



2009 **Classical Societies and Cultures GA 3: Written examination**

GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2009 about 85 per cent of students studied Greek texts and 15 per cent studied Roman texts. Nearly 95 per cent of those studying Greek texts wrote on the *Iliad* passage in Section A and 60 per cent of them wrote on *The Persians* extract. The Roman responses to Section A were split fairly evenly between the *Aeneid*, the *Annals* and the sculpture. There were no responses on Suetonius and only a few for Seneca. In Section B, Question 7 was the most popular (with 23 per cent of students choosing this question), followed by Question 5 (19 per cent), Question 3 (14 per cent) and Questions 1 and 9 (both 11 per cent).

There appeared to be some variation in the quality of students' preparation for the 2009 Classical Societies and Cultures examination. Although most students showed understanding of the criteria and addressed them explicitly, many didn't directly address some criteria, or only made passing reference to them. Some students appeared not to take into account the equal weighting of criteria and wrote a great deal on some and very little on others. Some students did not complete two Section A analyses and the Section B essay, and some answers were very brief. This suggests that time management was a problem.

The most successful students exhibited a feel for classical ideas that many others lacked. This was particularly apparent in the analyses of the Thucydides passage. Students who are comfortable with contemporary literary analysis find Thucydides difficult because he uses few adjectives and minimal imagery. The straight-faced tone leaves them flummoxed. What techniques can be discussed if there are no literary devices on show? Students latched onto a couple of words, 'showering', 'hurling' and 'slaughtered'; some identified this as 'emotive language' while others went so far as to call it 'imagery'. 'Emotive language' is a useful label for words selected for effect by the writer of an opinion piece in a modern newspaper, but it is unhelpful and quite misleading when applied to Thucydides. Thucydides made his purpose clear, and it wasn't to stimulate feelings. He wanted his readers to reflect on causes. His language is rational rather than emotional, and his purpose was to enquire into the reasons for conflict by accurately representing human behaviour. The set passage shows his refusal to succumb to pathos rather than indulge in it. His techniques include a careful selection of facts and ordering of material so that the description builds unerringly towards its chilling conclusion. He saves the most telling detail for last – the thirst-crazed Athenians fighting to drink muddy water stained with their own blood.

Responses to Section A identified many issues, ideas and values, although some students wrote about the ideas of the prescribed text generally rather than about those in the passage (this was especially true of responses to the *Clouds* passage). Students generally scored lower marks for techniques this year, especially in responses to the *Iliad* passage, where many students dealt thoroughly with ideas to be found in the passage, but neglected techniques. The author's purpose in using a particular technique was not considered by many students, yet it is the author and his culture that is the focus of this study.

Students found it challenging to evaluate the importance of the passage to the work, or to assess whether an artwork was typical of its genre. This criterion was often addressed briefly or vaguely. Students should assume that the passages and artworks have significance either to the prescribed work, or to the development of artistic styles and themes among the prescribed artworks. The significance of an artwork needs to be explored by comparing it with the other set artworks.

Some Section A responses included irrelevant material, such as an introduction to the analyses which gave information about the author and the work as a whole; for example, 'Written in 750 BC by the blind poet, Homer, the *Iliad* deals with the fight between Achilles and Agamemnon ...' Lengthy introductions are unnecessary and are unlikely to earn marks, but it does help to briefly place the passage in the work, as this contributes to the significance of the passage. A few students described the historical context at some length in their Section A responses and gave the impression that they were not confident of their analytical skills and were avoiding the main task.

In Section B most students wrote essays that were of a satisfactory length and showed a sound knowledge of the chosen texts, but few papers argued a strong case in response to the statement. There were marked differences between students who could construct a persuasive and relevant argument from their material on the chosen topic, and those who could not. Students should be reminded that they are required to construct an argument. As in the past, few students explored the implications of the terms in the question, which led to essays that were not sharply focused. It is understandable that students were eager to show what they knew, but essays often lacked a clear structure. The terms of the question are designed to help students structure their essays; they are not simply a prompt to present everything that comes to mind



about the texts. Every essay topic calls for a definition of terms. Many students accepted the assertion in the topic as a given and tried to manipulate the evidence to support it.

Again this year, many students appeared to adapt pre-prepared essays to fit a topic – that is, essays they had written previously about their chosen texts or on a related or similar topic. Often these did not fit well to the question asked, and lacked relevance. Many students were committed to writing about particular texts but chose inappropriate topics. For example, a response to Question 7 ‘There are no real winners in war’ would not be well supported by evidence from *Antigone* relating to conscientious objection, nor from *The Bacchae* relating to the behaviour of the gods towards mortals. Students should understand that there is at least one question for each prescribed text and that their task in reading time is to identify the most appropriate question for their chosen texts.

Criterion 4, socio-historical context, continues to be a low-scoring criterion, but this year students also scored poorly for criterion 5. As in the past, the Roman essays tended to give less information about socio-historical context. The lack of comparison between works was particularly noticeable in essays which dealt with the texts separately and consecutively.

Very few students made the mistake of comparing two prescribed texts in Section B this year, but some compared two books from the *Aeneid* or from the *Iliad*. Teachers should advise against this as it limits the student’s ability to address criteria 4 and 5. Using the *Aeneid* Book 1 and the *Aeneid* Book 12 in an essay on Question 6 (‘Love is always a destructive force in classical texts’) was an ill-advised choice.

There were many discursive, ‘English-style’ responses that focused on the literary techniques of plot and character development 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 lacked reflection on the cultural environment of the author and the prevalent ideas of the day. Analysis of particular techniques is only relevant to the Section B essay if it supports an argument, and listing a number of epithets rarely clinches an argument about the qualities of a hero.

The best students used a wide vocabulary to describe the works and their meanings precisely. 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 placed the passage/artwork in the context of the work/genre. The weaker ones were less likely to look closely at the material on the examination paper and 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.

Few students over-used Greek terms in their essays this year. There is nothing to be gained if an English word can do the job as well. When a student used a Greek word they needed to demonstrate that they understood the term correctly, which consumed time and space for little advantage. Students of Roman culture tended to limit their Latin words to well-defined ones and used them expertly.

Students are urged to make clarity and accuracy their objectives, and to leave time to reread 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	73	9	2	1	1	6	0	0	5	4



Second question

Question chosen	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	2	7	40	16	11	10	4	1	0	6	4

Noticeable this year was the difference in approach between students who explicitly addressed the criteria and those who did not. Many Section A analyses dealt with the three criteria in order, identifying the ideas, then analysing them, then moving on to techniques and importance, using those terms (ideas, techniques and importance) and describing specific examples of each. Better answers were more thorough in their analysis of techniques and importance, explaining the purpose and effects of techniques and the relation of the passage to the text as a whole. Weaker papers tended to be more implicit and discussed the passage more generally. Often the ideas were well handled but the other criteria were neglected. Sometimes it was not clear which criterion was being addressed. Some students cited ‘war’ as an idea; however, an idea is something about the nature of war – its brutality, for instance.

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 represented by 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 the task as a comprehension exercise. None of these are analysis. Analysis identifies specific features in a passage, explains the ideas that they express and shows their importance in the work.

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

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

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	3	19	37	28	13	3.4

Students should read the passage as if it is an artefact from a remote time and place which can tell us about the people of that time and place. They should look for the obvious things first. What was a warrior’s life like? How was a great king different from other men? How did these people imagine the gods? Passage analysis is not a puzzle with a tricky solution; it is a search for knowledge about the authors and their society.

Weaker responses restated the contents of the passage line by line, without analysis. Where students attempted analysis in the *Iliad* passage there was sometimes too much focus on the characters of Hector and Andromache. Better analyses dealt with the ideas relating to heroes, honour, relations between men and women and the tragic nature of war.

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

The most effective approach is to describe what the writer/artist is doing in the passage/artwork. For example:

In this passage of the Iliad Book 6, Homer details the encounter between Hector and Andromache, centralising the emotional stress faced by Hector in his carrying out of his heroic duties...

The following examples show three ways of finding ideas in Thucydides’ description of the end of the Athenian army in Sicily.

- Summary: *The Athenians charge into the river then the Syracusans slaughter them.*
- Explanation: *Thucydides describes the miserable end of a great army that over-reached itself.*
- Exploration: *Thucydides maintains his appearance of objectivity while carefully constructing this picture of a horrifying scene designed to impress the reader with the foolishness of men and the eternal possibility of misfortune.*



The ideas in the artworks were well handled, usually by students who knew them and were able to analyse them thoroughly.

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
%	3	8	26	35	19	9	2.9

Emotive language is not a technique of Classical literature. It is particularly disappointing that many students found emotive language in the Thucydides passage. It was not the author’s purpose to excite emotions in his readers by using provocative language. Alliteration, rhyme and assonance are devices used by the translator and should not be attributed to a Classical text. Some students found techniques in the *Iliad* passage but attributed them to Hector rather than to Homer.

Students were awarded marks in this criterion 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, they used phrases like ‘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.

Different writers use different techniques and some techniques are the hallmark of a particular writer; for instance, Thucydides and Tacitus select and order their material very carefully. Students should prepare for the analysis by looking for the writers’ hallmark techniques.

Some of the analysis of techniques in the artworks was particularly detailed and impressive, but students still needed to explain how the use of these techniques contributed to the ideas in the artwork.

The following two responses take very different approaches in examining the passage; the first identifies a technique used by the author and explains its effect, while the second only describes the character’s actions and motives.

When he writes that Messalina’s adultery was going smoothly Tacitus is using sarcasm to make the reader think the worst of Messalina and to drive home his case against the principate.

Messalina enjoys adultery but she enjoys breaking all the rules even more. She is drunk on power.

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
%	7	16	27	30	14	5	2.4

Criterion 3 was commonly addressed in generalities such as ‘This passage is important because it foreshadows later events’. Although true, this is uninformative. Another example was ‘This passage is important because it shows Hector’s heroism’. Again, this is true, but many other passages do the same. What sort of heroism does it show? Students wrote less about the importance of the passage/work than the other criteria, and 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, by stating ‘This passage is significant because the issues are still relevant today.’ Some evaluated the importance by simply listing the ideas and techniques, for example, ‘The passage is significant because it contains ...’

In order to address the importance of the artworks, students required a broad knowledge of the other set works for the purposes of comparison.

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. The following are two examples of this.

This is a very significant passage because it explains why and how Dido fell in love with Aeneas thereby thwarting Juno’s plans to prevent him from founding Rome.



The representation of the mounted youths on the Parthenon frieze takes up the theme of the contest between man and nature that can be seen in the centauromachy and it is important because it shows man in charge.

Section B

Question chosen	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	0	11	3	14	4	19	4	23	3	11	8

A good way to start a Section B essay is for students to state the question they are answering and the texts they intend to draw on for evidence in support of their argument. Most students chose appropriate questions for their preferred text pairings but there were many students who did not. Students committed to writing about *The Persians* and *Women of Troy* did reasonably well on the topic of war (Question 7), not quite so well on leaders (Question 10) and poorly on heroes and prowess in battle (Question 1).

Definitions of the terms in the question were generally lacking. Some papers cited Socrates in *Crito* as an example of a hero who did not display prowess in battle (Question 1) – an arguable proposition provided that ‘hero’ was adequately defined. Unfortunately it usually wasn’t. Yet Socrates’ role as protector of the laws of his city and martyr is particularly appropriate to a hero.

Some questions required more than one term to be addressed: ‘teach’ and ‘intimidate’ (Question 3), ‘talk’ and ‘action’ (Question 4) and ‘future’ and ‘present’ (Question 10). There was general agreement that women are braver than men (Question 3) without any definition of ‘brave’ and often little examination of men. Students should give themselves the best chance of achieving a high mark by selecting a question carefully and defining its terms before they embark on their case.

A popular recourse was to use the Section A passages as sources of quotes for the Section B essay. This is fine, provided the quotes are relevant to the argument. It was of dubious value to quote from the *Iliad* Section A passage to support an argument that love is always a destructive force (Question 6). Love is certainly expressed in Andromache’s words, but not love’s destructiveness.

Better prepared students had the confidence to answer the right question, grapple with its terms, and use relevant material. Less confident students tended to write everything they knew about their texts, without considering the question.

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.

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. In the case of artworks, however, comparison of just two pieces may not produce sufficient material.

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
%	0	6	21	33	26	13	3.2

Several essays claimed to argue that women were braver than men (Question 3) but actually argued that women suffered more than men (which was a topic from a previous examination) and made a rather fragile link between suffering and bravery. Students should use the terms of the question to shape and discipline their essays, not as a launching point for a broad discussion about the texts. 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 rephrasing the statement, but there is usually a word or phrase that should be discussed or defined. Qualifying words need to be noted. In Question 6 ‘always’ needed to be questioned, as did ‘unique’ in Question 2. Students answering Question 2 (‘The Parthenon is unique in its design and purpose’) showed plenty of knowledge about the Parthenon but not much about uniqueness. It proved to be a difficult question to answer well.



A good beginning earns marks for this criterion. The following is an example of a good beginning for an essay in response to Question 1.

It is not true that prowess in battle is the most important quality of a hero. Prowess in battle is taken here to be the actual skill of fighting, and a hero to be a warrior who risks his life in defence of his people. In Homer's Iliad Book 6 some heroes of the Trojan war are presented in a softer, more human light, and they show qualities as least as important as fighting skills.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	3	14	28	33	21	3.6

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

There were some inaccuracies and false claims. Weaker students sometimes failed to sufficiently elaborate on or clarify what they knew. Students should not sacrifice truth and complexity in the interests of consistency. For example, Andromache in *Iliad* Book 6 exhibits admirable qualities but bravery may not be the foremost of them.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	11	23	33	22	9	2.9

To state a fact is to show knowledge; to explore the meaning and implications of a fact is to analyse. Essays that were limited to facts – those that retold the narrative or presented knowledge about the texts – scored low for this criterion on analysis. This criterion rewards students whose arguments are focused and supported and who show that they are prepared to reassess their argument in the light of the comparisons they make. Most analyses focus on ideas but some analysis of techniques is occasionally relevant to an argument. Some students felt the need to insert paragraphs listing Homer's techniques – epithets, noble language, etc. – in an essay where they did not contribute much as evidence. The analysis presented must be relevant.

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.

Some students showed expertise in stringing quotes and references together, describing characters and plot development, but this falls short of real analysis where the meaning must be explored in terms of the classical culture.

The following two excerpts were taken from essays responding to Question 8, 'The aim of art and architecture is to intimidate, not to teach.' The second contains as much factual information as the first, but there is no analysis of this material.

The Augustus of the Prima Porta is barefoot, indicating that he is a hero, and he displays on his cuirass scenes of the rescue of the Roman standards from the Parthians. The purpose of this is to remind the Roman public that he is worthy to be first among equals because he has restored the pride of Rome...

The statue of Augustus from the Prima Porta has many techniques, such as bare feet and the ad locutio pose...

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	19	27	22	12	2.8

Most comments on the socio-historical contexts of works were accurate, although there were some glaring errors. Homer did not write for Mycenaeans, and the *Iliad* was not written in the late Bronze Age. Many papers wrongly claimed that Xerxes' loss in the Bay of Salamis ended his reign and destroyed the Persian Empire.

In general, this criterion was well understood and most students made an effort to address it; however, it was still a low-scoring criterion. Nine 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 *The Persians* or Thucydides were able to link the texts to



events of Greek history quite closely. Some Roman essays referring to the reigns of Augustus or Nero brushed over the socio-historical context as if it was common knowledge. Some essays gave a list of features belonging to the time when the work was produced without relating them to the question, 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.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	13	24	30	23	7	2.8

There were several reasons for the lower marks given for this criterion this year. One reason was that students tended to deal with each text in turn, as if they were writing two separate essays. If the essay is constructed as an argument then it is easier to make comparisons when they arise. Secondly, there was more than the usual number of difficult pairings where comparison was limited. Teachers should take care when selecting non-prescribed texts to ensure that there is the basis for comparison. Students needed to use appropriate pairings of texts that allowed for profitable comparison in order to score well on this criterion. The language of comparison was used by most students (‘however’, ‘whereas’, ‘on the other hand’, etc.) but specific comparisons were often lacking.

Criterion 6 – Use of relevant evidence to support an argument

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	9	24	31	23	13	3.1

The more successful students quoted or paraphrased appropriately to support their arguments, and evidence was spread throughout the essays 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 that gives a citation authority but the effectiveness of the words in supporting the essay’s argument. Some students would do better to show their knowledge of the texts rather than of the opinions of commentators and critics.