

Writing Guide for Student Report Cards

Office of Learning and Teaching

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Introduction

Student report cards were introduced to provide parents with clearer and more consistent information about their [student's](#) progress against state-wide standards.

This resource is designed to help teachers write comments for the new student report cards that are concise, clear and comprehensive. It includes:

- advice on how to write comments that are clear and succinct
- advice on what to avoid in writing comments
- examples of good practice in writing comments, with an emphasis on providing rich, relevant, valid and honest information
- commentary on some completed reports

Section I

The need to be clear, concise, comprehensive and consistent

The report card is a concise, commonsense report of student progress and achievement that all parents can easily understand. It describes what students have achieved against the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). It also informs parents of the areas in which their child needs to improve and states what the school will do and provides suggestions for what parents can do at home with their child.

The report is not intended to educate parents in the language of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) or any other educational framework. Jargon and specialist educational terms should be avoided. Nor should it contain detailed curriculum statements or descriptions of programs of study. Parents and students should be able to identify areas where they can focus their attention and aim for improvement.

Written comments should be consistent with the judgements made and the corresponding A to E ratings. Recommendations for improvement need to be consistent. Comments about student achievement should also be provided.

The challenge for teachers is to provide all the relevant detail about students' progress and ensure that the information on the report is clear and concise. It is important the report is coherent and there are logical links between the achievement of the student, areas for improvement and actions the school and parents might take.

It is also essential reports provide assessment information that is accurate and based on evidence from teachers' assessment records about judgements made against the VELs.

Key information in the report cards

Student reports should provide the following key information:

1. Clear information on what the student has achieved

This section of the report focuses on each student's progress on the basis of assessment evidence gathered by the teacher over a semester.

2. Suggestions for areas of improvement that the student should work on next

This section of the report focuses on future learning to be addressed in the following reporting period.

3. Information on how the school will help the student to improve

This section of the report makes recommendations for actions to be taken by the school to help the student's future learning.

4. Suggestions on how parents can help the student to improve

This section of the report suggests specific ways in which parents can support the student, taking account of the areas for improvement or future learning.

1.1 Useful tips

1.1.1 Make comments easy to understand

Two connected ideas per sentence is an effective way of using the space available in the student report. The two ideas should be closely related and the first idea may introduce a topic, while the second may add detail to illustrate the 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)..

Generally sentences should be short and no longer than 25 words.

1.1.2 Avoid unnecessary information

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

Delete redundant words and sentences that do not change the meaning. For example 'a range of different ideas' says no more than 'a range of ideas'.

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.

Avoid unnecessary or repetitious expressions. 'Padding' adds no helpful information and takes up valuable space.

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

1.1.3 Do not use of specialist terms

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

1.1.4 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 towards expected levels of achievement and where they need to improve.

1.1.5 Avoid comments which refer only to task completion

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

- ‘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.

Parents want to know what was learnt and how well, where improvement is needed and what should be done next.

1.1.6 Use evidence

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

- areas of strength and specific areas for improvement
- ways to help the [student](#) continue to learn and develop future pathways
- ways for parents to assist the [student’s](#) learning.

1.1.7 Focusing on key aspects

[Below](#) is a primary report card demonstrating the importance of ensuring an appropriate (but not necessarily comprehensive) coverage of the domains in the various sections of the report card.

It is not always possible to include comments on all domains in every report, so it is important to identify aspects of achievement that are the most important.

John Davidson

Year 4 Semester 2

Learning Area	Rating	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Health and Physical Education	E	○●				
Interpersonal Development	B		○●		●	
Personal Learning	A		○●			●
Civics and Citizenship	C		○●		●	
The Arts	D		○●			
English Reading	A				○●	●
Writing	C		○●	●		
Speaking and listening	B				○●	
The Humanities	C		○●		●	
Mathematics Number	C		○●		●	
Space	C		○●		●	
Measurement, chance and data	C		○●		●	
Structure	C		○●		●	
Working mathematically	C		○●		●	
Science	C		○●		●	
Design, Creativity and Technology	C		○●		●	
Information and Communications Technology	A				○●	●
Thinking Processes	C		○●	●		

In the English domain for example, the student is achieving very well in Reading, and Speaking and Listening, but not in Writing. Because of the close relationship among all three dimensions of English, especially at Primary level, the lower level of achievement in Writing probably deserves attention in the report.

It may be possible to note some general advice for improvement if patterns in the student's behaviour are affecting different domains. For example, does the student need to *plan* his writing and his artwork? Does he need to spend more *time* on all learning tasks? Is some aspect of his writing achievement common to the cause of similar achievement in Thinking Processes? Can his excellent achievement in ICT be helpful in assisting his improvement in areas of lower achievement in any way?

Section 2

Writing comments for each section of the report

2.1 The achievement section (“What *the student* has achieved”)

Comments in this section should focus specifically on achievement against the [standards](#). It is important to avoid comments related to completion rates, program activities, effort or other matters unrelated to achievement. Avoid stating in the ‘Achievement’ section what has *not* been achieved – instead, put this in ‘Areas for Improvement’.

The comments must align with the judgements made at the dimension level as reflected in the domain rating on the graphic.

The following examples illustrate ways of making comments more succinct and focussed on the individual student’s achievement. Further elaboration of the comments may be dealt with during interviews or conversations with parents or students.

Original	Suggestion	Notes
<i>Students were involved in designing, drawing and constructing 2D and 3D shapes.</i>	<i>Jane effectively designed, drew 2D and began to construct 3D shapes.</i>	Ensure the report relates to student achievement not to learning programs, or move to <i>Areas for future learning</i> : <i>Jane’s work with 2D and 3D shapes shows that she needs ...</i>
<i>Thom’s timeline project on the history of the Earth was well presented. His diagrams and symbols were accurate.</i>	<i>Thom’s timeline project on the history of the Earth included clear and accurate diagrams and symbols.</i>	Evidence to support reports of achievement is integrated into a succinct summary.
<i>Lee has read four novels and completed three pieces of writing this semester.</i>	<i>Lee’s reports on four novels shows improved understanding of stories.</i>	Completion rates alone are seldom indicative of achievement.
<i>Students were involved in a variety of learning experiences in Number, including graphical representation of data.</i>	<i>Kim accurately adds and subtracts two-digit numbers and has begun to use bar graphs to represent collected data.</i>	Focus on specific evidence for individual student, or move to <i>Areas for future learning</i> : <i>Kim needs to improve how he presents numbers in graphs.</i>
<i>Kate has demonstrated a range of strategies to make meaning.</i>	<i>Kate can find explicit information when reading difficult texts.</i>	Translate professional vocabulary or terminology. Avoid vague expressions such as ‘a range of’, and use specific examples instead.

<i>Elizabeth has achieved a sound understanding of the particle model and is able to use this knowledge to explain the structure and properties of different types of matter.</i>	<i>Elizabeth understands the particle model and can explain the structure and properties of different types of matter.</i>	Ensure unnecessary words are removed.
<i>Alan has well-developed interpersonal skills and is able to work effectively with others to compete group tasks.</i>	<i>Alan works well in groups and can explain the benefits of working in a team.</i>	Specific aspects of achievement that align with the VELs are identified but are written in plain English.
<i>Tim reads and interprets maps of different kinds and at different scales, including street directories and school atlas maps.</i>	<i>Tim reads and understands simple maps such as street directories and atlases.</i>	Clear, evidence-based description of achievement will provide a pathway for improvement by including more challenging maps e.g. ordnance survey, topographic maps etc.

Sample comment prompts for the 'achievement' section:

Sample comment prompts are sometimes helpful in focusing attention on the relevant section of the report, in this instance, achievement. The comment prompts below are for English and Mathematics, but they give you some idea of how they could be constructed for other domains.

The student:

- speaks confidently...
- asks questions...
- answers questions...
- gives relevant information when responding to questions...
- reads fiction and factual texts ...
- reads fluently...
- is developing confidence ...
- discusses ideas presented by authors...
- selects key ideas, distinguishes between fact and opinion...
- can retell a story in sequence..
- plans and writes for a variety of purposes such as...
- can measure time and length...
- is able to use numbers up to millions and decimals to hundredths...
- can estimate by rounding to the nearest 1000.

2.2 The areas for improvement section (“Areas for improvement or future learning”)

Information included in the areas for improvement section provides a clear picture of important next steps for the student. This advice should be manageable and realistic.

Avoid long lists of areas for improvement or for future learning. If too much is listed, students and their parents will find it hard to know where to focus attention. Instead, focus on what is critical.

The following examples illustrate ways of focusing comments relating to areas for improvement easier to understand and more focused.

Original	Suggestion	Notes
<i>Kate had difficulty in understanding scientific ideas expressed in some journal articles. It took her a long time to read and she had difficulty in determining main ideas.</i>	<i>Kate needs to begin her research with simple journal articles. She should use a key word list. She needs to practise skimming for information.</i>	Focus the report on direct, practical strategies for improvement. It is unnecessary to describe the difficulty in detail.
<i>I would also recommend that Jackie use her class time more effectively. Whilst she is quick to redress her attention and focus in class when requested to do so, I would like to see Jackie develop a more independent approach of her own.</i>	<i>Jackie should keep working in class without being told to do so, and become a more independent learner.</i>	Ensure the advice is sufficiently specific to provide guidance for the student. Avoid unnecessary terms, such as <i>redress her attention</i> and <i>I would like to see</i> . The advice could also be appropriate for more general improvement.
<i>You should consider being involved in more extra-curricular activities to further enhance your education.</i>	<i>Paul should take part in more extra-curricular activities.</i>	Focus on the individual student. Avoid unnecessary terms such as <i>to further enhance your education</i> .
<i>He sometimes needs to seek clarification and further information before proceeding with a task. This is particularly important for him in task analysis activities where multiple processes are required or when only the essential information needs to be extracted in order to complete the task.</i>	<i>Before starting a task Jack should ask for help about exactly what is required, especially for complex tasks with several steps.</i>	Ensure the language used provides support for the student to develop personal goals and a pathway for improvement.

<i>Van should apply the proof-reading and re-drafting process consistently.</i>	<i>Van should proof-read and re-draft his writing.</i>	Aim for the greatest simplicity of language.
<i>... after finishing the first draft, Fergus needs to spend time embellishing his work,</i>	<i>... after finishing the first draft, Fergus should focus on adding new ideas, and using a wider vocabulary.</i>	Provide clear and specific advice: ‘embellishing’ needs clarification; state <i>what</i> Fergus should focus on in his re-drafts: new ideas, improving vocabulary, or adding illustrations.

Sample comment prompts for the ‘areas for improvement’ section

The sample comment prompts below are mainly for English and Mathematics, but they give you some idea of how they could be constructed for other domains.

The student needs to:

- plan their writing using key words or drawings and maps...
- read their writing and make changes...
- plan and edit written pieces...
- check calculations...
- develop confidence to express their ideas and opinions...
- work cooperatively in teams...
- keep going with a task that is not solved successfully the first time...
- practise following instructions...
- listen more attentively during class discussions and not be distracted by those around them...
- vary their sentence beginnings.

2.3 The school support section (“The school will do the following to support the student in his or her learning”)

Information included in the school support section is designed to provide a realistic picture to the student and the parents of plans the school has for helping the student. It is important that this section has a clear link to the areas for improvement section and that it avoids specifying outcomes of these plans.

The following examples illustrate ways of focusing comments relating to the school support section easier to understand and more focused.

Original	Suggestion	Comments
<i>I encourage her to seek assistance, when in doubt of the expectations of a task, in order to avoid confusion.</i>	<i>I will encourage her to ask for help when she is unsure about the task,</i>	Clearer and more accessible language.
<i>We encourage her to develop her organisational skills in</i>	<i>We will use a work diary to help her to hand in work on time.</i>	Clearer and more accessible language and a practical and

<i>order to ensure that her work is completed and submitted when due.</i>		manageable strategy.
<i>Kate needs to use the internet more widely when researching rather than relying on one or two reference books for her assignments.</i>	<i>Kate will be given two key websites for her research. She will use a simple data chart to record information.</i>	Focus on strategy rather than area for improvement.
<i>Steve needs to improve the range of sentence structures he uses.</i>	<i>Steve will use stories with a range of sentence types as models in his writing.</i>	Focus on strategy rather than area for improvement.

Sample comment prompts for the ‘school support’ section

The sample comment prompts below are for English and Mathematics, but they give you some idea of how they could be constructed for other domains.

- Kate will be given writing guides to help her organise her writing
- John will participate in small group activities and be given opportunities to talk about ideas and learn new vocabulary
- Kate will be given a timetable for forward planning and organisation of her work program
- John will be given more practice using times tables
- Kate will be given number lines and problem solving tasks to help her with whole numbers.

2.4 The home assistance to help the student’s progress section (“What you can do at home to help the student’s progress”)

The advice provided here should relate directly to an area of improvement and describe assistance that is feasible and not onerous. It should not create unreasonable demands on the family. Preferably, the advice should relate to behavioural aspects of the student’s work, not content or curriculum-based matters. For example, it is reasonable to ask parents to help students complete a diary, but not to help them synthesise research materials.

The examples below are brief, practical and clear.

Ask Mark to put his vocabulary list on display to practise his spelling.
Encourage Costas to show you and talk about his artwork at home.
Encourage Peter to do some physical activity every day.
Continue to discuss the news with Maria.
Encourage Anna to read to the rest of the family.
Ask Kate to check her work diary each night.
Ask Nicholas to talk about what he is going to say in class presentations.

Sample comment prompts for the ‘home assistance’ section

The sample comment prompts below are mainly for English and Mathematics, but they give you some idea of how they could be constructed for other domains:

- read to, read with...
- talk with...
- play time/memory games...
- provide opportunities for John to estimate and recognise...
- encourage Kate to work with other members of the family on small projects at home
- encourage John to join a local sporting group to help him develop physical and social skills
- encourage Kate to talk about her daily events in the order they happened, staying on the topic...
- revise the daily routine each morning to prepare John for the day’s activities and events...
- assist with developing speed and accuracy in using times tables by playing times tables games and relate times tables to everyday situations...
- use a timetable (e.g. train or bus) and ask questions about time intervals (e.g. if the bus leaves at 2:15 pm what time will it arrive at this station?)
- discuss the material Kate reads asking for an explanation of certain words or different ways that something could be said.

2.5 The “Student comment” and “My learning goals” sections

This feature of report cards requires students to develop their own awareness of their successes, their learning needs and areas of improvement.

See [Developing, Monitoring and Reporting on Personal Learning Goals \(PDF - \)](#) for further advice.

3.1.2 Areas for improvement or future learning

<p><i>Alexander's reading will improve if he uses library periods more constructively and sets aside regular time for reading.</i></p> <p><i>In his written work, Alexander needs to explore themes and issues in greater depth.</i></p>	<p>It is unclear what Alexander should do to make his library periods more constructive. Is this a time-wasting issue, or one of not understanding the library's resources, or of not knowing how to use the library effectively? The suggestion to set aside regular time for reading is vague. How much time? How often?</p> <p>There should be a focus on the <i>kinds</i> of reading Alexander should do, not simply the time committed. Should he read novels, newspaper feature articles, biographies? Is there evidence that he reads some kinds of fiction that are too simple for him now? Is there a list of suggested books from which he should select, such as those in the Premier's Reading Challenge, or a list available in the library?</p>
<p><i>In class, he should try to participate more frequently in class discussions.</i></p> <p><i>Alexander should establish more productive working habits, including: revise for regular grammar tests; enter all homework in his diary; use the proof-reading and re-drafting process consistently; maintain a personal vocabulary and spelling list; and use a dictionary to check spelling and a thesaurus to widen his vocabulary.</i></p>	<p>The report identifies a number of areas for future learning that are linked to the standards, which are mainly easy to understand.</p> <p>These specific suggestions relating to work habits are useful and easy to follow.</p>

3.1.3 The school will do the following to support Alexander in his learning

This area of the report should reflect some of the areas identified for future learning.

It may be that Alexander needs help in using the library; or in selecting books that he is likely to find enjoyable; or in suggestions for other material he could read.

It might be helpful for the school to monitor some of the suggestions for improving his working habits. Suggestions for the school's actions to support Alexander's learning will relate to the areas of improvement required. They could relate to implementing reading programs, selecting appropriate reading materials and activities and planning his library borrowing program.

3.1.4 What you can do at home to help Alexander's progress

It may be that the parents can assist in monitoring some of Alexander's working habits. For example, parents could: look at and sign his diary regularly; look with him at his vocabulary and spelling work periodically and perhaps ask him to explain meanings of certain words.

3.2.2 Areas for improvement or future learning

<p><i>Although Anna's work was of a very high standard, there are areas where she could improve.</i></p>	<p>This comment acknowledges Anna's standard of achievement so that the suggested improvements are not presented as faults but as ways to move forward.</p>
<p><i>She should show all necessary working when solving problems so that errors can easily be detected.</i></p>	<p>This comment can be omitted as the next point includes it.</p>
<p><i>When writing mathematical reports, her interpretative skills would improve if she explained more clearly how data, graphs and tables are related.</i></p>	<p>When she writes mathematical reports, Anna can improve her interpretative skills by explaining very clearly how her data, graphs and tables are related.</p>

3.2.3 The school will do the following to support Anna in her learning

“Anna will be provided with assistance to improve her mathematical reports by explaining more clearly how her data, graphs and tables are related”.

This could be more specific about the type of assistance to be provided.

“Anna will be provided with exercises that allow her to practise explaining how data is related to a graph or table”.

3.2.4 What you can do at home to help Anna progress

This is a chance to affirm that her parents are supporting Anna and to encourage them to continue to do so.

“Continue to express interest in Anna's work and to provide support for her study at home. To help her improve her interpretative skills, encourage her to explain her mathematical reports to you and ask her to clarify any points you find hard to follow.”

3.3 John's Report

John Davidson

Year 4 Semester 2

Learning Area	Rating	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Health and Physical Education	E	○.....●				
Interpersonal Development	B			○.....●		
Personal Learning	A			○.....●		
Civics and Citizenship	C			○.....●		
The Arts	D		○.....●			
English Reading	A				○.....●	
Writing	C		○.....●			
Speaking and listening	B				○.....●	
The Humanities	C			○.....●		
Mathematics Number	C			○.....●		
Space	C			○.....●		
Measurement, chance and data	C			○.....●		
Structure	C			○.....●		
Working mathematically	C			○.....●		
Science	C			○.....●		
Design, Creativity and Technology	C			○.....●		
Information and Communications Technology	A				○.....●	
Thinking Processes	C		○.....●			

3.3.1 What John has achieved

<p><i>John has completed several written pieces of works this semester in English. These all show an understanding of writing for different purposes and audiences. His spelling, grammar and punctuation meet the expected level at this time of the year.</i></p>	<p>The first comment deals only with completion of work, and is of limited use, unless it notes a change in his usual behaviour. It has the value of noting that there is a body of evidence available, upon which the subsequent judgements about purpose, audience, spelling, grammar and punctuation are based.</p>
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	<p>The graphic representation of his achievement shows that John's writing is approximately at the expected standard, the comment about spelling, grammar and punctuation is not required.</p> <p>It is important to avoid generalisations that really mean 'could do better' (most kids could) or 'should do better' (given what the teacher knows about John) in these areas.</p> <p>In selecting areas for comment, look for patterns of inconsistent achievement within and across domains.</p>
<p><i>John's oral report on families was informative, with several humorous anecdotes he had collected from elderly neighbours.</i></p>	<p>The comments about his oral language show John is able to collect, select and present information in an informative and entertaining manner.</p> <p>This kind of recognition of John's strengths is likely to encourage him.</p>

3.3.2 Areas for improvement or future learning

<p><i>John usually finished his work very quickly, without planning out what he was going to do and how he could use materials creatively.</i></p> <p><i>John did not hand in his assignment on responding to famous artworks. During feedback, he has not commented on other children's artwork.</i></p>	<p>The report notes that John works quickly and neither plans nor considers how his work could show creativity. This is specific information, which parents should be able to understand easily.</p> <p>The second paragraph refers to John's work completion. Firstly, it notes that he did not hand in a specified assignment. There is no information on why he did not hand it in (didn't complete it, too hard, he was absent). It also notes he did not comment on his classmate's work. These comments indicate absence of evidence for achievement, but make no reference to improvement or future learning.</p> <p>Throughout, the language used in these comments refers to the past: 'has displayed'; 'usually finished'; 'what he was going to do'; 'did not hand in'; 'has not commented'; 'has had difficulty'; 'has been'.</p> <p>Comments on 'areas for improvement' and 'future learning' should look forward to the future more than back to the past. The language should use expressions such as 'needs to'; 'could'; 'should'. The comments should focus more on the behaviours the teacher hopes to see than on the ones that are problematic.</p> <p>Provide positive advice for an accessible strategy or solution the student can adopt, e.g.</p> <p><i>John needs to work more slowly using a plan for using art materials. He needs to hand in all assignments. He needs to participate actively in group discussions of the work of classmates.</i></p>
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In Physical Education, John has had difficulty in mastering some of the movement patterns and skills covered this semester, particularly balancing, hopping and rolling. He has been a reluctant participant in sessions on a regular basis.

The comment *John needs to improve his motor skills, particularly balancing, hopping and rolling* is easily understood and more specific.

It also links to the strategy the school could use, designed to overcome a specific reason for low achievement:

The school will encourage John to participate more regularly in Physical Education sessions and ensure a partner assists him with rolling, balancing and hopping activities.

Section 4

Writing checklist

Aspects of report	Actions to complete	Yes	No
Overall	Report is expressed in clear and succinct language		
	No repetition of comments		
	Clear coherence between sections		
What the <i>student</i> has achieved text box	Key aspects of achievement noted		
	Comments consistent with ratings and standards		
	Comments focus on most important aspects		
Areas for improvement / future learning text box	Key aspects for improvement have been noted (most important for this age, level, student; not too many)		
	Focus on the future		
	Aspects are linked to areas of achievement		
School plans for improvement text box	Plans are linked to areas of improvement		
	Plan is simple to understand and follow		
Home assistance text box	Realistic suggestions are linked to designated areas of improvement		
	Comments are short and clear		
	Suggestions are positive and achievable		
Student comment or learning goals text box	Students have been provided with support and guidelines to develop their learning goals		
	Strategies have been established for students to review and record progress frequently		
	Strategies have been established for students to contribute to the writing of the report		