-standards/proficient-teacher)’, The Standards, NESA website, accessed 16 November 2022.

State of New South Wales (Department of Education) (2021) ‘[Curriculum Policy Standards: Implementation document for Curriculum planning and programming, assessing and reporting to parents K-12 policy](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2005-0290)’, NSW Department of Education, accessed 10 November 2022.

Wiliam D (2013) ‘[Assessment: The bridge between teaching and learning](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258423377_Assessment_The_bridge_between_teaching_and_learning)’, *Voices from the Middle*, 21(2):15–20, accessed 15 November 2022.

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