

Classical Societies and Cultures GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

On the whole the standard was similar to last year. There were few very short responses or responses that struggled with the tasks. However, there were more responses that only implicitly addressed the criteria, especially for Part A. As usual, there were some excellent responses that were rewarding and exciting to read.

The major reason for students scoring less well were: implicit narrative responses, neglect of Criterion 2 (techniques), misunderstanding of Criterion 3 (importance to the whole work) of Part A, or poor choice of essay topics in Part B. Students appear to have responded to the 2001 assessment report with regard to Criteria 4 and 5 of Part B as the problems identified then were not as problematic this year. Neither was comparing two prescribed texts an issue this year.

A small number of students tried to reproduce prepared responses to either Part A or Part B. For Part A, this took the form of focusing the analysis on ideas outside the passage. In Part B it was trying to marry the prepared essay with the examination topic that the student had selected. Students need to be reminded to number their responses and to divide their time according to the distribution of marks. There were a number of papers where the analyses and the essay were the same length.

Many responses were hampered by poor spelling and expression. Fluent and succinct responses allow more ideas to be expressed clearly and explicitly. Poor expression can lead to ambiguities: *'Homer was said to be an Ionian in the C8 or C9'*: absurdities: *'people who were inherited from rich relatives'*; *'Medea only gets her safety through promises to fertilise Aegeus'* and *'Thucydides depicts an exact account of an hysterical event'*. Likewise inaccuracies, e.g. *'The Iliad written in 350 BC, the C13'* and The Bacchae *'written in 406 and performed posthumously in 409'* do not demonstrate that students are in command of their material. Finally, students should be advised not to include esoteric Greek or Latin terms into their responses. They are often incorrectly used, e.g. *'The Greek community believed in that thing called gravitas.'* and do not contribute to any criterion.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

The most popular Greek text was *Oedipus*, followed by *Iliad*/Hellenistic sculpture and Clouds/Thucydides. The most popular Roman text was *Aeneid*, followed by Tacitus, and Roman architecture. There were fewer responses on Thyestes and none on Horace. In general there seemed to be a more even spread across the texts implying that teachers and students are feeling more confident with the range of prescribed texts. There were also more Greek/Roman combinations.

Students should be reminded that Part A requires a literary or art analysis that looks at the works **aside from their context**. It is an opportunity to appreciate the works for their own sake rather than as the cultural products from a particular society. A discussion **relevant** to and with a **focus** on the passage/work was required.

Many students, writing on selected passages, began their analysis with an introduction as a way to start. However, a number used up valuable time with redundant information, e.g. **historical context** for which there is **no criterion** in **Part A**. A better use of time would be to identify the context of the passage within the work, explaining why the passage is important to the 'plot' of the work as a whole, thus gaining credit toward Criterion 3. Another way to 'introduce' their analysis would be for students to list the ideas, issues and values found in the passage and explain their relationship to the ideas issues and values of the work as a whole, gaining credit for both Criterion 2 and 3.

Fewer students responded with a discussion of the general ideas in the text as a whole (or of the style) and the authors 'usual' techniques, with little reference to the passage/work. However, there was a greater tendency to retell the story, summarise the passage or describe the art works leaving the reader to identify ideas, techniques and the importance of the passage/artwork to the whole work/style. Students need to understand the difference between a summary, a comprehension exercise and an analysis. Many students were able to tie their general discussion to the passage/work through quotes and specific details. Encouraging students to underline and annotate passages/artworks, throughout the year and on the examination paper should help to keep them focused on the passage/artwork and to identify relevant ideas, issues, values and techniques.

More appropriate responses tended to:

- focus on the passage then link to the whole work
- analyse rather than describe
- be explicit rather than implicit
- explain ideas, issues, values, aesthetic qualities and techniques
- use quotes to support discussion
- discuss the importance of the passage to the whole work or the relationship of the artwork to its style
- use all information to 'work' for the criteria, e.g. by combining ideas, techniques and importance.

Less appropriate responses tended to:

- summarise the whole work/style with reference to the passage/artwork
- narrate/describe rather than analyse
- be implicit rather than explicit
- identify ideas, issues, values, aesthetic qualities and especially techniques, rather than explain them
- use quotes as the discussion or identification of a technique rather than to support the discussion
- discuss ongoing significance, or significance to classical society, rather than the importance of the passage to the whole work
- contain redundant information that did not ‘work’ for the criteria, e.g. socio-historical context.

Criterion 1 Knowledge of ideas, issues, values, and/or aesthetic qualities in the passage/work (Average mark 3.72/Available marks 5)

The following contributed toward this criterion:

- **identification** and **explanation** of ideas, issues, values and/or aesthetic qualities **specific** to the passage/work
- quotes and specific references **used to support** analysis
- **relevant** historical context **only** if applicable to the ideas in the passage/work, e.g. for Thucydides, Tacitus, or the art.

Criterion 2 Analysis of techniques used to emphasise ideas, issues, values and/or aesthetic qualities in the passage/work (2.85/5)

Correct identification, **explicit** explanation of the **impact** of the technique and **consistent** use of supporting quotes contribute towards this criterion. Given that this is a core criterion for coursework assessment tasks throughout the year it is surprising that some students left out, or only implicitly cover techniques.

Students should be encouraged to think about what the author has done to achieve the effect produced by the passage/work. Rather than ‘Oedipus says “I stopped her. I solved the riddle by my wit alone”’ or even ‘Sophocles uses words like “I stopped her. I solved the riddle by my wit alone”’ a better response would be ‘Sophocles *characterises* Oedipus as arrogant with the *repetition* of the pronoun I’.

Criterion 3 Evaluation of the importance of the passage to the work as a whole, or of the work to its cultural form (2.18/5)

More students attempted an explicit response to this criterion than last year, usually in an ‘introduction’ or a ‘conclusion’. A number of students though are still confusing, ‘importance to the whole work/style’ with importance to the society or, the ‘ongoing significance’ criterion of the ‘Catalogue’ assessment task. Many still handle it in a fairly cursory or implicit way by summarising the whole work/style or merely referring to other parts of the text. **Explicit** comments about the importance of the passage/work were rewarded, for example, for *Oedipus*, that the passage:

- revealed another side to Oedipus’ character, his earlier confidence now appearing as arrogance
- contained ideas such as disrespect for/questioning of the gods and motifs such as the relationship of blindness and sight to ignorance and wisdom found throughout the play
- used these elements to prefigure his ‘downfall’

rather than ‘*provides us, today’s society, with a portal into the ideas, issues and values of the times they were produced in*’, or ‘*important to Athens because it warned them of excessive pride*’.

References to **specific** intratextual (as distinct from intertextual) **links to support the analysis** were characteristic of the better responses.

Students could be encouraged to think about:

- the impact on the whole work if the passage was not there
- the importance of the passage to a) plot b) characterisation c) ideas, issues, values, techniques and aesthetics of the whole work.

Similarly art students could think about how typical the work is of:

- the subject matter
- ideas and techniques associated with the style it represents.

Section B

The most popular essays were 4 and 6, followed by 1, 3, 8 and 10.

Students need to think carefully about which topic suits the texts they have prepared. A number of responses scored low on the relevance and analysis criteria because they had to rely on assertion rather than evidence when trying to fit, for example, *Oedipus* to Question 4 (war) or *Clouds*, *Crito*, *Oedipus* or *Medea* to Question 10 (history writing).

This problem is also related to many students’ inability to analyse the topic and understand terms. Less successful responses picked a term, e.g. ‘heroes’ and used it in a fairly uncritical, narrative way. There also seemed to be some confusion about the meaning of the term. Students used it indiscriminately as epic hero, dramatic hero, protagonist or merely as someone to be admired. More successful responses analysed the topic and addressed all terms, e.g. ‘In **Greek tragedies** we feel **pity** for the **heroes** because their **misfortunes** are **undeserved**’ to construct an argument. Attention to the precise terms of the topic is essential to really well. Likewise students should use words like ‘*always*’, ‘*only*’,

'never', 'rather than' and 'just another' as key words around which to construct their argument. Students should be encouraged to 'unpack' and plan essay topics during the year and on the examination paper.

A number of students wrote on three or more texts and this should be discouraged. Responses tend to be list like, superficial and less likely to cover all criteria. Brief cross-referencing to other works, rewarded at Criterion 6 as evidence to support an argument, are a better approach. Students now better understand that the prescribed art 'texts', Hellenistic sculpture and Roman architecture, comprise a number of works each. Fewer students used a comparison of one prescribed work with one from another period to judge whether 'emotional realism is to be valued more than formal perfection' or whether 'architecture is political rather than functional'.

Criterion 1 Development of a relevant argument and /or responses (3.47/5)

Responses needed to be relevant to the topic selected; therefore essays that bypassed the topic or were only loosely linked to the topic could not score well. In Question 4, for example, any hardship faced by a hero was asserted to make them more heroic 'in the presence of death'. The most successful responses analysed the topic and sustained a **relevant argument** throughout the essay with **progressive conclusions** relating the discussion back to the **topic**. The extent and nature of developments and differences or relationship of the works to their contexts formed the argument of the most successful responses.

Criterion 2 Knowledge of the ideas, issues, values and/or techniques in the works (3.71/5)

Students could think in terms of 'plot', use of characters, themes (ideas, issues, values) and techniques when planning their responses.

Criterion 3 Analysis of the ideas, issues, values and/or techniques in the works (3.29/5)

The most successful responses, when discussing the features of the works, demonstrated knowledge **relevant to the topic** through selection and analysis rather than through adopting a narrative/descriptive approach. Students often did not recognise that a number of viewpoints on an issue such as the 'glory' or 'costs' of war can be found within a single text. In *Iliad* 24, for example, Hermes suggests that the battlefield is 'where men win glory', whereas the costs of war are seen in Achilles grief at the loss of Patroclus and the Trojans (Priam, Hecuba, and Andromache's) grief over Hektor. Similarly in *Trojan Women*, Cassandra asserts that war gave Hector and Troy an opportunity to win glory, whereas most of the text deals with the costs of war to the women and the reputation of the Greeks. Inclusion of an analysis of techniques, e.g. the use of characters to voice different viewpoints, was typical of the most successful responses. Less successful responses tended to concentrate only on elements of the 'plot'.

Criterion 4 Evaluation of the relationship of the works to their socio-historical/artistic contexts (2.71/5)

'Catalysts of change' is the focus of area of study 1, Unit 4, and the ability to identify the **relationship** of works to their socio-historic context is a core criterion of each assessment task for School-assessed Coursework, it is equally important in this examination. Students need to place information in the relevant section of the paper. One student began their analysis (Part A) with the historical context of *Oedipus* on the page after it had been left out of an otherwise excellent essay (Part B) on the same text. No marks could be awarded toward the analysis and the omission lost marks for the essay as well.

The least successful responses left out all reference to context. Most dated the works and described contemporary events or values. Only the most successful also suggested whether the works reflected, questioned or supported the society and times in which they were produced or used it to account for developments and differences between the works. Since the prescribed and complementary works ideally come from different time periods, comparison of their historical contexts makes a good starting point. It is the first point of 'difference'.

Criterion 5 Understanding of developments and/or differences between the works (3.19/5)

Generally 'developments' refer to art works and 'differences' to written texts.

Every topic carries the instruction: Discuss this statement by **comparing** at least two works you have studied this year. Comparison is a requirement of the essay. Merely including two texts in the discussion is not comparing them. At the very least the language of comparison should be employed, for example, words and phrases such as: 'however', 'on the other hand', 'in contrast to', 'a different approach', 'similarly', 'likewise' and 'conversely'.

Most responses discussed works that dealt with the idea or issue raised by the topic and some concentrated on the ways the author/artist presented them. Most generalised about developments between works or the different emphasis given to ideas, issues or values in the 'plot'. The best discussed the ways and the extent to which, the two works differed in terms of **specific** elements of the 'plot, characters, ideas/issues/values, techniques or contexts. Analysis worked best when comparisons were made within the one paragraph. When the texts/works were discussed sequentially often the comparison got lost.

Criterion 6 Use of relevant evidence to support an argument (3.35/5)

The most successful responses used quotes, specific references to the works and where appropriate, the interpretation of critics to support their argument. Less successful responses just retold the plot, included lots of information or tried to say everything they knew whether relevant or not. There is no need for students to use footnotes or other forms of citation in the examination.