



## 2007 Classical Societies and Cultures Examination GA 3: Written examination

### GENERAL COMMENTS

Most students were adequately prepared for the 2007 Classical Societies and Cultures examination and showed they understood the criteria by planning responses which addressed them adequately.

Section A responses identified issues, ideas and values confidently, but some students did not address techniques explicitly. A technique is something done by the author/artist – for example, the choice of a word or image, or the juxtaposition of plot elements – yet many analyses did not mention the author/artist. Students must identify and explore specific techniques to achieve high marks for the second criterion.

Students continued to find it challenging to evaluate the importance of the passage to the work or to assess whether an artwork was typical of its genre; some did not explicitly address this criterion or only made passing reference to it. Some Section A responses included irrelevant material such as unnecessarily lengthy introductions to their analyses, which gave information about the author and work as a whole. Although such lengthy introductions are unnecessary, it does usually help to place the passage in the work, as this contributes to the significance. It also helps to compare the chosen artwork with the other set artworks to show how typical it is in relation to the cultural form. Some students persisted in writing about the historical context in their Section A responses. These papers gave the impression that such students were not sufficiently trained in passage analysis and may not have mastered analytical skills.

In Section B most students wrote essays that were of a satisfactory length and which showed a sound knowledge of the chosen texts. It was particularly noticeable this year that few students took the time to explore the implications of the terms in the question, which led to essays that were not sharply focused. Every essay topic calls for some definition of terms. Many students accepted the assertion in the topic as a given and tried to manipulate the evidence to support it, even though their chosen texts clearly suggested a contrary approach. This occurred commonly with Question 6, where many students simply accepted that Classical texts represented women as wives or mothers but found it difficult to support this assumption using *Lysistrata*.

Some students appeared to adapt pre-prepared essays to fit a topic – that is, essays they had written through the year on their chosen texts or on a related or similar topic. Often these did not fit well to the question asked, and these students struggled to keep on the topic. Many students had committed to writing about particular texts but chose inappropriate topics; for example, *Iliad* (Book 1) was not suited to Question 3 about war's benefits.

Most students attempted to address criterion 4, socio-historical context, in their Section B essays this year, but it was still the lowest scoring criterion in Section B. They were generally successful with the socio-historical context of Greek texts of the fifth century BCE, but students writing on Roman texts tended to assume that references to the Augustan era or the rule of Nero would suffice; they needed to be more explicit in describing the socio-historical context.

Confusion persists about whether the *Iliad* is a Mycenaean text, an Archaic period text or a Classical text. This still needs to be clarified. A sentence such as the following could be handy: 'During the three centuries between the Homeric age and 5th century Greece, much societal change had occurred.' This can be followed by a comparison between the two periods.

Very few students made the mistake of comparing two prescribed texts in Section B this year. There were many discursive 'English style' responses that focused on the literary techniques of plot and character rather than on culturally relevant ideas. These essays were often well written and quite sophisticated in identifying the motivation and psychology of the characters but they omitted reflection on the cultural environment of the author and the prevalent ideas of the day. These discursive responses commonly dealt with Greek texts that have been adopted into the English literary canon – especially the tragedies and Homer.

The best students used a wide vocabulary to describe precisely the works and their meanings. They conveyed sophisticated ideas and made fine distinctions. Quotations and specific references were fitted seamlessly into the arguments.

The better Section A analyses were very focused on the passage/artwork, identified and explained the features clearly and were able to place the passage/artwork in the context of the work/genre. The weaker ones were less likely to look closely at the material on the exam paper but made general observations instead.



The better Section B essays were thoughtful responses to the statement in the question. They presented a clear position and supported it with appropriate material from the most appropriate texts. Agreement or disagreement with the statement was often qualified as the student sought precision or took account of conflicting evidence. Weaker essays were not closely linked to the topic and were often undermined by the use of inappropriate texts.

Each year students are advised not to overuse Greek terms when describing the values of Classical Greek culture. There is nothing to be gained if an English word can do the job as well; 'prize' is preferable to *geras*. The message appears to have been heard, and most Greek and Latin terms were used sparingly and appropriately this year, and often with accurate definitions. Students of Roman culture tended to limit their Latin words to well-defined ones such as *furore* and *pietas*, and used them expertly.

Students are urged to make clarity and accuracy their objectives, and to leave time to re-read their work at the end of the examination.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

**Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.**

### Section A

#### First question

Question chosen	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	0	47	19	4	7	4	16	0	0	2	1

#### Second question

Question chosen	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	2	10	25	15	15	14	2	0	1	9	6

When responding to Section A, students should focus on the passage provided. The socio-historical context is not relevant, just the words of the passage, the ideas they convey and the significance of these ideas and developments in the passage to the work. The task is similar for the artworks; the focus is on the artwork pictured, the techniques used in that work, the ideas expressed and the significance of those ideas within the cultural form of the work (which is the group of prescribed artworks).

Telling the story (an implicit narrative response) is not the task. Some weaker responses provided a summary, some paraphrased and some treated it as a comprehension exercise. None of these is analysis. Analysis identifies specific features in a passage, explains the ideas that they express and shows how the ideas are expressed and their importance in the work.

A description of the artwork will implicitly convey information about techniques and ideas but better responses were explicit about techniques used and the purposes of those techniques.

Students should prepare by annotating passages and highlighting techniques, ideas and implications.

The most popular Section A texts were *Iliad* (Book 1) and *The Persians* (options 1 and 2 in the tables above). Other texts were well supported, except for Seneca and Suetonius (options 7 and 8 above).

#### Criterion 1 – Knowledge of ideas, issues, values and/or aesthetic qualities in the passage/work

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	2	13	34	33	16	3.4

Students showed good knowledge of the set texts; most knew where the passage occurred and were able to place it competently. However, some students strayed outside the passage and wrote about ideas not directly represented. The artworks were generally well treated.

The most effective approach was to say what the writer/artist is doing in the passage/artwork; for example, *Thucydides develops the character of Cleon to show the belligerent attitude of his party...*

It helps sometimes to build the analysis around a central idea; for example, *What is striking in this passage is the reflective, changing tone of the great warrior's speech, or What impresses here is the dramatic tone Virgil adopts to describe the death of Turnus.*



Consider three ways of finding ideas in Achilles' distress:

- paraphrase: *Achilles collapses in tears and calls on his mother for help*
- explanation: *Achilles' tears represent the depth of his despair because honour is denied him*
- exploration: *So despairing is Achilles that he begins to question the heroic code by which he has always lived. His tears aren't childish but a response to terrible betrayal for which there may be no compensation. For him, life is close to losing its meaning – '...but now he (Zeus) gives me nothing'.*

Some students appeared to choose an artwork in the hope that a careful description would supply the ideas and techniques required. The artworks on this year's paper were open to this approach but only those who knew them well were able to analyse them successfully. A good analysis of an artwork requires the same careful preparation as does that of a text; a simple description is not sufficient.

**Criterion 2 – Analysis of techniques used to emphasise ideas, issues, values and/or aesthetic qualities in the passage/work**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	4	20	33	27	13	3.2

Students were awarded marks here for identifying and explaining techniques used by the author/artist in the passage/artwork. Correct identification is important, as is an explanation of the writer's purpose in using the technique and its effect. Many students were unclear about what constitutes a technique and many papers implied, rather than explicitly stated, techniques; for example, 'Tacitus describes...' or 'Tacitus then states...' The technique is in the way Tacitus describes something, his choice of words and juxtaposition of observations. The better answers made fine distinctions in analysing the effect of a technique.

Consider the following two responses. The first identifies a technique used by the author and explains its effect. The second only describes the character's actions and words.

*Achilles weeps, but the words Homer gives him are noble ones so that his despair is heroic, not childlike.*

*Achilles weeps and calls out to his mother, demanding a restoration of his honour.*

Different writers use different techniques and some techniques are the hallmark of a particular writer; for instance, Tacitus juxtaposes events very carefully. Students should prepare for the analysis by looking for those hallmark techniques.

**Criterion 3 – Evaluation of the importance of the passage to the work as a whole, or of the work to its cultural form**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	10	27	33	20	7	2.8

This criterion was not addressed as well as the first two, usually because students wrote less about the importance of the passage/work. Sometimes a single sentence was simply tacked on at the end of the analysis.

Some students made the error of writing about importance to the society or 'ongoing significance'; for example, *This passage is significant because the issues are still relevant today.* Some evaluated the importance by simply listing the ideas and techniques: *The passage is significant because it contains...*

The better responses made intratextual links. They linked the passage to the work and showed how it contributed to the development of themes and established the groundwork for what was to come: *This passage is essential to the development of the character of Augustus as a leader who wasn't ashamed of his beginnings...* and *The Riace Warrior is important because it treats the warrior as an object of beauty, possessing a body comparable to that of a god (Zeus of Artemision) or a hero, Achilles (the Doryphoros).*

Following is an example of a response to Section A Question 1 on the 2007 paper, the passage from Iliad Book 1.

*This passage occurs after the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, and describes its direct outcome, the seizure of Briseis by Agamemnon to show Achilles who is the greater of the two. Distraught, Achilles' prays to his mother, the goddess Thetis. He will ask her to intervene with Zeus who should restore his honour by punishing the Greeks. Zeus will be drawn into the conflict and the scene will shift to Olympus and the unruly gods.*



*This is a pivotal point in Book 1. The distraught hero's plea will be honoured and Zeus will take steps which determine the course of the epic.*

*Briseis, 'in all her beauty', reluctantly follows Agamemnon's heralds – 'she trailed on behind' – a delicate touch indicating her preference for Achilles over the high-handed king and demonstrating Homer's subtle psychology.*

*Now Achilles isolates himself, perhaps to conceal his unheroic tears, or perhaps to do something he wants no one to know about. Homer places him by the 'heaving gray sea' where he scans 'the endless ocean'; the heaving sea mirrors his emotions and the ocean may be uncaring or it may suggest that there are larger things, and that he needs to acquire some perspective.*

*Achilles' distress is dramatically presented in noble language, speech that is both direct and eloquent. Zeus is 'thundering on high' and Agamemnon possesses 'far-flung kingdoms'; these are stock descriptions but they heighten the scene and set the conflict against a larger backdrop; they make Achilles' tears heroic.*

*There is hyperbole in Achilles' charge that Agamemnon 'tears her (Briseis) away himself'. This is precisely what doesn't happen. The king won't take the risk of appearing at Achilles' tent in person.*

*Thetis responds to Achilles' prayer, rising from the 'churning surf'. She is compared to mist in a startling simile – is she solid, is she real? Or is she something only Achilles can see and hear?*

*Homer repeats 'wept' and 'prayed' then tenderly presents the mother's comforting words – 'My child, why in tears?' She is so like a human mother in Homer's delicate description – she 'stroked Achilles gently, whispering his name'. But there is a cruel irony here. What comfort can there be when a god says 'we must share it all'? The 'it' is the dishonouring of a mortal man fated to die young; no god dies and no god is dishonoured. It is something a god cannot share.*

*There is significant development of Achilles' character here – or, at least, in our knowledge of his character. This isn't the confident leader who called the assembly to deal with the plague, who boldly assured Calchas was protected even against the king himself. Nor is it the furious Achilles who called his king 'dogface'. This is a shaken and vulnerable person who is unable to bear his mistreatment stoically. Fortunately he has powerful forces on his side.*

*The focus of the passage is on Achilles' sense of betrayal – 'Zeus ...should give me honor'. Achilles has followed the heroic code, he has risked his life in battle in exchange for honour. Now Zeus must uphold the code and restore his honour. Though he doesn't mention it here, Achilles has also obeyed the gods. When Agamemnon first threatened to seize Briseis, Achilles reached for his sword and only stopped when Athene grabbed him by the hair and promised him three times the value of his lost trophy if he would sheath his sword again – which he did. But now that reassurance is forgotten, Briseis is gone.*

*After the passage Achilles explains the quarrel in detail to Thetis (the gods, apparently, are not omniscient, though they are half-attending to events among men, like adults in an adjacent room) and proposes his treacherous plan for revenge which she immediately takes up. The father of the Gods will reluctantly agree to favour the Trojans until Agamemnon is forced to plead with Achilles.*

*The passage links the rage of Achilles to the disorderly scheming of the Olympians which fills the last part of Book 1, and reminds us that the universe of the Greeks was unplanned and everything did not revolve around men.*

## Section B

Question chosen	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	1	2	12	14	27	10	13	3	1	15	2

Most students chose appropriate questions for their chosen text pairings but some attempted to base arguments on texts which did not yield much useful material; for example, it is difficult to use *Iliad* (Book 1) to argue about the benefits of war in a Classical society. This caused problems in a few papers.

Question 4 was the most popular ('Pride is always a destructive force in classical literature') and it fitted several of the set texts well – *Iliad* (Book 1) and *The Persians* particularly. There were, understandably, very few essays in response to Question 8 ('Young children are of little importance in classical texts').

Several students made it clear that they were going to argue certain things about their chosen text pairing regardless of the question. A few made no attempt to relate to the question, while others related to it loosely and unconvincingly. These pre-prepared essays are never as successful as considered responses to the actual question asked. The best students examined the question and answered it directly, choosing the best supporting evidence from appropriate texts.

Few students disagreed with the statement presented; however, wholehearted agreement with the statement did not produce the best essays in most cases. Few students took the trouble to challenge the premise of the question and/or define its terms. Most questions contained a single assertion this year, which should have made the task of defining terms easier. The topics were all simple statements with little qualification and it was up to the student to provide the necessary qualification.



Most students noted the advice to limit their comparisons to two texts rather than skim over a larger number of texts. Brief cross-references to other works are encouraged, however, and can sometimes clinch an argument nicely.

Although students are encouraged to support a point of view in their essay, they should discuss the topic on its merits. They should not simply ignore material that may weaken the case they are arguing.

**Criterion 1 – Development of a relevant argument and/or responses**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	2	9	34	34	19	<b>3.6</b>

Responses needed to relate to the topic to score well in this criterion. Pre-prepared essays tend not to do this. Students should take time at the beginning of their essay to define the terms in the statement they are responding to. Sometimes this is as simple as re-phrasing the statement, but there is usually a word or phrase that should be discussed or defined. In Question 6 ‘mothers’ and ‘monsters’ merited some discussion. In Question 9 it was important to define ‘strength’ as opposed to ‘wisdom’ and to relate these qualities to heroism, not just assume that it was all understood. Also, the word ‘always’ that keeps cropping up (in Questions 2, 3 and 4) – it should be a signal to students to question the question.

A good opening sets the basis for a high score on relevance, provided that the essay follows the plan. For example, the following opening in response to Question 7 sets the scene well.

*Tenderness is the ability to feel the suffering of others and act to alleviate it. In Lysistrata, the main character, though robust in her behaviour is moved to act by a certain tenderness, so I would agree that women in classical texts are capable of tenderness. But is it only women?...*

The opening should give a concise definition, the texts on which the argument is based and the main contention in just a few lines. Openings that do this set the direction for the entire essay and irrelevance is rarely a problem.

The students who had the most difficulty writing relevant essays were those who were adapting pre-prepared pieces.

**Criterion 2 – Knowledge of the ideas, issues, values and/or techniques in the works**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	2	8	29	34	26	<b>3.7</b>

This was the highest scoring criterion. Most students showed sound knowledge of the texts and the major ideas they deal with. There were a number of different approaches evident in the kind of material students drew on. Some essays were more focused on how the texts related to historical developments and events (for example, those on Thucydides and Tacitus), while others were focused on how the texts expressed cultural preoccupations and values.

There were some inaccuracies and false claims, but most essays showed solid knowledge of the texts. Weaker students sometimes failed to sufficiently elaborate on or clarify what they knew.

**Criterion 3 – Analysis of the ideas, issues, values and/or techniques in the works**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	5	22	32	27	11	<b>3.1</b>

To state a fact is to show knowledge; to explore the meaning and implications of a fact is to analyse. Essays which were limited to facts – those that re-told the narrative or presented knowledge about the texts – scored low for analysis. This criterion rewards students whose arguments are focused and supported, who show that they are prepared to re-assess their argument in the light of the comparisons they make.

In the best responses material was carefully selected and the analysis included an assessment of the writer’s methods and purposes in dealing with the ideas and issues. Students needed to make sure that their observations about character, ideas and techniques were relevant to the topic and not just included to show knowledge of the texts.

Consider the following two responses. The second response does not analyse Tacitus’ work, though it does show accurate knowledge.

*Survival was the first task of a Roman emperor. Nero’s murder of Britannicus was to secure his position, but Tacitus dwells on the treachery involved, the details of the plot and the innocence and talent of the victim, to emphasise Nero’s unworthiness.*

*Nero is a disgraceful leader, poisoning his own brother, Britannicus, and watching him die at the dinner table*



**Criterion 4 – Evaluation of the relationship of the works to their socio-historical/artistic contexts**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	9	11	15	25	21	18	3.0

This criterion was well-understood and most students made an effort to address it; however, it is still the lowest-scoring criterion because approximately 10 per cent of papers did not address it at all. Some topics and texts facilitated the inclusion of this criterion more than others; for example, students who used *Lysistrata* or Thucydides were able to link the texts to events of the Peloponnesian War quite closely. Some essays gave a list of features belonging to the time when the work was produced, but it is better to refer to socio-historic features that are relevant to the work and the topic under discussion. The better responses noted how the work related to its time – whether it reflected the society in which it was produced or challenged it.

Students needed to be accurate and clear about the work’s socio-historical context. Homer was still problematic for some students. What was Homer’s socio-historic context? It certainly extends beyond the eighth century BCE, and a strong case could be made for the entire period of Greek civilisation from the Archaic to the Hellenistic. It is not, however, a Mycenaean work.

Better responses incorporated context into comparison between the texts and analysis; for example, *There was less than a generation in time between the construction of the Temple of Zeus with its separate static figures and the Parthenon with its dynamic flowing figures but there was a great difference intellectually between the stolid piety of Olympia and the effusive humanism of the Parthenon sculptures.*

Particularly pleasing this year was the number of essays which related fifth century BCE texts to the intellectual climate of the period, with the rise of sophism and re-assessment of the nature of divinity.

**Criterion 5 – Understanding of developments and/or differences between the works**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	6	20	33	27	11	3.1

Students needed to use appropriate pairings of texts that allowed for profitable comparison in order to score well on this criterion. Most did. Some students referred to two texts in order, but did not make comparisons or cross-references. The language of comparison was used by most students (‘however’, ‘whereas’, ‘on the other hand’, etc.) but specific comparisons were often lacking. There were several problematic essays which compared two books from the same epic (for example, *Aeneid* Books 1 and 12 or *Iliad* Books 1 and 9). In these cases ‘developments and/or differences between the works’ could not be shown convincingly.

Consider the following two responses. The first response shows much more in the way of comparison.

*Thucydides makes it clear that the extreme behaviour of the Corcyreans is a collapse of nomos (law and order) and reduction to a state of physis (nature) where no civilised constraints exist to prevent the worst crimes (fathers killing sons). Ironically Socrates’ extreme behaviour is to assert the claims of law (you were our child and slave) and reject the natural response to flee from death.*

*The Corcyreans’ extreme behaviour is to commit terrible crimes in a frenzy of fear whereas Socrates refuses to save his own life when he can.*

Students should consider the points of comparison and development between the texts in the pairings they choose as some yield more ideas than others.

**Criterion 6 – Use of relevant evidence to support an argument**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	3	17	31	28	19	3.4

The best students quoted or paraphrased appropriately to support their arguments and evidence was spread throughout the essay wherever an assertion was made. Some students referred to critics, but some carefully remembered quotes were not relevant and did little to support the argument. It is not the name of the author which gives a citation authority but the effectiveness of the words in supporting the essay’s argument.