

SENIOR GEOGRAPHY PROJECT

Success in the SGP

James Harte, Councillor GTA NSW & ACT

The Senior Geography Project (SGP) is aimed at developing the geographical inquiry skills of the student through its application into a practical research project (NESA, 2009). It develops a student's organisational, analytical, communicative, and geographical inquiry capabilities. However, it can be daunting for many students and, as I am sure many Senior Geography teachers can attest to, it can range from a highlight to a lowlight in Preliminary Geography for both student and teacher alike. However, with appropriate planning, structure, and support, the process can be streamlined to maximise student achievement and minimise teacher stress.

Success in the SGP is different for every school, every teacher, and every student. For some, success is simply undertaking independent research on a topic that genuinely interests them, for others it may just be having a finished product to submit, whilst the results-focused students might only view success as an A grade. In addition, at a state-wide level success can be achieved in the Young Geographers Competition, the annual competition in which teachers are able to submit up to four student projects to be assessed by a marking panel from the GTA NSW & ACT.

Who Am I?

My name is James Harte and I am on the Council for the GTA NSW & ACT. I work at an independent girl's school in Sydney's North Shore and I am in my fifth year of teaching. Each year of my (early) career has involved the Senior Geography Project, and each year has presented a range of challenges and achievements. Consistent evaluation and reflection on the processes implemented throughout the Senior Geography Project have ensured that my students and I feel comfortable and confident in completing this major project in Preliminary Geography.

My Stories of Success

In terms of academic success, in 2021 a student I taught achieved outright first place in the Young Geographer competition for her investigation into the implementation of environmentally sustainable practices in Frenchs Forest, whilst another of my students achieved equal second place for her investigation into demographic change in Yass Valley. In addition to this, the Geography team at my school achieved second and third place in 2020, and first and second place in 2019. Going beyond purely academics, however, success in this project for me is also viewed as sustained motivation, consistent progress, and genuine interest in its completion. The Senior Geography Project is a cornerstone of the Preliminary Geography year, and the

significance of this on the learning and development for the student should be supported and celebrated throughout its completion.

How I structure / plan SGP

I have provided the structure I utilise for the SGP each year in the table below:

Stage	Task	Due date
1	Senior Geography Project assessment notification and booklet handed out	Week 5, Term 1
2	Interview with teacher on TWO potential topic ideas	Week 6, Term 1
3	Research Proposal due	Week 7, Term 1
4	Gathering and processing data due	Week 2, Term 2
5	Final Report due	Week 6, Term 2

At each step of the project, I provide feedback and guidance on the work submitted. Below I have outlined the expectations and detail of each stage.

Stage 1 – Assessment Launch

Here, I hand out the notification and booklet. Within this, I have collated a series of activities and tasks aimed at generating a broad range of topics and locations that students could potentially choose. The activity that is most enjoyed by students' year in and year out is the 'ABC of the SGP' source Matt Carrol (2018).

I wish I could take credit for this, but I learned about this from Matt Carrol's GTA NSW Senior Geography conference on the SGP in 2018. This activity requires students to attribute each letter of the alphabet with a potential topic for the SGP. This promotes thinking

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of a wide range of locations and topic areas, whilst also building collaborative and group thinking amongst the class. In addition to this, students are shown exemplars from a range of topics and presentation types. This sets the expectation and prepares students for the final product. The two primary purposes of this stage are to make students aware of the requirements of the assessment and submission, whilst also generating ideas about the range of topics and locations that they can choose.

At this stage, be sure to tell students that there is no explicit mode of submission requirement. Traditionally, the SGP is done in a written-report format. However, the syllabus does not explicitly state this is required. Alternative options can include vlogs, podcasts, websites, among many others. Additionally, it is important to guide students to think about local topics. The SGP works best when it is local Geography with people and places that students can easily access. This helps students to narrow down the focus of their project and achieve sufficient depth in their analysis of data and sources.

Stage 2 – Interviews

In this step, I hold individual meetings with students during class time in which they propose two ideas that they have thought about since being provided the assessment. I have a conversation around the following:

- What is most interesting for you?
- What is the one that can easily be investigated within the time frame?
- What topic do you think is most valuable?
- What data sources, people and places do you have access to?

Choosing a topic is often the hardest part of the project and can often cause mental blocks and a state of languish. These interviews provide support and instil confidence in the students who appreciate (and often explicitly require) the feedback and guidance, whilst also offering an opportunity to redirect topics early on and ensure that all topics are ethical and safe for students to undertake.

Stage 3

At this stage, students are provided a research proposal scaffold with a structure for them to fill in outlining:

- Their topic and question
- Specific aims, focus questions and hypothesis linked to one another.
- An annotated map of key locations of the project
- Key contacts that will be used in their research
- A timeline of research to be completed

Getting these components completed early is pivotal in guiding effective research and making the inquiry process structured and valuable. From this, the teacher can help support students in gathering their data through a bank of tools that can be loaned from the department to undertake their research.

Note: students are not expected to have completed any significant research by this point.

Stage 4

By this stage, students will (hopefully) have completed the majority of their research. By submitting their research here, I am able to work with them in determining what is valuable and how the data can be best synthesised in order to identify key patterns and trends in the research; with this feedback providing the opportunity for deeper, more accurate, and more effective analysis of the collected data.

For a range of reasons, there will always be students who have completed limited research. If nothing else, this submission date will act as an opportunity for you to discuss with student (and parent if necessary) what they can do from this point to ensure they succeed in the SGP.

Stage 5

The submission of the SGP is met with relief and a sense of achievement. For most, there is a lot of pride in the work they have submitted. Months of hard (and sometimes physical) work and genuine passion have gone into this submission. On the due date, I have tried a variety of strategies which all hold equal value. Some years, the class have a party and watch a documentary and/or movie as a reward for their work. Other years, I have had students create an informal presentation outlining their topic, the research completed, and the conclusion they have come to present to other students. However, the latter option can often add unnecessary stress depending on the class and student.

The Marking

Whilst the marking of this project can be a lengthy process (commiserations if you have a large class), it is a point of genuine enjoyment for me as a teacher. This project, in my opinion, is a point of enthusiasm for Geography, and for the geographical inquiry process. There are not many other opportunities across Stage 4, Stage 5, and Stage 6 Syllabus that allow for this level of student autonomy and personal investment in the learning process. As a teacher, putting in the work through support, facilitation, and guidance early on makes the marking process much smoother overall.

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How you can support students

In my teaching, there have been two keys to success in maintaining student engagement in the project. What has been most effective for me are regular individual interviews and check ins, and the development of a booklet for students to consistently refer back to when they need guidance. This booklet includes examples of research methodologies, FAQs from past years, and checklists for students to complete prior to submission.

Future planning

In all things we do as educators, it is important to reflect on our practice. I have developed my methods through trial and error, and they will continue to evolve year-by-year for as long as the SGP is a part of the Geography Syllabus. The methods used by teacher and student in this process should also develop in line with the new technologies and tools available for students to complete research. No cohort will ever be the same, and each class holds significant variables that influence student capacity in the completion of this project. As such, it is important to reflect on the strengths and areas for improvement of the teacher's role in the SGP, and how the processes you use to ensure student achievement can be influenced.

Final Comments

As mentioned in the article, each year you are able to submit up to four projects from your class to GTA NSW & ACT for marking. In this, the projects considered to be the most outstanding are awarded various prizes (2021 was a \$500 cash prize for first place!). The YGA information brochure can be downloaded [HERE](#): Senior entry submission closes **Friday 24 October 2022** and prize winners notified by March 2023.

I have uploaded resources, such as the research proposal and marking criteria, to the GTA NSW & ACT HSC Teachers Facebook Group Google Drive folder [HERE](#). You are welcome to use these.

If you've made it this far, I'd like to leave you with the following tips for the SGP:

- Guidance and support *are* crucial. I love independent learning strategies and building autonomy in learners, but students can't do this alone
- If students are involving local councils in their primary research, contact them EARLY. Response times can be slow!
- This project is a marathon, not a sprint. It cannot be done last minute. Emphasise the importance and value of this project early on and ensure student buy-in; this is crucial!

The 2022 GTA NSW & ACT Young Geographer Awards

See page 51 of this Bulletin for
Award Categories, Project Specifications & Marking Criteria

Stage 1: Assessment launch

A – Z of the of SGP

Selecting Your Topic

One of the biggest struggles of the Senior Geography Project is selecting the topic, this page is here to help you generate ideas.

Each student within the class will be allocated a selection of letters. With your letters, you need to come up with at least one idea for a proposal.

Letter	Topic
A	
B	
C	
D	
E	
F	
G	
H	
I	
J	
K	
L	
M	
N	
O	
P	
Q	
R	
S	
T	
U	
V	
W	
X	
Y	
Z	

Any additional ideas can go here

SGP Research Proposal

SGP Research Proposal

This proposal is due **Monday Week 7**, but I would encourage you to submit it earlier.

Topic	
Question	

Aim

An **aim** is what you set out to achieve in conducting your research. Your project should have 2-3 aims that are stated as sentences. These sentence should begin with words like: To investigate, to understand, to examine etc.

Focus questions are the specific questions that will need to be answered in order to meet each of your aims, and thereby answer your overarching research question. You should have 2-3 focus questions for each of your aims.

Aim 1	
Focus Question	
Focus Question	
Focus Question	

Aim 2	
Focus Question	
Focus Question	
Focus Question	

Aim 3	
Focus Question	
Focus Question	
Focus Question	

Hypothesis

A **hypothesis** is what you expect to find out as a result of conducting your research. You should have a hypothesis for each of your aims.

This is an 'educated guess' about what you think will be the answer to your aims.

Hypothesis 1	
Hypothesis 2	
Hypothesis 3	

Rationale

This is a section that explains the purpose of your research. This needs to explain the relevance and importance of the topic needs. i.e. Describe your topic / issue and state what your research is trying to find out

Stage 3: Research Proposal Scaffold

Proposed Methods

For each aim you should have a detailed list of BOTH primary and secondary methods. You can choose to list these in bullet point form, or in a table. It would be beneficial to include some sources of secondary data (specific reports/ articles).

Aim 1	Primary Research Methods	
	Secondary Research Methods	
Aim 2	Primary Research Methods	
	Secondary Research Methods	
Aim 3	Primary Research Methods	
	Secondary Research Methods	

Locations

Insert annotated map/screen capture of Google Maps – different coloured pins for different types of data/methods

Key Contacts

Note: You do not need to have made contact with them yet! You just need to know who you can contact when you need to

Contact 1	
Name	
Position	
Phone Number	
Email	
Contact 2	
Name	
Position	
Phone Number	
Email	
Contact 3	
Name	
Position	
Phone Number	
Email	

Timeline

Insert table, calendar or Gantt Chart – all data collection needs to be accounted for, as well as time for data analysis, and writing up of final report

HSC EXAM SUPPORT



The Geography Teachers' Association of NSW & ACT

HSC EXAM PREP PACKAGE FOR STUDENTS & TEACHERS

PURPOSE OF THE PACKAGE

- Examination support and advice for 2022 HSC Students
- Professional Learning for teachers new to teaching Stage 6 Geography and useful for institutions preparing pre service teachers for classroom practice.

CONTENTS

- The package consists of pre-recorded videos and support materials. Teachers can use the materials with their HSC classes, irrespective of the number of enrolled students.
- Seventeen shorter presentations and thirteen presenters representing all sectors, and both Sydney and regional schools. Only two case study presentations are repeated from 2021. **Note there may be small variations in the final package.*

USE

- Recommended for tutorial and in class revision / teacher led revision.
- Transfer key ideas and advice from illustrative examples and case studies to those studied in your school.
- One suggestion for deeper learning during revision is to ask students to prepare their own HSC Preparation video for a section of a topic.
- Not to be used for private tutoring purposes.
- Links and passwords are NOT to be provided to students.
- Streamed directly from Vimeo and not downloadable.
- Support materials downloadable from a Google Drive folder.

ACCESS

- Registration is by school. The registered teacher will receive the links and passwords to access Vimeo and the Google Drive resources
- Access will be available from **Tuesday 14 June to Monday 24 October** (HSC exam)
- Presentations on specific case studies show approaches that can be applied across other studies and will be particularly useful for teachers new to HSC Geography. Stopping a video to draw comparisons will help students contextualise the depth of their knowledge and understanding of their own case studies. Individuals or groups of students can be asked to create their own case study presentations to share with other students. Developing a presentation and creating a script will reinforce key concepts and factual information and expose gaps in their preparation for the HSC.

[See over for package content, cost and registration ...](#)

HSC EXAM PREP PACKAGE FOR STUDENTS & TEACHERS

PACKAGE CONTENT

TOPIC	PRESENTATION	PRESENTER
All Topics	General Advice 1 – Ten Tips to Nail the Trial / HSC Exam	Matt Carroll, Cranbrook, Bellevue Hill
	General Advice 2 – Revision strategies	Renee Yeowell, Knox Grammar, Warrawee
Skills and tools	Skills and tools presentations include mapping and using mathematical techniques.	Sammy Coburn and Alan Cizzio Maitland Grossman High School James Harte, Roseville College
People and Economic Activity	General advice for this topic	Nathalie Newton- Walters, Lindisfarne Anglican Grammar, Terranora
	Economic Activity – Cocoa	John Wigan, Asquith Girls High School
	Economic Activity – Viticulture	Renee Yeowell, Knox Grammar, Warrawee
	Economic Enterprise – Tamburlaine *	Matt Carroll, Cranbrook, Bellevue Hill
Ecosystems at Risk	Biophysical Interactions	Judd Newton, Henry Kendall High School, Gosford
	Vulnerability and Resilience*	Lorraine Chaffer, GTA NSW & ACT
	Importance of management and Protection	Brendan Stewart, The Kings School, Nth Parramatta
	Evaluating management strategies	Judd Newton, Henry Kendall High School, Gosford
	Case study: Alpine ecosystems	Liam Callaghan, Kinross Wolaroi School, Orange
	Case Study: Great Southern Reef	Matt Carroll, Cranbrook Bellevue Hill
	Case Study: Great Barrier Reef *	Matt Carroll, Cranbrook Bellevue Hill
Urban Places	General Advice, World cities and Megacities	Karen Bowden, GTA NSW & ACT
	Urban Dynamics in a Country Town or Suburb	Andrew Toovey, Mount Annan Christian College
	Urban Dynamics in a Large City	Jaye Dunn, Asquith Girls High & Aurora College

* Denotes a repeat presentation from 2021

SCHOOL & TEACHER REGISTRATION

\$ 265 Members \$385 Non-members

Schools with less than 5 students can contact the GTA for a per student rate.

NOTE: All prices include GST

REGISTER HERE

Any questions contact Lorraine Chaffer through GTA NSW & ACT at gta.admin@ptc.nsw.edu.au

Phone: (02) 9716 0378 • Email: gta.admin@ptc.nsw.edu.au • www.gtansw.org.au • PO Box 699 Lidcombe 1825



The Geography Teachers' Association of NSW & ACT

NEW

UNPACKING THE HSC GEO EXAM

A 3hr NESA-accredited, flexible, anywhere, anytime online learning opportunity through Open Learning

This professional development course unpacks the HSC Geography exam using the 2021 exam as an exemplar, and so explores strong approaches for teachers to prepare their students for the HSC.

Through watching the videos, reading the materials and engaging with the discussions in this PD you should become more confident about rigorously preparing your students to interpret and answer questions, and so better prepare them for the HSC Trials and Examinations.

The course objective is for you to complete learning activities where you address the following outcomes:

- apply knowledge of the content and teaching strategies of Geography to develop engaging teaching activities (NESA Standard 2.1.2)
- develop, select and use informal, formal, diagnostic, formative and summative assessment strategies to assess student learning (NESA Standard 5.1.2)

Here are some reviews of *Unpacking the HSC Exam*:

- *Very thorough, informative, and detailed, but most of all valuable. For example, I really enjoyed hearing from the Senior Marker. Such an insightful process that I wouldn't get otherwise.*
- *This course is great! The GTA should feel so proud of the effort and expertise in putting this together.*

To access the course go to openlearning.com/ptc-nsw/courses/geo-hsc

COST: \$90 you can register straight away at that website, by first creating an *Open Learning* account by clicking *Join Up* or *Sign Up*, and then paying using credit card. If you want your school to pay for you, follow the instructions at shorturl.at/goIJ4 to organise an invoice.

If you have any questions email gta.elearning@gmail.com

Completing *Unpacking the HSC Geo Exam* will contribute 3 hours of NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) Accredited PD in the priority area of Delivery and Assessment of NSW Curriculum/EYLF addressing standard descriptors 2.1.2, 5.1.2 from the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers towards maintaining Proficient Teacher Accreditation in NSW.

www.gtansw.org.au • gta.admin@ptc.nsw.edu.au • 02 9716 0378