

# Referee Guide - Role of Referee

Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) accreditation

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# Table of contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Referee role .....	3
Referee requirements .....	4
<b>Advice for referees .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Understanding the Standard Descriptors.....	5
Ethical behaviour .....	5
Professional discussion with the applicant.....	6
Structured interview with a HALT Assessor.....	6
Preparing for the structured interview.....	7
The HALT Module Report .....	7
Appendix 1 .....	8

# Introduction

This guide provides advice to nominated referees about the requirements for referees who support applications for Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher (HALT) accreditation.

The foundation of the accreditation process is the [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#) (the Standards). The Standards are a public statement of what constitutes quality teaching. The Standards define the work of teachers and make explicit the elements of high- quality, effective teaching in schools/early childhood services that result in improved educational outcomes for students/children.

The Standards are a framework that describe the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required of teachers at each career stage. They present a common understanding and language for discourse between teachers, employers, teacher educators, teacher organisations, professional associations and the public.

The higher levels are voluntary levels of accreditation undertaken by highly effective, skilled classroom practitioners recognised as exemplary teachers.

Highly Accomplished Teachers are characterised as independent, highly effective teachers who have a demonstrated impact on student/child learning progress and achievement and the practice of colleagues. They consistently demonstrate practice at the Standards for Highly Accomplished Teacher.

Lead Teachers are characterised as exemplary teachers. They lead improvement processes to enhance student/child learning progress and achievement through evaluation, analysis, and feedback with colleagues. They consistently demonstrate practice at the Standards for Lead Teacher.

## Referee role

Referees verify an applicant's claim for accreditation through direct knowledge of the applicant's practice. All applicants must nominate up to two referees in each evidence module and between three and five referees in total, over the course of the three modules.

The role of a referee is to:

- provide verbal evaluative comments about the applicant's practice in relation to between one and four Standard Descriptors<sup>1</sup>, as allocated by the applicant
- verify the practice described in the applicant's documentary evidence for the allocated Standard Descriptor/s.

When compiling each module applicants provide contact details for the nominated referee/s and identify which Standard Descriptors have been allocated to each referee.

After an applicant has submitted a referee's details as part of an evidence module, a HALT Assessor may contact the referee to engage in a structured interview.

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<sup>1</sup> Each referee is allocated up to a maximum of four Standard Descriptors as part of their role supporting an application for accreditation at HALT. Where a referee has commented on less than four Standard Descriptors in one module, the same referee may be nominated in a different module to comment on different Standard Descriptors, up to the maximum limit.

## Referee requirements

Nominated referees must have first-hand knowledge of the applicant's practice in a NSW school. Referees are expected to provide clear and concise statements verifying the practice identified in the applicant's documentary evidence. They are also required to respond to questions from the HALT Assessor seeking evaluative comments about how the applicant meets between one and four nominated Standard Descriptors by identifying specific examples of the applicant's practice.

Across an application, an applicant's nominated referees must include:

- a teacher colleague
- a teacher who has received professional assistance or guidance from the applicant.

Applicants for Lead Teacher accreditation must ensure that at least one of their nominated referees can comment on the applicant's practice in relation to the Lead Teacher Initiative.

Other referees may include, but are not limited to:

- teachers
- school leaders (including principals)
- initial teacher education students
- education consultants
- teacher educators and/or specialist staff.

Applicants cannot nominate a student as a referee or any individual who has been involved in making judgements about their application, including a HALT Assessor or the External Assessor for the Site Visit.

If an applicant's current principal/service director is not their current line manager, applicants are advised to include the supervisor/line manager as a referee, provided they can specify examples of an applicant's teaching practice demonstrating professional knowledge and engagement with students/children and colleagues.

## Advice for referees

Referees play an important role in supporting an applicant to achieve HALT accreditation. Referees provide evaluative comments and verification of an applicant's annotated documentary evidence to strengthen and confirm practice and impact against the Standards.

Referees should only provide comments that reflect their direct involvement with the applicant and first-hand knowledge of their practice. The role of the referee is not to provide character references or summative judgements about an applicant's abilities. Referees should avoid providing only generalised statements about the applicant's professional qualities that do not address the Standards.

The role of the referee is an important professional responsibility in the accreditation process. If a referee is unsure of their suitability, they should discuss this with the applicant.

## Understanding the Standard Descriptors

The Standards establish the benchmarks and identify the characteristics of high-quality, effective teaching practice that improves student/child learning outcomes at each career stage. An effective teacher integrates and applies the knowledge, practice and professional engagement outlined in the Standard Descriptors to create teaching and learning environments that make learning engaging and highly valued.

Standard Descriptors are multifaceted, complex statements that identify the level of professional knowledge, practice and engagement required at each career stage.

The Standard Descriptors provide the criteria for the verbal evaluative comments and verification of an applicant's practice made by referees. Standard Descriptors can be analysed by understanding the following components:

- **focus** – identifies a specific aspect of teaching practice for that Standard Descriptor across all career stages
- **action** – identifies aspects of teacher action and behaviour and includes verbs such as model, support, initiate, lead, coordinate and evaluate. Demonstrating actions in evidence and annotations is key to demonstrating the level of practice required at each career stage
- **practice** – identifies specific professional skills, behaviour and application of knowledge shaped by context, teacher experience and belief and informed by theoretical and practical knowledge
- **impact** – identifies the change/result/outcome of the specific teaching practice/s within the Standard Descriptors. Inherent in each Standard Descriptor is an outcome or impact that may be explicit or inferred. The impact of teaching practice should be apparent in annotated documentary evidence.

Many Standard Descriptors are multifaceted, and in some instances, applicants may require a range of evidence to fully demonstrate the complexity of a Standard Descriptor. Referees may only be able to verify an aspect of the evidence using their first-hand knowledge.

In such instances, referees should discuss with the applicant the degree of their first-hand knowledge of the applicant's practice, including their capacity to verify and provide evaluative comments about the annotated documentary evidence for each nominated Standard Descriptor. The applicant may choose to respond to the advice by changing the Standard Descriptors assigned to a referee or choosing an alternative referee.

### Ethical behaviour

Referees must maintain high ethical standards in all professional discussions with applicants. The same is expected of applicants. Engaging in professional discussions enables referees and applicants to come to a shared understanding of how evidence of practice and impact has been demonstrated against the nominated Standard Descriptor/s in the annotated documentary evidence.

Referees should not rely on or ask applicants to draft responses. Applicants must not verbally suggest or direct referees to make explicit responses on their behalf. Referees should avoid potential conflicts of interest, including personal relationships with the applicant. Applicants are advised not to nominate referees who are relatives or close friends.

If a referee considers there is a conflict of interest or has an ethical concern, they should discuss this with the applicant first and/or seek guidance from the applicant's principal/service director.

## **Professional discussion with the applicant**

It is recommended that applicants have a professional discussion with each nominated referee before submitting their contact details in an evidence module.

Referees require knowledge of the applicants annotated documentary evidence for each of the Standard Descriptors allocated for comment and verification. Referees will be asked by the HALT Assessor to verify the practice described in an applicant's annotated documentary evidence.

Professional discussions with referees may include:

- unpacking the Standard Descriptor/s allocated to a referee to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the practice and impact of practice identified
- examining the evidence of practice and impact of practice provided in the annotated documentary evidence to demonstrate each allocated Standard Descriptor
- exploring the types of first-hand knowledge referees may have of an applicant's practice and professional achievements over time.

Examples of the practice and impact of practice described in the annotated documentary evidence for each Standard Descriptor, may include but is not limited to, an applicant's involvement in, responsibility for or lead role in:

- planned activities
- organised events
- teaching and learning initiatives
- impacting on the practice, knowledge and professional growth of colleagues
- impacting on student/child learning progress and achievement.

## **Structured interview with a HALT Assessor**

A HALT Assessor may contact a referee at the point of assessing a module. A mutually convenient time for this discussion may be negotiated.

HALT Assessors will conduct a structured, confidential interview of up to 30 minutes. The HALT Assessor will ask four to five questions (see [Appendix 1](#)) to:

- collect verbal evaluative comments about the applicant's practice in relation to between one and four Standard Descriptors, as allocated by the applicant
- verify the practice described in the applicant's documentary evidence for the allocated Standard Descriptor/s.

During the structured interview, referees will be asked additional questions to confirm their professional relationship with the applicant and provide context for their knowledge of the documentary evidence. This information ensures that the mandatory policy requirements for referees are met and it provides the HALT Assessor with a context for the referee's first-hand knowledge of an applicant's practice.

Evaluative comments require the referee to make objective judgements using established criteria and evidence. For HALT accreditation, the criteria are the Standards, and the evidence is direct knowledge of the applicant's teaching practice and impact on students/children, colleagues and the broader education community, where applicable.

During the structured interview, referees should refer to specific examples of an applicant's teaching practice and their first-hand knowledge of the impact on the student/child's learning progress and achievement, colleagues' practice and/or the broader educational community. Referees must refer to the annotated documentary evidence to support reasons for their judgements.

## Preparing for the structured interview

To prepare for the discussion with a HALT Assessor, referees may consider the following questions:

- What have you seen the applicant do in relation to the Standard Descriptor/s? How did they do it? Why did they do it?
- What specific examples of practice and impact of practice can you provide from your first-hand knowledge and involvement?
- How did the applicant demonstrate the **action** described in the Standard Descriptor/s?
- Consider how the verbs used in the Standard Descriptor/s describe the actions and behaviour at each career stage:
  - **Highly Accomplished Teacher:** How did the applicant model, share, support, work with colleagues, assist, initiate, organise, plan, engage?
  - **Lead Teacher:** How did the applicant initiate, lead, mentor, evaluate, monitor, lead by example, implement, review, co-ordinate, advocate, model?
- How effective was the applicant's practice in impacting student/child learning progress and achievement and/or colleagues' practice?
- What evidence is available?
- What was the impact of their actions? On whom did they have an impact?
- How has impact been measured?
- How has the practice and/or impact been sustained over time?

## The HALT Module Report

The HALT assessor will provide a summary of the evaluative comments and record which Standards Descriptors are verified by the referee in the HALT Module Report. A copy of the HALT Module Report is provided to the applicant.

## Appendix 1

# Referee structured interview, evaluative questions

### Questions for colleague or other referee

- Describe your professional relationship with the applicant.
- Provide the context for your first-hand knowledge of the applicant's documentary evidence.
- Describe your direct knowledge of the actions/activities/initiatives/practice/impact used to demonstrate Standard Descriptor X.X.X in the applicant's documentary evidence.
- Explain, using your first-hand knowledge, how the applicant's practice meets/demonstrates Standard Descriptor X.X.X.
- Describe an example of the applicant's practice related to Standard Descriptor X.X.X.
  - What did you see the applicant do?
    - How did they do it?
    - Why did they do it?
    - What was the outcome of the practice?
    - How was the outcome measured?
    - How has the practice/initiative/activity/impact been sustained over time?
- Can you verify the practice described in the annotated documentary evidence for Standard X.X.X is the applicant's own work?

### Questions for mentee referee

- Describe your professional relationship with the applicant.
- Provide the context for your first-hand knowledge of the applicant's documentary evidence for Standard Descriptor X.X.X.
- Using your direct knowledge, explain:
  - how the applicant has provided professional assistance and/or guidance to you
  - the impact of this guidance on student/child learning progress and achievement and/or your own professional growth?
- Describe how the professional assistance and/or guidance provided to you by the applicant demonstrates Standard Descriptor X.X.X.
- Describe a situation (where applicable) where you have been guided/assisted by the applicant to improve student/child learning outcomes.
- Can you verify the practice described in the annotated documentary evidence for Standard Descriptor X.X.X is the applicant's own work?



## Questions for Lead Teacher Initiative referees

- Describe your professional relationship with the applicant.
- Provide the context for your first-hand knowledge of the applicant's Lead Teacher Initiative and documentary evidence for Standard Descriptor X.X.X.
- Describe your first-hand knowledge of the actions/activities/initiatives/practice/impact used to demonstrate Standard Descriptor X.X.X in the applicant's documentary evidence for the Lead Teacher Initiative.
- Using your first-hand knowledge, describe the impact of the applicant's Lead Teacher Initiative on student/child learning.
- Using your first-hand knowledge, describe the impact of the applicant's Lead Teacher Initiative on the practice of colleagues.
- What first-hand knowledge do you have of the positive impact and sustainability of the applicant's Lead Teacher Initiative over time?
- Can you verify the practice described in the annotated documentary evidence for the Lead Teacher Initiative and Standard X.X.X is the applicant's own work?