



BSSS Student News

Semester 2 2026



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Would you like to see your work in this publication? Talk with your teachers, or email bsssenquiries@act.gov.au



The BSSS acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We acknowledge the traditional Custodians of the land on which our department is located and where we live, learn and work.

We pay our respects to Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

Keeping motivated: Why am I here?

A question we all may ask from time to time. In this case the question relates to why I am at school? Into semester two, year 12 are hearing calls to formals, grad, university, work, gap years, the beach or just summer with only one more semester of school separating from these activities.

Year 11 are digesting their college's assessment of their semester one academic performance and possibly doubling down on their selected subjects, "tweaking" them, or wondering if school is worth the effort with three long semesters to graduation.



Both groups should consider the adage which says that if you work at something you love you will never work a day in your life. This is one of those quotes attributed to Confucius among others and like all adages is built on truth. The cognitive psychologist and author Daniel Willingham in his best-selling book "Why don't students like school?" posits that the brain is not designed for thinking but rather to conserve mental effort because thinking can be ponderously slow and frequently open to error. (Willingham, 2009)

However his work does lean a little into the adage as he also records that people enjoy mental work if the result is success. So, people do like to solve problems, but not unsolvable ones, or ones that feel that way. (Willingham, 2009).

The key word is 'success'. There are other researcher/authors who build their writings around the notion of achieving success. John Hattie, well known to teachers for his wide-ranging text 'Visible Learning' (Hattie, 2008) borrowed the notion of the Goldilocks principle from a fairytale – work that was not too hard or too easy but 'just right' like baby bear's porridge in the fairytale. The principle may be applied equally by teachers in their classes or by students in their reviewing of classwork or working through online assigned learning. The principle when applied to school is that you will learn more from questions with some element of challenge so that success (in this case learning) is more likely to follow.

There are other researchers – motivation is a popular topic – such as Ryan and Deci (2000) who examined the foundations of motivation – what leads us to want to do some things and avoid doing others. They focused on two versions of motivation – extrinsic motivation where some outcome separate to the activity is gained and intrinsic motivation where there is satisfaction in the activity itself.

Ideally intrinsic motivation would be behind all of our activities, but Deci and Ryan also found that intrinsic motivation was somewhat fragile and could be diminished by external motivators like monetary reward, surprisingly. Less surprisingly threats, deadlines and imposed goals all of which reduced intrinsic motivation and also reduced wellbeing. People need support for intrinsic motivation to flourish. In particular they need support for what Deci and Ryan identified as key drivers of motivation - competence, autonomy and relatedness. Of course, if the activity is something you dislike then intrinsic motivation will be largely absent. So, selecting school subjects you like and are good at is a big start as your year advisers will have told you.

In achieving competence at something we've chosen to do, we return to the Goldilocks principle for explanation – if we can almost do something we are more likely to persist with it. Many successful video games work on this principle. Autonomy is also important for motivation; we need to feel that not only are we interested to do something, but we have control of at least some aspects of what we do. Relatedness (to others) is less immediately important to performing an activity but can affect how we feel about it.

A Professor of Education, Daniel Muijs (Muijs, 2026) recently blogged a review of some of the evidence about motivation. He writes that the evidence of success preceding motivation is much stronger than aspiring to success by being motivated so Goldilocks is an important component of being motivated.

Independently of the strategies of your school and teachers, what might help intrinsic motivation? The answer could be in Daniel Pink's popular description of motivation in his book *Drive* (Pink, 2018). Pink, as a populariser of research takes a more conversational approach than Ryan and Deci and summarises the key ideas behind intrinsic motivation as autonomy, mastery and purpose.

Autonomy is an important ingredient in both models; it matters that you have control to a degree of what you are doing. One way you can have this is by selecting subjects for interest (intrinsic), not for scaled score rewards (extrinsic). Or by consciously directing your study using strategies that work for you, not just doing 'the homework'. Mastery fits with the Goldilocks principle; we do need to feel we are getting better at an activity to be motivated to keep doing it. Set your study tasks to need some challenge.

The third prong of the Pink thesis is purpose, which is the idea that what we are doing is important or serves some higher ideal. You might experience this through some school activities such as sustainability, or social justice groups, or through your long-held ambition to be a doctor saving lives, or working for UNICEF, or another non-government organisation.

In essence you can be intrinsically motivated to continue and thrive at school if you consciously take some control of what you do, how well you do it and have a reason for why you do it. The results may surprise you and have a positive effect on your wellbeing. [Here](#) (McQueen, n.d.) is a link to a video by another writer and presenter which adds a spoken rather than written voice to the discussion.

Summarising, intrinsic motivation provides fuel for your academic fire, but it can be damaged by others if you do not consciously attend to its key components.

References

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Willingham, D. T. (2009). *Why don't students like school? A cognitive scientist answers questions about how the mind works and what it means for the classroom*. Jossey-Bass.

Latest News

10 Jul 2026

Information about the Mathematics Review

Media Release

Presentation

FAQs

Review Overview

Executive Summary

10 Jul 2026

Review of Mathematics as a Requirement of the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate

You are invited to have your say on the proposed recommendation that all students complete a course under the Mathematics Framework as a requirement for the award of an ACT Senior Secondary Certificate.

To provide context for the review refer to the [Review of Mathematics as a requirement of the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate – Discussion Paper](#).



Reviews

A review of Mathematics as a requirement of the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate

The ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) is currently reviewing whether Mathematics should be a requirement of the Senior Secondary Certificate like the existing English requirement.

Read on to find about more about the review.

Why is a course in Mathematics being considered as a requirement?

The review is examining whether a course in mathematics would better prepare students for further study, employment and everyday life. Community feedback will help inform this discussion.

If Mathematics becomes a requirement, would students need to study it in both Year 11 and Year 12?

No. The proposed minimum requirement is a Mathematics minor, which is equivalent to one year of study. This could be completed in Year 11, Year 12, or across both years.

Would Mathematics have to count towards an ATAR?

No. ATAR calculations would remain unchanged. A student's ATAR is calculated using their best 3.6 T majors, or their best 3 T majors and best T minor.

Why is the BSSS reviewing the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate requirements?

Regular reviews of the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate are an important part of the role of the BSSS. The last major review was undertaken in 2014, when a course in English became a requirement, making this an appropriate time to consider whether the current requirements continue to meet the needs of students, employers and the wider community.

What is being proposed?

The proposal is for all students to complete at least a Mathematics minor (two standard units) as part of their ACT Senior Secondary Certificate.

Can students, parents and carers have a say?

Yes. The BSSS encourages students, parents, carers, educators and community members to share their views.

How can I provide feedback?

You can:

- Attend a community consultation session.
- Complete the online survey.
- Write a submission and email it to bsss.enquiries@act.gov.au.
- Visit the BSSS website for more information about the review and consultation process.

What happens to the feedback that is provided?

Feedback received through the consultation process will be reviewed by the Mathematics Advisory Committee before it makes a formal recommendation to the BSSS.

Where can I find more information?

The Discussion Paper and link to the survey are available on the BSSS website (www.bsss.act.edu.au)



Important Dates for Students

August to December 2026



25–26 August – ACT Scaling Test (AST)

25 September – End of Term 3

13 October – Start of Term 4

20–21 October – AST Second Sitting (eligible students only)

15 December – Year 12 results available online

16 December – ATARs released through UAC

18 December – End of school year

AI and Cognition

When it comes to assessment, your teachers are looking at what you create in response to assessment tasks as being representative of your learning and thinking. AI has disrupted that for everyone. A recent story from the USA shows this very clearly; a professor at Brown University allowed students to do their work as take-home exams, and the [results were so affected by AI](#) that he needed to get the students to do an in-class validation exam. The professor said:

“We cannot afford to have a society in which a significant fraction of our best young minds think that cheating is OK. That leads to a declining society, to a failed society... We cannot choose to become idiots.” ([Source](#))

So how do we stop ourselves “choosing to become idiots”? To start with, by not using AI to replace our own thinking. We know people are using AI, whether they are allowed to or not. So, let’s look at this from the perspective of what you’re learning and what you’re losing, because part of learning to use AI is learning to use AI responsibly.

If your teacher says, “no AI”, that means they want to know what you can do without AI. AI can make a shiny product, but no one wants you to focus on a polished product if it means you’re bypassing the skills that you need to learn.

Just as we might be suspicious of AI art or music when it shows up in our social media feeds or music streaming, because it is missing the human creative element, you need to be

cautious about handing over your ability to learn.

What do you need to be cautious about?

What it seems is happening is a thing that the literature calls a “performance paradox” – in this case, people who use AI produce a polished item, but have not actually learned the knowledge and skills taught by the task.

The quality of the product can fool people like teachers or parents into thinking that the student has learned what they intended to learn, but in reality the student is missing the knowledge and skills that they were supposed to get from the task.

Importantly, in some studies the performance paradox **wasn't obvious to the people who were doing the learning**. They didn't know at the time that they weren't learning the content; it was only when they were tested later that it was shown that they didn't know the content.

Things you might consider:

Do I already know how to do the task automatically? Has my competence undergone the “remember-to-know” shift?

Automaticity is something you have experience with; it is when you are able to do a task without it needing to be consciously thought about. Examples that you might think of in your own life include:

- Reading is likely an automatic skill for you; you no longer need to sound out letters and check whether a squiggle is an m or an n.
- Brushing your teeth, or putting on deodorant, are likely automatic skills for you. For example, when you first used a spray deodorant, you might have worried about how far from your armpit you hold it, or whether you have used enough or too much. As the skill becomes automatic, you don't have to think about these things anymore.
- You might be learning to drive and comparing how your skills are not yet automated in the way that the experienced drivers in your life show. Right now, you're obsessively checking mirrors; in a few years you'll be aware of them without a second thought!

The “remember-to-know” shift describes when information stops being something you learned and you can remember learning, to being something that you know. For example, you probably don't remember the day you learned the words to *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* – you just know them.

If you have to consciously think about recalling information, it's not a good idea to get AI to do it for you. Just like building up any skill, you need to do the skill to get the benefit of the skill.

Is the task building skills and knowledge that I will need?

Most school curriculums work in a “spiral” – the idea being that you learn a skill and then spiral back to a task that uses that skill in a new and different way, or that extends that skill. If you skip the learning of the easy skill, it can be harder to do the next part of the work.

Most skills are transferrable between tasks, even if the content is different. If you've learned percentages, you can calculate interest on a loan. If you can calculate the area of a rectangle, you can work out how much paint you need for a wall. If you can interpret a novel, you can spot when an ad campaign is trying to sway your opinion.

One thing that is important in the age of AI, though, is knowledge. If you don't know anything, you can't think critically about the outputs of AI. This is why many guidelines for beginning to use AI now say that you should start using AI requesting information about something that you are very knowledgeable about, so that you see how AI can be both right and wrong (sometimes in consecutive sentences!), and so that you have the critical ability to discern between what's good and what's slop.

If the task is in an area that you want to continue studying, it's worth making the effort to attain the knowledge, so that you can test assumptions and any generated content against your own knowledge.

Do I need “someone” to explain the work to me in a different way?

Difficult mental tasks can feel just as hard as difficult physical tasks, but just like you don’t give up if you’re trying to get physically fit, you shouldn’t give up when you’re trying to improve your learning. If you must use AI, use it to explain the work to you rather than getting it to do the work for you. If you have access through your school to an EduTech AI platform like EduChat, you can use that to help. If you are using another platform, you can use custom instructions like these:

“Act as an expert academic tutor. You must never give me a direct answer or write answers for me. You must break the concept down and ask me questions to check my understanding, affirming when I am correct.”

“I need you to teach me without giving me all the answers. Can you break down [this concept] for me using a simple explanation, and then ask me questions to check and develop my understanding?”

“I am a Year 11 student in Canberra. This is the question for my English assignment: [Question goes here]. Without giving me the answer or listing ideas, ask me a series of questions designed to prompt me to think about how I could answer the question and structure my essay, including how I could incorporate direct quotes from the text and secondary sources.”

The following is a good article about prompting generic large language models to help you learn: <https://wur-studentsupport.screenstepslive.com/m/118226/l/1858839-basics-of-llm>

Note that you must abide by the rules in the school you are in. If the school says no AI, then no AI!

Further Resources

If you would like more information about AI and cognition, we recommend this article by Australian authors Leslie Loble and Jason Lodge.

Lodge, Jason M.; Loble, Leslie (2026). Artificial intelligence, cognitive offloading and implications for education. University of Technology Sydney. Report. <https://doi.org/10.71741/4pyxmbnjq.31302475.v2>

A note on AI and image-based abuse

AI is responsible for a rise in image-based abuse. People in your age group – particularly young men -- are very vulnerable to it, and do not know where to go for help if they are being blackmailed or scammed. You can always talk with a safe adult, and use the resources provided by eSafety to work out the next best steps.

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people> has a lot of good information about different topics for people who are experiencing difficulty with things that are happening online. They do not victim-blame, and they offer case studies about what happens when you report online conduct that is not ok.

Your value and the way ahead

The following is in response to student submissions through review processes. We never want any of you to feel like you're failing and may not achieve anything of value, because that's not how we see you and your achievements. We also know there are other people in your life who will see you and your achievements positively. Even if things are not going the way you want them to right now, you are NOT a failure and you CAN achieve things of value. Let's look at some reasons why that is the case.

Your marks at school do not represent your worth as a person and they certainly don't represent failure. Your grades (A-E) represent how well you met the Achievement Standards and rubrics for that item. There are lots of different reasons why you might not have met the Achievement Standards for that task; the thing to take from it is what happened, and work on the reason why. For example:

- Did you do less well than you wanted to because of time management?
- Did you do less well than you wanted to because you did not understand the work?
- Did you do less well than you wanted to because you did not enjoy the work?

These three things have different causes and different solutions. Time management might be setting app screentime limits on your phone, or scheduling sessions to work on your assessments.

Not understanding the work might be helped by scheduling some sessions with your teacher or teacher librarian, or working with a study buddy from your class.

If you didn't enjoy the work, that's about finding strategies to help you undertake tasks you don't enjoy – such as rewarding yourself when they are complete, using a "body double" to undertake the task alongside you (e.g., get your friends together for a silent study session), or spending some time relating the task to your future goals.

Your ATAR is only for uni entry

The ATAR is a rank, and it has one purpose – universities want it to help them with deciding on who to offer direct entry places to for their degrees.

The ATAR is not a percentage, it's not a mark, it's not a score, it doesn't compare between years. Being a rank, it shows where you rank compared to the other people who got an ATAR that year. This is why it doesn't compare between years – because every group of students who come through are different. All it shows is where you rank based on your 3.6 best T courses that you studied across Year 11 and 12. That's it.



"We are not going to fix the skills shortages we have, and will have, unless we break down the artificial barriers between uni and TAFE."

Education Minister Jason Clare

If Australia had a year of super geniuses come through, there would still be a similar numbers of 99.95 ATAR's and a 30 ATAR's that year – the ATAR wouldn't reflect them being super geniuses, it would reflect how they ranked compared to each other.

This is why ATAR estimates are only ever a best guess – no one knows how you will go compared to everyone else your age in Australia that wants to go to Uni, except to be able to say, “this is how you may have gone in the past”.

There are plenty of non-uni pathways

The big question to ask yourself is: do you actually want to go to uni? Uni is great fun, and you get to study things you love, but if you’re not actually keen on the whole “studying” part, you might not actually find that university is your best choice. University subjects cost money, even if you fail them, and you have to be self-disciplined – no one will be checking up on you to give you v-grade alerts or to make sure you have a valid package of study. You may find that taking an apprenticeship or internship where you get to work alongside any study and see the practical application of the skills you are learning is a path you prefer.

If you really want to go to uni, there is a way

There are a range of ways that universities offer alternative entry.

Alternative pathways you can apply for alongside an ATAR:

1. Through the [Educational Access Scheme](#), which is run by UAC.
2. Through the [Schools Recommendation Scheme](#), which is also run by UAC.
3. Through an at-school offer scheme like [ANU’s early offers](#), [ACU guarantee](#), or [CSU’s Charles Sturt Advantage](#). Note that these all have different closing dates, so some have closed for 2026 already.

Alternative entry that may or may not need an ATAR:

1. Do a VET diploma that will be recognised by the university that you wish to attend (e.g., the [University of Canberra offers pathways](#) from CIT; [ANU will assess diploma level study](#) as part of their alternative entry pathways).
2. Do a university preparation certificate or program run by the institution you want to get entry to. Some of these operate in parallel to your current schooling, whereas others are for after you’ve left school.
3. Do a few years in the workforce and then apply for university.

Education Minister Jason Clare said in June: “We are not going to fix the skills shortages we have, and will have, unless we break down the artificial barriers between uni and TAFE.” University is a pathway for people who want to study further in their favourite academic disciplines, or get the qualifications for specific jobs, like doctor, teacher, architect, or lawyer – it certainly does not need to be the first thing you do after school, and it is not mutually exclusive with vocational education. It might be that spending a few years on a VET qualification will not only get you into the higher degree of your dreams; it will also teach you valuable skills and knowledge for the future.

People develop their careers

The idea that you will get into one job and stay there for the rest of your days doesn’t accurately represent how people build their careers these days. What this means is that there is plenty of scope for you to find one thing you enjoy and start building into other things that you are interested in, or that you enjoy.

We suggest chatting with some of the adults in your life about how their careers have changed over time – you might find that they have built and grown over time as their interests changed and diversified, even if they stayed in the same general field.

Over your lifetime, there will be new careers that come into being, and you will help to set the groundwork for what these careers look like.

You can find career stories here:

<https://myfuture.edu.au/career-stories>

The future is a mystery

None of us can accurately predict the future, and what skills will be valuable in the future. When your parents graduated Year 12, they had no idea that in the future there would be iPhones, TikTok, a global pandemic, generative AI or the gig economy, but all of these things have led to a range of new jobs and opportunities -- app developers, content creators, influencers, data centre managers – as well as unforeseen challenges like lockdowns and hybrid working.

Many adults who spent their teens and twenties mucking about chatting on the internet suddenly discovered that this was an essential work skill in the hybrid office.

Sometimes education professionals talk about different kinds of knowledge as “declarative” and “procedural” – the basic description of this is the difference between things you know, and things you know how to do.

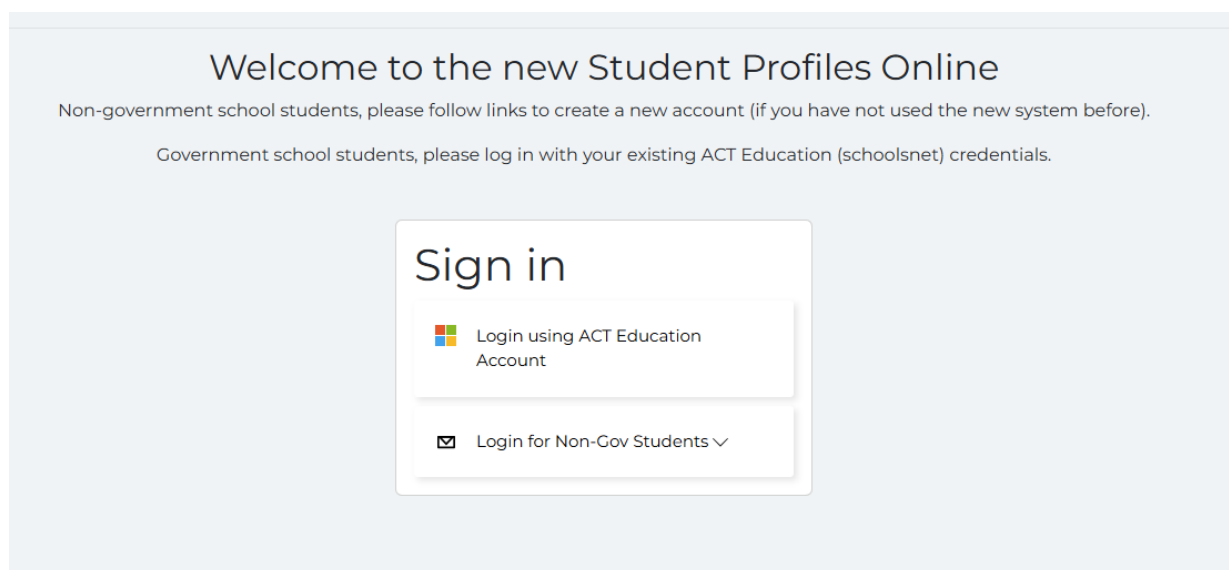
When your teachers are teaching you particular topics – like a novel study in English – they aren’t just teaching you things to know. They’re teaching you how to do things, like evaluate sources, work out ratios and percentages, interpret bias, not give up when things are tricky, and how to ask the right questions.

It doesn’t matter if the curtains are purple in a poem, it matters that you understand that authors make choices both consciously and unconsciously that are intended to affect their audience and that you learn how to spot these choices, because the procedural knowledge you get from this is to know to be alert to how people might try to influence how you respond – for example, in advertising, online, or in political forums.

Having declarative knowledge – such as the road rules, the history of the world, which chemicals it’s dangerous to mix – is very important. But the procedural knowledge you build alongside that declarative knowledge is what will help you to apply your knowledge and skills to an uncertain future.

Questions from students

Do you have a question that you'd like answered here? Email bsssenquiries@act.gov.au



Why can't I log in to Student Profiles Online?

There are a few things to check if you're having trouble getting into SPO. In order:

1. Check that you are using the right link. There is one link for ACT Government Schools, and one link for everyone else.
2. If you are using the link for people in private schools, overseas schools and CIT, you will need to make an account before using SPO for the first time.
3. If you put in details that don't match what is on ACS for you, or if details are missing from ACS, you will get an error message. You can ask your school to check what details are on ACS for you by seeing your Certification Officer, and in some cases, Student Services/Pastoral Care staff. These are the same people who check the spelling of names, add in your addresses, and help keep your data up to date.
4. If you have moved from a Government School to CIT, you will need to let us know and we will manually make sure that your account is working.
5. If you have tried all these things, you can email bssscertification@ed.act.edu.au for help. It is best if you let us know what you have tried, what time you tried to log in, and what you were doing when you got the error.

Why aren't I seeing results on Student Profiles Online?

There are a few reasons why this might be the case. Things you can look for:

1. Check the filters at the top of the screen – are you on the semester or year you are expecting? If it says "Y1", change to "S1" or "S2"
2. Check the subject: some subjects like Specialised Arts subjects will be recorded separately from the baseline version of that subject. So, if you did a unit in Specialised Drama and a unit in Drama, they will be under two different courses.
3. Some results are only available in the current year, such as your rank in a scaling group. You need to speak with your school if you want this information outside of the current year.

Things your teacher can help you with:

1. The school has not yet published the results.
2. The school has “unpublished” the results.

If you have checked these things, you can email bssscertification@ed.act.edu.au for help. It is best if you let us know what you have tried, so that we can more readily troubleshoot.

I found a random website that says it'll give me an accurate ATAR estimate. Should I believe the website, or my school's estimate?

Do not take any estimate as a promise. We know you want to know what kind of ATAR you might get, and a random website might give you an ATAR calculation which causes you to hope

for the best or fear for the worst. Your school will do their best with a lot more information, and they are able to counsel you about factors that they are aware of that might affect your ATAR.

There is NO official BSSS ATAR estimate calculator. No one – not even us – knows what the ATAR for any specific student will be until the full scaling process has happened, because the point of the process is that it's done for every scaling group and every student fresh each year, with no assumptions made about the student, subject/s, or school. Every year there are groups that perform better or worse than the school expected them to, because of the nature of a rank.

Special Provisions: Rest and Movement Breaks

Schools have responsibilities under the *Disability Standards for Education*, and these responsibilities include reasonable adjustments for students who have disability as defined by the Disability Standards for Education. Rest and movement breaks and extra time fall under the umbrella of reasonable adjustments, but where rest and movement breaks are unlikely to have an effect on the inherent requirements of an assessment, extra time is another story.

The Disability Standards for Education speak to what happens when there is a qualification attached to the student's learning – which there is in Senior Secondary.

In section 3.4 section 3 (emphasis added):

*(3) In assessing whether an adjustment to the course of the course or program in which the student is enrolled, or proposes to be enrolled, is reasonable, the provider is entitled to **maintain the academic requirements** of the course or program, **and other requirements or components that are inherent in or essential to its nature.***

*Note: In providing for students with disabilities, a provider may continue to **ensure the integrity of its courses or programs and assessment requirements and processes**, so that those on whom it confers an award can present themselves as having the appropriate **knowledge, experience and expertise implicit in the holding of that particular award.***

The knowledge, experience and expertise implicit in the Senior Secondary Certificate is outlined by the Australian Qualifications Framework, the BSSS Frameworks and course documents, and the Achievement Standards. Many assessments use time as part of the construct being assessed, which can mean that having more time to complete the task can be an advantage if applied without clear and rigorous processes.

The Inherent Requirements of tests

Identifying the inherent requirements of a task – the things that cannot be changed – is important to knowing what a reasonable adjustment will be.

For example, use of spellcheck could be a reasonable adjustment in a History exam, but not a reasonable adjustment in a spelling test, because spelling is the inherent requirement.



Feeling some nerves, experiencing distractions, and worrying about tests are all normal experiences

It is important to be mindful that there is an interplay between doctors and schools in this space. Doctors will sometimes recommend a provision that it is not possible for a school to provide as it would not allow the student to meet the inherent requirements of the task, because different tasks have different inherent requirements.

How this relates to rest and movement breaks and extra time to work

Extra time to work is a provision with limited support in the critical literature, in part because there is still ongoing research into the impacts of extra time. Some applications of extra time are better-studied than others.

In the AST the split between rest and movement breaks compared to extra time to work comes down to:

Extra time to work is for when a student is measurably slower at completing a test than others their age, usually due to pain, injury, a specific learning disorder, or slower processing that has been measured using a psychometric test.

Rest and movement breaks are for when a student needs to pause in a test to manage a condition, physical feeling, or emotion, usually because they have a condition that affects attention, are likely to freeze or panic, need to take medication, or need to move to alleviate pain.

Implementing breaks and extra time

There are a range of strategies that can be used to implement breaks and extra time. Some of them are whole-group strategies, with an awareness that these strategies can help everyone stay on-task and calm in a high-stakes assessment environment. Feeling some nerves, experiencing distractions, and worrying about tests are all normal experiences and can be addressed with strategies such as the ones below. Stress and anxiety are often private and personal, and sometimes it feels like other people aren't experiencing nerves when in reality, they're just better at hiding their nerves! Some friction is to be expected when undertaking high-stakes assessment.

Although you have likely encountered these ideas in junior years, for many people, it is when they reach senior secondary that exams become too difficult to just "wing it" and they must put some strategies in place. Explicitly thinking about and implementing exam-taking strategies is likely to help all students.

Strategies for all students

- Reading time strategies – for example, asking your teacher how to use reading time to best advantage
- Exam organisation strategies – e.g., working out the best order of questions, eliminating distractors in multiple choice, space and mark values as indicators of how much time to put into a question
- Strategies when feeling "stuck" in an exam: e.g., skipping a question or changing which section of the exam the student is working on, and returning to it later in the test

- Refocussing strategies such as box breathing (breathing in for 4, holding for 4, breathing out for 4); body scan; identification of items that appeal to different senses
- Building up tolerance for extended concentration through reading, extended work, hobbies, monotasking (e.g., not playing on your phone whilst you watch TV)

Many students who apply for rest breaks and/or extra time in the AST reflect that they do so because of stress. Some things all students can try to help reduce stress:

Self-talk strategies – before, during, and after the exam

The way you talk to yourself can have a powerful impact on your confidence and performance in exams. Before the exam, replace unhelpful thoughts such as “I’m going to fail” with realistic and encouraging statements like “I’ve prepared for this and I’ll do my best.”

During the exam, focus on staying calm and task-focused by reminding yourself, “One question at a time” or “I can work through this.” If you encounter a difficult question, avoid panicking and instead tell yourself, “It’s okay not to know everything. I’ll move on and come back later.” After the exam, try not to dwell on mistakes or compare answers with others. Instead, acknowledge your effort and remind yourself that one exam does not define your abilities.

Positive, balanced self-talk can help reduce anxiety and keep you focused on what you can control. You might like to set up an agreement in your friend group not to “post-mortem” the exam, so that you don’t end up collectively catastrophising.

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Acute management of stress: e.g., breathing or grounding exercises

Feeling nervous before or during an exam is normal, but having strategies to manage stress can help you regain a sense of control. One effective technique is slow, controlled breathing. Try breathing in through your nose for four counts, holding for four counts, and breathing out slowly for four counts. Repeating this a few times can help calm your body's stress response. Grounding exercises can also be helpful when anxiety feels overwhelming.

A simple method is the “5-4-3-2-1” technique: identify five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. This brings your attention back to the present moment rather than worrying about what might happen. Practising these techniques before exam day can make it easier to use them when you need them most.

Knowing about the impact of a single test on results, including the AST aberrant process

It is important to remember that in the ACT there is only one time when a single test determines your overall academic success, and that is if you deliberately make a non-serious response on the AST. No other time, not even regular AST, just if you deliberately make a non-serious response.

Your results are based on a range of assessments completed over time, which provide a much broader picture of your knowledge and skills. If an exam does not go as planned because of unexpected circumstances such as illness, severe anxiety, or another significant issue, there are processes in place to help ensure that one performance does not unfairly affect your final result.

In the AST, a process called aberrance is used so that if you perform very differently to your in-school results, we take your in-school results as being a better illustration of your performance. Talk with your school’s Certification coordinator for more information.

Understanding that there are safeguards and multiple measures of achievement can help reduce pressure and remind you that one difficult exam is not a measure of your worth, potential, or future success.

Clinical management of stress and anxiety: building lifelong coping skills

Exam accommodations can play an important role in helping students access assessments fairly, but they are only one part of managing stress and anxiety. Developing practical coping strategies and seeking appropriate support can help you feel more confident in a wide range of situations, both at school and beyond.

Working with a psychologist, counsellor, or other health professional can help you understand your anxiety, identify unhelpful thinking patterns, and develop skills such as relaxation techniques, problem-solving, and emotional regulation. Learning these strategies takes time and practice, but they can make a lasting difference to your wellbeing.

The goal is not to eliminate stress completely, as some stress is a normal part of life, but to build the confidence and skills needed to manage challenges effectively and continue participating in important opportunities, even when they feel difficult.

Specific strategies

If you are approved for rest and movement breaks or extra time, you need to spend a bit of time working out how best to use them. We have given you some questions that you might reflect on to help you trial different ways of using these accommodations. Note that these reflection questions and strategies may not fit all situations.

Specific Strategies: Rest and Movement Breaks

Reflecting on what works for you

Understanding your own needs is an important part of managing exams effectively. Think about the situations that make you feel like you need a rest or movement break. Do you notice yourself becoming restless, distracted, uncomfortable, or fatigued after a certain amount of time?

You might find that your concentration starts to drop after 20 minutes, that you begin making more careless mistakes after working for a long period, or that physical symptoms such as pain, stiffness, or tension start to increase.

It is also worth considering whether you can recognise when you need a break, or whether these signs become obvious only after your performance has already been affected. Finally, think about how long a break needs to be for you to feel refreshed and ready to return to the task.

Strategies to trial

Different types of breaks work better for different students, so it is important to experiment with a range of approaches. You may find that taking breaks at regular, predictable intervals is more effective than waiting until you feel overwhelmed. For example:

- A short break every 20 minutes might help prevent tension, discomfort, or loss of focus before these become significant problems.
- Some students prefer to take breaks between sections or tasks, which can help create a mental reset and reduce distractions.
- Tools such as countdown clocks, visual timers, or ADHD timers can also be useful for some students, although others may find that they increase stress.
- During a break, try strategies such as stretching, changing your posture, walking briefly, or practising controlled breathing exercises.

The more you practise these strategies, the more confident you will become in using them effectively during assessments. You should maintain records of what was tried, and how it worked.

Specific strategies: Extra Time

Reflecting on how you use extra time

If you are provided with extra time in exams, it can be helpful to think about how you are actually using it. For example:

- Do you use all of the available time, or do you still finish early?
- Consider the order in which you complete questions and whether your approach helps you make the best use of the time available.
- Reflect on whether you tend to get stuck on difficult questions or spend longer than necessary trying to find the "perfect" answer.
- Think about how much time you genuinely need to plan, organise, and produce written responses.

Understanding your habits can help you identify strategies that allow you to use extra time more effectively and reduce unnecessary stress.

Strategies to trial

There is no single "right" way to use extra time, so try different strategies to discover what works best for you. Some students find that countdown clocks or timers help them stay aware of how much time they are spending on each question, while others find these tools distracting.

Setting your own time limits can also be useful. For example, you might decide not to spend more than a certain number of minutes on a one-mark question before moving on and returning to it later.

Practising under low-pressure conditions, such as trial exams, practice tasks, or classroom activities, can also help you build confidence in your ability to complete work within the available time.

You may find that the more experience you gain, the less anxious you feel about running out of time. If you have access to both extra time and rest breaks, try different combinations rather than assuming you will automatically know how to use them effectively.

Regular practice will help you develop strategies that feel natural and useful when it matters most.

Keeping track of what works

As you experiment with different strategies, it can be helpful to keep a record of what you tried, when you used it, and how effective it was. This will help you identify patterns and build a clearer understanding of the supports that genuinely improve your performance and wellbeing.

Over time, these records can provide valuable evidence of the strategies that work best for you and can also remind you of the progress you have made in developing your exam and study skills.

You should work with your school's inclusion team to keep centralised records of what was trialled, when it was trialled, and what the result was. This can help to provide an evidence base for AST special provisions, or it might help visualise your improvement.

