

Criteria for the assessment of thinking geographically

Thinking geographically is defined as the ability to study, reflect on, reach conclusions and apply ideas to topics and issues in a way that is unique to the subject. For the purpose of assessment, using 'comparative pairs', it is intended that geographical thinking should be seen as being characterised by criteria that need to be reviewed holistically, i.e. without the allocation of weightings to each separate criterion within an overall descriptor.

Elements of the descriptor

The descriptor of geographical thinking is based on several key elements that provide a framework for assessment. These elements are as follows.

- Significance of place (*unique features, but not 'singular'*)
- Interconnectedness of processes (*physical [atmospheric; geomorphological], and human [economic; social; cultural; political]*)
- Importance of evidence (*identifying, distinguishing and using 'data' from various sources: eg pictures, maps, graphics, tables*)
- Framework of concepts (*applying geographical ideas*)
- Focus on issues (*often in the form of a decision making activity, incorporating a values dimension*)

Descriptor statements

The descriptor that exemplifies these elements is as follows. Although presented as separate elements, their strength in assessing geographical thinking lies in regarding them holistically.

- Students demonstrate an appreciation of the unique features of places. They understand how features of site and location together with physical and human processes produce places that are unique contexts for study. They also appreciate the more general processes that act on places to create discernable patterns of land use and landscapes.
- Students identify a range of human and physical processes at work in places and are able to make connections between them. The goal is to think holistically, appreciating how different processes interact and affect each other.
- Students are concerned to identify, select, present, process, evaluate, and interpret both quantitative and qualitative evidence to support or reject arguments, propositions or plans. Appropriate evidence from primary sources, where possible, is accorded special significance. People's values and beliefs are seen as significant in creating viewpoints that affect the interpretation of evidence and that create personal geographies of places. The student's own values and beliefs can also be developed and applied.
- Students base their thinking on a framework of concepts that provide structure, coherence and rigour to their thinking. These include fundamental concepts such as scale, place and space, as well as concepts related to processes such as globalisation, sustainability and interdependence.
- Students focus their thinking on specific issues, problems or dilemmas that relate to the use of spaces. They use geographical perspectives creatively to suggest actions to address the issues and, taking account of available evidence, present ideas for alternative futures.

Special note

Geographical thinking in the e-scape trial

Although the context of devising this descriptor is related to the e-scape work, it is not intended that work already done by students should be assessed against the entirety of the descriptor. The e-scape assessment activity was not written against this descriptor, though several of its elements were included. It is a matter for further work as to how the assessment of geographical thinking can be undertaken in the most appropriate ways.