NEW VCE STUDY DESIGN
ALISON BRADBURY, Donvale Christian College

Ideas for approaching the Interpretive Outcomes

Making reading/listening/viewing engaging

Choosing a suitable topic

I generally begin shaping an Interpretive Outcome by selecting my topic, rather than from deciding how I can use an excellent written, spoken or visual text. I am using the textbook *Aspekte Junior* by Klett (ISBN 978-3-12-605250-4) and have built up my two-year VCE overall plan on the basis of the topics covered in the chapters of this textbook.

My interpretive outcomes relate to the Study Design themes; 'The German-speaking communities' or 'The world around us'.

In class we work on a broad topic area, such as: lifestyles and leisure activities (Unit 1), communication and media (Unit 2), consumerism (Unit 3) environment and sustainability (Unit 4).

I then narrow down to a specific focus for the Outcome, an aspect which relates to the overall topic and allows students to draw on vocabulary covered in class, but offers a topic focus that is new to them for the actual Outcome. In this way the assessment process itself becomes a learning opportunity. There is nothing more pleasing than having students come out of the assessment saying "That was really interesting, I didn't know anything about that before".

I approach the design of the assessment task afresh each year, because I believe that to be authentic and relevant cultural learning, it needs to be up to date. Especially in areas like 'the impact of information technology', what was fine a couple of years ago will now be out of date. Part of the reason the tasks are so meaningful is because they relate to the students' own lived experience. For example,

while 'social media' seemed a good choice of topic for my Unit 2 outcome in 2019, in 2020 the obvious focus was *Online Lernen*. The focus for my Unit 4 outcome, generally on the environment, varies from year to year in line with the theme chosen by the UN Conference for German students — so in 2019 it was 'sustainable cities' and in 2020 it was 'marine environmental issues' — and I chose the *Wattenmeer* area in Germany as the focus for the Outcome.

I generally begin by coming up with a possible idea and doing some online research to see if the topic is viable. I find some articles and YouTube clips or short documentaries on the topic, and gradually begin to shape the assessment task in my mind. Lots of material ultimately get rejected as too difficult, but in the meantime, dipping into these texts helps to put me in touch with the current debate on the topic in Germany, and identify key players or useful concepts as a focus for further investigation.

Highlighting German cultural aspects

Even where the topic is taken from the theme 'The world around us' rather than 'The German-speaking communities', it is important to find a specifically German cultural aspect within the broader topic. This allows students to address the Study Design criterion of recognising meaning in terms and concepts without a direct equivalent in English. There is a gradual increase in the expectations here, from 'recognise and interpret expressions without a direct equivalent in English' (Unit 1) through the expectation of recognising 'meaning in terms and concepts without a direct equivalent in

English' (Units 2 and 3) to recognising 'cultural, language or contextual aspects critical to meaning' (Unit 4). I find building this into the Outcome one of the most fascinating aspects of preparing the task. In this context, it allows students to develop a nuanced understanding of cultural difference, avoiding obvious stereotypes.

In an outcome for Unit 1 in the general topic area of leisure/lifestyle, the outcome focused on *Schrebergarten*. There was plenty of scope to find images of *Schrebergarten* as prompts, and suitable short video clips, with students answering specific questions and completing a table with detailed information before writing a imaginative personal response, in an account of their visit to a *Schrebergarten*.

Another Unit 1 outcome related to *Alpinismus*. I think it is great to show students to breadth of lifestyles across the German-speaking countries, and this topic allowed for a Swiss focus. The particular expression without a direct equivalent in English was *Seilschaft* — I made sure this word was in their dictionary first, but the students needed to show how it had a broader application than just mountaineering — in fact, this cultural component was one of the reasons why alpinism was given World Cultural Heritage status by UNESCO in 2019.

For the topic of *social media*, I used a short video clip and 'Slow German' podcast about the Selfie Museum in Köln.

In a topic chosen last year for the Unit 3 Outcome on consumerism, students looked at online shopping — this turned out to be even more pertinent than I had expected, given that we went straight into lockdown

the following week! It also turned up as a topic on the 2020 German exam (Section 1 Part B Listen and Respond in German), so my students were really well prepared for that. To bring in specifically German cultural aspects, one part of the topic was to look at the German preference for paying with cash, and slowness to move towards card payment (they had to interpret a sentence from an article: Die Deutschen hängen am Bargeld). Students also contrasted the online shopping experience with the face-to-face experience, with one of the texts being an image of a *Fußgängerzone* and the task asking them to write a piece for an advertising brochure, using the phrase from the listening text "*Ein entspannter Einkaufsbummel in der Fußgängerzone*".

This year's Year 12 class have already worked extensively on the internet and use of technology last year, in their Unit 2 outcome on online learning, so I needed to find another German-specific focus topic from the general topic area of consumerism. I am currently developing an assessment task relating to *Konsumkritik* and bringing in the ideas of Heidemarie Schwermer and her book "*Leben ohne Geld*".

Including visual material: images

The new Study Design has brought in Viewing alongside Reading and Listening as text forms for students to interpret, which is very appropriate, considering how much of our time these days is spent watching video material. Of course, the visual source can be an image/series of images and does not necessarily need to be a video.

Interpretation of images also comes into the new oral examination, so it is a skill to develop well in advance of the end of Year 12. From the beginning of Year 11 or even earlier I try to bring in some development of these skills, giving students the technical vocabulary needed such as *im Vordergrund, im Hintergrund, in der Mitte des Bildes*. As I prepared a reference sheet for my students about interpreting images, I did some research online and have found that VCAA is lining us up with trends

internationally — in many countries image interpretation is part of oral examinations.

Through this research I discovered the expectations of skills at various stages of language learning. At the A2 level, students need to be able to describe what they see, perhaps making guesses if it is not quite clear what is happening in the image. At the B1 level, which our Year 12 students are aiming for, the expectation is that the image be *interpreted*, by discussing the feelings generated by viewing the image, and by making connections with their own experiences or knowledge. For this reason, my reference sheet includes phrases such as *ich denke, dass… man könnte vermuten, dass… and dieses Bild erinnert mich an…* This scaffolding can be applied in image interpretation in the interpretive outcomes as well.

It is up to the teacher to carefully select an image that allows for such complex interpretation — for example, with central figures who have interesting facial expressions, with a detailed background, and some identifiable German cultural features. In their oral examination, some of my Year 12 students chose the topic "Kaffee und Kuchen" and brought in images of typical Viennese coffee house scenes, showing marble table tops, Herr Ober in a bow tie, coffee served with a glass of water with a teaspoon laid on top of it.

Including visual material: videos

Taking on the challenge of including video material in the interpretive outcomes, I have generally looked for short YouTube videos on my chosen topic, rather than taking a full-length feature film or documentary. I think a key thing about interpreting video material is that students will not understand every word. They need to be encouraged to use their metalinguistic skills to interpret meaning from the context — this is the best approximation to learning the language in a natural manner through immersion in a German-speaking society. To give students the courage to attempt this, it is important to begin exposing them to short videos offering natural language at a normal

speech pace from the beginning of their study of German. By asking them accessible questions, the teacher can guide students to the realisation that it is ok to operate in a space where they don't understand every word. For example, in working on the topic of family with my Year 8 class, I have found a 2 minute video by a young man in Berlin, showing himself and family playing frisbee in a park — he gives his own age and hobbies, and each of his sisters does the same. In the assessment situation for VCE, I try to shape the questions such that students are looking for specific pieces of information from the video — such as prices or dates. This addresses the criteria: "differentiate between general meaning and **specific meaning**" (Unit 1 Outcome 2) and "use strategies for identifying relevant concepts and **detailed information**" (Unit 2 Outcome 2). In Year 11, I use the viewing and listening text responses as the place to provide questions in simple German, maybe in the form of a table to be filled with statistical information.

Finding suitable listening texts

Finding suitable listening texts is difficult. Texts offered in textbooks have several drawbacks. They may be available to students online via the publisher website so that it cannot be guaranteed that the text is unfamiliar to all students. Often they are too long for the SAC situation, where the listening text is ideally of similar length to exam listening texts, i.e. not longer than two minutes. This is important, so that the text can be played twice or three times (depending on level of difficulty) without using up too much of the time available in the assessment period. Another drawback is that the texts are already several years out of date by the time they go through the publishing process, so that any statistics offered don't reflect the most current position.

Slow German podcasts are one possible source, but they tend to be longer than two minutes. The text is available to download, so one option is to offer this as a reading text instead. Another is to shorten it, selecting only key paragraphs, and re-record it as a shorter listening text.

In general, finding suitable listening resources for assessment tasks demands the willingness to modify existing texts and record them, or create completely fresh texts yourself. I have used both methods over the last few years, to ensure that the listening text is of the correct length and level of complexity.

An online article can be adapted into a listening text by going through and shortening the article, then checking for words or expressions beyond the range of the students and re-writing those sentences. For example, a passive sentence might be simplified into an active form for Unit 1 outcome. Higher-level vocabulary may need to be replaced with the simpler vocabulary which the students have learnt — it is fine if there are some words for them to look up in their dictionaries, but they should not be needing to look up every second word.

A successful adaption for the topic *Alpinismus* involved taking a long article on things to be aware of when mountaineering and recording in clear list form each of the *Zehn Gebote für Bergsteiger* with a sentence or two going into detail on each point. This was the section of the outcome where students were responding in English, and they needed to fill in a table listing the ten commandments.

For the topic of *Online Lernen*, I really needed a text that offered contrasting perspectives on the topic, rather than one that was simply informative. After much pondering, I worked with a colleague (thanks, Nicole Durand!) to draw up a list of pros and cons of online teaching from the teacher's perspective, on the basis of which we recorded a 'conversation' in Microsoft Teams where she argued the position that teaching is much more rewarding face-to-face in the classroom, and I offered the benefits of online teaching. The students really enjoyed listening to this short 'debate' and could listen for points to use in their own responses in the outcome.

Shaping questions to allow students to move between texts and text types

Reading the Study Design carefully, it is clear that the expectation is that over the two years students will build up their skills at interpreting texts. Students are expected to first recognise different perspectives in the texts they are given and write responses that bring in information from two or more texts, comparing, contrasting and accounting for these differing perspectives on the particular topic. Unit 1 asks students to 'combine information from texts', Unit 2 asks them to 'recognise and account for other perspectives', stepping up in Unit 3 to 'comparing different points of view/perspectives' and eventually in Unit 4 students are expected to 'make comparison between details, ideas and points of view' in each of the texts.

Exam tasks also often ask students to compare perspectives, especially in response to listening texts, where two speakers offer contrasting opinions or experiences. Building this aspect into SAC tasks is tricky, as often texts sourced online are informative rather that persuasive and do not express a clear perspective. Teaching the evaluative language needed to make such comparisons is a vital part of preparation, both for the SACs and for the written examination. Phrases like *einerseits/andererseits*, *einen gemeinsamen Standpunkt teilen* and *in Gegensatz zu* should be part of the general language repertoire of students.

Equally important is familiarising students with the characteristics of the various text types and style of writing. Again the Study Design expects students to demonstrate a progression in their skills, from using suitable German 'for the purposes of the text type' in Unit 1, to 'suitable for the text type and audience' (Unit 2), to 'suitable for the audience, purpose and text type' (Unit 3) and finally, in the extended response for Unit 4 SAC 2, demonstrating 'stylistic features' suitable to the 'audience, purpose and text type'. The Study Design further specifies that this extended piece must demonstrate 'a different text type to the stimulus material'. This skill of moving between text types also prepares students well for the written examination, in which the read and respond in German section (Section 2 Part B) generally offers a short text and asks students to use information from that text to create a response in a different text type.

For the Unit 1 outcome, using texts that are generally informative, alongside basic questions to answer, I usually ask students to write a short imaginative personal piece, such as a diary entry after visiting a *Schrebergarten* or after completing a hike in the Alps (*Alpinismus*). I expect them to draw on information in the texts provided as they do this. For Unit 2, I often ask students to write a persuasive or evaluative piece, in the form of a speech or article on the topic. For example, for the topic *Online Lernen* the task was to write *either* an evaluative article for an educational magazine about the advantages and disadvantages of online learning, drawing on both the texts and their own experience *or* to write a letter to the School Board expressing their viewpoint on the question of whether online learning is a viable model to continue into the future. For my Unit 4 SAC on the *Wattenmeer*, students were asked to write a letter to the editor urging greater protection of this coastal area.

In conclusion

Creating fresh interesting assessment tasks, that allow you to meet the Study Design criteria effectively takes time and effort. Shaping the task to include both lower level and higher level thinking skills, so that both weaker students and more able students come out of the experience feeling satisfied with their responses is challenging. The reward is seeing students responding enthusiastically to the chosen topics, and coming away with a more nuanced mature understanding of the connections between culture and language. I always find that I enjoy the process of familiarising myself more closely with the details of the chosen topic, and continue to draw on that knowledge in future years in the classroom. ∎

Have fun!