

2016 VCE Classical Studies examination report

General comments

The 2016 Classical Studies students showed that they knew the prescribed works thoroughly and could write about them at considerable length. Their ability to answer questions varied. Some composed highly focused answers, while others used the question as the starting point for a general survey of the works. Some tried to relate material they had prepared to the question, and a few presented what they knew whether it was relevant or not. Some students constructed convincing arguments, while others simply narrated or described.

In this examination students must not only demonstrate knowledge, they must also analyse, reflect and argue. It is difficult to do this in the examination without practice during the year. The highest-scoring responses showed that students had thought deeply about the classical world and were able to find the most important ideas of that world in the prescribed works and discuss them confidently.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A – Individual study

Question chosen	none	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
%	1	41	11	18	16	7	<1	2	5

Part a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	9	16	33	24	15	3.1

Part b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	7	27	35	20	7	2.8

Part c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	2	4	8	12	15	22	19	11	5	0	5.6

The questions were well understood by the students. The passages and works were recognised by nearly all students. Some of the questions, however, were clearly not questions that some students had prepared for.

The passages and images were used well. Some students limited their analysis to the material in the examination and did not discuss material from other parts of the prescribed works when they were required to. Questions that asked for an analysis of ideas were often answered with storytelling by lower-scoring students – this applied particularly to the part c. questions. Students should be aware that the significance of a passage lies in the ideas, the techniques and the relationship of the passage to the work.

Consider the beginnings of two different answers to Question 2c., which asked students to assess Aristophanes' critique of Athenian society. Both answers are relevant and correct. The first identifies a technique used by Aristophanes to make his critique; the second describes the critique, which is what the question asked for.

Aristophanes describes court cases being fixed and the jurors being just like dogs barking for the demagogues who keep them poor and eager.

Aristophanes is concerned with the foundations of the Athenian democracy, the commitment of the Athenians to their community and the integrity of their institutions. He reveals the manipulation of the assembly and the courts by demagogues, the corruption of officials and citizens, and the withdrawal of the wealthy from participation in government and administration.

Question 1

Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 1 (pp. 77–87) and Book 3 (pp. 128–144)

Question 1a.

This question drew many confident and over-long responses. Some students went outside *The Iliad* and began telling the story from the abduction of Helen in Sparta, which was unnecessary. Most students described the appearance of Chryses at the Greek camp to ransom Chryseis, the rebuff and threats he received from Agamemnon, his prayer to Apollo, the plague, Achilles calling the assembly in response to an idea sent by Hera, the testimony of Calchas and Agamemnon's fury. Most students scored well.

Question 1b.

Students should use a systematic approach when answering questions such as this. They should read the passage carefully before answering the question. Some students went straight to the intervention by Athena but the careful readers noted that Agamemnon makes four references to gods and each one tells us something about their roles. They protect kings, love heroes, bestow gifts on their favoured ones and make demands that are obeyed. A thorough explanation included a reflection on divine power and the way it is exercised.

Question 1c.

Most students treated this question as an exercise in character analysis and were able to describe the petulance of Agamemnon and the impulsiveness of Achilles, supporting the description with quotes from the passage. Low-scoring responses quoted from the passage and noted the emotion

expressed; for example, 'Agamemnon speaks sarcastically and says "Desert, by all means".' Sophisticated responses explained why Agamemnon and Achilles were so angry – because each felt dishonoured, honour being the most important thing in the world to these heroic characters. For example:

Agamemnon is furious because his honor and status are threatened and his instinct is to strike out to assert his superiority – no one in all the armies can be allowed to doubt that Agamemnon is supreme.

Question 2 **Aristophanes, 'Wasps'**

Question 2a.

This was a context question, like Question 1a., and most students demonstrated that they knew the sequence of events in the play and answered it correctly. Differences in marks resulted from differences in detail and accuracy.

Question 2b.

Many responses listed the things Bdelycleon says to persuade his father, without explaining why this is effective. It is effective because Bdelycleon knows his father's weak point. The following is an extract from a high-scoring response that provided this explanation.

Bdelycleon knows his father is proud and determined to have an influence. In his defence of jury duty, Philocleon has noted the flattery jurors receive, the respectful treatment because of their power, and the handsome pay. Bdelycleon shows that jurors aren't respected at all. In fact, the opposite is true, and this deflates the old man swiftly.

Question 2c.

Students were not limited to including evidence from the passage; they could have included evidence from elsewhere in the play. Most were able to discuss Aristophanes's critique of the courts and the assembly through the character of Philocleon, but few mentioned the generational differences between father and son, and the representation of the young members of the aristocratic class that Aristophanes focuses on in Act 2. The highest-scoring answers showed that the student had imagined the society that Aristophanes was writing about and had reached conclusions about class and power, politics and law.

Question 3 **Euripides, 'Bacchae'**

Question 3a.

Some students appeared unprepared for a question on sociohistorical context. It called for intelligent speculation since there was no single correct answer. Quite a few students managed to find connections between the passage and the situation in Athens in the last years of the Peloponnesian War. Two themes were identified – the over-confidence of rulers when they are swimming in very dangerous waters, and the mysteries. Few students were familiar with scholarly scepticism about Euripides's representation of the Dionysus cult and most accepted that there was truth in Euripides' claims about the practices. The key to the relationship between the Bacchae and contemporary Athens was instability and waning confidence in institutions that had been battered by the long war.

Question 3b.

Responses were divided between those focusing on the speech by Dionysus at the beginning of the play and those content to pick out Pentheus's references to the god in the passage. Students received some credit for describing the view of Dionysus that Euripides presents through Pentheus, but they could not score well without reference to the serious and powerful god of the opening scene.

Question 3c.

The most commonly identified idea was that represented by the over-confident young king, a ruler who doesn't know the limits of his power. Plenty of other ideas were also found in the passage: order and disorder, punishment and control, religious innovation, distrust of prophets, distrust of women and voyeurism. The technique most students discussed was the characterisation of Pentheus as an arrogant young man whose tone is authoritative, confident, contemptuous and angry. We see Thebes through the character's eyes and know that his prejudices will be punished. Some students described Pentheus as guilty of hubris in this passage. In contemporary discussions *hubris* is used interchangeably with arrogance, but in Classical Greece it meant shameful action that offends the gods or an abuse of power that shames the victim. It was not an attitude; it was a behaviour.

Question 4

Greek free-standing sculpture of the early classical, classical and late classical periods (490–323 BCE)

Question 4a.

Aphrodite of Knidos was recognised by nearly all students. Most responses noted the naturalism of the figure, nudity, contrapposto, the informal pose, the more naturalistic treatment of hair and the textural contrast between polished marble skin and the folds of the drapery. This question was answered well.

Question 4b.

Ideas posed a problem for some students. What is an idea and what is a technique? Naturalism, the proportions of the body and the contrapposto stance were all discussed capably, but these are techniques, usually, not ideas. Divinity, the ideal female figure, observing without being observed – these were more productive as ideas. Modesty was identified by some students, represented by the enigmatic placement of the right hand, perhaps screening the genital area from view, perhaps drawing the viewer's eyes to that area. Naturalism is a technique identifiable in posture, gesture and expression, but it can also be an idea – the idea that real human figures are admirable and beautiful and that perfection can only be found in what is real.

Question 4c.

The highest-scoring answers made comparisons with early classical sculptures, and also with the representation of the female body in other works. Comparisons with severe-style sculptures such as Zeus of Artemision worked well, and most students mentioned some or all of the Dying Niobid, Amazon of Kresilas, and Eirene and Ploutos in their examination of developments in the representation of the female figure. The highest-scoring answers showed clearly that the student knew how ideas about the human figure changed between the early and late classical periods.

Question 5
Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Book 2

Question 5a.

An effective way to highlight Virgil's techniques is to begin with the narrator. The following is a sound example of this approach.

Virgil presents this scene through the eyes of Aeneas who is watching from the palace roof. There is rapid movement as Polites runs through the long porticos with Pyrrhus behind him in full cry. Aeneas, the spectator, is unable to intercede, he can only watch. Pyrrhus is a predator, snake-like (poised to strike). The dramatic death of Polites is made more shocking when he vomits his life's blood before his parents' feet. The extreme violence and blood is followed by noble speech as Priam berates Pyrrhus and calls on the gods to pay him well. There is time (there is always time in epic poetry for a speech) for Priam to remember the return of Hector's body by Achilles and to unfavorably compare the ignoble Pyrrhus with his father. This is a reference to the last book of the Iliad. The passage ends in demeaning slaughter and pathos. Priam is weak, in contrast to the rampaging Pyrrhus; his spear throw is accurate but ineffectual. Pyrrhus responds brutally and ironically to Priam's speech then drags him to the sacrificial altar, slithering through the pools of his son's blood. There is a flash of light on the blade of Pyrrhus's sword and it is buried to the hilt in Priam's side. Dramatic description, violence, lots of blood, lots of vivid and shocking detail and stark contrasts between the hunter and his prey.

Question 5b.

Many students made good points about pathos, suffering and sacrilege. The following is an example:

This passage leaves a strong impression of pathos. Polites is fleeing but unable to escape and he is slaughtered before his parents who are clinging to the altar hoping that mercy will be shown. But there is no mercy, and Priam, the old man, formerly a great king, is dragged through his son's blood to be impaled at the altar. Virgil describes these events to make his audience sympathise with the doomed Trojans and the descriptions highlight their suffering and inability to defend themselves. Sacrilege is a second idea. Pyrrhus shows no respect for the gods when he kills people at the altar. It is acts such as this one which bring the fury of the gods down on the Greeks when they leave Troy. Respect for parents' rights is raised by Priam when he points out that it is disrespectful to kill a child in front of his father. It is also customary to respect the sanctuary of an altar for suppliants and to show mercy. We are reminded of beliefs in the afterlife in Pyrrhus' reference to a meeting between Priam and Achilles in the underworld.

Question 5c.

A good answer to a question about the significance of a passage required a detailed knowledge of what precedes it and what follows it, and how the passage shapes what is to come. The following response shows this broader understanding:

Aeneas has been determined to fight on, and die in the ruins of Troy, if that was his fate, despite the instructions he received from Hector's ghost. He briefly organized some resistance but has retreated to the roof of the palace to re-group and survey what is happening across the city. In this passage he looks into the palace below. He is an eye-witness to the killing of Priam by Pyrrhus, relating the scene of violence and confusion to Dido in Carthage. The death of Priam brings the end of Troy nearer. The death of the king also shakes Aeneas up because he remembers his own father and his vulnerable family. His companions have left him, a decision is

pressing. Shortly after the passage Venus appears to Aeneas and lifts the veil to show him how the gods are aiding in the destruction of the city, and to convince him that he must escape now.

This passage is significant because it shows Aeneas that there is nothing he can do any more to protect the city or the royal family. Priam is dead. He still hasn't accepted entirely that the destruction of Troy is inevitable, but very soon he will accept it. Then, the search for a new Troy begins, and Aeneas takes on a new role as leader and founder.

Question 6

Cicero, 'In defence of Marcus Caelius Rufus'

Few students attempted the Cicero question this year. Students need to be aware of the circumstances of the speech. Cicero is defending Caelius in a political trial. The prosecution is attempting to blacken his name with accusations of immorality. Cicero speaks last in the trial and focuses on the accusations of immorality to draw attention away from the more serious charges. The tone of Cicero's speech is ironic and heavy with innuendo, intending to entertain the jury while procuring an acquittal.

Question 7

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Question 7a.

Some students found only the first simile – the spirited horse on the battlefield. High-scoring answers had interesting things to say about the horse. It is trained to respond to the trumpeter sounding the charge. It responds reflexively without considering the danger. It is controlled by a rider and isn't free to act in its own interest. And it will gain nothing at all from risking its life. This gives a very different picture of Pentheus from the one he holds of himself. The other simile comes at the end of the passage, where the king is stripped of his limbs like a tree stripped of its leaves by a strong wind. The irony here is that trees lose their leaves in a natural annual process and it is an adaptation for their survival. For Pentheus it is a very unnatural thing to be dismembered by his mother and aunts, and it does not help with his survival at all.

Question 7b.

The sins of Pentheus are clearly set out in the lead-up to this passage. Students who knew the story were able to detail his refusal to accept Dionysus, his rejection of witnesses, and his use of imprisonment and torture to pursue the worshippers. More importantly, he persisted when there were clear indications of divine intervention to release Acoetes. He was acting in defiance of the gods and that is reason enough for any punishment in mythology. Finally, he witnessed what is forbidden to uninitiated eyes.

Question 7c.

Beyond the gruesome details of the death of Pentheus lies the power of the irrational in human beings. This extract carries a warning to those who take the compliance and gentleness of women for granted. They are not what they seem, especially when Dionysus works through them. Pentheus has been single-minded in pursuing disorderly elements in the state he rules and he has refused to listen to good advice. He has defied the gods and suffers accordingly.

A metamorphosis occurs, thanks to Dionysus. It is not clear whether Pentheus actually transforms into a boar or whether this is a delusion his mother and aunts experience. He becomes the quarry, the hunted who was formerly the hunter. It is a cautionary tale of one who sees too narrowly, pursues too single-mindedly and who foolishly dismisses the irrational god.

Question 8

Roman portraits

Question 8a.

Construction techniques were not widely known by students. Most noted that this was a bronze statue that had been gilded. Many mentioned drilling in the folds of the drapery and hair. Some used the term ‘chiaroscuro’ to describe the contrast between light and dark created by cast folds and drilling. This was accepted because the term is generally understood. Higher-scoring answers referred to lost-wax casting and the casting of large statues such as this one in several pieces. The use of wax in the casting assisted sculptors to create fine detail such as the wrinkles in the horse’s neck and the tendons in its legs. This enabled a very lifelike work to be created.

Question 8b.

This question was well answered. Most students noted the fact that Marcus Aurelius does not wear the emperor’s heroic cuirass or any official insignia. His plain dress, a simple military tunic, suggests that he is a man of the people, yet the gilding and the outsize dimensions of the work suggest power. Some students pointed out that the military footwear signifies that Marcus Aurelius does not claim to be divine like some emperors before him (Augustus in the Prima Porta). The *ad locutio* gesture was much discussed – whether it indicates that the emperor is addressing his troops, or whether it is a gesture of mercy towards the defeated barbarian who may have been originally under the horse’s raised hoof.

Question 8c.

Good comparisons were made. Most answers began by noting that this is the only equestrian portrait among those studied, and attributed its survival to early Christians mistaking Marcus Aurelius for Constantine. There were clear similarities of style to be found in the hair and facial expression with the portrait of Hadrian. Most answers dwelt on the differences between this work and the others studied and these were accurately described. Few, however, mentioned Stoicism and the effect of this philosophy on the representation of the emperor.

Section B – Comparative study

Question chosen	none	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	1	15	26	31	2	7	5	14

Most students addressed all four assessment criteria in their essays. Knowledge of the works and their sociohistorical contexts was impressive. Essays were long and filled with generally accurate information and quotes drawn from the works. Analysis varied in quality. The area where improvement is most needed is in using the knowledge and the analysis to construct an argument. Few students interrogated the question. The majority accepted the statement without qualification. For example, many students simply accepted that the key theme for Herodotus and Thucydides was war. Lower-scoring essays illustrated the truth of the statement by indicating where, in the prescribed passages, the historians dealt directly with war; however, that is not an argument, it is an illustration. Higher-scoring responses noted that Herodotus states in his introduction that his purpose is to explain why Greeks and barbarians fought and that Thucydides writes about the Peloponnesian War because it was the greatest disturbance in the history of the Hellenes. That provides some support for an argument. Careful reflection on the sections prescribed reveals that war does not take up a great deal of the first half of Book 1 of *The Histories*, and of the four extracts from Thucydides only one explicitly describes warfare. Thoughtful responses began with a questioning of the statement and in every case the student concluded that although war was often the context for historical writing it was not the key theme.

Students can achieve reasonable marks by illustrating the truth of a statement but they cannot access high marks unless they write a well-reasoned argument.

Criterion 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	6	7	7	9	15	17	17	13	7	6.4

Students performed best on the first criterion. Most showed they knew the works and they addressed the sociohistorical contexts of the works in their essays. Some essays contained vast amounts of material often connected by a sequence of 'furthermore', 'additionally' and 'moreover', to build up the weight of the examples. Once the point is made and supported it is time to move to the next part of the argument, not repeat it.

Criterion 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	2	8	8	11	11	18	18	13	8	3	5.8

Knowing the works is a start, but knowledge of the ideas that inspired the works and the techniques that were used is needed for analysis. Most students knew that the Furies sought vengeance, but few recognised that to them vengeance and justice were identical – they 'hunt the man for Justice'. There was no attempt to disguise this. Most students knew what Odysseus did in Books 21 and 22 of the *Odyssey* but few analysed his behaviour from the point of view of wisdom. Analysis requires questions to be asked and answers proposed. If Ovid and Horace engage in politics in their poetry, how do they do it, and what political ideas do they put forward? Some students benefitted from having a broad overview of the works, which enabled them to select material for analysis more confidently and to find tenable answers.

Criterion 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	3	7	9	9	12	18	16	11	8	4	5.7

Students were careful to include comparisons of the works. Often these were implicit and made by juxtaposition. Students should be aware that the statements on which they construct their essays are intended to promote comparison. In other words, the works are likely to support different arguments in relation to the statement.

Excellent use was made of Odysseus by some students. In the *Odyssey* his wisdom is expressed by his acceptance of the support and guidance of Athena. But in 'Ajax', Odysseus's wisdom is in distancing himself from the god and in his independent diplomacy. Which is the greater hero? Those who wrote on Juvenal and Petronius struck a rich vein of comparison. Most showed convincingly that Juvenal was a bitter humorist given to vicious attacks (gleefully quoted) while Petronius was gentler. Not so clear was the question of whether the Ara Pacis honors one man. Most agreed that it did, unlike the Parthenon. Despite the role of Pericles, it is hard to argue that the Parthenon celebrates an individual. But the Ara Pacis may be more like the Parthenon than appears to be the case at first. It is dedicated to Peace, not to Augustus. Much of the external decoration depicts nature and mythological scenes. Augustus appears with his family and great processions of people, a man in a crowd. It is arguable, at least, that the Ara Pacis celebrates a peaceful Rome broadly, rather than one man. These comparisons make for richer explorations.

Genre is an important point of difference in several of the pairings. It is particularly relevant to 'The Eumenides' and 'The Apology', where Aeschylus uses myth to argue for law courts, which bring peace to Athens, while Plato uses Socratic dialogue to represent part of a real trial.

Criterion 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	2	6	7	11	12	17	18	13	8	3	5.8

Reading time offers students the opportunity to think about the statement they will be responding to. For example, what is it asserting? Poor leadership threatens Rome. In Roman terms, what exactly is poor leadership? It needs to be defined. Do Livy and Tacitus write about poor leadership? Yes, they do. Do they see it as the most dangerous threat to Rome?

Students continue to accept the statement without asking questions. If they use the statement to begin a general overview of the text, they do not do well on this criterion.

Students must first define terms, then decide their position: agree, agree in part or disagree. Then state their main line of argument. The definition requires careful thought. It must be simple, short and helpful – that is, it must structure a clear argument. Dictionary definitions may not be helpful. Questions 2, 4, 6 and 7 may not have needed any words to be defined but it is beneficial for the student to put the statement in their own words before proceeding. Evidence must be relevant to the argument. Some students wrote all that they knew. Students should choose their evidence and select the best. They should include the sociohistorical material that is relevant and structure their argument.

The following is an example of a clear and concise opening paragraph:

I define wisdom as accepting your place. I agree with the statement to an extent. That is, I think wisdom makes a hero more effective. I will argue that Odysseus in Books 21 and 22 of the Odyssey, accepts his place. He follows the direction of Athena, he recognizes his limitations and he successfully claims what is his. In contrast, the suitors do not accept their place. In Ajax, Odysseus accepts the ideas of justice of his community and his personal limitations, while Ajax offends a deity and goes against the judgement of his peers.