# Big History – Assessment advice



## Assessment

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

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

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

## General performance descriptors

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

Table - Performance descriptors for the A-E grade scale

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

## Areas for assessment

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

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

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

## Useful assessment strategies

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

### Inquiry-based research assignments and projects

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

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

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

### Presentations

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

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

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

### Peer assessment

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

### Self-assessment

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

## Additional information

**Resource evaluation and support**: Please complete the following [feedback form](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=muagBYpBwUecJZOHJhv5kbKo2q_ZUXlHndJMnh2Wd8NUOUk0VTIzUDVVSlVFQVM5MkdOMkJGTjVKNCQlQCN0PWcu) to help us improve our resources and support.

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

### Rationale

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

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

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

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

### Aim

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

### Purpose and audience

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

### When and how to use this document

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

### Assessment for learning

Possible formative assessment strategies that could be included:

* Learning intentions and success criteria assist educators to articulate the purpose of a learning task to make judgements about the quality of student learning. These help students focus on the task or activity taking place and what they are learning and provide a framework for reflection and feedback. [Online tools](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/622) can assist implementation of this formative assessment strategy.
* Eliciting evidence strategies allow teachers to determine the next steps in learning and assist teachers in evaluating the impact of teaching and learning activities. Strategies that may be added to a learning sequence to elicit evidence include all student response systems, [exit tickets](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/543), mini whiteboards (actual or [digital](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/575)), [hinge questions](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/557), [Kahoot](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningTool/Card/621), [Socrative](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningTool/Card/587), or quick quizzes to ensure that individual student progress can be monitored and the lesson sequence adjusted based on formative data collected.
* Feedback is designed to close the gap between current and desired performance by informing teacher and student behaviour (AITSL 2017). AITSL provides a [factsheet to support evidence-based feedback](https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/improve-practice/feedback#:~:text=FEEDBACK-,Factsheet,-A%20quick%20guide).
* [Peer feedback](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/549) is a structured process where students evaluate the work of their peers by providing valuable feedback in relation to learning intentions and success criteria. It can be supported by [online tools](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Browser?cache_id=1d29b).
* Self-regulated learning opportunities assist students in taking ownership of their own learning. A variety of strategies can be employed and some examples include reflection tasks, [Think-Pair-Share](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/645), [KWLH charts](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/562), [learning portfolios](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/583) and [learning logs](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningActivity/Card/564).

The primary role of assessment is to establish where individuals are in their learning so that teaching can be differentiated and further learning progress can be monitored over time.

Feedback that focuses on improving tasks, processes and student self-regulation is the most effective. Students engaging with feedback can take many forms including formal, informal, formative, summative, interactive, demonstrable, visual, written, verbal and non-verbal.

[What works best update 2020](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/cese/publications/research-reports/what-works-best-2020-update) (CESE 2020a)

### Differentiation

Differentiated learning can be enabled by differentiating the teaching approach to content, process, product and the learning environment. For more information on differentiation go to [Differentiating learning](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/teacher-quality-and-accreditation/strong-start-great-teachers/refining-practice/differentiating-learning) and [Differentiation](https://education.nsw.gov.au/campaigns/inclusive-practice-hub/primary-school/teaching-strategies/differentiation).

When using these resources in the classroom, it is important for teachers to consider the needs of all students in their class, including:

* **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students**. Targeted [strategies](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/aboriginal-education-in-nsw-public-schools) can be used to achieve outcomes for Aboriginal students in K-12 and increase knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal histories and cultures. Teachers should utilise students’ Personalised Learning Pathways to support individual student needs and goals.
* **EAL/D learners**. EAL/D learners will require explicit English language support and scaffolding, informed by the [EAL/D enhanced teaching and learning cycle](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/resources-for-schools/eald/enhanced-teaching-and-learning-cycle) and the student’s phase on the [EAL/D Learning Progression](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/multicultural-education/english-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect/planning-eald-support/english-language-proficiency). In addition, teachers can access information about [supporting EAL/D learners](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/multicultural-education/english-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect/planning-eald-support/english-language-proficiency) and [literacy and numeracy support specific to EAL/D learners](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/resources-for-schools/eald).
* **Students with additional learning needs**. Learning adjustments enable students with disability and additional learning and support needs to access syllabus outcomes and content on the same basis as their peers. Teachers can use a range of [adjustments](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/disability-learning-and-support/personalised-support-for-learning/adjustments-to-teaching-and-learning) to ensure a personalised approach to student learning. In addition, the [Universal Design for Learning planning tool](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/learning-from-home/teaching-at-home/teaching-and-learning-resources/universal-design-for-learning) can be used to support the diverse learning needs of students using inclusive teaching and learning strategies. Subject specific curriculum considerations can be found on the [Inclusive Practice hub](https://education.nsw.gov.au/campaigns/inclusive-practice-hub/primary-school/teaching-strategies/differentiation).
* **High potential and gifted learners**. [Assessing and identifying high potential and gifted learners](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/high-potential-and-gifted-education/supporting-educators/assess-and-identify#Assessment1) will help teachers decide which students may benefit from extension and additional challenge. [Effective strategies and contributors to achievement](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/high-potential-and-gifted-education/supporting-educators/evaluate) for high potential and gifted learners help teachers to identify and target areas for growth and improvement. In addition, the [Differentiation Adjustment Tool](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/high-potential-and-gifted-education/supporting-educators/implement/differentiation-adjustment-strategies) can be used to support the specific learning needs of high potential and gifted students. The [High Potential and Gifted Education Professional Learning and Resource Hub](https://schoolsnsw.sharepoint.com/sites/HPGEHub/SitePages/Home.aspx) supports school leaders and teachers to effectively implement the High Potential and Gifted Education Policy in their unique contexts.

All students need to be challenged and engaged to develop their potential fully. A culture of high expectations needs to be supported by strategies that both challenge and support student learning needs, such as through appropriate curriculum differentiation (CESE 2020a:6).

## About this resource

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

**Alignment to system priorities and/or needs**:

This resource aligns to the School Excellence Framework elements of curriculum (curriculum provision) and effective classroom practice (lesson planning, explicit teaching).

This resource supports teachers to address [Australian Professional Teaching Standards](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/teacher-accreditation/meeting-requirements/the-standards/proficient-teacher) 5.1.2, 5.5.2

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

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

**Department approved elective course**: Big History

**Course outcomes**: BH5-1, BH5-2, BH5-3, BH5-4, BH5-5, BH5-6, BH5-7, BH5-8, BH5-9, BH5-10

**Author**: Curriculum Secondary Learners

**Publisher**: State of NSW, Department of Education

**Resource**: Teaching resource

**Related resources**: Further resources to support Big History can be found on the Department approved elective courses webpage including course document, sample scope and sequences, assessment materials and other learning sequences.

**Professional Learning**: Join the [Teaching and Learning 7-12 statewide staffroom](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/statewide-staffrooms) for information regarding professional learning opportunities.

**Universal Design for Learning Tool**: [Universal Design for Learning planning tool](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/learning-from-home/teaching-at-home/teaching-and-learning-resources/universal-design-for-learning). Support the diverse learning needs of students using inclusive teaching and learning strategies.

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

**Reviewed by**: This resource was reviewed by Curriculum Secondary Learners and by subject matter experts in schools to ensure accuracy of content.

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**Evidence Base**:

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

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

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

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

## References

**Links to third-party material and websites**

Please note that the provided (reading/viewing material/list/links/texts) are a suggestion only and implies no endorsement, by the New South Wales Department of Education, of any author, publisher, or book title. School principals and teachers are best placed to assess the suitability of resources that would complement the curriculum and reflect the needs and interests of their students.

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

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

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

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

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