

Civics and Citizenship Level 9

Chapter 4 — Skills: investigating and evaluating

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Contents

Section	Page
Building and testing questions about a current political, legal or civic issue	2
Weighing evidence: judging sources, data and viewpoints on current issues	15
Proposing changes to political, legal or civic institutions — and defending them	28
How well legal institutions and processes achieve justice	43
Australian and international political actors: their power and their ties to institutions	55

Building and testing questions about a current political, legal or civic issue

A note on “better questions” before we start. The curriculum asks us to develop and evaluate questions, but it does not say what makes one question better than another. In this section, when we evaluate questions we compare them against **five checks** (part 3): focus, clear terms, findable evidence, tested assumptions, and room for more than one perspective. A question that passes more of these checks is treated as the stronger question. Other definitions exist and are not interchangeable with this one — but every task in this section can be answered using these five checks alone.

One more term needs a working meaning. In this section, an **issue** is a matter that people disagree about and that can be looked into with evidence. “What time does the library close?” is a question, but it is not an issue in this sense, because there is nothing to disagree about.

Curriculum focus (VC2HC10S01): draws on VC2HC10S01.E01 and VC2HC10S01.E02.

Theory

1. Every investigation starts with a question

An investigation does not begin with an answer. It begins with a question. A strong question points you to where to look, what evidence to gather, and when you can stop. A weak question wastes your time: it can be answered with one word, or it is so big that nobody can answer it, or it has already decided its own answer before any evidence is looked at.

In this subject, the questions we develop are about three kinds of issues:

- **Political issues** — who holds power, and how decisions get made. Example: the decision to pass a national law setting a minimum age of 16 for social media accounts (Section 1B of this book follows that law from idea to Act).
- **Legal issues** — what the law says, how it is applied, and what duties and rights it creates. Example: what that same law requires social media platforms to do.
- **Civic issues** — how citizens and communities take part. Example: whether young people’s views were heard in the debate about that law, and how they made their views known.

One real issue usually raises all three kinds of question at once. That is why brainstorming works: one issue sends questions out in many directions. To **brainstorm** means to produce as many questions as you can, quickly, without judging them yet. Judging comes next — that is the *evaluating* half of this section.

2. Three kinds of questions

Questions used in investigations sit at three levels. Figure 1 sets them out, with one civic example of each.

Three kinds of questions

Kind	What it asks	Example: the social media minimum-age law	Use
Factual	One right answer, found in one source.	"When did the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024 receive royal assent?"	Builds the facts and dates that other questions need.
Explanatory	How or why something happened; evidence from several sources.	"How did the social media minimum-age law move from idea to Act?"	Follows a process or finds causes.
Evaluative	How well, to what extent, or should; evidence plus reasoning across more than one perspective.	"How well does the law protect young Australians online?"	Judges against a stated standard; contested terms must be defined first.

Most investigations are built like a ladder: one main explanatory or evaluative question, supported by factual questions that supply the facts it needs.

Table of three kinds of questions — factual, explanatory and evaluative — showing what each kind asks for, an example about the social media minimum-age law, and what each kind is used for

- **Factual questions** have one right answer, usually found in one source. They are the bricks of an investigation — dates, numbers, names — but a pile of bricks is not yet a building.
- **Explanatory questions** ask *how* or *why*. They need evidence from several sources put together.
- **Evaluative questions** ask *how well*, *to what extent* or *should*. They need evidence **and** reasoning, and they must deal with more than one perspective. Because they often contain contested terms — *protect*, *fair*, *effective* — those terms must be defined before the question can be answered.

Most investigations are built like a ladder: one main question (explanatory or evaluative), supported by a few factual questions that supply the facts the main question needs.

3. Five checks for a strong question

Here is the tool this section uses to compare questions. Figure 2 lists the five checks.

Five checks for a strong question

Compare every question you brainstorm against these checks before you choose one.

1 FOCUS

One issue, one angle, one scale (local, state, national, regional or global). A question about "the internet" is not focused.

2 CLEAR TERMS

Contested terms — safety, fairness, effective — are defined before answering. Say what the term means here, and whose definition you are using.

3 FINDABLE EVIDENCE

Sources you can actually reach — parliament's records, court decisions, news reports, official figures — can answer it.

4 TESTED ASSUMPTIONS

The claims hiding inside the question are named first. Apply this check to questions you agree with, not only to ones you disagree with.

5 ROOM FOR PERSPECTIVES

The question can hold more than one view. A yes-or-no question usually shuts discussion down.

A question that passes more of the five checks is the stronger question.

Diagram listing five checks for a strong question — is it focused, are its terms clear, can evidence be found, are its assumptions tested, and does it leave room for more than one perspective

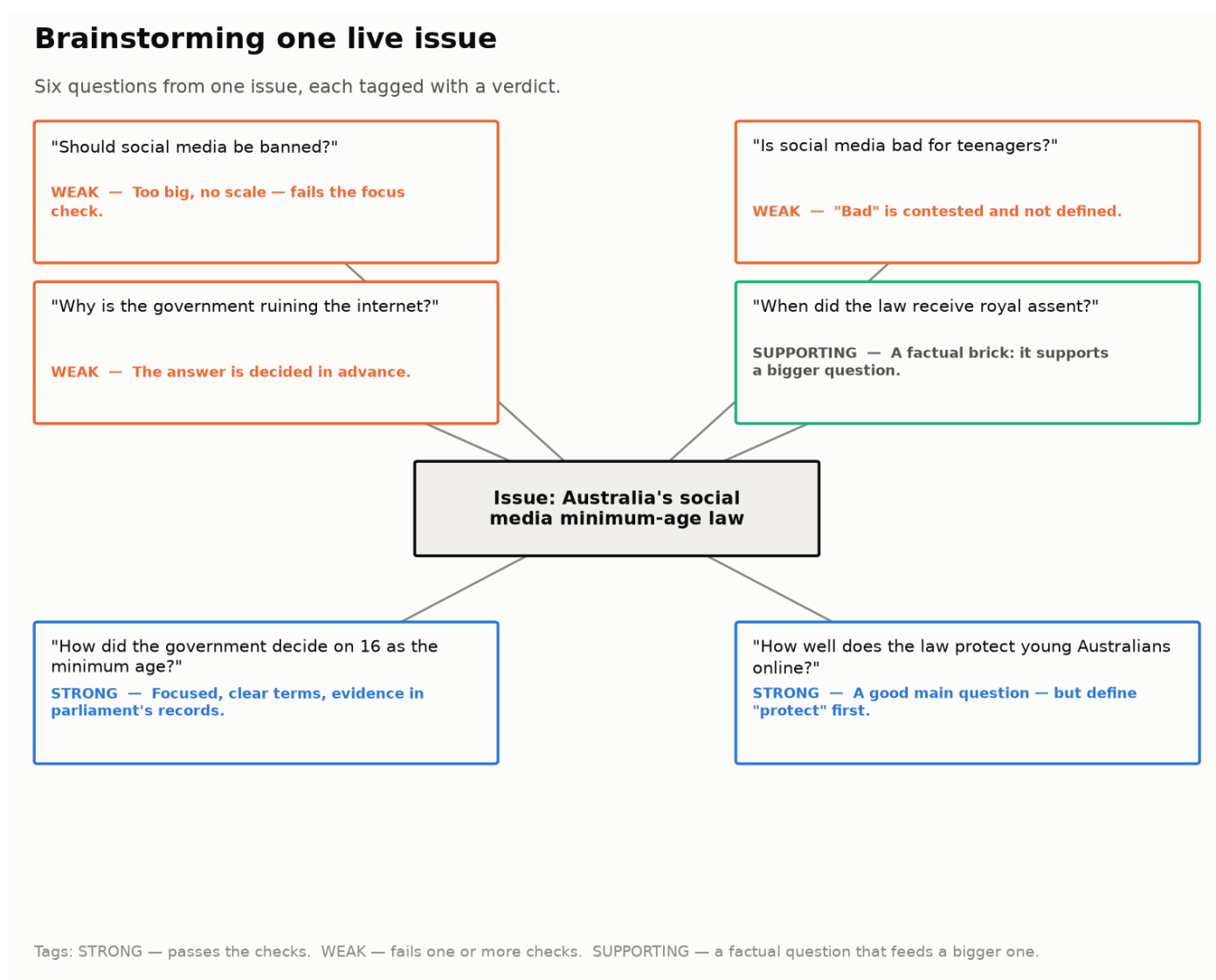
1. **Is it focused?** One issue, one angle, one scale. A question about "the internet" is not focused; a question about one Australian law, made in one year, about one age limit, is.
2. **Are its terms clear?** Civics is full of contested terms — words like *safety*, *fairness* and *effective* that people define differently. Before you can answer a question containing one, state what the term means here and whose definition you are using.
3. **Can evidence be found?** A strong question can be answered with sources you can actually reach: parliament's records, court decisions, news reports, official figures. If no reachable source can answer it, pick another question.
4. **Are its assumptions tested?** Every question carries claims inside it. "*How did the government fix the social media problem?*" assumes there is one problem, and assumes the government fixed it. Name the assumptions before you answer — and apply this check to questions you agree with, not only to questions you disagree with.
5. **Does it leave room for perspectives?** A strong question can hold more than one view. A question that can only ever be answered *yes* or *no* usually shuts a discussion down instead of opening it up.

4. Brainstorming a live issue: the social media minimum-age law

Time to brainstorm (VC2HC10S01.E01). The issue: Australia's social media minimum-age law. The facts, all real and dated:

- The *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024* was introduced into the House of Representatives on 21 November 2024, passed both houses by 28 November 2024 and received royal assent on 10 December 2024 (Parliament of Australia, retrieved 26 August 2026).
- The rule commenced on 10 December 2025. Platforms must take reasonable steps to stop children under 16 from holding accounts (eSafety Commissioner, retrieved 26 August 2026).
- Before the vote, a Senate committee inquiry took submissions from the public, experts and industry (Section 1B).

This one issue is political (a decision by parliament), legal (new duties for platforms) and civic (young people sit at the centre of it) — so questions flow out of it in every direction. Figure 3 shows a brainstorm of six questions, each tagged with a verdict.



Brainstorm map with the issue of Australia's social media minimum-age law at the centre and six student questions around it, each tagged as strong, weak or supporting with a one-line reason

Notice the pattern. The weak questions fail the checks in predictable ways: they are too big (check 1), they use contested terms without defining them (check 2), or they have decided the answer in advance (check 4). The factual question is not the main question — it is a supporting brick.

The next step is evaluating which question will produce the most useful findings. Figure 4 scores the three best candidates against all five checks.

Evaluating the shortlist

Three questions from the brainstorm, scored against the five checks. Pass = the question meets the check.

Question	1 Focus	2 Clear terms	3 Findable evidence	4 Tested assumptions	5 Room for perspectives	Verdict
A "How did the government decide on 16 as the minimum age?"	Pass — one decision, one number	Pass	Pass — parliament's records, inquiry submissions	Pass — the decision is on the record	Pass — several views exist	Most useful answer — one week, one student, real evidence
B "How well does the law protect young Australians online?"	Pass	Fail — "protect" is not defined	Pass	Pass	Pass	Good main question once "protect" is defined
C "When did the law receive royal assent?"	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail — only one answer exists	Supporting fact, not a main question

Verdict for this task: Question A. It passes all five checks and can be answered with public evidence in one week.

Evaluation grid scoring three candidate questions against the five checks, with a verdict row naming which question will produce the most useful answer

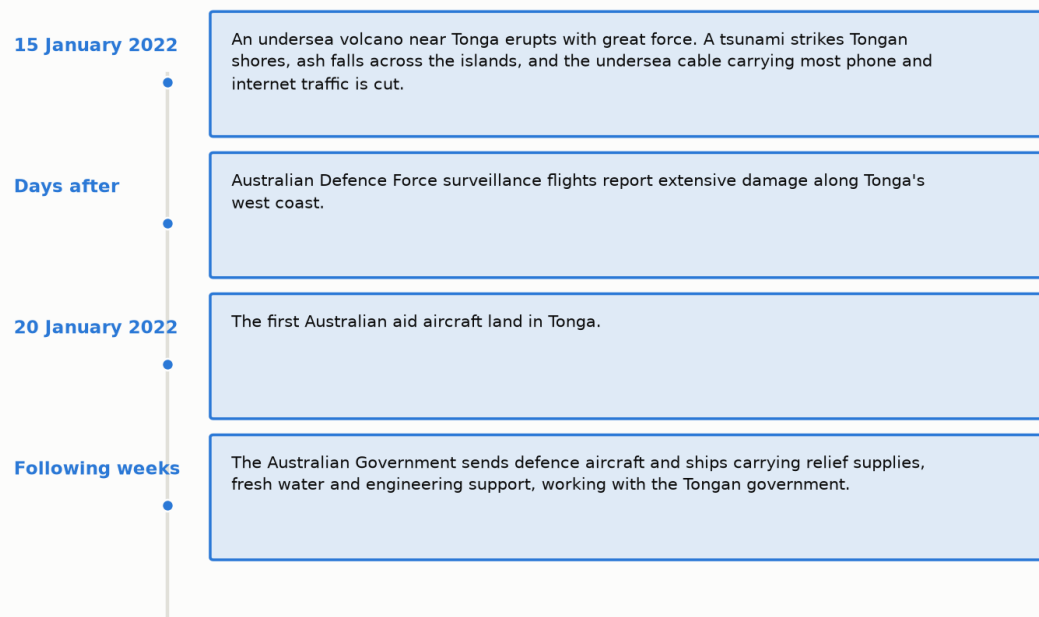
5. Developing questions about how the government has responded

The second family of questions in this section asks **what the Australian Government's response has been to a global or regional issue** (VC2HC10S01.E02). Section 1D of this book covers Australia's regional and global roles in full; here are two fact files — one regional, one global — to question. Both sets of facts are real and dated.

Fact file A — a regional issue: Australia's response to the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai eruption, Tonga. On 15 January 2022, an undersea volcano near Tonga erupted with great force. A tsunami struck Tongan shores, ash fell across the islands, and the undersea cable that carried most of Tonga's phone and internet traffic was cut. Australian Defence Force surveillance flights assessed the damage, and the first Australian aid aircraft landed in Tonga on 20 January 2022. Over the days and weeks that followed, the Australian Government sent defence aircraft and ships carrying relief supplies, fresh water and engineering support, working with the Tongan government (Australian Government Department of Defence and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, retrieved 26 August 2026). Figure 5 lays the facts out.

Fact file A — a regional issue

Australia's response to the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai eruption, Tonga



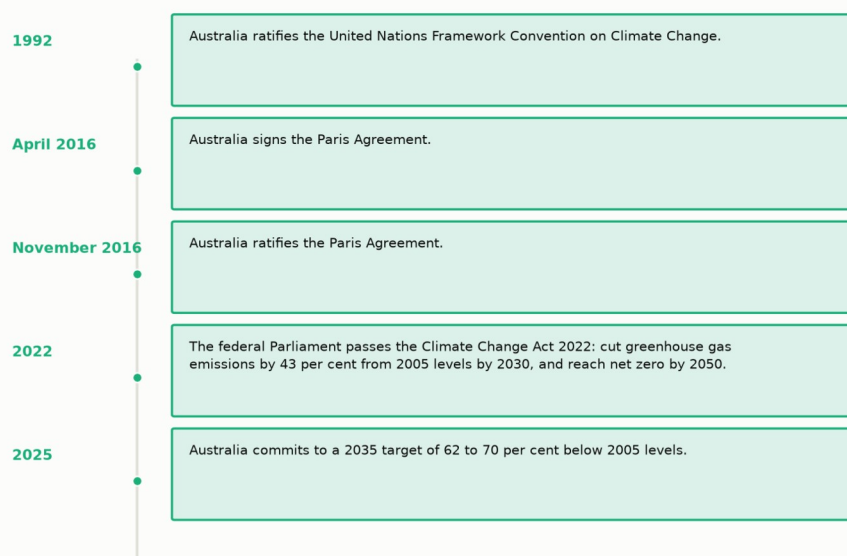
Sources: Australian Government Department of Defence and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; retrieved 26 August 2026. These facts are material for questions, not answers.

Fact file about the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Haapai eruption of January 2022 and Australia's response, with dated points and a source line

Fact file B — a global issue: Australia's response to climate change under international agreements. Australia ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992. Australia signed the Paris Agreement in April 2016 and ratified it in November 2016. In 2022, the federal Parliament passed the *Climate Change Act 2022*, which puts into law a target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 43 per cent from 2005 levels by 2030, and to reach net zero by 2050. In 2025, Australia committed to a 2035 target of 62 to 70 per cent below 2005 levels (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; *Climate Change Act 2022* (Commonwealth); Australian Government, retrieved 26 August 2026). Figure 6 lays these facts out.

Fact file B — a global issue

Australia's response to climate change under international agreements

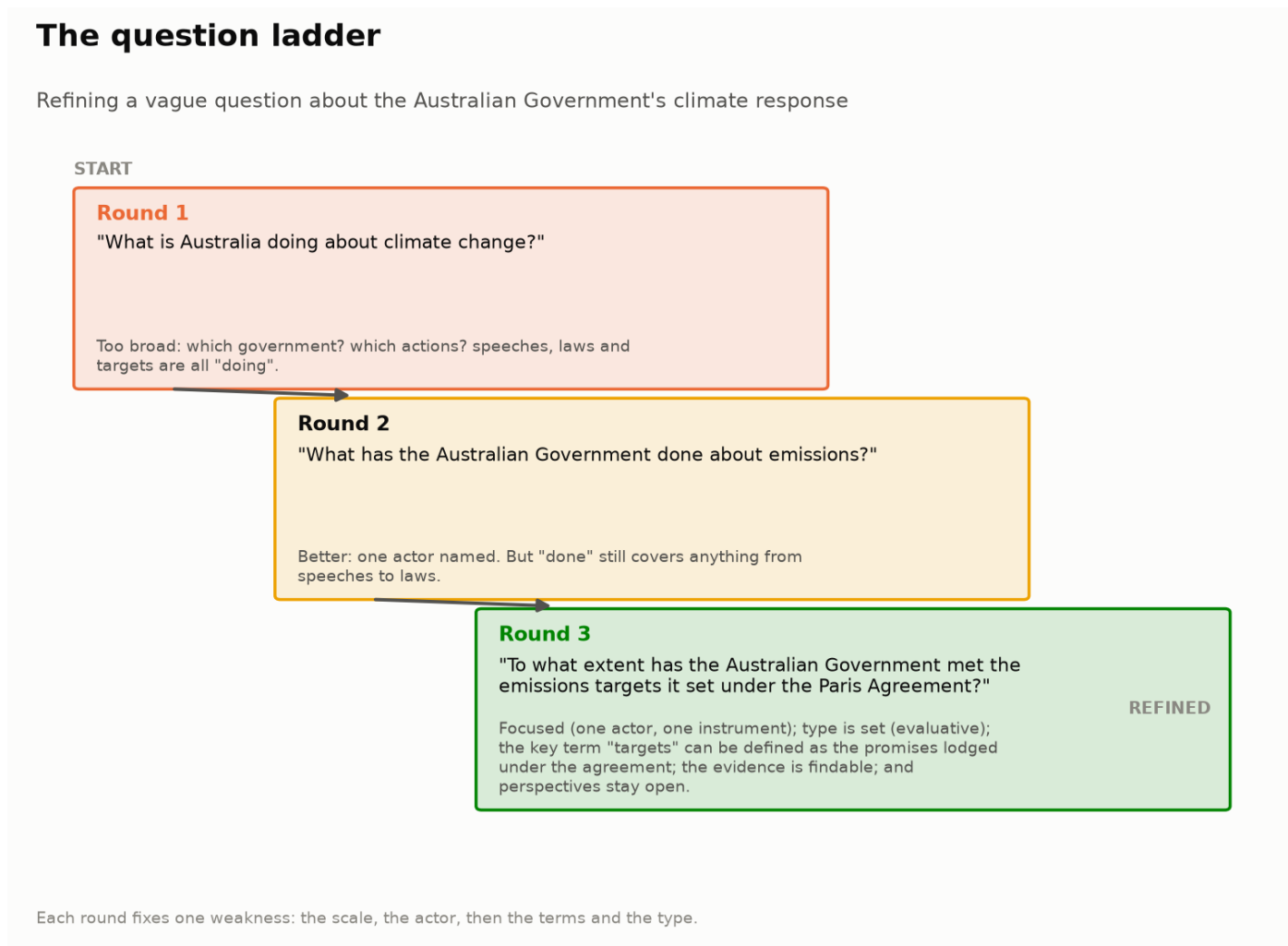


Sources: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; Climate Change Act 2022 (Commonwealth); Australian Government; retrieved 26 August 2026. Whether the response was enough is an evaluative question.

Fact file about Australia's climate change commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, with dated points and a source line

A fact file gives you material for questions, not answers. The facts say what the government **did**. Whether the response was enough, well chosen, or too slow is an evaluative question, and reasonable people answer it differently — that is exactly why it is worth investigating.

From a vague question to a strong one. A first question about a government response is almost always too big. Figure 7 shows the question ladder: three rounds of refining one question about the climate fact file.



Question ladder showing three rounds of refining a question about Australia's climate response, from too broad, to narrower, to a refined investigative question, with notes on what improves at each round

Testing the assumptions. Once a question is refined, pull out the claims hiding inside it. Figure 8 does this for two loaded questions about the same issue — one loaded against the government, one loaded for it. The check applies in both directions.

Testing the assumptions inside a question

One loaded question each way — the check applies in both directions

Loaded for the government

"Isn't Australia's social media law the best response in the world?"

What the question assumes:

- Assumes "best" has an agreed meaning
- Assumes other countries' responses are known and can be compared
- Assumes a law is the right kind of response
- Assumes the answer before the evidence is gathered

Loaded against the government

"How quickly did the Australian Government fix the social media problem?"

What the question assumes:

- Assumes social media use is one problem with a settled boundary
- Assumes the law fixed it — before any evidence is looked at
- Assumes speed is the right measure of the response
- Assumes fixing it was the government's job alone

Name the assumptions inside your own question too — including the ones that point the same way as your own view.

Two panels dissecting the assumptions inside one loaded question critical of the government and one loaded question favourable to it, showing that the check applies in both directions

6. The method, start to finish

Pulling it together, this is the method every investigation in this section follows:

1. **Choose an issue** — contemporary, real, and checkable.
 2. **Brainstorm** — many questions, no judging yet (VC2HC10S01.E01).
 3. **Apply the five checks** to keep the strongest questions.
 4. **Choose the question that will produce the most useful findings**, and say why.
 5. **Refine it** on the question ladder until it is focused and its terms are clear.
 6. **Name its assumptions** — both the ones for and the ones against your own view.
 7. **Sketch the plan**: the evidence you will gather, the perspectives you will seek out, and a source for each.
- Figure 9 gives you the planning grid.

Investigation planning grid

Copy this grid and fill it in for your own investigation

My question	After the question ladder — focused, with clear terms
Kind of question	Factual, explanatory or evaluative?
Focus	Issue, angle and scale (local, state, national, regional or global)
Terms to define	Any contested term, and whose definition you are using
Assumptions inside	Named in both directions — for and against your own view
Evidence I will gather	Facts, dates, figures and records
Perspective 1 + a source	One view, and where you will read or hear it
Perspective 2 + a source	A different view, and where you will read or hear it
My verdict after the checks	Which question you chose, and why it gives the most useful answer

A plan that names its terms and its assumptions is worth more than a long list of questions.

Blank investigation planning grid with rows for the chosen question, its type, the five checks, assumptions, evidence, perspectives and sources, for students to copy

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Task: Three students brainstormed questions about the social media minimum-age law.

- **Student A:** “Is social media bad?”
- **Student B:** “How did the Australian Government decide on 16 as the minimum age?”
- **Student C:** “Should governments stay out of the internet?”

Which question will produce the most useful findings for a one-week class investigation? Use the five checks.

Working	Comment
Check 1 — focus. A has no limits: bad for whom, in what way, where? C is just as wide: which governments, which parts of the internet? B is focused: one decision, by one government, about one number.	Check 1 removes A and C almost at once.
Check 2 — clear terms. A uses <i>bad</i> , a contested term with no definition given. C uses <i>stay out</i> , which would need defining. B’s terms — <i>decide</i> , <i>minimum age</i> , <i>16</i> —	Contested terms must be defined before a question can be answered.

Working	Comment
are clear.	
Check 3 — findable evidence. B can be answered with parliament’s records and the Senate inquiry’s submissions, which Section 1B shows are real and public. A and C have no reachable evidence that could settle them.	A question nobody can gather evidence for is not an investigation question.
Check 4 — assumptions. A assumes one yes-or-no answer covers everything. C assumes governments are either “in” or “out”. B assumes a decision was made — and that assumption can be checked from the record (royal assent, 10 December 2024).	Testable assumptions are fine; hidden, untested ones are not.
Check 5 — perspectives. B can hold several views: people who supported 16, people who wanted a different age or a different design, and platforms’ own arguments.	More than one perspective keeps the question open.
Verdict: Student B’s question.	It passes all five checks; A and C fail three each.

Example 2 — unscaffolded

Task: Using Figure 6 (the climate fact file), write one refined investigative question about the Australian Government’s response to climate change. Then list two assumptions your question carries.

How to approach it. Start broad, then refine on the ladder: fix the scale (the Australian Government, not “the world”), fix the subject (one response, such as the targets in the *Climate Change Act 2022*), and decide what kind of question you are asking (explanatory or evaluative). If your question contains a contested term, say what it means. For the assumptions, ask yourself: what would have to be true for my question to make sense? A model response is in the Model responses section at the end.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Look at Figure 1. Which kind of question has one right answer, and why is that kind of question not enough on its own for an investigation?

Q2. Classify each question as factual, explanatory or evaluative: (a) “How many members does the Australian Senate have?” (b) “How does a bill become an Act of Parliament?” (c) “How well does the Senate review bills?”

Q3. Look at Figure 2. List the five checks for a strong question.

Q4. Consider this question: “Why did the Australian Government waste money on the Tonga response?” (a) Write down two assumptions carried inside it. (b) Now consider the opposite question: “Why didn’t the Australian Government send more help to Tonga?” Write down one assumption it carries. (c) What does comparing the two questions tell you about how assumptions work?

Q5. Look at Figure 5 (the Tonga fact file). Write one factual question and one explanatory question that the fact file can help you answer.

Q6. Look at Figure 7. Name two ways the round-3 question is stronger than the round-1 question.

Unscaffolded

Q7. “Does Australia do enough about climate change?” Explain two ways this question fails the five checks, then rewrite it so that it passes them.

Q8. Brainstorm five questions about Australia’s response to the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha‘apai eruption (use Figure 5). Apply the five checks and pick your strongest question. Give reasons for your choice.

Q9. A classmate says, “Evaluative questions are just opinion questions, so you don’t need evidence for them.” Write a reply in three or four sentences.

Q10. Using Figure 6, write one evaluative question about Australia’s climate commitments. Your question must contain at least one contested term — define that term the way check 2 asks, stating whose definition you are using.

Inquiry task

Source 4.1 — Two government responses at a glance

	Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha‘apai eruption	Climate change commitments
Scale of the issue	Regional — Tonga and the Pacific	Global — the whole world
What happened	Undersea eruption on 15 January 2022; tsunami, ash, and the undersea cable cut	Rising greenhouse gas emissions worldwide, and international agreements to cut them
What the Australian Government did	Surveillance flights, then aid aircraft and ships carrying relief supplies, fresh water and engineering support	Ratified the Paris Agreement in 2016; passed the <i>Climate Change Act 2022</i> (43 per cent cut by 2030, net zero by 2050); committed in 2025 to a 2035 target of 62 to 70 per cent below 2005 levels
When	January to February 2022	1992, 2016, 2022 and 2025

Compiled by ClassBasics from Australian Government sources: Department of Defence and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Tonga response); United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Climate Change Act 2022 (Commonwealth) (climate commitments). Retrieved 26 August 2026.

The task — your investigation starts here. This task is the investigation itself: the questions you produce are the product. Choose **one** of the two responses in Source 4.1.

- Brainstorm.** Write at least six questions about the response you chose. Your set must include at least one factual question, one explanatory question and one evaluative question (use Figure 3 as a model).
- Evaluate.** Take your three best questions and score each one against the five checks, using a copy of the grid in Figure 4. Decide which question will produce the most useful findings, and say why.
- Develop.** Refine your chosen question on the question ladder (use Figure 7 as a model), then name the assumptions inside it (use Figure 8). Test both directions: does your question load claims *against* the government’s response, and does it load claims *for* it? Fix any loaded wording you find.
- Plan.** On a copy of the grid in Figure 9, sketch your plan: the evidence you would gather, two perspectives you would seek out, and one source for each perspective.

Marks are awarded for the quality of your reasoning — checks applied, terms defined, assumptions named — not for whether your final view agrees with the government’s response. Two students making opposite arguments can both do well if both reason carefully from defined terms and dated evidence.

Answers

Q1. Factual questions have one right answer. They are not enough on their own because an investigation needs a main question that pulls facts together — a *how, why, how well* or *to what extent* question — and one fact by itself cannot be investigated, only looked up.

Q2. (a) Factual. (b) Explanatory. (c) Evaluative.

Q3. Focus; clear terms; findable evidence; assumptions tested; room for perspectives.

Q4. (a) Any two of: that the money was wasted (rather than well spent); that the response was about money rather than lives or duties; that Tonga's recovery was Australia's job to fund. (b) Any one of: that Australia could have sent more; that sending more was the right kind of help; that the level of help was decided by the Australian Government alone. (c) Assumptions sit inside questions on every side of a debate — questions critical of the government carry them, and questions favourable to the government carry them too. The check must be applied in both directions, including to questions you agree with.

Q5. Factual — for example: “On what date did the first Australian aid aircraft land in Tonga?” Explanatory — for example: “Why did the eruption cut Tonga's phone and internet links?” or “How did Australia's response change between 15 January and 20 February 2022?”

Q6. Any two of: it names the actor (the Australian Government, not “the world”); it names the subject (emissions targets under the Paris Agreement); it sets the type (evaluative — *to what extent*); it points to where the evidence lives (the targets Australia has lodged and the official figures); its key term (*commitments*) is one a student can define.

Q7. See Model responses.

Q8. See Model responses.

Q9. See Model responses.

Q10. See Model responses.

Inquiry task. See Model responses for an example of part (c). Parts (a), (b) and (d) are your own product; check them against Figures 3, 4 and 9.

Model responses

Example 2. Question: “To what extent has the Australian Government met the emissions targets it set for itself in the *Climate Change Act 2022*?” Assumptions carried: (1) that the targets in the Act are the right measure of the government's response — a critic could argue the Act itself was the response to judge, or that international promises matter more; (2) that “meeting a target” is something that can be measured with official figures — which is true, but the figures can be read differently depending on the starting year used. Both assumptions are named, so the question stays open.

Q7. The question fails check 1 (no focus — “enough” compared to what, done by whom, over what time?) and check 2 (the contested term *enough* is not defined). It also fails check 5, because it invites a yes-or-no answer. A rewrite: “To what extent did the *Climate Change Act 2022* strengthen Australia's emissions targets compared with the targets Australia lodged under the Paris Agreement in 2016?” Here *strengthen* can be defined (a bigger cut, an earlier date, or a law rather than a policy promise), the actor and the scale are fixed, and the evidence is findable.

Q8. Example set: (1) “When did the first Australian aid aircraft land in Tonga?” (factual). (2) “What supplies did Australian ships carry to Tonga in January 2022?” (factual). (3) “How did Australia work with the Tongan government during the response?” (explanatory). (4) “Why did the Australian Government treat the Tonga response as urgent?” (explanatory). (5) “To what extent did Australia's response match the damage the eruption caused?” (evaluative). Strongest choice: (5) — it is focused on one event and two things to compare (the damage and the response), its terms can be defined, dated evidence exists for both sides, and it can hold more than one perspective. Question (4) also passes most checks but is harder to answer, because the government's reasons are not all on the public record.

Q9. Evaluative questions need evidence more than other questions do, not less. An opinion (“I think the law is good”) needs no support, but an evaluative question (“How well does the law protect young Australians online?”) asks you to judge against a standard — and the standard, the facts and the different perspectives all need evidence. Without evidence, you have not evaluated anything; you have only reported a feeling.

Q10. Example: “Was Australia’s 2035 target of 62 to 70 per cent below 2005 levels ambitious enough?” The contested term is *ambitious*. Here it is used in the sense of the Paris Agreement’s own language: a target is ambitious if it goes further than the country’s earlier promised cuts and keeps its share of the agreed global effort. Other definitions exist — a government might call any target that it can meet “ambitious” — and they are not interchangeable with this one.

Inquiry task (c), example. Chosen question after refining: “To what extent did Australia’s aid to Tonga in January 2022 match the scale of the damage caused by the eruption and tsunami?” Assumptions named: (1) that the damage can be measured (it can, from damage reports, but some damage — like the lost cable’s effect on the economy — is hard to price); (2) that matching damage is the right test of the response (someone could argue the right test is speed, or Tonga’s own priorities, rather than the size of the damage). Loaded-wording check: the question does not load against the government (“did too little”) or for it (“generous response”) — both loaded versions were dropped in refining.

Sources for this section

All sources retrieved 26 August 2026. Real-world facts in this section come from: the Parliament of Australia’s bills records and the eSafety Commissioner for the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024* dates (as used in Section 1B); the Australian Government Department of Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the response to the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha’apai eruption of 15 January 2022; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for Australia’s membership and the Paris Agreement; the *Climate Change Act 2022* (Commonwealth) for the 2030 and 2050 targets; and the Australian Government for the 2035 target committed in 2025.

Weighing evidence: judging sources, data and viewpoints on current issues

A note on the word “evaluate” before we start. To *evaluate* a source is not to retell it, and not to agree or disagree with it. It is to put it to the test and answer one question: **how far can this source be trusted — and for which question?** A *source* is anything that gives you information about an issue: a law, a court decision, a news report, a set of numbers, a post. A source can be strong for one job (giving facts) and weak for another (proving a point). Every task in this section is marked on the quality of your testing and your reasoning — never on which side of a debate you end up on.

Curriculum focus (VC2HC10S02): draws on VC2HC10S02.E01, VC2HC10S02.E02, VC2HC10S02.E03 and VC2HC10S02.E04.

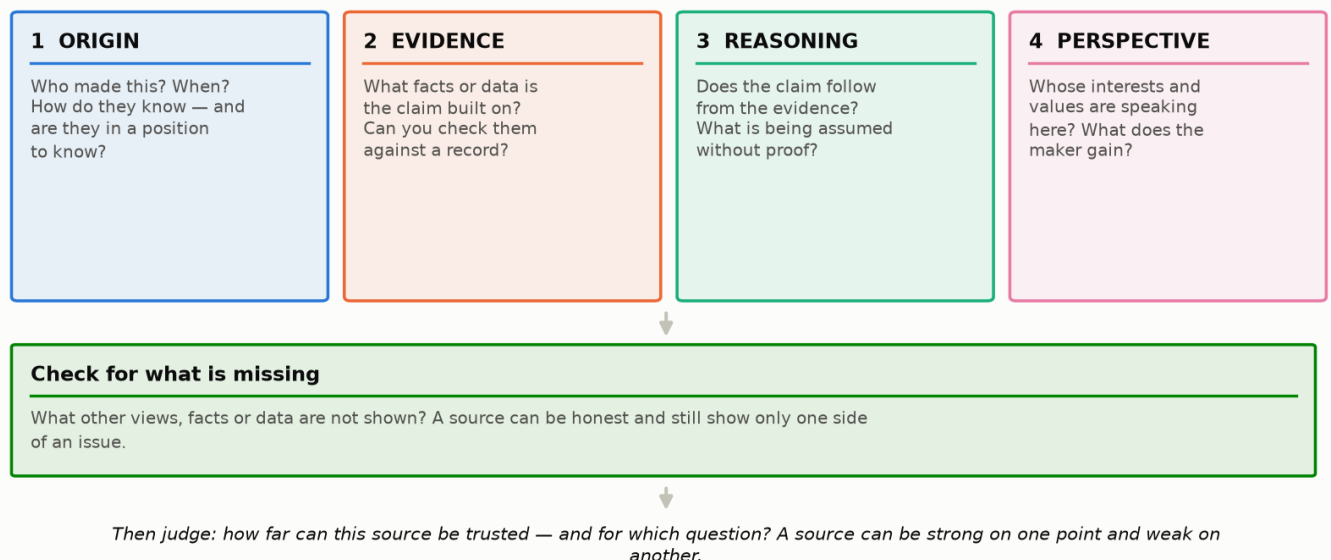
Theory

1. What evaluation is — and what it is not

On any contemporary issue you will meet a crowd of sources: news reports, posts, videos, numbers, claims. Your job in this section is not to collect what they say. It is to test them. Figure 1 gives you the four tests this book uses, plus the habit that catches people out: checking for what is **missing**.

Four tests for any source

Evaluation means putting a source to the test — not just retelling what it says.



ClassBasics. Parts 1 to 6 of this section put the four tests to work.

Diagram of four test cards — origin, evidence, reasoning, perspective — leading to a fifth card, “Check for what is missing”, and then to a verdict line: judge how far the source can be trusted, and for which question

Two warnings before you use the tests. First, testing a source is not attacking the person who made it: a well-meaning person can share a weak source, and a person with something to gain can share a strong one. Second, the verdict is not “good source” or “bad source”. The verdict is always *for which question* the source can be trusted.

2. Where civic information comes from

The running case in this section is a real, recent Australian law: the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024*. The law requires certain social media platforms — including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube and X — to take reasonable steps to stop Australians under 16 from holding accounts. The obligation began on 10 December 2025, a year after Royal Assent. There is no parent-consent option, and children and parents are not

punished; the duty sits on the platforms, and the eSafety Commissioner watches over it. Section 1B of this book traced how the law was made; here the law is our testing ground. (Platforms such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Discord, Roblox, Steam and YouTube Kids are not covered.)

Figure 2 sorts the sources you meet on this — or any — issue into four kinds, with the first question each kind demands.

Where does civic information come from?

Four kinds of source you will meet on any contemporary issue — with examples from the under-16 social media debate.

Kind of source	Example from this issue	First question to ask
Official records — laws, court decisions, votes in parliament, election results	The text of the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, on legislation.gov.au	What does the record actually say?
News media — reports, interviews and headlines	News reports on the Senate vote of 28 November 2024	Who wrote this, and how do they know?
Data and statistics — numbers gathered by an agency or a research group	The AEC figure that 90.7 per cent of enrolled voters voted at the 3 May 2025 federal election	What was measured — and what was not?
Opinion and social media — posts, videos and campaign messages	Posts about the under-16 ban by users, platform companies and campaign groups	Whose interest does this serve?

Each kind of source needs a different first question. All four still sit the same four tests from Figure 1.

ClassBasics, built from the sources listed at the end of this section (retrieved 26 August 2026).

Table of four kinds of civic source — official records, news media, data and statistics, and opinion and social media — with an example of each from the under-16 social media debate and the first question to ask of each kind

3. A primary source you can check

The strongest habit in evaluation is checking a claim against the record it came from. The passage of the social media age law is a perfect first check, because the votes are published and anyone can read them (Figure 3).

A primary source: how Parliament decided the social media age law

Votes in Parliament are recorded and published — anyone can check them.

Stage and date	Vote	Who voted each way
House of Representatives, 27 November 2024	101 yes, 13 no	Yes: the Australian Labor Party, most of the Coalition (the Liberal and National parties) and four of the independents. No: the Australian Greens, six independents, Rebekha Sharkie, Bob Katter and Liberal MP Bridget Archer.
Senate, 28 November 2024	34 yes, 19 no	The no votes included Liberal senator Alex Antic, National senator Matt Canavan and senators who belong to none of the three largest parties.
Royal Assent, 10 December 2024	The bill became law	Given by the Governor-General, Sam Mostyn. The law's age obligation — platforms must take reasonable steps to stop under-16 accounts — started on 10 December 2025.

Notice that the votes did not split along party lines: members and senators on both sides voted yes, and members and senators on both sides voted no. Records like this one let you check what any news report says about them.

Source: Parliament of Australia (aph.gov.au) and the Federal Register of Legislation (legislation.gov.au), retrieved 26 August 2026.

Table of the three stages of the social media age law — House of Representatives 27 November 2024 (101 yes, 13 no), Senate 28 November 2024 (34 yes, 19 no), Royal Assent 10 December 2024 — listing who voted each way at each stage

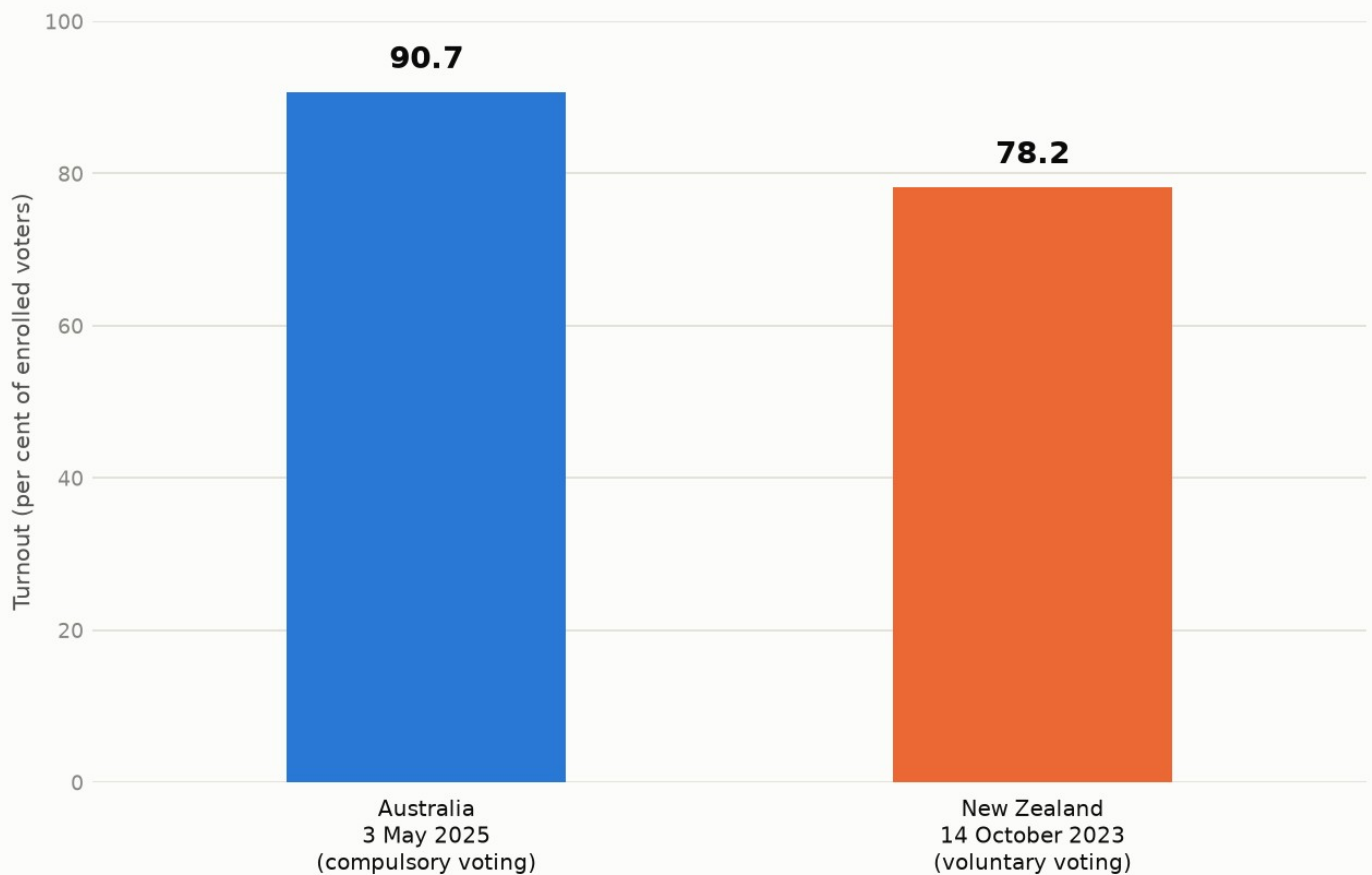
Now test a headline. A news report might say “the law sailed through with almost no opposition”. Against the record: in the House of Representatives, 101 members voted yes and 13 voted no — so the headline is right about that house. But in the Senate, 19 of 53 senators voted no, including members of both major parties. So the headline overstates the case: the law passed clearly, but not with “almost no opposition”. That correction — claim checked against record, kept where right, corrected where wrong — is evaluation. Notice you did not need to take a side on the law itself.

4. Evaluating data

Numbers are sources too, and they get the same four tests. Section 1C of this book compares Australia’s democratic processes with New Zealand’s. One number pair you will meet there is turnout — the share of enrolled voters who cast a vote (Figure 4).

Turnout at each country's most recent federal election

Turnout is the share of enrolled voters who cast a vote.



Sources: Australian Electoral Commission; New Zealand Electoral Commission. Retrieved 26 August 2026.

Bar chart of turnout at each country's most recent federal election: Australia, 3 May 2025, compulsory voting, 90.7 per cent; New Zealand, 14 October 2023, voluntary voting, 78.2 per cent

The maths you need here is the maths you know: Australia's bar is 12.5 percentage points higher than New Zealand's. The civics you need is harder — what the number can and cannot carry (Figure 5).

What the turnout chart does — and does not — tell you

Numbers need reading. The same data can sit inside different arguments.

What the numbers show

At the most recent federal elections, Australia's turnout (90.7 per cent) was 12.5 percentage points higher than New Zealand's (78.2 per cent). Voting is compulsory in Australia and voluntary in New Zealand. Almost every enrolled Australian voted in 2025.

What the numbers do not show

Whether voters knew much about the issues. How people voted. Whether compulsory voting is a good or a bad thing for democracy. Anything else about how well either democracy works.

The gap between the two bars invites an explanation — but the bars themselves do not give one. Saying 'compulsory voting explains the gap' is an argument, and it needs its own evidence.

ClassBasics. Figures as in Figure 4 of this section.

Two cards side by side: what the turnout numbers show (the gap, the compulsory-versus-voluntary difference, near-universal voting in Australia) and what they do not show (how informed voters were, how they voted, whether compulsory voting is good or bad)

Data never argues for itself. The moment someone says “this number *shows* that...”, they have added an argument to the number, and the argument needs its own testing. That is the difference between **reading** data and **using** data as evidence.

5. Evaluating perspectives

Every source carries a perspective — a view shaped by the maker's interests and values. Naming a perspective is not an insult; it is test 4 from Figure 1. The habit that makes perspective-checking fair is the **steelman**: to steelman a view is to state it in its strongest, fairest form before you test it — never in a weak or silly form that is easy to knock down. If you cannot state the other side so that its holders would say “yes, that is my view”, your evaluation of it does not count.

Figure 6 steelmans four perspectives on the under-16 ban.

Four perspectives on the under-16 social media ban

Each view stated in its strongest form — the steelman test from part 5 of this section.

Supporters — the government and the MPs who voted yes

Children face real harms online, and the companies that run the platforms make money from children's attention. Parliament should act now. Even where some of the evidence is not settled, the cost of doing nothing may be too high.

Critics — digital rights groups and some researchers

The evidence that the ban will reduce harm is not settled. The ban may push young people into hidden corners of the internet, cut them off from information and support, and weaken their rights to expression and to information under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The platform companies

The law puts the duty on us, not on children or parents. We must take reasonable steps to stop under-16 accounts, and we already run safety tools. Our concern is how age checks are done and what personal data they gather.

Young people

Views are split. Some young people welcome a safer space online. Others point out that they had no vote and little say in a law that shapes their daily lives.

None of these views is a simple 'for' or 'against' — and each one has an interest behind it. Naming the interest is part of the evaluation, not an attack on the person holding the view.

Positions built by ClassBasics from the public debate over the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024; retrieved 26 August 2026.

Four perspective cards on the under-16 social media ban, each stated in its strongest form: supporters in government and the parliament, critics in digital rights groups and some researchers, the platform companies, and young people themselves

When you evaluate a source on a contested issue, ask: which card is this source speaking from — including cards you agree with? Then check whether the source's evidence would convince someone standing on a different card. If it would, the source is strong. If it only persuades people who already agree, it is doing something other than proving its point.

6. Misinformation and disinformation

Two kinds of false information pollute every contemporary issue, and evaluation treats them differently (Figure 7).

Misinformation and disinformation

Both spread false claims. The difference is the intent — and that changes how you respond.

	Misinformation	Disinformation
What it is	False or misleading information shared by someone who believes it is true	False information made and shared by someone who knows it is false, in order to mislead
Who usually spreads it	Anyone — often a person trying to help or to warn others	A person or group trying to shape what people think, for money or for power
Example type	An old photo shared as if it showed a new event	A made-up claim posted through fake accounts to stir up anger

How to check either one

Find the original record. Check the date. Ask who gains if the claim is believed. Look for a second, independent source before you share it — and if you cannot find one, say so.

ClassBasics. See also section 3C of this book on the influence of misinformation and disinformation in public debate.

Table contrasting misinformation — false or misleading information shared by someone who believes it is true — with disinformation — false information made and shared on purpose to mislead — plus a card of checking habits for both

The same checking habits work on global issues. False and misleading claims also circulate about climate change and about people movement — the global contemporary issues you meet in sections 1D and 3B of this book — and the fix is the same: find the original record, check the date, ask who gains, and look for a second, independent source.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Task: A news article says: “Australia’s turnout of 90.7 per cent beats New Zealand’s 78.2 per cent by a wide margin — proof that Australia’s democracy is healthier than New Zealand’s.” Evaluate the article’s use of its sources. (The article’s two numbers come from the sources behind Figure 4.)

Working	Comment
Origin. The two numbers match the official counts: the Australian Electoral Commission reports 90.7 per cent of enrolled voters voted on 3 May 2025, and the New Zealand Electoral Commission reports 78.2 per cent on 14 October 2023.	Test 1 and 2 pass: the facts come from the agencies that ran the elections, and anyone can check them.
Reasoning. The article adds the word “proof” and the claim “healthier”. But Figure 5 shows what the numbers do not measure: how informed voters were, how they voted, whether the voting rules are good. Turnout is one measure of participation, not a measure of health.	The facts are right; the step from the facts to the claim is not checked. A right number inside a too-big claim is the most common weak source of all.

Missing. The article leaves out the biggest fact about the gap: voting is compulsory in Australia and voluntary in New Zealand. Much of the 12.5-point gap is the rule, not the mood of the voters.

Checking for what is missing is test 5. A source can be honest and still leave out the fact that changes the story.

Verdict. The article is reliable for the two turnout figures and weak as evidence that one democracy is healthier than the other.

The verdict splits the question — which is exactly what “evaluate” means (Figure 8).

A model evaluation, with notes

Evaluating Source B — the New Zealand turnout source. Each sentence does one job.

Source B gives the official figures for New Zealand's 2023 general election: 78.2 per cent of enrolled voters voted, and voting was voluntary.

— **ORIGIN** — who made it, and how they know

The figures come from the agency that ran the election and can be checked against its published results, so the data can be trusted.

— **EVIDENCE** — the facts are checkable

But a turnout figure measures how many people voted, not how well informed they were — so the source alone cannot show that voluntary voting makes a democracy better or worse.

— **REASONING** — the limits of the claim

The source carries the perspective of an official count, not a judgment about voting systems.

— **PERSPECTIVE** — named and allowed for

It is therefore reliable for facts about turnout, but weak as evidence about whether Australia should keep compulsory voting.

— **VERDICT** — reliable for X, weak for Y

The verdict splits the question: one source can be strong for one job and weak for another. That is what 'evaluate' means — it is not 'agree' or 'disagree'.

ClassBasics model. The same five moves appear in the model responses at the end of this section.

Model paragraph evaluating the New Zealand turnout source, with each sentence labelled by the job it does: origin, evidence, reasoning, perspective, and a verdict that splits the question

Example 2 — unscaffolded

Task: Australia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 17 December 1990 — a promise, in international law, to bring its laws into line with the Convention. Using Figure 9 and Sources 4.1–4.3 at the end of this section, analyse the degree to which Australia is meeting this one obligation in the social media age law. Reach your own judgment. (Section 2C of this book studies Australia’s international obligations; here the task is to evaluate the sources about this one.)

Measuring Australia against one obligation: the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Australia signed the Convention on 22 August 1990 and ratified it on 17 December 1990. Rights to protection and rights to participation can pull in different directions over one law.

Articles that support the law

Article 3 — in all decisions about children, their best interests must come first. Article 17 — children should be able to get information that is good for them, and be kept away from harmful material. Article 19 — children must be kept safe from harm.

Articles that raise questions about the law

Article 12 — children have the right to say what they think about matters that affect them, and for those views to be given real weight. Article 13 — children have the right to expression, which includes seeking and receiving information.

To judge the extent to which Australia is meeting this one obligation, weigh both columns against the evidence and reason to your own judgment. That is the task in Worked example 2 and in Question 11.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); dates from the United Nations Treaty Collection, retrieved 26 August 2026.

Two-column diagram of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: articles that support the law (3, 17 and 19) beside articles that raise questions about it (12 and 13), with a note to weigh both columns against the evidence

How to approach it. Figure 9 splits the Convention’s articles into two columns: articles that support the law and articles that raise questions about it. Your analysis should (1) name what the law clearly delivers for the first column, (2) name what critics say it costs the second column, and (3) weigh the two against each other to a judgment *in degree* — for example, “largely meeting the obligation, except...”, or “meeting one side of the obligation while straining the other”. A judgment in degree is the task; a flat “yes it does / no it doesn’t” is not. You will be marked on the quality of your reasoning, not on the judgment you reach. A model response is in the Model responses section.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Look at Figure 1. (a) List the four tests. (b) What extra habit sits between the four tests and the verdict?

Q2. Look at Figure 2. (a) Which kind of source is the text of the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024*? (b) Which kind of source is a video posted by a platform company about the ban? (c) What is the first question to ask of each?

Q3. Look at Figure 3. (a) In which house did the larger number of members vote no, and how many? (b) Give one name from the “no” side in the House and one from the “no” side in the Senate. (c) What does the pattern of the votes tell you about how the issue cut across parties?

Q4. Look at Figures 4 and 5. (a) What is the difference in turnout between the two elections, in percentage points? (b) Name two things the chart does **not** show.

Q5. Look at Figure 6. Match each statement to the perspective card it speaks from: (i) “The duty should sit on the companies that profit from children’s attention, not on children or parents.” (ii) “We had no vote and little say in a law that shapes our daily lives.” (iii) “Even where some of the evidence is not settled, the cost of doing nothing may be too high.”

Q6. Look at Figure 7. Classify each case as misinformation or disinformation, and say which words in the figure decide it: (a) your aunt shares a post warning that a ban started “this week”, not knowing the post is three years old; (b) a group builds fake accounts that post made-up claims about the ban to stir up anger.

Unscaffolded

Q7. A columnist writes: “Nine out of ten enrolled Australians voted in 2025 — but when the law says you must vote, the number tells you little about how engaged or informed the voters were.” Evaluate this claim using Figures 4 and 5. Is the columnist reading the data, or adding an argument to it — and is that argument checkable?

Q8. At the UN climate change conference COP28 in Dubai, which ended on 13 December 2023, nearly 200 countries agreed for the first time to language about “transitioning away” from fossil fuels. Small island states — the countries most at risk from rising seas — said the wording was too weak and had pushed for stronger language; several oil-producing states resisted stronger wording; other countries called the agreement real progress. (Section 3B of this book looks at climate change as a global issue.) (a) Steelman the view of the small island states and the view of the oil-producing states, one sentence each. (b) Evaluate one of the three responses to the agreement as a source about what should happen next: name its perspective, its evidence, and what it leaves out.

Q9. The *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Voting at 16) Bill 2019*, introduced by the Greens member Adam Bandt on 21 October 2019, would have let 16- and 17-year-olds vote in federal elections; like every bill of its kind in Australia, it did not pass. In New Zealand, the Supreme Court ruled in 2022 (the *Make It 16* case) that a voting age of 18 for national elections was inconsistent with the country’s human rights law, and in 2023 the New Zealand Parliament voted on lowering it — the change needed the support of 75 per cent of members and did not get it. Examine a possible change of this kind to Australian law: state the strongest case for and the strongest case against lowering the federal voting age to 16, then say what evidence would decide the question for you. (Section 2B of this book looks at human rights laws and how they can change.)

Q10. A post reads: “The ban is pointless — every kid I know is still on their apps, so the law has achieved nothing.” Evaluate the post with the four tests and the missing-check. What could the poster know first-hand, what could they not know, and what source would settle the question?

Source inquiry

Source 4.1 — The obligation and the law, in facts

- Australia signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 22 August 1990 and ratified it on 17 December 1990 (United Nations Treaty Collection).
- Article 3: in all decisions about children, the child’s best interests must come first.
- Article 12: children have the right to say what they think on matters that affect them, and to have those views given real weight.
- Article 13: children have the right to expression, including seeking and receiving information.
- Article 17: children should be able to get information that is good for them, and be protected from harmful material.
- Article 19: children must be kept safe from harm.
- The law: listed platforms must take reasonable steps to stop under-16 accounts; the obligation began on 10 December 2025; there is no parent-consent option; children and parents are not punished; the eSafety Commissioner oversees it.

Source 4.2 — The strongest case for the law

Children face real, documented harms online — bullying, harmful content, and design that profits from holding their attention. Platforms did not stop under-16 accounts on their own, so the duty now sits in law where it can be enforced. The Convention’s articles on protection (3, 17 and 19) pull toward this law, and the law punishes no child: it limits some access now and can be reviewed as evidence grows.

Source 4.3 — The strongest case against the law

The evidence that a ban reduces harm is not settled, and a ban may push young people into hidden, less safe corners of the internet while cutting some off from information and support communities. The Convention’s articles on participation (12 and 13) say children’s views must be heard and given real weight, and many young people say they

were not heard. Age checks may gather sensitive personal data. A smaller step — enforcing the safety duties already in law — was open.

Source 4.1 compiled by ClassBasics from the United Nations Treaty Collection and the Act itself; Sources 4.2 and 4.3 are the strongest forms of the two sides, compiled by ClassBasics from the public debate over the Act — parliamentary speeches, eSafety Commissioner statements, and the published views of child-safety and digital-rights groups. All retrieved 26 August 2026.

Q11. (a) Using Source 4.1, name the two articles the case for the law leans on, and the two articles the case against it leans on. (b) Sources 4.2 and 4.3 both quote the same Convention. Explain how two opposite cases can honestly lean on the one document. (c) Name one fact in Source 4.1 that both sides would agree on, and say why it does not decide the argument. (d) Analyse the degree to which Australia is meeting its Convention obligation in this one law. Weigh both columns of Figure 9 against Sources 4.2 and 4.3 and reason to your own judgment in degree. You will be marked on the quality of your reasoning, not on the judgment you reach. (e) Name two further sources you would check before settling that judgment, and say what each would add.

Answers

Q1. (a) Origin, evidence, reasoning, perspective. (b) Checking for what is missing.

Q2. (a) An official record. (b) Opinion and social media. (c) Of the record: what does the record actually say? Of the post: whose interest does this serve?

Q3. (a) The Senate, with 19 no votes (against 13 in the House). (b) House: any one of the Australian Greens, the six independents, Rebekha Sharkie, Bob Katter, Bridget Archer. Senate: any one of Alex Antic, Matt Canavan, or senators who belong to none of the three largest parties. (c) The issue did not split along party lines — members and senators on both sides voted each way.

Q4. (a) 12.5 percentage points. (b) Any two of: how informed voters were; how people voted; whether compulsory voting is a good or a bad thing for democracy; anything else about how well either democracy works.

Q5. (i) The platform companies card. (ii) Young people. (iii) Supporters.

Q6. (a) Misinformation — the aunt believes the post is true (“shared by someone who believes it is true”). (b) Disinformation — the claims are made-up and shared “on purpose to mislead”.

Q7. See Model responses.

Q8. (a) Small island states: the countries that will sink or suffer first asked for wording strong enough to cut emissions fast, because weak words now mean real harm to them within decades. Oil-producing states: their economies and public services are built on oil income, and a fast phase-out agreed abroad would cut jobs and public services at home before alternatives are ready. (b) See Model responses.

Q9. See Model responses.

Q10. The post passes test 1 for a narrow claim: the poster knows first-hand that the kids they know are still on apps. It fails as evidence for the wider claim (“the law has achieved nothing”), because the poster cannot see accounts they do not see — the missing-check — and platforms must report on the steps they take to the eSafety Commissioner, so the settling source is the Commissioner’s published reports and the platforms’ transparency data, not one person’s circle of friends.

Q11. (a) For: Articles 3, 17 and 19 (any two). Against: Articles 12 and 13. (b) The Convention holds two kinds of rights at once — rights to protection and rights to participation — and one law can serve one kind while straining the other. Each side quotes the half of the Convention that its case rests on, and neither half is fake. (c) For example: Australia ratified the Convention on 17 December 1990, or the law punishes no child. A shared fact sets the frame of the argument but does not weigh the two columns against each other. (d) See Model responses. (e) Any two of, with a reason each: the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child’s most recent review of Australia (what the treaty body itself makes of the law); eSafety Commissioner reports on how the obligation is working in practice (real data on under-16 accounts); published research on whether age bans reduce harm in countries that have them (the evidence question both sides name); surveys of Australian young people about the law’s effect on them (the Article 12 question).

Model responses

Example 2. The law delivers the protection column of the Convention in a clear and enforceable way: Articles 3, 17 and 19 ask Australia to put children’s best interests first and to keep harmful material away from them, and the law turns that into a duty on platforms that the eSafety Commissioner can watch — a duty the platforms did not meet on their own. Against that, the law strains the participation column: Articles 12 and 13 give children a right to be heard and to seek information, and the law was made with limited direct input from young people and removes some of their access to information and support spaces, with no parent-consent path. Weighing the two, Australia is meeting the obligation in large degree on protection and in smaller degree on participation — the obligation is kept where the Convention protects and stretched where it empowers. A different weighing is open: someone who ranks participation first may judge the same facts the other way, and the marking rewards the weighing, not the result.

Q7. The columnist is adding an argument to the data, and the argument is a fair one — with limits. The number itself only measures attendance: with compulsory voting, 90.7 per cent tells you the law works, not that voters are engaged or informed, which is exactly what Figure 5 lists under “do not show”. So the claim is a reading of the data’s limits, not a misreading of the data. It stays checkable: engagement and information can be measured by other sources — surveys of voters’ knowledge, for instance — and the columnist offers none, so the claim is a sound caution presented without its own evidence.

Q8 (b). Evaluating the small island states’ response: origin — governments of countries that face the first and worst effects of rising seas, speaking for their own voters, so test 1 is strong and their interest is open. Evidence — the agreed wording stops short of a phase-out, which is checkable in the conference text, and the science on what a 1.5-degree limit needs is published and open to all. Perspective — the countries that bear the most risk asking for the fastest cut; what is missing is any account of the costs a faster phase-out would place on oil-dependent economies. Verdict — a strong source on what the agreement lacks for the most at-risk countries, and a weak source on what the agreement achieves for countries starting from oil.

Q9. For: 16- and 17-year-olds already pay tax and are bound by every law the parliament makes, decisions on climate will shape their lives longest, and the New Zealand Supreme Court found in 2022 that an 18-year voting age clashed with the right to be free from age discrimination. Against: 16 is below most ages of adult responsibility in Australian law, many argue judgment on long-term questions keeps developing through the teens, and a voting age that matches the other adult ages keeps the rule simple and consistent. The deciding evidence would be real-world data: how 16- and 17-year-olds actually vote where they can — turnout, enrolment and survey data from places that have lowered the age — because the argument turns on whether 16-year-olds can use the vote, not on feelings about it.

Q11 (d). The protection side of the obligation is met in a direct and enforceable way: the law puts children’s best interests and their safety from harm (Articles 3, 17, 19) into a legal duty on platforms, backed by an independent commissioner, after years in which platforms did not keep under-16s off on their own. The participation side is met in a thinner way: the law limits some of the information and expression Articles 12 and 13 cover, young people’s views were not given real weight in the process, and the ban is blunt — no parent-consent path, no case-by-case exceptions. On balance, Australia is meeting the obligation to a high degree on the articles about keeping children safe and to a lower degree on the articles about hearing and informing them — a judgment in degree, not a flat yes or no. The opposite weighing — ranking participation above protection — is open to a student who argues it well, because the marking rewards the reasoning.

Sources for this section

All sources retrieved 26 August 2026. Real-world facts in this section come from: the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024* on the Federal Register of Legislation ([legislation.gov.au](https://www.legislation.gov.au)); the Parliament of Australia (aph.gov.au) for the divisions of 27 November 2024 (House of Representatives, 101 to 13) and 28 November 2024 (Senate, 34 to 19) and for Royal Assent on 10 December 2024; the eSafety Commissioner (esafety.gov.au) for the lists of covered and excluded platforms and the start date of the age obligation; the Australian Electoral Commission (aec.gov.au) for turnout at the 3 May 2025 federal election; the New Zealand Electoral Commission (elections.org.nz) for turnout at the 14 October 2023 general election; the United Nations Treaty Collection for the dates Australia signed (22 August 1990) and ratified (17 December 1990) the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and for the text of the Convention; the United Nations for the outcome of the COP28 climate change conference in Dubai (13 December 2023); the Parliament of Australia for the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Voting at 16) Bill 2019* (21 October 2019); and the New Zealand Supreme Court’s 2022 decision in the *Make It 16* case and the New Zealand Parliament’s 2023 vote on the voting age. Sources 4.2 and 4.3 are positions compiled by ClassBasics from the public debate, not quotations.

Proposing changes to political, legal or civic institutions — and defending them

Victorian Curriculum 2.0 · Civics and Citizenship · Levels 9 and 10 · Skills — Evaluating democratic institutions and systems

VC2HC10S03

- VC2HC10S03.E01
- VC2HC10S03.E02

Theory

Part 1 — The skill: recommend, then justify

In Chapters 1–3 you met Australia’s political, legal and civic institutions and how they work. This section turns from *how they work* to *how well they work* — and then to the skill named in the curriculum: recommending a change to an institution and justifying that recommendation.

Two words carry the whole section:

- **Recommend** means to put forward one specific change. “The AEC should do X” is a recommendation. “Things should be better” is not.
- **Justify** means to give reasons, backed by evidence, that the change would make the institution do its job better. A justification answers the question *why would this work?*

An **institution**, for this section, is an established organisation or system with a public job (Figure 1).

Three kinds of institutions

An institution is an established organisation or system with a public job.

POLITICAL

Make and carry out public decisions: who governs, how they are chosen, and what they decide.

Australian examples

The federal Parliament; the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), which runs federal elections; government departments.

LEGAL

Apply and interpret the law, and check that power is used lawfully.

Australian examples

The courts, from local courts to the High Court of Australia; bodies created by law such as the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC).

CIVIC

Inform, organise and speak for people outside government.

Australian examples

News media; community groups; groups that campaign for a cause; bodies that teach about public life.

You met political institutions in Chapter 1, legal institutions in Chapter 2, and civic institutions in Chapter 3.

Original table by ClassBasics. Examples drawn from sections 1A-1C, 2A-2D and 3A-3C of this book.

Three rows labelled political, legal and civic, each with its job and named Australian examples such as Parliament, the AEC, the courts, the NACC and the news media

Figure 1. The three kinds of institutions this section evaluates.

Part 2 — A contested term: “better uphold”

The curriculum says a change should help an institution support human rights and democracy more strongly — to “better uphold” them, in its words. Reasonable people disagree about what “better” means — it is a **contested term** (a term whose meaning is genuinely argued over, not settled). One person may think more participation is what matters most; another may think accountability matters most. This book does not pick a side in that argument. Instead it uses **working checks** (Figure 2): a recommendation in this section must say *which* check the change improves.

Working checks: what does "better uphold" mean?

The curriculum names democracy and human rights but does not define "better uphold". This section uses these checks.

DEMOCRACY CHECKS

Participation.

more people take part, not fewer

Representation.

the institution reflects the people it serves

Accountability.

people with power must answer for how they use it

Transparency.

the public can see how decisions are made

HUMAN RIGHTS CHECKS

On paper and in practice.

rights written in law are also real in daily life

No group shut out.

the protection reaches everyone, not just some

A way to put it right.

if a right is broken, there is a real path to have it fixed

A recommendation in this section must say WHICH check the change improves. Other definitions of these terms exist; they are not used here.

Two panels of working checks: democracy checks (participation, representation, accountability, transparency) and human rights checks (rights on paper and in practice, no group shut out, a way to put a broken right right)

Figure 2. The working checks used in this section to judge a change. Other definitions exist; they are not used here.

Contested term — how marks work here. Two students can recommend opposite changes and both earn full marks, if each says which check the change improves, gives evidence, and answers the strongest objection honestly. Marks are for the quality of the reasoning, not for the side you take.

Part 3 — The five-step model

Every recommendation in this section is built with the same five steps (Figure 3). Learn the model; the worked examples and every task below reuse it.

The five-step model for a justified recommendation

Recommend a change to an institution, then justify it.



Marks are awarded for each step done well — not for whether the reader agrees with your change.

Five stacked steps joined by arrows: 1 name the institution and its job; 2 find the gap with evidence; 3 propose one specific change; 4 justify with evidence and comparison; 5 answer the strongest objection

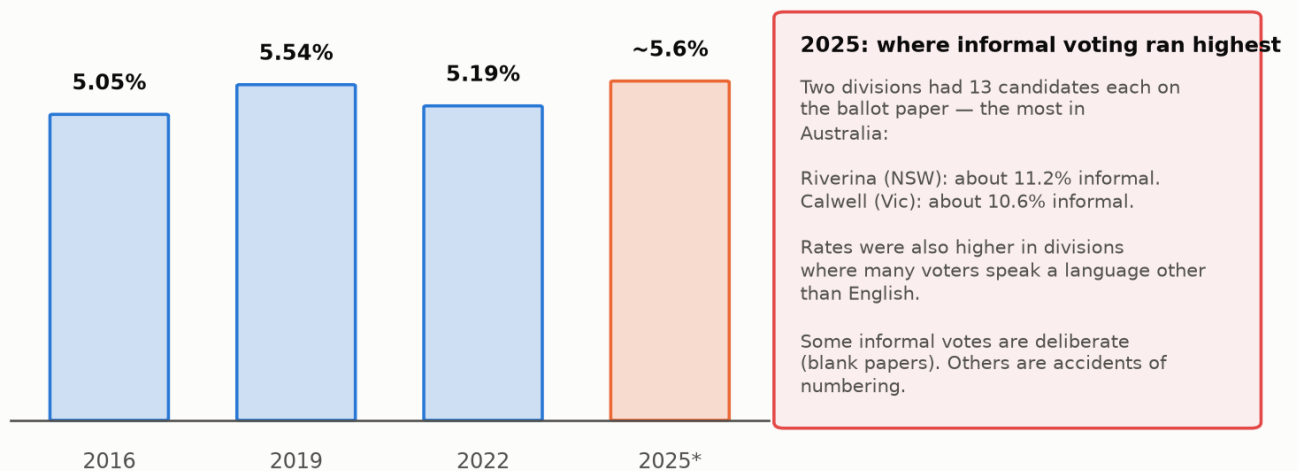
Figure 3. The five-step model for a justified recommendation.

Part 4 — Evidence file A: the AEC and the informal vote

The **Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)** runs federal elections. Voting in Australia is **compulsory** (required by law for enrolled citizens), and turnout — the share of enrolled voters who vote — stays near 90% (Figure 9). Yet not every ballot paper is counted. An **informal vote** is a ballot paper that is not filled out correctly (or is left blank) and is not counted. Figure 4 shows how many votes went informal at recent federal elections, and where the problem runs highest.

Informal votes in the House of Representatives, 2016-2025

An informal vote is a ballot paper that is not filled out correctly and is not counted.



Source: Australian Electoral Commission, Participation in the 2025 federal election (retrieved 26 August 2026). *2025 figure approximate at time of AEC writing.

Bar chart of informal House of Representatives votes, 2016 to 2025, around 5 to 5.6 per cent, with a panel noting the 2025 divisions with 13 candidates, Riverina and Calwell, had the highest informal rates

Figure 4. Informal votes are not counted. The rate runs highest where the ballot paper is hardest to complete correctly.

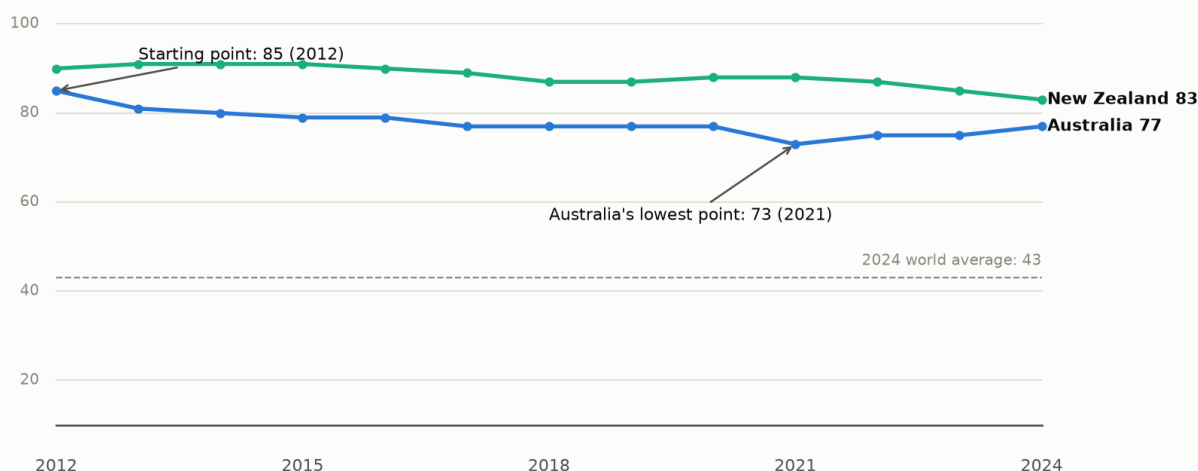
Read Figure 4 like an evaluator: the gap is real (about 1 in 18 votes uncounted in 2025), it is not spread evenly (it clusters in divisions with very long ballot papers and in divisions where many voters speak a language other than English), and part of it is deliberate (blank papers), part accidental (numbering mistakes). A good recommendation targets the accidental part.

Part 5 — Evidence file B: integrity, the CPI and the NACC

Corruption — the dishonest use of public power for private gain — is hard to count directly, so experts around the world score how corrupt each country's public sector is *perceived* (judged) to be. Transparency International's **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)** gives each country 0–100, where 0 means highly corrupt and 100 means very clean. Figures 5 and 6 show Australia's score over time and against the Asia-Pacific.

Corruption Perceptions Index scores: Australia and New Zealand

Transparency International ranks 180 countries and territories; 0 = highly corrupt, 100 = very clean.



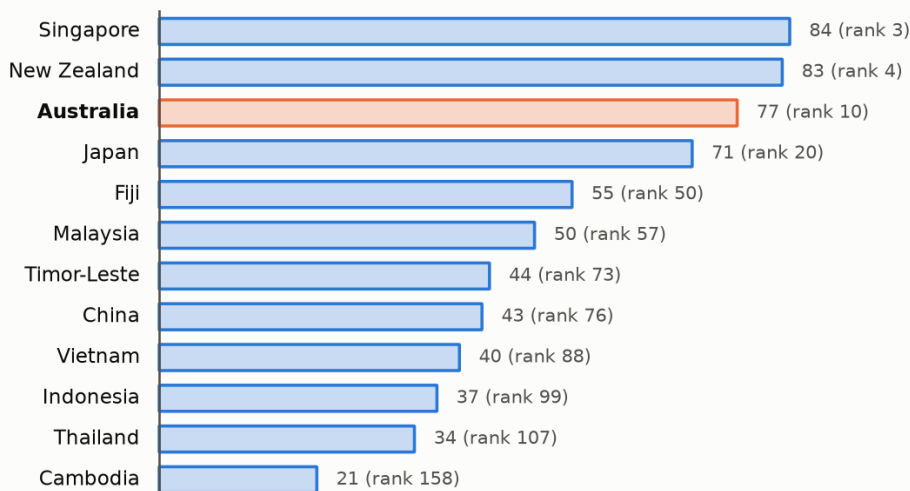
Source: Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 data file, published 11 February 2025 (retrieved 26 August 2026). Scores measure perceived public sector corruption.

Line chart of CPI scores 2012 to 2024 for Australia (85 falling to 73 then recovering to 77) and New Zealand (90s falling to 83), well above the 2024 world average of 43

Figure 5. Australia's CPI score fell for a decade before recovering part of the loss.

Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 across the Asia-Pacific

Perceived public sector corruption, 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). Rank out of 180 shown in brackets.



Source: Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 (published 11 February 2025, retrieved 26 August 2026). Selection of Asia-Pacific countries.

Horizontal bar chart of 2024 CPI scores for twelve Asia-Pacific countries, from Singapore (84) to Cambodia (21), with Australia highlighted at 77, rank 10 of 180

Figure 6. Australia sits in the top ten worldwide, but two Asia-Pacific neighbours score higher.

Australia's answer to corruption risk at the federal level is the **National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC)**, an **integrity** body (integrity = honesty and fairness in public life). Figure 7 summarises what it is and how it works; Figure 8 shows a real 2026 case that moved from a corrupt offer to a sentence. Three terms from Figure 7, defined: the NACC can **compel** (force by law) witnesses and documents; **whistleblowers** are people who report wrongdoing they

saw inside an organisation, and are protected when they report; and it looks at **systemic** corruption — spreading through a whole system — not just one-off acts.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC)

Australia's national integrity body, created by the National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022

WHAT IT IS

An independent Commonwealth agency. It detects, investigates and reports on serious or systemic corruption in the Commonwealth public sector. The government cannot tell it what to investigate.

WHO IT COVERS

Commonwealth public officials: ministers, parliamentarians and their staff, staff of Commonwealth agencies, and contractors working under Commonwealth contracts.

WHAT IT CAN INVESTIGATE

Corrupt conduct: for example, conduct that affects a public official's honest exercise of their duties, a breach of public trust, abuse of office, or misuse of information gained in office.

HOW IT WORKS

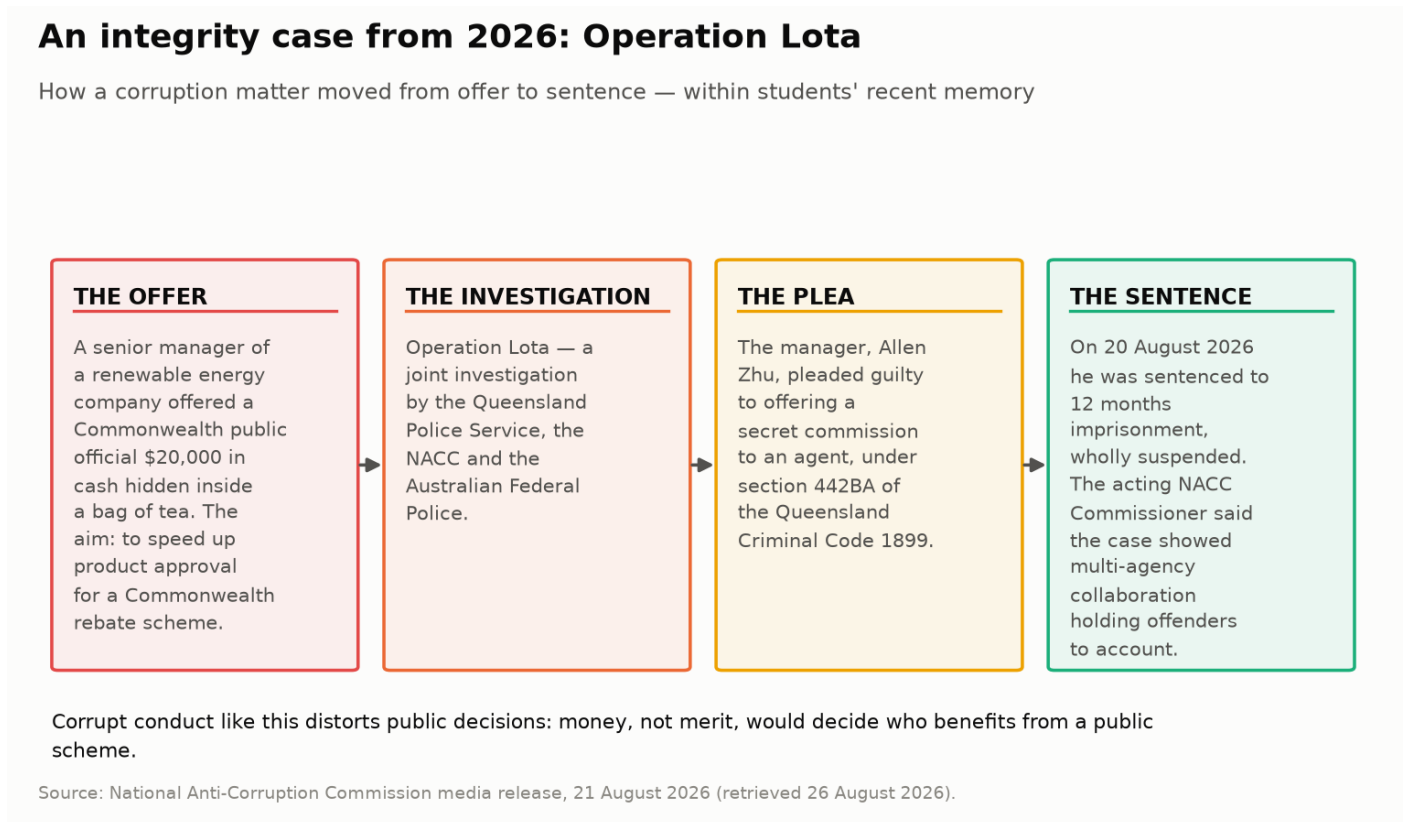
Anyone can report corruption to it. It can compel witnesses and access documents. Investigations are usually private; public hearings happen only in exceptional circumstances. Whistleblowers are protected.

Its referral duties have applied since 1 July 2023. The NACC also educates the public service and the public about corruption risks.

Source: National Anti-Corruption Commission, Overview of the NACC and Frequently asked questions (retrieved 26 August 2026).

Four cards describing the NACC: an independent Commonwealth agency; covering ministers, parliamentarians, staff and contractors; investigating corrupt conduct such as abuse of office; working by reports from anyone, compulsory powers, usually private investigations and protected whistleblowers

Figure 7. The NACC in four cards. Note what is missing from the “How it works” card as well as what is there.



Timeline of Operation Lota: an offer of \$20,000 hidden in a bag of tea; a joint police and NACC investigation; a guilty plea under the Queensland Criminal Code; a suspended prison sentence on 20 August 2026

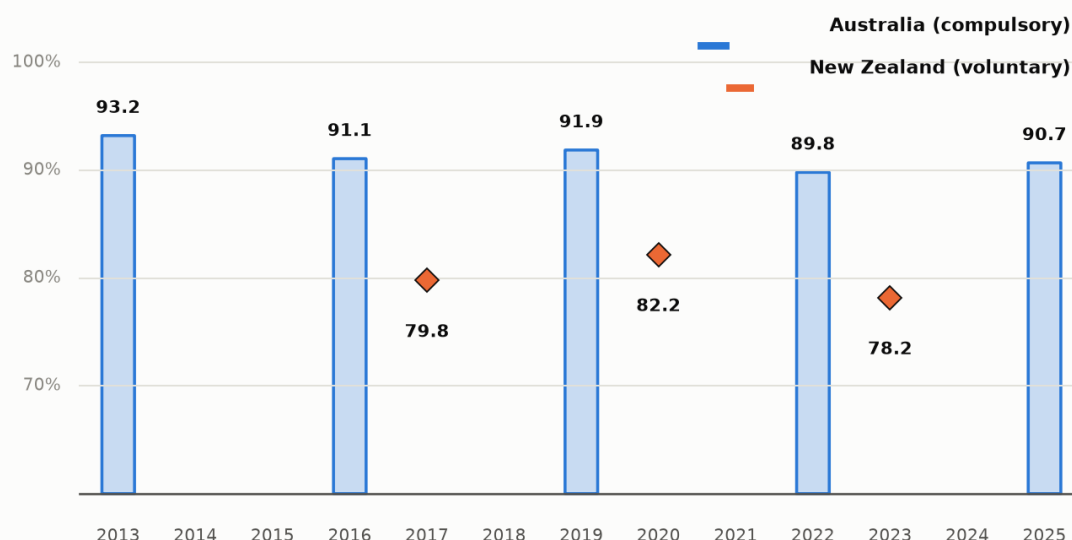
Figure 8. A named, dated integrity case from 2026 — within your recent memory.

Part 6 — Evidence file C: compulsory voting, Australia and New Zealand

For worked example 2 you will compare Australia with New Zealand. Both are democracies in the Asia-Pacific region; both hold free elections with a secret ballot. One big difference: voting is compulsory in Australia and voluntary in New Zealand (section 1C of this book). Figure 9 shows what that difference looks like in turnout, and Figure 10 states the strongest case on each side of the compulsory-voting question.

Turnout at national elections: Australia and New Zealand

Turnout = the share of enrolled voters who voted. Australia's voting is compulsory; New Zealand's is voluntary.



Sources: Australian Electoral Commission, participation pages (turnout 2013-2025); New Zealand Electoral Commission (turnout 2017-2023). Retrieved 26 August 2026.

Combined chart: Australian turnout bars near 90 to 93 per cent at each election from 2013 to 2025, and New Zealand voluntary-voting markers near 78 to 82 per cent in 2017, 2020 and 2023

Figure 9. Compulsory voting and high turnout travel together in Australia; voluntary-voting New Zealand sits about 10–15 points lower.

Compulsory voting: the strongest case on each side

About 13% of the world's democracies compel voting — Australia is one of them (AEC).

THE STRONGEST CASE FOR

- Results reflect the whole population, not just the motivated.
- Governments must appeal to almost everyone, not just their supporters.
- Turnout stays high even as it declines globally.
- The duty is small — enrol and attend. The secret ballot still protects what you choose.

THE STRONGEST CASE AGAINST

- Voting expresses choice; a forced choice is not fully free.
- The right to take part includes the right to stay home.
- Compulsion may add uninformed votes to the count.
- Democracy should inspire participation, not order it.

This is a genuinely contested issue. Marks in this book are awarded for the quality of the reasoning, not for which side you take.

Both columns stated in the strongest form an advocate would recognise. See also section 1C of this book.

Two columns: the strongest case for compulsory voting (whole-population results, governments must appeal to everyone, high turnout, small duty with a secret ballot) and the strongest case against (forced choice is not fully free, the right to stay home, uninformed votes, inspire rather than order)

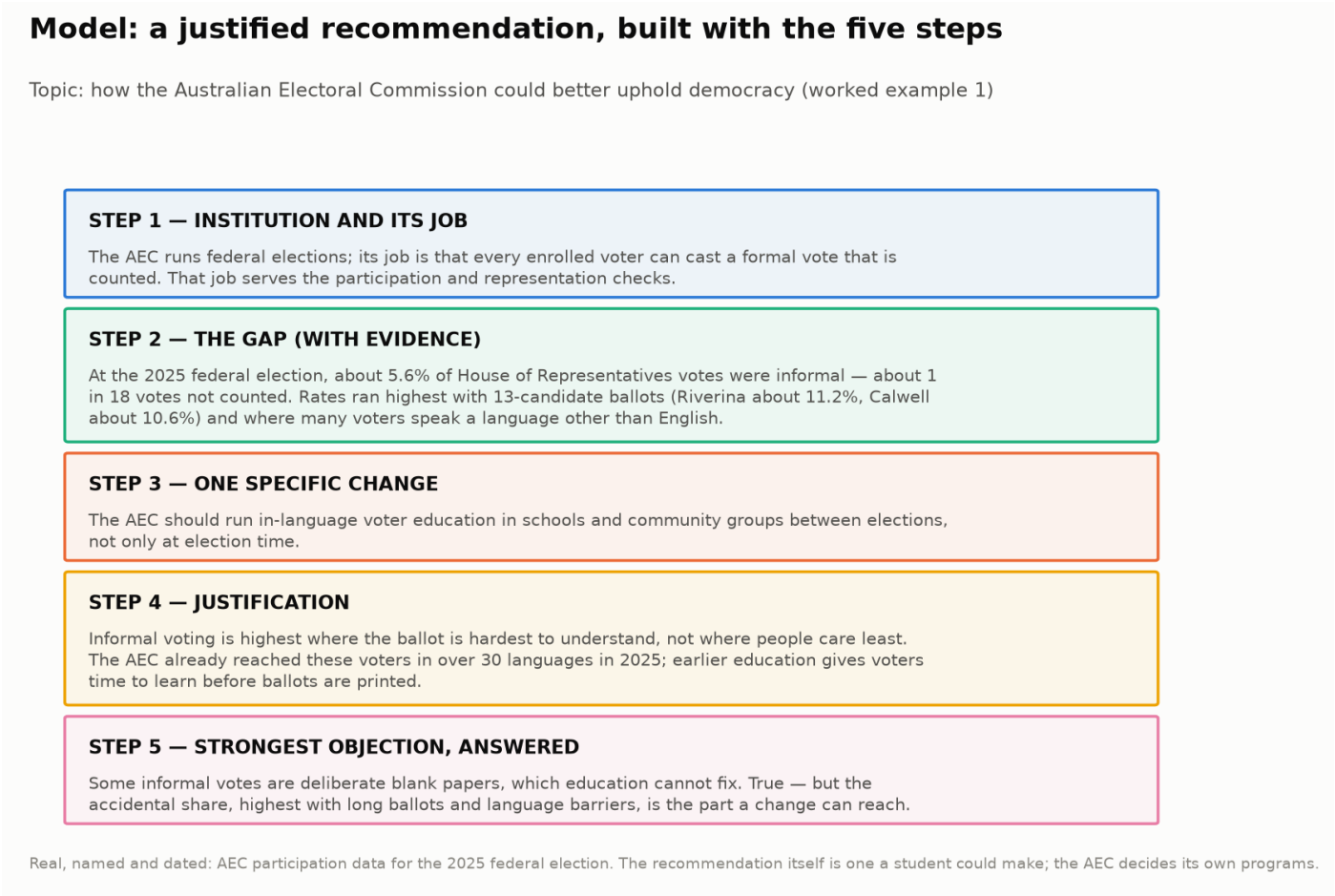
Worked examples

Worked example 1 — scaffolded (E01): how the AEC could better uphold democracy

Build the recommendation with the five-step model, using Evidence file A.

Step	Working	Comment
1. Institution and its job	The AEC runs federal elections; its job is that every enrolled voter can cast a formal vote that is counted.	The job serves the <i>participation</i> and <i>representation</i> checks (Figure 2). Naming the check now makes step 4 easier later.
2. The gap, with evidence	At the 2025 federal election about 5.6% of House votes were informal — about 1 in 18 votes not counted. Rates ran highest where ballots had 13 candidates (Riverina about 11.2%, Calwell about 10.6%) and where many voters speak a language other than English.	Evidence, not opinion. The gap is stated with numbers, a date, and named places.
3. One specific change	The AEC should run in-language voter education in schools and community groups <i>between</i> elections, not only during election campaigns.	One change, described so clearly that you could tell whether it happened. Not a wish list.
4. Justification	Informal voting is highest where the ballot is hardest to understand, not where people care least. The AEC already reached these voters in over 30 languages at the 2025 election; moving some of that effort outside the campaign gives voters time to learn before ballots are printed. More counted votes → participation and representation improve.	The reason links the change to the gap, and names the check that improves.
5. Strongest objection, answered	Objection: some informal votes are deliberate blank papers, and education cannot change a deliberate choice. Answer: true — but the accidental share, highest with long ballots and language barriers, is the part this change can reach.	The objection is stated in its strongest form, and the answer concedes what it cannot fix.

The finished recommendation reads as Figure 11.



Step	Working	Comment
	still free and secret.	
4. Justification	The duty lifts participation: Australia's turnout has stayed near 90% while turnout declines globally (Source A). Results would reflect more of the whole population, so governments would have to appeal to more New Zealanders — the representation check improves.	Names the checks the change improves (participation, representation).
5. Strongest objection, answered	Objection: the right to take part includes the right to stay home, and a forced choice is not fully free; New Zealand may prefer to inspire turnout, not order it (Figure 10). Answer: a fair objection — which is why this is a recommendation to <i>consider</i> , weighed against the participation gain, not a claim that Australia's way is simply better.	The model never hides a good objection. Answering honestly is what justifying means.

Notice the shape of the answer in step 5: it does not pretend the objection is silly. A recommendation can be justified *while* conceding that reasonable people would decline it. That is how contested issues are handled in this book — marks for reasoning, not for side.

Sources: New Zealand Electoral Commission, turnout 2017–2023; Australian Electoral Commission, participation pages (retrieved 26 August 2026). Facts about New Zealand's system as established in section 1C.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

- Sort these six institutions into the three kinds in Figure 1: the federal Parliament; the High Court of Australia; a community group that campaigns for a local park; the AEC; the NACC; a newspaper. (Two go in each kind.)
- Using Figure 4: (a) what was the informal rate in 2019? (b) name the two divisions with the highest informal rates in 2025 and one thing they shared; (c) give one reason why a high informal rate weakens the representation check.
- Using Figure 5: (a) state Australia's CPI score in 2012 and in 2021; (b) describe the trend from 2012 to 2024 in one sentence; (c) a score of 77 does not mean "no corruption". What does the score measure instead?
- Using Figure 6: (a) name two Asia-Pacific countries that scored above Australia in 2024 and one that scored below 40; (b) what does "(rank 10)" mean; (c) which country in the figure would be the strongest comparison for an E02-style argument that Australia could improve, and why?
- Match each statement to the democracy check it most directly serves (participation, representation, accountability, transparency): (a) "Ministers must answer questions about their spending in Parliament."; (b) "Almost every enrolled adult votes at each election."; (c) "The register of who owns what is open for the public to read."; (d) "The Parliament includes members from city, country and remote divisions."
- Using Figures 7 and 8: (a) name two groups of people the NACC covers; (b) under what condition does the NACC hold a public hearing?; (c) which Figure 2 check does the NACC most directly serve, and in one sentence, how?

Unscaffolded

7. Some people argue the NACC should hold public hearings far more often; others argue private investigations protect people accused before anything is proven. Recommend **one** change to how the NACC works (you may choose either direction). Use all five steps of the model, and state the strongest objection to *your* change before answering it.
8. Section 1C established that New Zealand uses a two-vote proportional system (MMP — each party's share of seats follows its share of the party vote) while Australia does not. Recommend whether **Australia** should adopt one named process from New Zealand's system, or should not. Justify with at least one Figure 2 check and one piece of evidence, and answer the strongest objection.
9. A student writes: "Australia's CPI score fell from 85 to 73 between 2012 and 2021, so by 2021 corruption in Australia was worse than in New Zealand." Evaluate this claim using Figures 5 and 6. In your answer, separate what the evidence supports from what it does not.
10. Source A says voter turnout has been declining globally while Australia's stayed near 90%. Give the strongest form of each of these two views: (i) this is good evidence that compulsory voting improves democracy; (ii) high turnout alone does not prove a democracy is healthy. For each view, name the working check it leans on.

Source task

Source A

Source A — the AEC on compulsory voting and turnout

Extract from the Australian Electoral Commission's page on participation in the 2025 federal election

"Compulsory voting is a key part of Australia's democracy and citizens are provided a range of voting service options and encouraged to participate through a vast program of communication. Australia is one of only around 13% of democracies across the world that have compulsory voting. While voter turnout has been declining globally, the turnout rate for the 2025 federal election (approximately 90% at the time of writing) is on track to be slightly higher than it was at the 2022 federal election."

— Australian Electoral Commission, Participation in the 2025 federal election (page current as at the 2025 election count)

Plain-words gloss: enrolled Australians must vote; the AEC says very few democracies make voting compulsory, turnout is falling around the world, and Australia's stayed near 90%.

Retrieved 26 August 2026.

Boxed quotation from the Australian Electoral Commission: compulsory voting is a key part of Australia's democracy; Australia is one of only around 13% of democracies with compulsory voting; while turnout declines globally, the 2025 turnout of about 90% is on track to be slightly higher than 2022; with a plain-words gloss

Source A. Extract, Australian Electoral Commission, Participation in the 2025 federal election (retrieved 26 August 2026), with plain-words gloss.

S1. (a) According to Source A, about what share of the world's democracies have compulsory voting? (b) How did the AEC expect the 2025 turnout to compare with 2022?

S2. Source A is the AEC describing its own system. Identify one sentence that reports a *fact* you could check against another source, and one phrase that is a *judgement* the AEC makes. Why does the difference matter when the source is the institution itself?

S3. *The argument itself is the task.* Write your own justified recommendation, 250–350 words, using the five-step model (Figure 3). Choose **one** Australian political, legal or civic institution you have met in this book. Your recommendation must: name the institution and its job; state the gap with at least one piece of dated, named evidence from this section or another; propose one specific change; say which working check the change improves; and state and answer the strongest objection. If it strengthens your case, use an Asia-Pacific comparison (E02) — for example, a process from New Zealand established in section 1C.

Marking guide: one mark per step done well (5), one for evidence quality (1), one for naming the check (1) — 7 marks. Marks are for reasoning; the reader may disagree with your change and still award full marks.

Answers

1. Political: the federal Parliament; the AEC. Legal: the High Court; the NACC. Civic: the community group; the newspaper.
2.
 - (a) 5.54%. (b) Riverina (NSW, about 11.2%) and Calwell (Vic, about 10.6%); both had 13 candidates on the ballot paper, the most in Australia. (c) If votes from some divisions go uncounted more often, those voters' views are reflected less in the result.
3.
 - (a) 85 in 2012; 73 in 2021. (b) Australia's score fell for about a decade, then recovered part of the loss by 2024 (77). (c) It measures how corrupt the public sector is *perceived* to be by experts, not the number of proven cases.
4.
 - (a) Above Australia: Singapore (84) and New Zealand (83). Below 40: any of Indonesia (37), Thailand (34), Cambodia (21). (b) Australia had the 10th-highest score of the 180 countries and territories ranked. (c) New Zealand or Singapore — near neighbours in the region that score higher, so “adopt what they do” is a fair comparison (E02).
5.
 - (a) accountability; (b) participation; (c) transparency; (d) representation.
6.
 - (a) Any two of: ministers; parliamentarians and their staff; staff of Commonwealth agencies; contractors under Commonwealth contracts. (b) Only in exceptional circumstances. (c) Accountability — it can investigate and expose dishonest use of public power, so power is answered for.

S1. (a) Around 13%. (b) Slightly higher than the 2022 federal election.

S2. Fact example: “Australia is one of only around 13% of democracies across the world that have compulsory voting” — checkable against other countries' laws. Judgement example: “Compulsory voting is a key part of Australia's democracy” — a claim about value, not a countable fact. It matters because an institution describing itself has an interest in looking good; facts can still be checked, judgements must be weighed.

Full solutions

7 — model answer (one of two acceptable directions). *Step 1:* The NACC is Australia's independent integrity body for the Commonwealth public sector; its job serves accountability. *Step 2 (gap):* Investigations are usually private and public hearings happen only in exceptional circumstances, so the public rarely sees the process at work; critics say this limits public confidence. *Step 3 (change):* The NACC should publish a plain-language public summary for every completed investigation, whether or not a hearing was held. *Step 4 (justification):* This keeps private investigations (protecting people accused before findings) while adding the transparency check — the public sees outcomes, not just headlines. *Step 5 (objection and answer):* Objection: summaries could prejudice people named if details leak or are misread. Answer: summaries would state findings only after a matter is closed, as courts do with published judgments. *Alternative direction (more public hearings) equally acceptable if each step is done well.*

8 — model answer (recommend-against also acceptable). *Step 1:* The federal Parliament is Australia's law-making institution; its job serves representation. *Step 2 (gap):* Under Australia's system, a party can win a majority of House seats without a majority of first-preference votes; seats and votes can diverge. Under New Zealand's MMP (established in section 1C, defined in question 8), each party's share of seats follows its share of the party vote. *Step 3 (change):* Australia should adopt New Zealand's second, party-list vote (the MMP party vote) for the House of Representatives. *Step 4 (justification):* The representation check improves: seat shares would follow vote shares more closely, as they do in New Zealand (section 1C). *Step 5 (objection and answer):* Objection: proportional systems make small parties hold the balance of power and can slow government formation — New Zealand's 2023 coalition took weeks to form. Answer: slower formation is the price of closer representation; Australia already accepts coalitions at federal level when no party wins a majority.

9 — model answer. Supported by the evidence: on the CPI measure, yes — in 2021 Australia scored 73 and New Zealand 88, so experts perceived more public-sector corruption in Australia than in New Zealand that year, and Australia’s own score had fallen from 85 (2012). Not supported: the CPI measures *perceived* corruption, not proven cases, so “corruption was worse” overstates what a perception index can show; and 73 still sat far above the 2024 world average of 43, so the fall is a slide among top performers, not into the world’s worst. Verdict: the claim is defensible *as a reading of the CPI*, provided it is hedged as perception, not fact.

10 — model answer. View (i), strongest form: participation is a democracy check; Australia keeps near-90% turnout while turnout declines globally (Source A), and results therefore reflect almost the whole enrolled population — the comparison with voluntary systems (Figure 9) is evidence the duty causes the difference. Check used: participation. View (ii), strongest form: a democracy check is not only who votes but whether power is accountable and rights are real; a country could compel turnout and still fail transparency or rights, so turnout alone proves little. Check used: accountability / rights in practice. Both views are reasonable; they weigh different checks.

S3 — marking guide in use. A 7/7 response names the institution and its job (e.g. “the AEC runs federal elections”); states a dated gap from this book’s evidence (e.g. informal voting about 5.6% in 2025, or turnout 78.2% in New Zealand 2023, or the CPI fall 2012–2021); proposes one specific change; names the working check the change improves; and states the strongest objection in its best form before answering it honestly. A 4–5/7 response typically does steps 1–4 but skips or weakens step 5, or gives evidence without a date or name.

All real-world material in this section is real, named and dated: Australian Electoral Commission, Participation in the 2025 federal election and participation pages 2013–2025; Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 (published 11 February 2025); National Anti-Corruption Commission, overview and frequently-asked-questions pages and media release of 21 August 2026 (Operation Lota sentencing); New Zealand Electoral Commission, turnout 2017–2023. Retrieved 26 August 2026.

How well legal institutions and processes achieve justice

Victorian Curriculum 2.0 · Civics and Citizenship · Levels 9 and 10 · Skills — Evaluating democratic institutions and systems

VC2HC10S04

- VC2HC10S04.E01
- VC2HC10S04.E02

This is a skills section. It takes the legal knowledge you built earlier in this book — how courts and trials work (Section 2A) and what the three principles of justice mean (Section 2D) — and uses them to practise **evaluating**: judging *how well* a legal institution or process achieves justice. This section describes the law in general terms for classroom study; it is not legal advice.

Theory

The skill this section teaches. To *evaluate* is not to say “good” or “bad”. It is to measure something against a stated standard, gather evidence for and against, and end with a judged conclusion. The standard here is the three principles of justice. So every evaluation in this section follows the same four moves: (1) name the checks, (2) collect evidence that the checks are met, (3) collect evidence that they are not, and (4) weigh both and give a reasoned judgement.

Part 1 — The measuring stick

The curriculum names three principles of justice: these are **fairness**, **equality** and **access**.

Contested terms — read before going on. The Victorian Curriculum names fairness, equality and access as the key principles of justice, but it does not define them. These are **contested terms**: reasonable people define them differently, and the definition chosen can change the conclusion reached. This section therefore uses the working definitions in Figure 1 (the same ones introduced in Section 2D) and uses only those definitions throughout. Every question in this section can be answered from them alone. Other definitions exist; they are not interchangeable with these.

Evaluating justice: the three checks

Ask these three questions of any legal institution or process

JUSTICE is achieved when people get what the law says they are owed, through fair processes. To evaluate HOW WELL it is achieved, test the institution against three principles.

FAIRNESS

Check: does the process take no sides, and give every person a real chance to be heard? In a trial: the accused is presumed innocent, and the state must prove its case.

EQUALITY

Check: does the same rule apply to everyone, whatever their money or power? In a trial: one law catches the powerful and the weak alike.

ACCESS

Check: can people actually reach and use the system? In a trial: legal aid and interpreters help a person answer the case against them.

This section applies the three checks to criminal trials and to incarceration. They are the measuring stick for every evaluation here.

Three cards showing the three justice checks — fairness, equality and access — each with a check question and one line on what it means in a criminal trial

Figure 1. The three principles of justice, written as checks you can apply to any legal institution or process.

Part 2 — Evaluating a criminal trial (.E01)

A **criminal trial** is the court process in which the state (through the **prosecution**) says a person (the **accused**) broke the criminal law, and a court decides whether that is proved. You met the parts in Section 2A. Figure 2 lines each part up against the principle it serves.

A criminal trial and the principles of justice

Trial feature	Principle served	Why it matters
Presumed innocent until proved guilty	Fairness	The prosecution must prove guilt; the accused does not prove innocence
An independent judge, and a jury of 12 citizens that decides the verdict	Fairness	Decision-makers are neutral, and the state's power to convict is shared with the community
An open, public hearing	Fairness	Justice is done in the open, where anyone can watch
The accused is told the charge, can answer it, and can get a lawyer and an interpreter	Access	A person can actually reach the system and put their side
The same law applies to everyone	Equality	Wealth and power buy no special treatment in court
A right to appeal to a higher court	Fairness + access	If the process goes wrong, a higher court can fix it

A structure can uphold a principle on paper yet still reach the wrong result — see the Chamberlain case, Figure 3.

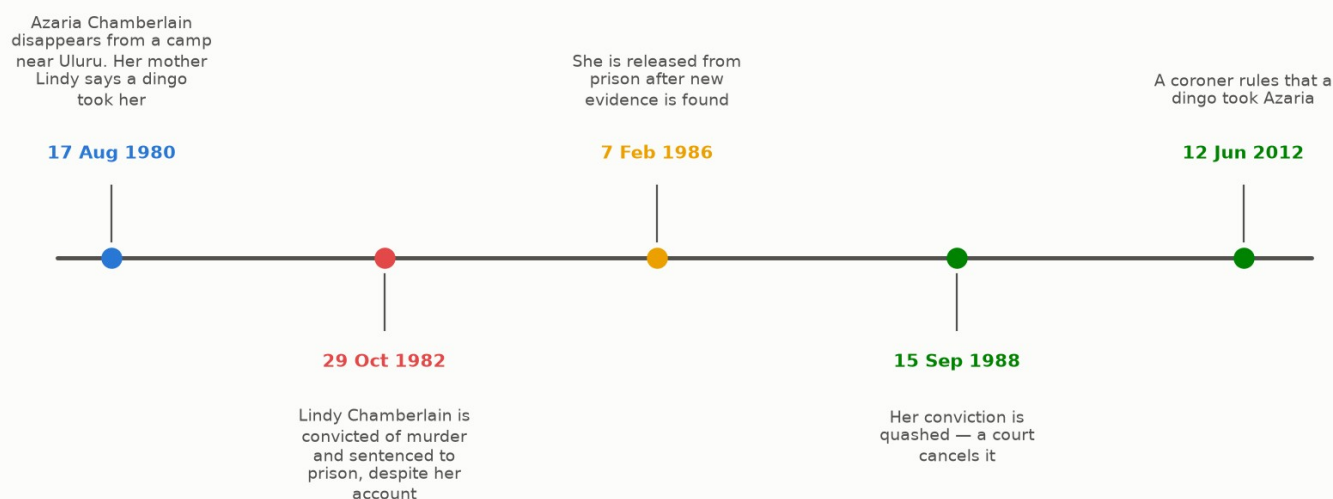
Table with six rows. Each row gives a feature of a Victorian criminal trial, the principle of justice it serves (fairness, access, equality, or fairness and access), and why it matters. Features: presumed innocent until proved guilty; an independent judge and a jury of twelve citizens; an open public hearing; the accused told the charge and able to get a lawyer and an interpreter; the same law applies to everyone; a right to appeal to a higher court.

Figure 2. Features of a Victorian criminal trial, matched to the principle of justice each one serves.

Notice a key idea in Figure 2's footer: a trial can have all the right *structures* and still reach the wrong *result*. The Chamberlain case (Figure 3) is Australia's most studied example.

The Chamberlain case — a wrongful conviction, then corrected

Marker spacing is not to scale



The trial had the structures of fairness, but it convicted an innocent person. Appeals and new evidence later put it right.

Timeline of the Chamberlain case with five dated markers. 17 August 1980, Azaria Chamberlain disappears from a camp near Uluru and her mother Lindy says a dingo took her. 29 October 1982, Lindy Chamberlain is convicted of murder and sent to prison. 7 February 1986, she is released after new evidence is found. 15 September 1988, her conviction is quashed. 12 June 2012, a coroner rules that a dingo took Azaria.

Figure 3. The Chamberlain case. The trial had the structures of fairness, but it convicted an innocent person. Appeals and new evidence later put it right.

Lindy Chamberlain was tried by a jury, with a judge, a prosecution and a defence — the structures in Figure 2 were all present. Yet the trial got the facts wrong and she was sent to prison for a crime she did not commit. Her **conviction** (the court's finding of guilt) was later **quashed** — cancelled by a higher court — after new evidence, and in 2012 a **coroner** (a court officer who investigates some deaths) ruled that a dingo had taken Azaria.

The lesson for evaluating a trial is to look at three things, not one: the **structures** (were the fair-process features there?), the **result** (did it get the facts right?), and the **corrections** (when it went wrong, could the system fix it?). A trial that has the structures but gets the result wrong is not achieving justice at the time — even if the appeal process achieves it later. Worked example 1 applies these three looks to the Chamberlain trial.

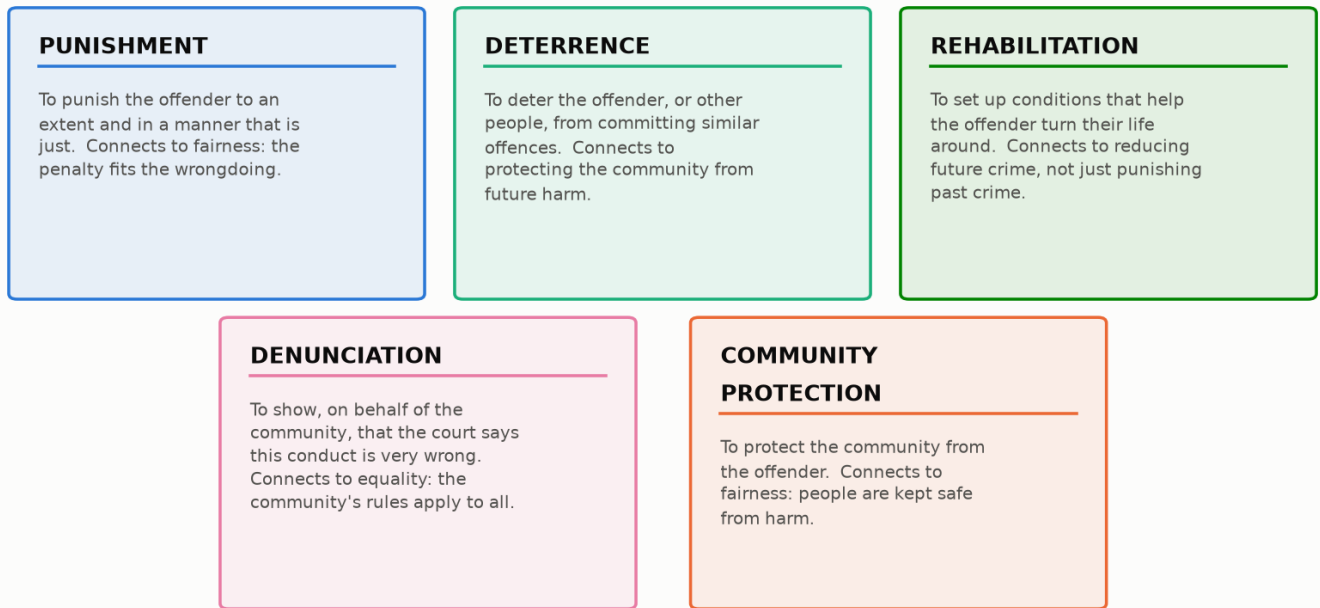
Part 3 — Justice and incarceration (.E02)

Incarceration means keeping a person in prison as a punishment; it is also called **imprisonment**. The link between justice and incarceration is the question: *does putting people in prison actually achieve justice, and when?*

First, why does a court imprison anyone at all? In Victoria, the *Sentencing Act 1991* (Vic) lists the only reasons a court may punish. Figure 4 shows the five purposes, in plain words.

Why courts punish: the five purposes of sentencing

Sentencing Act 1991 (Vic), section 5(1)



A court may combine these purposes. A sentence must be no more severe than needed to achieve its purpose.

Five cards showing the purposes of sentencing under the Sentencing Act 1991 (Vic) section 5(1): punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation, denunciation and community protection, each with one line on how it connects to justice.

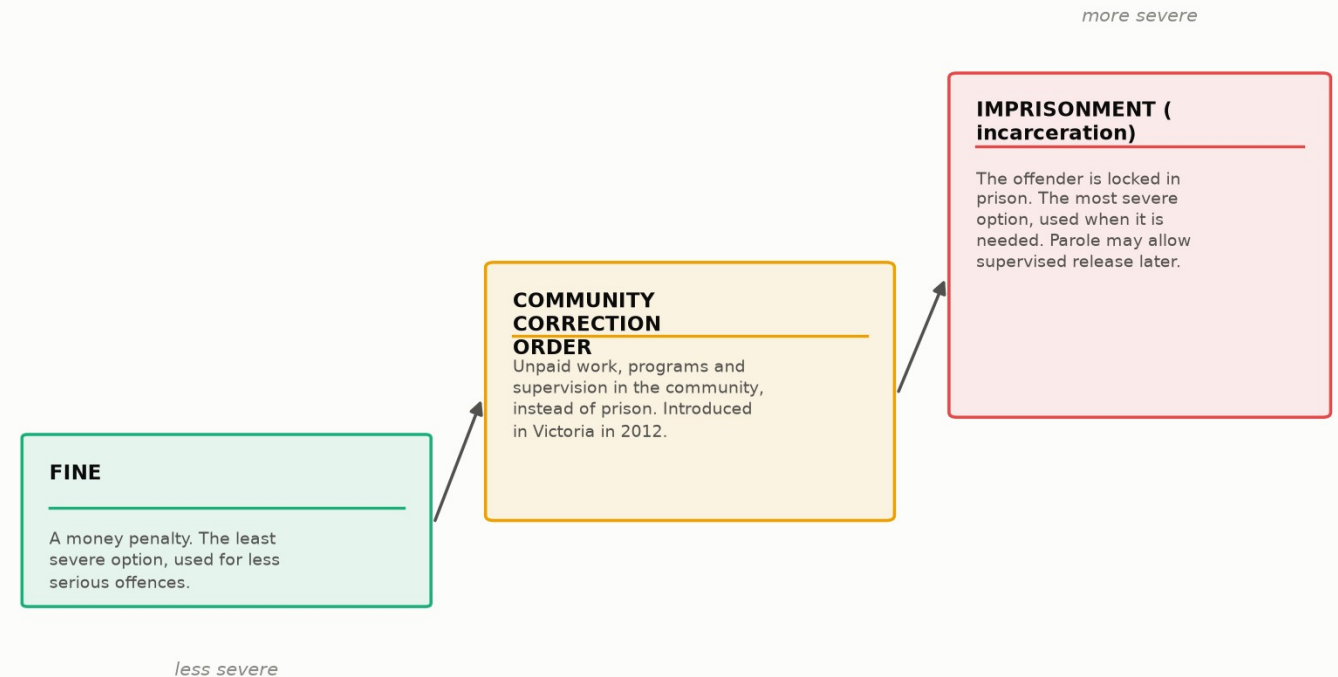
Figure 4. The five purposes of sentencing in Victoria, and how each connects to justice.

Three of these words need plain definitions. **Deterrence** means trying to stop the offender, or other people, from offending by making them fear the punishment. **Rehabilitation** means helping the offender change so they can live without offending again. **Denunciation** means the court saying, on behalf of the community, that this conduct is very wrong.

Second, where does incarceration sit among the options? Figure 5 shows that prison is the most severe sentence, not the first one. A **community correction order** is a sentence served in the community — with unpaid work, programs and supervision — instead of prison; these began in Victoria in 2012.

Sentences, from least to most severe

Victoria — incarceration (imprisonment) is the most severe option



A judge picks the least severe sentence that still meets the purposes in Figure 4 — so imprisonment is not the first choice.

Three rising cards from least to most severe sentence: a fine; a community correction order (introduced in Victoria in 2012); and imprisonment, with a note that parole may allow supervised release later.

Figure 5. Sentences in Victoria, from least to most severe. Imprisonment is the last resort.

Third, how big is incarceration in Australia? Figure 6 gives the current national figures.

Australia's prison population

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Corrective Services, Australia — March quarter 2026



Whole-of-Australia figures. Incarceration is a big, costly part of the legal system — so whether it achieves justice matters a lot.

Three stat tiles from the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the March quarter 2026: 49,295 persons in custody in Australia; an imprisonment rate of 225 prisoners per 100,000 adults; about 1 adult in 440 in prison on an average day.

Figure 6. Australia's prison population (ABS, March quarter 2026). A person in **custody** is being kept in prison.

Finally, the relationship itself pulls two ways (Figure 7). This is a genuinely contested issue, and this book does not define one correct view.

Justice and incarceration — pulling two ways

A discussion frame: what incarceration does for justice, and where it can fail



A good discussion weighs BOTH sides with evidence, then reaches a judged conclusion. Marks go to the reasoning, not the side taken.

Two panels. Left, in green, how incarceration can serve justice: it punishes wrongdoing in proportion to the harm, protects the community, deters offending, and treats like crimes with like sentences. Right, in red, where incarceration can fail justice: it can punish an innocent person, punishment and rehabilitation can pull apart, prison may not fix the causes of offending, and time in prison cannot be given back if a conviction is later quashed.

Figure 7. The two-way relationship between justice and incarceration.

A contested issue — both sides at their strongest.

The strongest case that incarceration serves justice: some people cause such serious harm that only prison keeps the community safe; a penalty that fits the harm respects the victim and the law; and treating like crimes with like sentences keeps the law consistent and equal.

The strongest case that incarceration can fail justice: it can punish the innocent, as the Chamberlain case shows, and that time can never be returned; prison often does not fix the causes of offending, so people reoffend; and a heavy focus on punishment can crowd out rehabilitation.

Notice which side you favour. Marks in this workbook are awarded for the quality of the reasoning and the use of evidence, not for which side you land on.

One correction mechanism sits at the end of a prison sentence: **parole**. In Victoria the Adult Parole Board, set up under the *Corrections Act 1986* (Vic), can release a prisoner early under supervision if it is satisfied this is safe. Parole links the punishment purpose to the rehabilitation and community-protection purposes — a built-in attempt to make incarceration serve justice.

Part 4 — Putting an evaluation together

An extent judgement needs a stated position, evidence for it, counter-evidence (evidence against it), and a judged conclusion. Use the scale of judgements you met in Section 2D: *to a great extent, mostly, in part, to a small extent*,

very little. Worked example 1 shows the four moves applied to a trial; worked example 2 shows them applied to the discussion of incarceration.

Worked examples

Worked example 1 — judging a criminal trial against the principles of justice (scaffolded)

Case source: the Chamberlain case, Northern Territory (Figure 3). Lindy Chamberlain was convicted of murder on 29 October 1982 and sentenced to prison; she was released on 7 February 1986 and her conviction was quashed on 15 September 1988; in 2012 a coroner found that a dingo had taken Azaria.

Question: To what extent did the 1982 Chamberlain trial uphold the principles of justice?

Step	What to do	Comment
1. Position	State a point on the scale. Example: “The trial upheld the principles in its structure, but not in its result — at the time, to a small extent.”	An evaluation commits to a position up front.
2. Evidence — structures	The trial had the fair-process features: a jury, an independent judge, a prosecution and a defence, and the accused was presumed innocent and could answer the case.	Use the checks in Figures 1 and 2, one at a time.
3. Evidence — result	The result was wrong: an innocent person was convicted and sent to prison. Fairness in structure did not produce a fair outcome.	A trial is judged on result as well as structure.
4. Counter-evidence	The system’s corrections worked later: new evidence led to release in 1986, the conviction was quashed in 1988, and the 2012 coroner’s finding confirmed her account.	A strong evaluation gives evidence against its own position.
5. Judged conclusion	Restate with reasons: “At the time the trial achieved justice to a small extent, because the result was a grave injustice; over time, the appeal and review processes restored fairness.”	The conclusion follows from the weighed evidence.

Sources: Chamberlain case — conviction 29 October 1982; release 7 February 1986; conviction quashed 15 September 1988; coroner’s finding 12 June 2012.

Worked example 2 — discussing the link between justice and incarceration (scaffolded)

Question: Discuss the link between justice and incarceration.

Step	What to do	Comment
1. Define	Incarceration means keeping a person in prison.	Define the contested term before using it.
2. Link purposes to principles	Punishment and community protection connect to fairness and safety; rehabilitation connects to reducing future harm; denunciation connects to equality.	Use the five purposes in Figure 4.
3. The serve-justice side	Imprisonment protects the	Give the strongest case for this side

Step	What to do	Comment
	community from serious harm, punishes in proportion to the harm, and keeps like crimes treated alike.	(Figure 7, left).
4. The fail-justice side	It can punish the innocent (Chamberlain), it may not fix the causes of offending, and lost time cannot be returned.	Give the strongest case for this side too (Figure 7, right).
5. Judged conclusion	Example: “Incarceration serves justice when it is a last resort, proportionate and paired with rehabilitation and parole; it fails justice when it is overused or when it punishes the innocent.”	Weigh both sides, then judge.

The finished discussion is a short piece of writing that moves through these five steps in order.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. For each feature of a criminal trial in Figure 2, write the principle it mainly serves (fairness, equality, access, or more than one): (a) presumed innocent until proved guilty; (b) the same law applies to everyone; (c) the accused can get a lawyer and an interpreter; (d) a right to appeal to a higher court.

Q2. Using Figure 3: (a) in what year was Lindy Chamberlain convicted, and in what year was her conviction quashed? (b) how many full years was that gap? (c) which two 1986–2012 events show the system correcting itself?

Q3. Using Figure 4: (a) which purpose is about helping the offender turn their life around? (b) which purpose is about stopping the offender or others from offending again? (c) which two purposes connect most directly to keeping the community safe?

Q4. Using Figure 5: (a) name the least severe sentence; (b) what is a community correction order, and from what year did these begin in Victoria? (c) why is imprisonment described as a last resort?

Q5. Using Figure 6: (a) how many people were in custody in Australia in the March quarter 2026? (b) what was the imprisonment rate per 100,000 adults? (c) in one sentence, say why the size of the prison population makes the question “does incarceration achieve justice?” important.

Q6. For each situation, state which principle of justice (fairness, equality or access) is most at risk, and why: (a) an accused person cannot afford a lawyer and none is provided; (b) a judge is a close friend of the prosecutor; (c) a wealthy person is fined while a person with no income is sent to prison for the same offence.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Using Figure 2 and one named Victorian institution or Act from this section, explain how one feature of a criminal trial upholds one principle of justice. Write two to three sentences.

Q8. To what extent does a Victorian criminal trial uphold the principles of justice? Use Figure 1, at least one feature from Figure 2 that supports your position, and one way a trial can fall short (for example, cost, delay, or a person facing a charge without a lawyer). Give a position, evidence, counter-evidence and a judged conclusion.

Q9. Discuss the link between justice and incarceration. Use Figures 4, 5 and 7. Put the strongest case on each side, then reach a judged conclusion. Marks are awarded for the quality of the reasoning and the use of evidence, not for which side you take.

Q10. A student claims: “If a court follows the right steps, the result is always just.” Use the Chamberlain case (Figure 3) to test this claim. Identify one assumption (something the claim takes for granted as true) in the claim, one piece of evidence that supports it and one that challenges it, and reach a judged conclusion.

Source task — Source A: the five purposes of sentencing

Read Source A (Figure 8) and answer S1–S3.

Source A — the five purposes of sentencing, in plain words

The purposes for which a Victorian court may impose a sentence are — (a) to punish the offender, to an extent and in a manner that is just in all the circumstances; (b) to deter the offender or other persons from committing offences of the same or a similar kind; (c) to set up conditions that help the rehabilitation of the offender; (d) to show, on behalf of the community, that the court says this conduct is wrong; and (e) to protect the community from the offender.

In short: a Victorian court may punish only for these five reasons — to punish justly, to deter, to help rehabilitation, to speak for the community against the conduct, and to protect the community. Nothing else is a lawful reason for a sentence.

Sentencing Act 1991 (Vic), section 5(1), put in plain words for classroom study (in force; current as at 26 August 2026).

Source A — the five purposes of sentencing from the Sentencing Act 1991 (Vic) section 5(1), put in plain words, with a short gloss stating that a Victorian court may punish only for these five reasons.

Figure 8. Source A: the purposes of sentencing in the Sentencing Act 1991 (Vic), section 5(1), in plain words.

S1. (a) List the five purposes of sentencing in Source A. (b) Which purpose is about helping the offender turn their life around?

S2. Connect two different purposes in Source A to two different principles of justice (fairness, equality or access), using the working definitions in Figure 1. Justify each connection in one sentence.

S3. Evaluate the claim: “Imprisonment achieves justice because it protects the community.” Use Source A and Figure 7. Give the strongest case for the claim, the strongest case against it, and your judged conclusion. Marks are awarded for reasoning, not for the side taken.

Answers

1.
 - (a) fairness (b) equality (c) access (d) fairness and access.
2.
 - (a) Convicted 1982; quashed 1988. (b) Six years. (c) Her release in 1986 and the quashing of her conviction in 1988 (the 2012 coroner's finding also confirms her account).
3.
 - (a) rehabilitation (b) deterrence (c) deterrence and community protection.
4.
 - (a) A fine. (b) A sentence served in the community with unpaid work, programs and supervision instead of prison; from 2012 in Victoria. (c) Because a judge must pick the least severe sentence that still meets the purposes, so prison is used only when needed.
5.
 - (a) 49,295. (b) 225 per 100,000 adults. (c) Any answer that links the large number of people affected to the importance of asking whether prison achieves justice.
6.
 - (a) access — the person cannot reach the system and put their side. (b) fairness — the decision-maker is not neutral. (c) equality — the same offence is not treated the same way.
7. See full solutions.
8. See full solutions.
9. See full solutions. Marks are awarded for reasoning, not for the side taken.
10. See full solutions.

S1. (a) Punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation, denunciation, community protection. (b) Rehabilitation. S2. Open — the reasoning must connect each purpose to a working definition in Figure 1. S3. Open — marks are awarded for reasoning, not for the side taken.

Full solutions

Q7. Model answer: “Access means people can actually reach and use the legal system. Victoria Legal Aid, set up by the *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic), pays for a lawyer for a person who cannot afford one, so an accused person can actually reach the court and answer the case against them.” Marking guide: principle named and tied to a working definition (1 mark); named institution or Act used correctly (1 mark); explanation links the feature to upholding the principle (1 mark).

Q8. Model structure: *Position* — “A criminal trial in Victoria upholds the principles of justice to a great extent, but not completely.” *Evidence* — the accused is presumed innocent and the prosecution must prove guilt (fairness); the same law applies to everyone (equality); legal aid and interpreters help a person answer the case (access). *Counter-evidence* — cost and delay can make access unequal, and a person facing a serious charge without a lawyer may not get a fair hearing (the concern addressed in *Dietrich v The Queen* (1992)). *Judged conclusion* — “The structures strongly uphold fairness and equality; access is the principle most often strained, so overall to a great extent but not completely.” Marking guide: position (1); supporting evidence (1); counter-evidence (1); judged conclusion (1).

Q9. Model reasoning: *Serve-justice side* — imprisonment protects the community from serious harm, punishes in proportion to the harm, deters offending and treats like crimes alike, which serves fairness, equality and safety. *Fail-justice side* — it can punish the innocent (Chamberlain), lost time cannot be returned, and prison may not fix the causes of offending so people reoffend. *Judged conclusion* — incarceration serves justice when it is a proportionate last resort paired with rehabilitation and parole, and fails justice when overused or mistaken. Marking guide: strongest case given for each side (1 each); judged conclusion with reasons (1); use of at least one figure (1). Marks are awarded for reasoning, not for the conclusion reached.

Q10. Assumption: that following fair steps guarantees a fair result. Evidence supporting the claim: the Chamberlain trial had the fair-process structures (jury, judge, prosecution, defence), which is what “following the right steps” means. Evidence challenging it: despite those steps, an innocent person was convicted and imprisoned, and only later corrections put it right. Judged conclusion: fair steps make a just result much more likely but do not guarantee it, so the claim is too strong; a just system also needs working corrections. Marking guide: assumption (1); supporting evidence (1); challenging evidence (1); judged conclusion (1).

S2 (worked). A strong answer: deterrence connects to fairness, because fairness includes people being kept safe from harm that the law forbids; and community protection connects to access, in the sense that a community kept safe can actually use and reach the law. Any position is acceptable if each connection is tied to a working definition in Figure 1. Marking guide: two purposes chosen (1); each tied to a working definition (1 each); quality of reasoning (1).

S3 (worked). *For:* protecting the community is a listed purpose in Source A, and keeping people safe from serious harm is a core part of justice. *Against:* protection is only one of five purposes; if imprisonment ignores rehabilitation it can raise reoffending and reduce safety, and it can punish the innocent, which is itself an injustice. *Judged conclusion:* the claim is right in part — protection is one way imprisonment serves justice, but justice also needs punishment to be just, and rehabilitation to be pursued, so the claim overstates one purpose. Marking guide: strongest case for (1); strongest case against (1); judged conclusion (1).

Sources (as at 26 August 2026)

Curriculum: Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0, Civics and Citizenship, Levels 9 and 10 — VC2HC10S04 and elaborations E01–E02 (VCAA export retrieved 2026-07-29, re-read 2026-08-21).

Statutes: *Sentencing Act 1991* (Vic), s 5(1) (purposes of sentencing); *Corrections Act 1986* (Vic) (Adult Parole Board of Victoria, parole); *Legal Aid Act 1978* (Vic) (Victoria Legal Aid); *Juries Act 2000* (Vic) (trial by jury). Community correction orders began in Victoria in 2012.

Cases: Chamberlain case, Northern Territory — conviction 29 October 1982; release 7 February 1986; conviction quashed 15 September 1988; coroner’s finding 12 June 2012; *Dietrich v The Queen* (1992) 177 CLR 292 (High Court of Australia).

Data: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Corrective Services, Australia* — March quarter 2026: 49,295 persons in custody; imprisonment rate 225 per 100,000 adult population (viewed 26 August 2026).

All institutions, laws and cases above are real and named; descriptions are simplified for Year 9 study and current to 26 August 2026. This section is classroom material, not legal advice.

Australian and international political actors: their power and their ties to institutions

Victorian Curriculum 2.0 · Civics and Citizenship · Levels 9 and 10 · Skills — Evaluating democratic institutions and systems

VC2HC10S05

- VC2HC10S05.E01
- VC2HC10S05.E02
- VC2HC10S05.E03
- VC2HC10S05.E04
- VC2HC10S05.E05

This is a skills section. It takes knowledge you built earlier in this book — political parties, interest groups and the media (Section 1B), media influence and misinformation (Section 3C), Australia’s place in the world and its international institutions (Section 1D), and how treaties become Australian law (Section 2C) — and uses it to practise **evaluating power**: judging how much power a political actor really has, where that power comes from, and how it connects with institutions. This section describes the law and institutions in general terms for classroom study; it is not legal advice.

Theory

The skill this section teaches. To evaluate the power of a political actor is not to say “powerful” or “not powerful”. It is to ask four questions and answer them with evidence: who holds the power, where it comes from, how it is used and checked, and what shows that it is real. Every evaluation in this section then ends the way the evaluations in Sections 2D and 4D end — a position on a scale, evidence for and against, and a judged conclusion.

Part 1 — The working definition (.E01–.E05)

Contested terms — read before going on. *Power* and *influence* are **contested terms**: reasonable people define them differently, and the definition chosen can change the conclusion reached. This section therefore uses the working definitions below and uses only those definitions throughout. Every question in this section can be answered from them alone. Other definitions exist; they are not interchangeable with these.

- **Power** (working definition): the ability of a person or group to bring about an outcome they want, or to stop an outcome they do not want, even when others oppose them.
- **Influence** (working definition): the ability to change what other people or institutions decide or do, without commanding them. Influence is one way power is used.

Notice two things about the working definition. First, power is about *outcomes* — what actually happens — not about claims or titles. Second, remember the distinction you met in Section 3A: **power held** is not always the same as **power perceived** (what others believe a person or group can do). Evaluating power means testing what an actor actually gets done.

Evaluating power: the working definition and the four questions

This section uses these definitions throughout

POWER is the ability of a person or group to bring about an outcome they want, or to stop an outcome they do not want, even when others oppose them. **INFLUENCE** is the ability to change what other people or institutions decide or do, without commanding them. Influence is one way power is used.

WHO HOLDS THE POWER?

Name the political actor — a party, an interest group, the media, an international body, an individual politician.

WHERE DOES THE POWER COME FROM?

Votes and seats, money and jobs, control of what people see and hear, numbers of people acting together, or connections abroad.

HOW IS IT USED — AND CHECKED?

What does the actor do with the power? And what limits it — laws, courts, parliaments, registers, or other actors?

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?

What actually happened because of this actor? Power is tested by outcomes, not by claims or titles.

Power held is not always power perceived (Section 3A). Evaluate what an actor actually gets done, not what people assume they can do.

Banner giving the working definition of power, then four question cards: who holds the power, where the power comes from, how the power is used and checked, and what the evidence is, with a footer on power held versus power perceived

Figure 1. The working definition of power used in this section, and the four questions every evaluation asks.

Part 2 — Australian actors and their connections outside Australia (.E01)

A **political actor** is any person or group that takes part in politics to shape what government does. You met the main types in Section 1B: **political parties** (organised groups that seek to win elections and form government), **interest groups** (organised groups that seek to influence policy without seeking to govern, such as business groups, unions and environment groups), the **media**, and individual politicians. A **peak body** is an organisation that speaks for a whole group of organisations — for example, the ACTU speaks for many Australian unions.

Many of these actors are connected to bigger networks outside Australia (Figure 2). These connections are a source of power: they let Australian actors share ideas, join global campaigns, and bring international support to an issue at home.

Australian political actors and their connections outside Australia

Five actors, five global networks

Australian actor	Kind of actor	Connection outside Australia	What the connection lets it do
Australian Labor Party	Political party	The Progressive Alliance — a worldwide group of parties with centre-left beliefs	Shares ideas and campaigns with like-minded parties abroad
Liberal Party of Australia	Political party	The International Democrat Union — a worldwide group of centre-right parties	Coordinates with like-minded parties and shares policy ideas
Australian Greens	Political party	Global Greens — the worldwide group of green parties	Joins global campaigns on climate and the environment
ACTU — about 1.8 million members through its affiliated unions	Peak body (for unions)	The International Trade Union Confederation — the world's largest union body	Brings international union standards and support into Australian workplace debates
Amnesty International Australia	Interest group (human rights)	Amnesty International — a global human rights organisation	Runs campaigns that cross borders, and reports on Australia to the world

Connections outside Australia are a source of power: shared ideas, joint campaigns, and international support for an issue at home.

Table of five Australian political actors — the Australian Labor Party, the Liberal Party of Australia, the Australian Greens, the ACTU and Amnesty International Australia — each matched with its connection outside Australia and what the connection lets it do

Figure 2. Five Australian political actors and their connections outside Australia.

Connections run the other way too: foreign governments and the people acting for them also try to influence Australian politics. Australia has a public register to make that influence visible (Figure 3).

The Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme (FITS)

Australia's public register of foreign influence arrangements

What the scheme is

A public register created by the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018 (Cth). The Act was passed on 29 June 2018 and the scheme began on 10 December 2018. A foreign principal is a foreign government, or a person or organisation acting for one or under its control.

Who must register

People who have arrangements with foreign principals and undertake certain activities to influence Australian government or political processes.

What gets registered

The arrangement with the foreign principal and the kinds of activities done under it. The register is public — anyone can look at it.

Why it matters for power

Visibility is a check on power. Citizens, parliament and the media can see who is trying to influence Australian decisions, and judge it for themselves.

FITS does not stop foreign influence by itself. It makes influence visible — and visibility is a check on power.

Table of four rows explaining the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme: what the scheme is, who must register, what gets registered, and why a public register matters for evaluating power

Figure 3. The Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme (FITS) — Australia's public register of foreign influence arrangements.

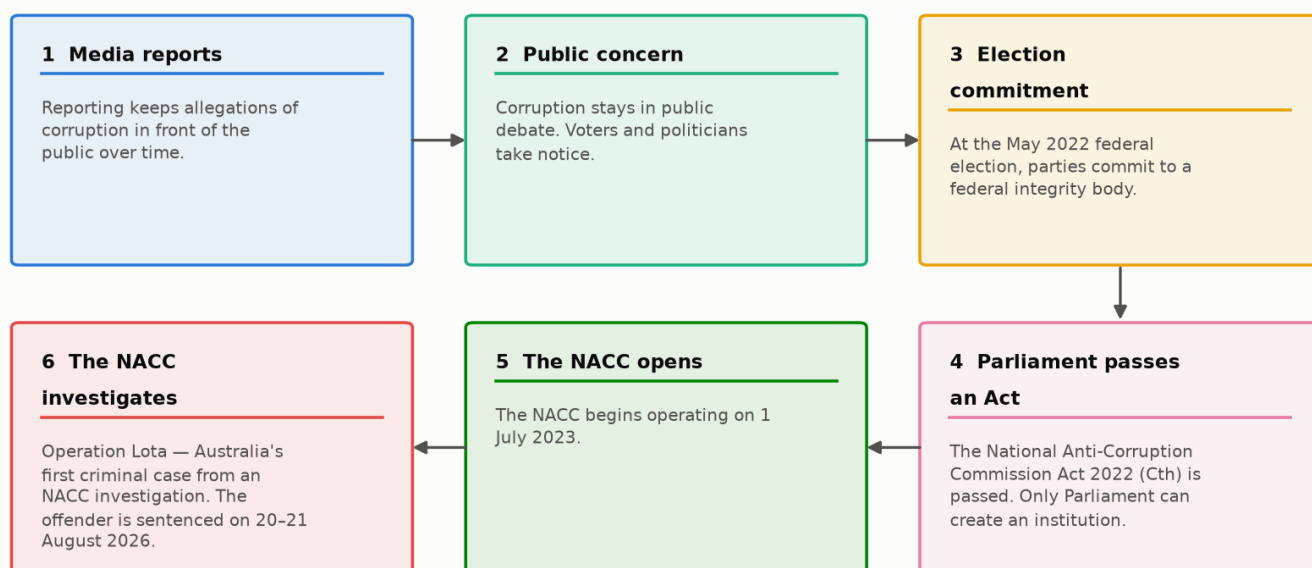
A public register does not stop foreign influence by itself. It makes influence *visible*, so parliament, the media and citizens can examine it. Visibility is a check on power.

Part 3 — The media's influence on institutions (.E02)

In Section 1B you saw that a small number of companies own most of Australia's major newspapers, and in Section 3C you examined misinformation. The media is a political actor because of what it can do to institutions. Figure 4 follows one chain: how media reporting can help bring a new institution into being.

A case study: media reporting and the building of the NACC

From reporting to a working institution — National Anti-Corruption Commission



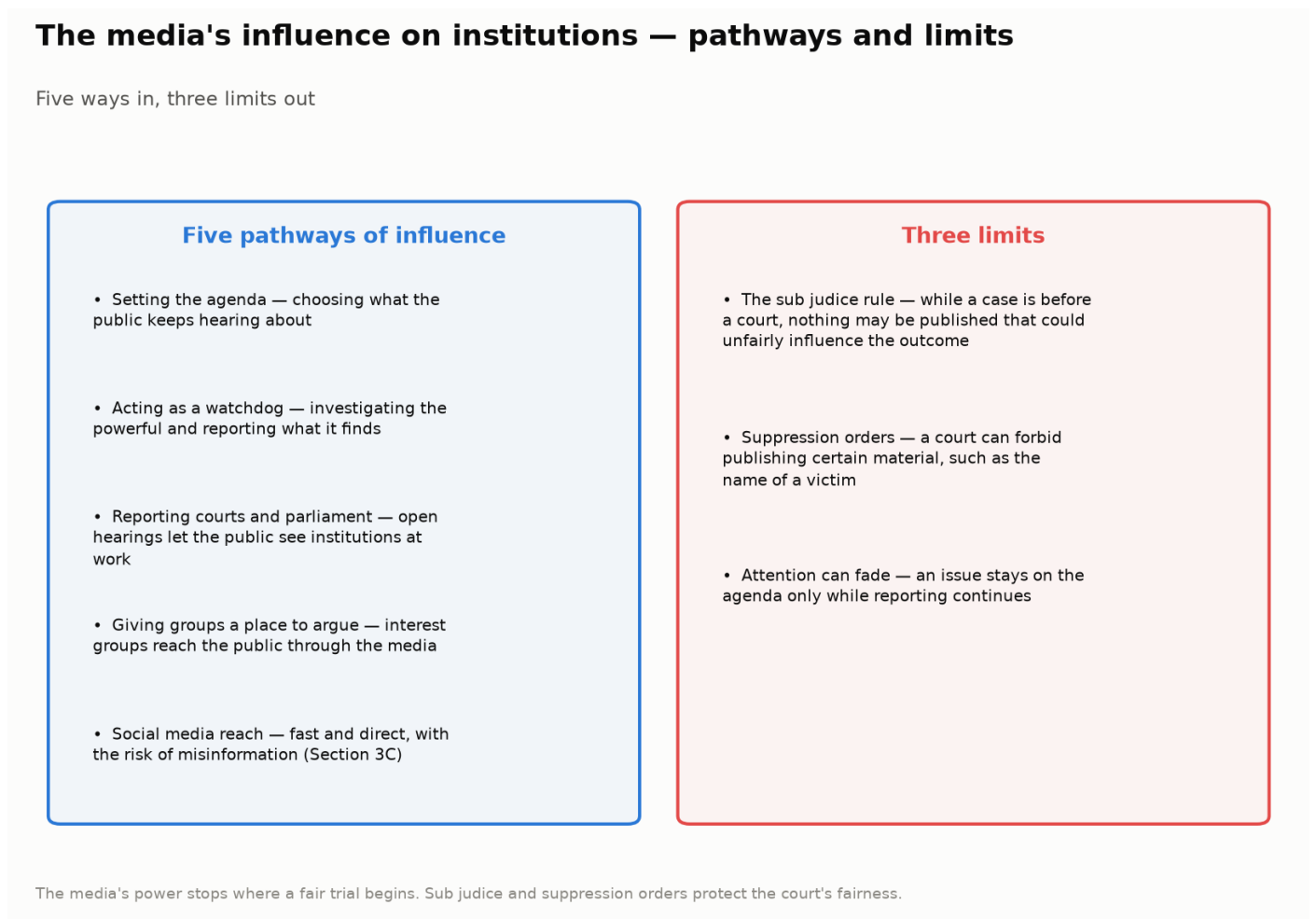
The media's part was early in the chain — reporting set the agenda. Parliament decided. The courts sentenced.

Flow diagram with six boxes: media reports raise public concern about corruption; the issue stays in public debate; parties make commitments at the May 2022 federal election; Parliament passes the National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022; the NACC opens on 1 July 2023; the NACC investigates, and in Operation Lota a court sentences an offender in August 2026

*Figure 4. A case study: media reporting and the building of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC). **Corruption** means the dishonest or unlawful use of power for private gain; an **integrity** body is an institution set up to keep public officials honest.*

Read Figure 4 carefully before going on. The media did not create the NACC — only Parliament can pass an Act, and only courts can sentence. The media's part was earlier in the chain: reporting kept the issue in front of the public until voters and politicians acted. In Operation Lota, Australia's first criminal case from an NACC investigation, the offender was sentenced in August 2026 — evidence that the institution now works.

Figure 5 sets out the pathways of media influence, and the limits on them.



Two panels. Left panel lists five pathways: setting the agenda; acting as a watchdog; reporting courts and parliament; giving groups a place to argue; and social media reach. Right panel lists three limits: the sub judice rule, suppression orders, and the fact that media attention can fade

Figure 5. Five ways the media can influence institutions, and three limits on that influence. A **watchdog** is someone who watches over powerful people and reports what they find.

Two of the limits need careful definitions. **Sub judice** is the rule that, while a case is before a court, nobody — including the media — may publish material that could unfairly influence the outcome, for example by turning a jury against the accused. A **suppression order** is an order a court makes that forbids publishing certain material, such as the name of a victim. These limits exist to protect fair trials — the media's power stops where the court's fairness begins.

Part 4 — International institutions and Australia's institutions (.E03)

You met the two-systems idea in Section 2C: international law binds Australia once the government **ratifies** a treaty (formally confirms it agrees to be bound), and Parliament then passes an Act to bring the treaty into Australian law. That idea is the key to this part. International institutions shape Australian institutions — and sometimes Australian institutions are tested by international ones.

International institutions and Australia's institutions

Influence runs in two directions

International institution	What it does	Connection to Australian institutions	Dated example
The United Nations climate framework: the UNFCCC (1992) and the Paris Agreement (2015)	Countries meet, negotiate and record their climate targets	Australia ratified the Paris Agreement on 10 November 2016. Its targets now sit in section 10 of the Climate Change Act 2022 (Cth): 43 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, and net zero by 2050	Targets written into Australian law in 2022
The World Trade Organization (WTO)	Sets trade rules between countries and settles disputes between them	Several countries challenged Australia's Tobacco Plain Packaging Act 2011 before the WTO — an Australian law was tested by an international panel, and survived	Panel report 28 June 2018 (all claims rejected); final reports adopted 29 June 2020
The UN Human Rights Council — Universal Periodic Review	Reviews every UN member country's human rights record about every four and a half years	Makes recommendations to Australia; the government records its response to each one	Australia reviewed 18 January 2021; 300 recommendations; government response June 2021

The UN climate framework pushed Australian policy forward; the WTO case tested an Australian law. Both directions are influence.

Table of three rows: the United Nations climate change framework and the Paris Agreement, the World Trade Organization, and the UN Human Rights Council; each matched with what it does, its connection to Australian institutions, and a dated example

Figure 6. Three international institutions and their connections with Australian institutions. The Paris Agreement targets live in section 10 of the Climate Change Act 2022 (Cth).

Look at the two directions in Figure 6. The UN climate framework pushed Australian policy *forward*: Australia's 2030 and 2050 targets now sit in an Australian Act. The WTO case went the other way: several countries challenged an Australian law, and an international panel tested it — and Australia's law survived. Both directions are influence. Worked example 2 returns to the Paris Agreement for a full evaluation.

Part 5 — UN recommendations and Australia's response (.E04)

The United Nations does more than make treaties. Through the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**, the UN Human Rights Council examines the human rights record of every UN member country, roughly every four and a half years, and makes **recommendations** — formal advice about what the country should change. The review is not a court: it cannot force a country to do anything. Its power is the power of the record, and of public pressure.

Australia's third review took place on 18 January 2021. Other countries put 300 recommendations to Australia, and in June 2021 the Australian Government responded, recording for each recommendation whether it supported it or noted it. Figure 7 shows how two recommendations were handled.

UN recommendations and Australia's response

The Universal Periodic Review, third cycle — Australia

How it works: every UN member country's human rights record is reviewed about every four and a half years. Australia's third review took place on 18 January 2021. Other countries put 300 recommendations to Australia, and in June 2021 the Australian Government responded, recording whether it supported or noted each one.

Recommendation	Government's response	What happened next
Adopt a national human rights act	Not supported by the government of the day	Australia still has no national human rights act. Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and the ACT's Human Rights Act 2004 protect rights in those places.
Raise the age of criminal responsibility (then 10 in most places)	Noted — criminal law is mainly a state and territory matter	The Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory have passed laws to raise the age from 10 to 12.

The UPR cannot force change. Its power is the record — and the public pressure that follows it.

Table of two example recommendations from Australia's third Universal Periodic Review and what happened next: a recommendation for a national human rights act, which the government of the day did not support, and a recommendation to raise the age of criminal responsibility, after which the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory passed laws to raise the age from 10 to 12

Figure 7. Two recommendations from Australia's third Universal Periodic Review (2021), and Australia's response. Australia still has no national human rights act, though Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and the ACT's Human Rights Act 2004 protect rights in those places.

A contested issue — both sides at their strongest. Whether the UPR actually changes Australian policy is genuinely debated, and this workbook does not define one correct view.

The strongest case that the UPR matters: it puts every country's record on the public record, gives reformers evidence and language to press for change, and some recommendations — such as raising the age of criminal responsibility — have been followed by real legal change.

The strongest case that the UPR matters little: it cannot force any change; governments can reject recommendations and face no penalty, and Australia's rejection of a national human rights act shows a government can simply say no.

Notice which side you favour. Marks in this workbook are awarded for the quality of the reasoning and the use of evidence, not for which side you land on.

Part 6 — How fully Australia upholds one international law (.E05)

To **uphold** an international law means to do what the law requires — not just to sign it. Judging how fully Australia upholds one needs a method, because the evidence pulls two ways. The Paris Agreement is the test case.

Under the Paris Agreement (which Australia ratified on 10 November 2016), each country must prepare and communicate its own national climate targets — called **nationally determined contributions** — and pursue actions at home to achieve them (Article 4.2). Each new target must go further than the last and show the country's highest

possible **ambition** (how much it aims to do) (Article 4.3). You will read both articles yourself in Source A at the end of this section.

Does Australia uphold Article 4 of the Paris Agreement?

The evidence pulls two ways

Evidence that Australia upholds it

- Australia ratified the Agreement on 10 November 2016
- Its targets are written into Australian law — section 10 of the Climate Change Act 2022 (Cth): 43 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, and net zero by 2050
- Its ambition has risen three times — 26–28 per cent by 2030 (2015), then 43 per cent (2022), then 62–70 per cent by 2035 (2024) — matching the Article 4.3 rule that each target must go further
- Australia reports on its progress

Evidence that Australia does not fully uphold it

- Targets are promises, not results — the actual cuts must still be delivered
- Emissions have not fallen in a straight line
- Critics argue a wealthy country with high emissions per person should cut faster and deeper
- The 'highest possible ambition' test in Article 4.3 is hard to prove

Commitments and results are different evidence. Weigh both before judging the extent.

Two panels. Left, in green, evidence that Australia upholds Article 4: ratified in 2016; targets written into the Climate Change Act 2022; targets rising over time from 26–28 per cent in 2015 to 43 per cent in 2022 to 62–70 per cent by 2035 in 2024. Right, in red, evidence that Australia does not fully uphold it: targets are promises, not results; critics argue the targets fall short of what a wealthy, high-emitting country should do; and progress has been uneven

Figure 8. Evidence on both sides of the question: does Australia uphold Article 4 of the Paris Agreement?

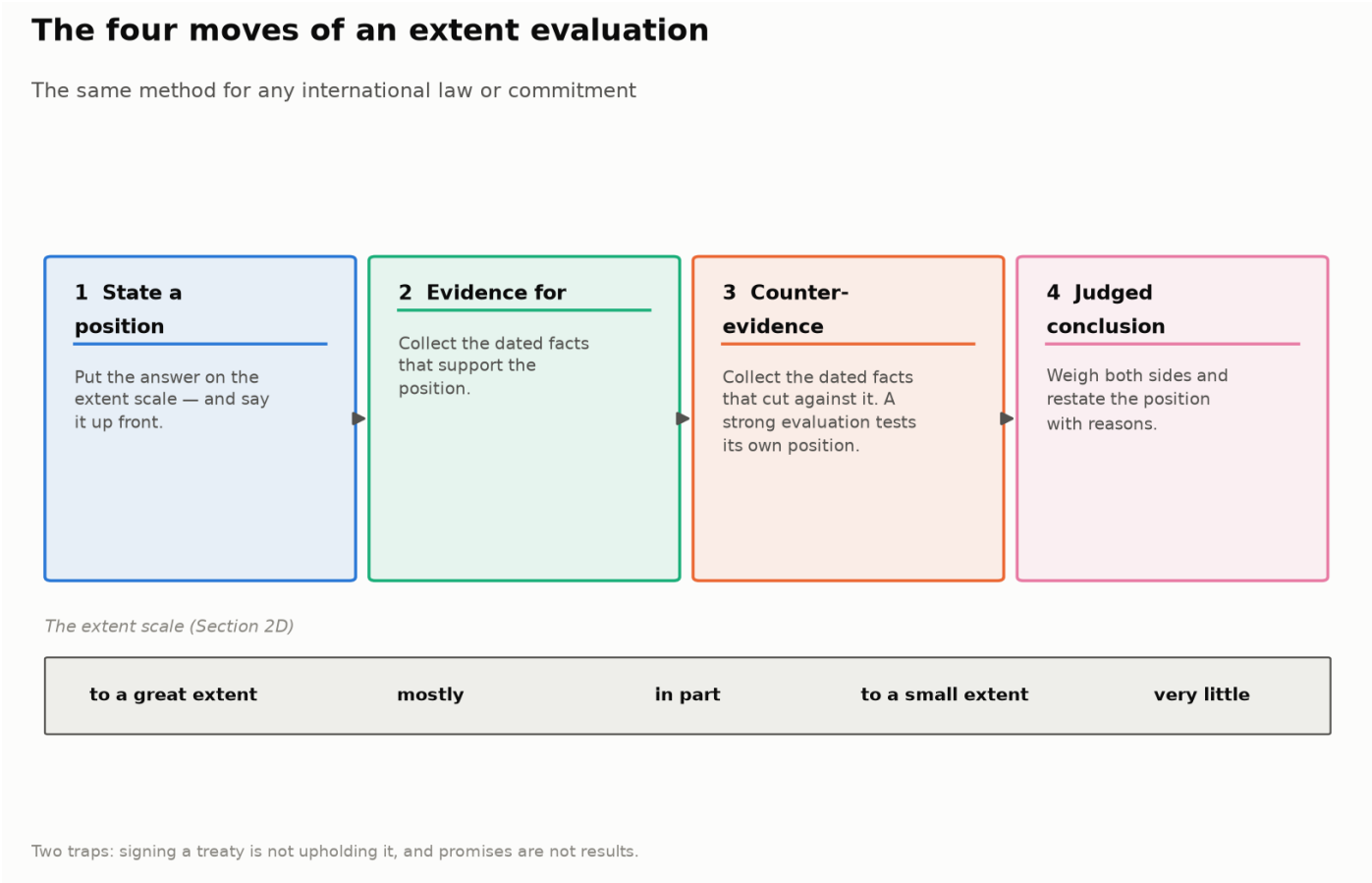
A contested issue — both sides at their strongest. Whether Australia is doing enough on its Paris targets is a live political debate, and this workbook does not define one correct view.

The strongest case that Australia upholds its commitments: Australia put its targets into a Commonwealth Act, has raised its ambition three times, and reports on its progress — which is exactly what Article 4 asks of a country.

The strongest case that Australia falls short: a target is a promise, not a result; actual cuts in **emissions** (greenhouse gases released into the air) have not always kept pace with the promises, and critics argue a wealthy country with high emissions per person should cut faster and deeper.

Notice which side you favour. Marks in this workbook are awarded for the quality of the reasoning and the use of evidence, not for which side you land on.

Figure 9 gives the method for turning that evidence into an evaluation.



Four steps in order: state a position on the extent scale, gather evidence that supports the position, gather counter-evidence against it, and weigh both to reach a judged conclusion, with the extent scale beneath: to a great extent, mostly, in part, to a small extent, very little

Figure 9. The four moves of an extent evaluation. The scale is the one you met in Section 2D.

Two traps to avoid. First, do not confuse *signing* with *upholding* — ratifying a treaty is the start, not the proof. Second, do not judge only on promises: ask what has actually happened, and what is still missing.

Part 7 — Putting the evaluation together

Every task in this section uses the same pattern: (1) name the actor and its connections, (2) use the four questions of Figure 1, (3) test the evidence both ways, and (4) reach a judged conclusion on the extent scale. Worked example 1 applies the pattern to the media; worked example 2 applies it to the Paris Agreement; the source task asks you to do it yourself.

Worked examples

Worked example 1 — evaluating the power of the media as a political actor (scaffolded)

Case source: the NACC case study, Figure 4. Sustained media reporting kept allegations of corruption in public debate; the Albanese Government committed to a federal integrity commission at the May 2022 election; Parliament passed the National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022 (Cth); the NACC opened on 1 July 2023; in Operation Lota, Australia’s first criminal case from an NACC investigation, the offender was sentenced on 20–21 August 2026.

Question: Evaluate the power of the media as a political actor, using the NACC case study.

Step	What to do	Comment
1. Name the actor and its power base	The media is a political actor whose power base is reach — what people	Use the working definition of power from Figure 1.

Step	What to do	Comment
	see, read and hear.	
2. Evidence of influence	Media reporting kept corruption allegations in public debate; parties then made election commitments; Parliament passed the NACC Act 2022; the NACC opened on 1 July 2023 and has since investigated and helped bring a conviction.	Trace the chain in Figure 4 step by step.
3. Counter-evidence — the limits	The media did not create the NACC: only Parliament can pass an Act, and only courts can sentence. Reporting must also stop where fair-trial rules (sub judice, suppression orders) begin.	A strong evaluation gives evidence against its own position.
4. Judge the kind of power	The media's power here is agenda power — the power to choose which issues the public keeps thinking about — not decision-making power.	Name the kind of power; that sharpens the judgement.
5. Judged conclusion	Example: "The media's influence on this institution was real and necessary but shared: it set the agenda, while Parliament and the courts held the decision-making power."	The conclusion follows from the weighed evidence.

Sources: National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022 (Cth); NACC, commenced 1 July 2023; Operation Lota sentencing, 20–21 August 2026 (NACC media release, viewed 26 August 2026).

Worked example 2 — building an extent judgement on an international law (scaffolded)

Question: To what extent does Australia uphold Article 4 of the Paris Agreement?

Step	What to do	Comment
1. State the standard	Article 4.2 requires each country to prepare, communicate and maintain its national targets and to pursue actions at home to achieve them; Article 4.3 requires each new target to go further than the last.	Quote or closely paraphrase the source — Source A.
2. Position	State a point on the scale. Example: "Australia upholds Article 4 to a great extent in its commitments, but the extent is harder to judge when measured against results."	Commit to a position up front.
3. Evidence for	Australia ratified the Agreement on 10 November 2016; its 2030 and 2050 targets are written into section 10 of the Climate Change Act 2022 (Cth); and its targets have risen three times — 26–28 per cent (2015), 43 per cent (2022), 62–70 per cent by 2035 (2024) — which matches the	Use Figure 8's left panel.

Step	What to do	Comment
	Article 4.3 rule that each target must go further.	
4. Counter-evidence	Targets are promises, not results; emissions have not fallen in a straight line; and critics argue Australia's targets still fall short of what a wealthy, high-emitting country should do.	A strong evaluation tests its own position.
5. Judged conclusion	Example: "Australia upholds Article 4 to a great extent in the structures of commitment — ratifying, legislating and raising targets — but fully upholding it depends on results that are still in the future."	Separate commitments from results.

The finished response is a short piece of writing that moves through these five steps in order.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Using Figure 1: (a) write the working definition of power used in this section; (b) which of the four questions asks you to look for evidence? (c) what is the difference between power held and power perceived?

Q2. Using Figure 2: (a) name two Australian political parties and the global group each is connected to; (b) which peak body is connected to the International Trade Union Confederation? (c) in one sentence, say how these outside connections add to an Australian actor's power.

Q3. Using Figure 3: (a) what do the letters FITS stand for? (b) in what year did the scheme begin? (c) why does a *public* register help citizens evaluate power?

Q4. Using Figure 4: (a) on what date did the NACC open? (b) what happened in Operation Lota in August 2026? (c) which step in the chain shows that media reporting alone cannot create an institution — and what had to happen instead?

Q5. Using Figure 5: (a) name three of the five pathways of media influence; (b) what are the two limits on media reporting of court cases? (c) in one sentence, say why those limits exist.

Q6. Using Figures 6 and 7: (a) which Australian Act contains the Paris Agreement targets? (b) what did the WTO panel decide about Australia's plain packaging law on 28 June 2018? (c) name one recommendation from Australia's third Universal Periodic Review and say what happened after it.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Choose one Australian political actor from Figure 2. Explain how its connection outside Australia can add to its power on a current issue. Name the actor, its connection, and the kind of power the connection adds. Write three to four sentences.

Q8. A student claims: "The media is the most powerful political actor in Australia." Test this claim using the NACC case study (Figure 4) and Figure 5. Identify one assumption (something the claim takes for granted as true) in the claim, one piece of evidence that supports it and one that challenges it, and reach a judged conclusion.

Q9. Explain one recommendation from Australia's third Universal Periodic Review and the Australian Government's response to it, and evaluate whether the UPR process has real power over Australian policy. Put the strongest case on each side, then reach a judged conclusion. Marks are awarded for the quality of the reasoning and the use of evidence, not for which side you take.

Q10. Choose one international law or commitment Australia has made (for example, the Paris Agreement or a recommendation from the Universal Periodic Review). Examine how fully Australia upholds it. Use the four moves of Figure 9: a position on the extent scale, evidence for, counter-evidence, and a judged conclusion.

Source task — Source A: the Paris Agreement, Article 4, paragraphs 2 and 3

Read Source A (Figure 10) and answer S1–S3.

Source A — the Paris Agreement, Article 4, paragraphs 2–3

Text shown verbatim for classroom study

2. Each Party shall prepare, communicate and maintain successive nationally determined contributions that it intends to achieve. Parties shall pursue domestic mitigation measures, with the aim of achieving the objectives of such contributions.

3. Each Party's successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression beyond the Party's then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.

In plain words: a nationally determined contribution is each country's own national climate target. Mitigation measures are actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Progression means each new target must go further than the one before. 'Differentiated responsibilities' means countries' duties differ with their wealth and circumstances.

Paris Agreement (2015), Article 4, paragraphs 2–3. Australia ratified the Agreement on 10 November 2016.

Source A — the exact words of Article 4, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Paris Agreement, with a plain-words gloss explaining nationally determined contributions, mitigation measures, progression and highest possible ambition

*Figure 10. Source A: the Paris Agreement, Article 4, paragraphs 2–3 (verbatim). In plain words: a **nationally determined contribution** is each country's own national climate target; **mitigation measures** are actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions; **progression** means each new target must go further than the one before.*

S1. (a) According to Article 4.2, what must each country do? (b) According to Article 4.3, what must each new target represent?

S2. Name one Australian institution and one Australian Act that give effect to Australia's targets under Source A, and explain the connection in two sentences. Use Part 4 and Figure 6.

S3. Evaluate the claim: "Australia upholds its commitments under Article 4 of the Paris Agreement." Use Source A and Figure 8. Give the strongest case for the claim, the strongest case against it, and your judged conclusion. Marks are awarded for reasoning, not for the side taken.

Answers

1.
 - (a) Power is the ability of a person or group to bring about an outcome they want, or to stop an outcome they do not want, even when others oppose them. (b) The fourth question: what is the evidence? (c) Power held is what a person or group can actually do; power perceived is what others believe they can do, which may sit above or below the real thing.
2.
 - (a) For example: the Australian Labor Party — the Progressive Alliance; the Liberal Party of Australia — the International Democrat Union; the Australian Greens — Global Greens. Any two. (b) The ACTU. (c) Any answer that links the connection to shared ideas, joint campaigns or international support for an issue at home.
3.
 - (a) Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme. (b) 2018 (the Act was passed on 29 June 2018 and the scheme began on 10 December 2018). (c) Any answer that links visibility to checking power: citizens can see who is trying to influence their government and judge it for themselves.
4.
 - (a) 1 July 2023. (b) Australia's first criminal case from an NACC investigation ended with the offender being sentenced (on 20–21 August 2026). (c) Parliament passing the National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022 — only Parliament can create an institution by passing an Act.
5.
 - (a) Any three of: setting the agenda; acting as a watchdog; reporting courts and parliament; giving groups a place to argue; social media reach. (b) The sub judice rule and suppression orders. (c) To protect fair trials — so that reporting cannot unfairly influence a case that is still before a court.
6.
 - (a) The Climate Change Act 2022 (Cth), section 10. (b) The panel rejected every claim against Australia's plain packaging law. (c) Any answer that uses one row of Figure 7, for example: the recommendation to raise the age of criminal responsibility — afterwards the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory passed laws to raise the age from 10 to 12.
7. See full solutions.
8. See full solutions.
9. See full solutions. Marks are awarded for reasoning, not for the side taken.
10. See full solutions.

S1. (a) Prepare, communicate and maintain its national climate targets, and pursue actions at home to achieve them. (b) A progression beyond the country's current target, reflecting its highest possible ambition. S2. Open — the reasoning must name the Parliament (which passed the Act) and section 10 of the Climate Change Act 2022 (Cth). S3. Open — marks are awarded for reasoning, not for the side taken.

Full solutions

Q7. Model answer: “The ACTU is connected to the International Trade Union Confederation, a global union body. On an issue such as workplace safety rules, that connection lets the ACTU point to standards and campaigns from unions in other countries, and bring international support to its case at home. The connection adds influence — the power to shape what decision-makers consider — rather than decision-making power, which stays with Parliament.” Marking guide: actor and connection named correctly (1 mark); kind of power identified (1 mark); link between the connection and the actor's power explained (1 mark).

Q8. Assumption: that the actor who gets the most attention, or starts the chain, must also be the one who decides. Evidence supporting the claim: without sustained media reporting keeping corruption allegations in public debate, the chain in Figure 4 may never have started — the media set the agenda that parties then answered. Evidence challenging it: the media could not create the NACC — only Parliament could pass the Act — and the media's own reporting is limited by the sub judice rule and suppression orders. Judged conclusion: the media is a powerful agenda-setter, but

calling it the most powerful actor overstates its power, because the decision-making power stayed with Parliament and the courts. Marking guide: assumption (1); supporting evidence (1); challenging evidence (1); judged conclusion (1).

Q9. Model reasoning: *Recommendation and response* — at Australia’s third Universal Periodic Review on 18 January 2021, other countries recommended raising the age of criminal responsibility; the government response was recorded in June 2021, and afterwards the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory passed laws to raise the age from 10 to 12. *The UPR-has-power side* — it puts Australia’s record on the public record, gives reformers evidence and language, and this recommendation was followed by real legal change. *The UPR-lacks-power side* — the UPR cannot force change; the same review recommended a national human rights act and the government of the day did not support it, so Australia still has none; governments can reject recommendations without penalty. *Judged conclusion* — example: “The UPR’s power is real but uneven: it can record, name and pressure, but whether change happens depends on Australian governments and parliaments.” Marking guide: recommendation and response explained (1); each side put at strength (1 each); judged conclusion with reasons (1). Marks are awarded for reasoning, not for the conclusion reached.

Q10. Model structure: *Standard* — set out what the law or commitment requires (for the Paris Agreement, Source A). *Position* — a point on the extent scale. *Evidence for* — for the Paris Agreement: Australia ratified it on 10 November 2016, targets in section 10 of the Climate Change Act 2022 (Cth), and targets rising three times (26–28 per cent in 2015, 43 per cent in 2022, 62–70 per cent by 2035 in 2024). *Counter-evidence* — targets are promises, not results; emissions have not fallen in a straight line; critics argue Australia should cut faster. *Judged conclusion* — separate commitments from results. Marking guide: standard and position (1); evidence for (1); counter-evidence (1); judged conclusion (1).

S2 (worked). A strong answer: the Commonwealth Parliament is the institution — it passed the Climate Change Act 2022 (Cth), and section 10 of that Act writes Australia’s targets (43 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, and net zero by 2050) into Australian law. The connection is the two-systems bridge from Section 2C: the Paris Agreement binds Australia at international law, and the Act brings the targets home. Marking guide: institution named (1); Act named (1); connection explained (1).

S3 (worked). *For:* Australia ratified on 10 November 2016, legislated its targets in the Climate Change Act 2022, and has raised its ambition three times — which is what Articles 4.2 and 4.3 ask for. *Against:* a target is a promise, not a result; emissions have not fallen in a straight line; and critics argue a wealthy, high-emitting country should cut faster and deeper, so the “highest possible ambition” test is the hardest one to prove. *Judged conclusion:* the claim holds to a great extent for the structures of commitment — ratifying, legislating, raising — but full upholding depends on results that are still in the future. Marking guide: strongest case for (1); strongest case against (1); judged conclusion (1).

Sources (as at 26 August 2026)

Curriculum: Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0, Civics and Citizenship, Levels 9 and 10 — VC2HC10S05 and elaborations E01–E05 (VCAA export retrieved 2026-07-29, re-read 2026-08-21).

Statutes: *National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022* (Cth) (establishes the NACC; commenced 1 July 2023); *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018* (Cth) (assent 29 June 2018; scheme commenced 10 December 2018); *Climate Change Act 2022* (Cth) (section 10: Australia’s targets of 43 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero by 2050); *Tobacco Plain Packaging Act 2011* (Cth); *Criminal Code 1899* (Qld), section 442BA.

Treaties and UN material: Paris Agreement (adopted 12 December 2015; Australia ratified 10 November 2016), Article 4, paragraphs 2–3; UN Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review, third cycle — Australia reviewed 18 January 2021, report A/HRC/46/13; Australian Government response, June 2021, A/HRC/46/13/Add.1.

Cases and proceedings: World Trade Organization dispute DS435, *Australia — Tobacco Plain Packaging* — panel report circulated 28 June 2018 (all claims rejected); Appellate Body reports circulated 9 June 2020; Dispute Settlement Body adopted the reports 29 June 2020. NACC Operation Lota — sentencing 20–21 August 2026 (NACC media release, viewed 26 August 2026).

Organisations and connections: Australian Labor Party and the Progressive Alliance; Liberal Party of Australia and the International Democrat Union; Australian Greens and Global Greens; ACTU (about 1.8 million members through

its affiliated unions) and the International Trade Union Confederation; Amnesty International Australia and Amnesty International.

All institutions, laws and proceedings above are real and named; descriptions are simplified for Year 9 study and current to 26 August 2026. This section is classroom material, not legal advice.