Factsheet: Cognitive verb framework

Understanding and applying cognitive verbs in syllabuses

Cognitive verb framework

The Cognitive verb framework has been provided for use with the:

- 2024 Applied syllabuses
- 2025 General, Applied (Essential), and Short Course syllabuses
- 2026 General Extension syllabuses.

The Cognitive verb framework is available on the QCAA website.

What are cognitive verbs?

Cognitive verbs, used in QCAA's syllabuses for senior subjects, are words that represent the mental operations students are expected to learn, perform and demonstrate.

Why are they important?

Cognitive verbs are important because they help:

- teachers to plan and assess
- students to consciously identify and use the subject-specific techniques or processes related to the cognitive verb
- students understand how to respond to tasks.

About the framework

The QCAA Cognitive verb framework states the purpose of the mental operation, rather than a definition of the word (or verb) itself. The framework follows a consistent syntax, outlining the term and its purpose, i.e.:

- The term *[cognitive verb]* represents the variety of subject-specific techniques and processes used to *[achieve some intended purpose]*.

This framework:

- acknowledges that each mental operation is associated with subject-specific techniques and processes
- clarifies reasons for, or purposes or outcomes of, performing the mental operation
- acts as a reference point for both teachers and students.

Applying cognitive verbs in context

The application of cognitive verbs in the context of each syllabus, or group of syllabuses, is simple.

It requires the identification of:

- a specific set of techniques or processes associated with the mental operation
- specific reasons, purposes or intended outcomes associated with performing the mental operation.

Example

Table 1 gives an example of the application of the cognitive verb *Analyse* in the context of the Physics 2025 v1.2 General syllabus.

This example is indicative only and not an exhaustive application.

Table 1 Indicative application of the cognitive verb Analyse — Physics 2025 v1.2 General syllabus

The term *analyse* represents the variety of subject-specific techniques and processes students use to break down information and reveal aspects that are not immediately obvious.		
Framework element	**Application in context**	**Syllabus reference**
Set of techniques or processes	Students use *mathematical processes and algorithms* to analyse quantitative data.	Syllabus objective explanatory paragraph (p. 4)
	These mathematical processes and algorithms may include: • performing gradient analysis • using minimum and maximum trendlines and R^2 calculations • propagating random error.	Additional subject-specific information science inquiry skills (p. 12)
Reasons, purposes or intended outcomes	Students analyse data for the purpose of identifying trends, patterns, relationships, limitations and uncertainty in data.	Syllabus objective explanatory paragraph (p. 4)

Summary

Cognitive verbs are central to Queensland's 2024, 2025 and 2026 senior syllabuses.

The QCAA's Cognitive verb framework emphasises why identifying the purpose for performing key mental operations is important, as well as identifying the subject-specific techniques or processes used to achieve this purpose. This supports:

- more explicit and intentional teaching
- improved clarity about assessment expectations and judgments.

More information

The Cognitive verb framework, suitable for use with the 2024 Applied syllabuses, 2025 General, Applied (Essential) and Short Course syllabuses, and 2026 General Extension syllabuses, can be found here.

If you would like more general information, please email the Senior Curriculum Unit at scu@qcaa.qld.edu.au.

If you would like subject-specific information, please contact the relevant Learning Area unit.