

Quick Tips for Writing Reports

Use evidence

Reports of judgements made about student achievement must be based on quality evidence of what each student has actually achieved against the achievement standards. The evidence that sits behind the overall judgement and the scores assigned provides the detail for the written comments about specific:

- areas of strength and areas for improvement
- ways to help the student continue to learn and develop future pathways
- ways for parents to assist their child's learning.

It is important to include an appropriate (but not necessarily comprehensive) coverage of the curriculum areas studied by the student and their levels of achievement in the various sections of the student report. Where a graphical representation has been used to show a student's level of achievement it is not necessary to explain this in writing as well.

Make comments easy to understand

Generally, sentences should be short and no longer than 15-20 words. Writing in long sentences makes it harder for parents to understand your message.

Two connected ideas per sentence is an effective way of explaining how the student is progressing. The two ideas should be closely related and the first idea may introduce a topic, while the second may add detail to illustrate a quality of a student's work. For example:

- John's oral report on 'families' was informative (first idea) with several humorous anecdotes he had collected from elderly neighbours (second idea).

Alternatively, the second idea may provide a comparison between possible approaches to completing work. For example:

- Kate needs to use the internet more widely when researching (first idea) rather than relying on one or two sources for her assignments (second idea).

The second idea may also describe an associated kind of behaviour you wish to comment on, such as:

- She shared information with the team (first idea) and worked cooperatively to complete tasks on time (second idea).

Avoid unnecessary information

Evaluate the aspects of a student's achievement and the improvements required in order to provide the most important matters on the report. Avoid crowding the report with less important details and being too detailed.

Ensure the content of each section relates exclusively to that section. Some matters may be best reported in a different section. The content of the report should describe coherent links between the areas of achievement, the way forward, and the school's and the parents' roles in supporting this improvement.

Delete redundant words or sentences that do not change the meaning. For example, 'a range of different ideas' says no more than 'a range of ideas'. Avoid unnecessary or repetitious expressions. 'Padding' adds no helpful information and takes up space.

Less important information may be deferred to a conference or conversation with the parent.

Do not use specialist terms

The student report should present information in clear, jargon-free language. For example, 'higher order thinking' represents a meaningful concept to teachers, but not to some parents. Word choice should reflect community understanding, not professional terminology. For example, 'He has appropriately completed all of the nominated tasks' really means 'He completed all the expected work'.

Avoid detailed curriculum descriptions

Do not include detailed curriculum statements or lists of all the topics, learning activities and assignments covered. Parents are more interested in how their child is progressing along the learning continuum, how well they are progressing towards expected levels of achievement and learning goals and targets, and where they need to improve.

Avoid comments which refer only to task completion

Avoid comments that only refer to task completion and do not provide an evaluation. For example:

- 'Natalie has completed the course requirements.'

There is no evaluation here and no indication of how well she has done.

- 'Justin has read the required four wide reading texts.'

This is unhelpful unless it represents evidence of a real achievement for Justin, perhaps identified in an earlier report as a goal. Consider if the four texts were suitably demanding for his stage of learning and where or not he produced any kinds of responses to them.

- 'Tom enjoys using the computer for his presentations and has successfully completed a number of PowerPoint presentations this year.'

This comment refers to enjoyment and task completion rather than learning achievement. Some kind of evaluation of Tom's achievement relative to the standards is needed.