



## GENERAL COMMENTS

This year was the first year of the new *VCE Classical Studies Study Design*. Students were well prepared and demonstrated a good understanding of the works and the required tasks. Most students responded to the questions in the order presented on the paper. Nearly all students accurately identified the questions they were answering. Most attempted to specifically address the question requirements in Section A and to address the assessment criteria in the Section B essay. A small number of students failed to complete the required number of questions.

There were few pre-prepared essays and most students attempted to deal with the statements in the questions. However, some students presented socio-historical material that appeared to have been prepared in advance, and this often resulted in writing that lacked relevance to the topic.

In Section A, students were required to answer three questions in their analysis of a passage or artwork. Students were required to compose focused responses – two short and one extended – and most students were able to write relevant answers. Section A responses were generally detailed and confidently written. In Section B, the pairings of texts/works were fixed and there was a specific question for each pairing.

Teachers and students should focus on producing relevant, precise and thorough answers to Section A questions as many answers were rambling and discursive. Unless the question states that socio-historical information is required, it should not be included in Section A responses. Students should avoid general observations about the work and background material unless the question demands it. Students are reminded to answer the question as asked.

Students frequently wrote about the actions and motivation of characters without discussing the authors of the works. The focus should be on authors' ideas and techniques as evidence of the classical culture to which they belonged.

It is important that students plan their Section B essays as in many cases there was little evidence of planning. It is understandable that students feel the need to write quickly and continuously for the duration of the examination, but good responses require thought and thinking takes time. Responses should take the form of an argumentative essay either agreeing with the topic, agreeing in part or disagreeing, and should have a clearly discernible structure. Only relevant evidence should be presented. This year there were many long and detailed essays that were too descriptive and insufficiently analytical. Some students showed a detailed knowledge of the texts but a limited ability to isolate the ideas and techniques of the author.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### Section A

Question chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
%	0	38	29	9	11	7	1	0	5

Students who earned high marks gave specific and thorough answers. While there was no loss of marks for including extraneous material, this tended to weaken answers and wastes time. Stronger answers were analytical rather than simply descriptive – they did not string together quotes from the passage or describe the artwork, but investigated the work. Some quotation is necessary but it should not replace analysis.

#### Part a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	4	17	34	32	12	3.3

Most of the part a. questions asked for specific information that was found in the passage or artwork. The main task was identification; however, some students overlooked this – they didn't name Hector's wife or say how Oedipus blinded himself. Students' ideas varied in what they considered to be the context of *The Iliad* Book 6 passage. Some chose to recount all the events of Book 6; many related Hector's movements from the time he left the battlefield. The most successful responses focused on the immediate circumstances, with Hector learning that Andromache had gone, distraught, to the gate-tower, having heard how hard pressed the Trojan fighters were, and rushing to meet her there at the Scaean Gates. Husband and wife ran each to the other; she because she feared his imminent death, and he because of her distress. Basic answers to part a. questions tended to quote extensively from the passage, often stringing quotes together without comment. Many papers reproduced the words that Socrates used to characterise himself in the passage.



The more advanced responses considered the tone of Socrates' speech and the context in which he was speaking. Few responses noted how extraordinary it was for someone facing the death penalty to speak calmly, candidly and reflectively in this way. While some students saw irony in this passage from the *Apology*, few saw the irony as Plato's. Most students handled the context well in *The Aeneid* passage, but many were superficial in response to the 'how' questions. When asked 'How does Cicero criticise Clodia in this extract?', relating to *In Defence of Marcus Caelius Rufus*, students needed to do more than find words of criticism in the passage. The 'how' includes his tone and the method, and the context needs to be considered. This informs Cicero's approach and explains why he speaks in the way he does. The question on the mosaic was the only part a. question directly asking for socio-historical information. A comprehensive answer needed to mention the influence of Greek culture in southern Italy in the first century CE, Pompeiian villas, theatrical scenes in mosaics and the possible derivation from a Hellenistic painting, yet many answers had little to say about the provenance of the mosaic and some dated it to the Hellenistic period.

The following is an example of a good response to Question 1a.

*Near the end of Book 6, Hector, the Trojan general, and his wife, Andromache, meet near the Scaean Gates, just inside the city of Troy. She has previously rushed to the walls 'like a madwoman' with her baby son, Astyanax, and his nurse in tow, having heard that the Trojans on the battle-field were hard-pressed, and fearing for the life of Hector. But Hector, meanwhile, has returned to Troy to arrange a placatory gift for the goddess Athena and to rouse his demoralised brother Paris to return to the battlefield. After that he has gone to his home in search of Andromache and now rushes to the gates, having learned she is there. They meet in a surge of emotion, he, desperate to protect his family, while she makes a last effort to persuade him to continue the defence of Troy from within the walls and not risk his life so needlessly. Their meeting place, the Scaean Gates, is the point of no return; beyond the gates lies death for Hector, within the gates safety is fleeting.*

**Part b.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	2	19	43	28	7	3.2

Most part b. questions called for some analysis of the passage or artwork and this often involved identifying techniques. Students should be aware that it is not sufficient to list or name techniques, they need to be accurately described and their effects should have been considered. There were some common errors: Andromache did not request that Hector stop fighting the Greeks; she proposed, quite sensibly, that he should continue the defence of Troy from within the walls, where they were most vulnerable to assault. Successful answers found three reasons for Hector rejecting her suggestion: retreat would be shameful, especially for him; he wants to win glory both for himself and his father; and he wants to fend off the day of her enslavement even though he knows Troy will fall one day. Most students found some of Sophocles' techniques used to build sympathy for Oedipus – rhetorical questions, personification of Cithaeron, repeated use of 'I', sight imagery and the metaphor of the body/prison. Punctuation is not a technique used by Sophocles; it is a convention of modern publishing. Direct speech is a technique, but in a play it is a given; we don't learn much from labelling it as one of Sophocles' techniques. The more successful answers focused on the characterisation of Oedipus and the tone of his speech, noting that he is still a regal figure in his disgrace. In the *Apology* question, few students explained what free dining at the Prytaneum was, and why the suggestion should have offended many of the jurors. Few explained how provocative Socrates was being. Most students described plenty of artistic techniques on display in the metope; the more successful responses explained the effect of the techniques and why they were used. Few students pointed out that the particular family mentioned in *The Aeneid* passage was that descended from Ascanius or Iulus, as Virgil called him, to link him to the Julians. Most were able to describe the importance of 'family' in *The Aeneid*. Most students were able to answer the part b. questions on the Cicero passages correctly but the successful answers made points about the finer details. Cicero's arguments are exaggerated; the question is not whether a man should reject all pleasures whatsoever, but a particular pleasure. The techniques question on the mosaic was competently handled by most students.

The following is a response to Question 3b. on the passage from the *Apology*.

*Socrates proposes a reward rather than the death penalty that his prosecutors have demanded. He believes he has done nothing worthy of punishment and has been a benefactor to the Athenians because he has devoted his life to improving their 'mental and moral well-being'. He claims that he was too 'fair-minded' for the normal pursuits of money and status and is consequently poor. The reward he proposes is free meals at the Prytaneum, the public table where free lunches were supplied, principally for sporting heroes but also for others who had performed a service for the city. Socrates makes a point of saying that the Olympic heroes have only given Athenians the semblance of success while he has provided the reality; and they don't really need the free meals while he does. His proposal is outrageous and bound to offend many of the jurors who do pursue money and status and do not feel benefited as a result of his activities. Plato has presented Socrates as calm, ironical and very provocative in this passage. It is a challenge to the jury which they are going to fail.*



**Part c.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	3	4	9	16	25	21	14	5	1	6

As 10 marks were available for each part c. question, students should have spent twice as much time answering part c. questions as the part a. and part b. questions. In many cases students wrote descriptively rather than analytically. In the Homer question there was a strong focus on ideas and many students had little to say about techniques, with many students listing techniques without examining their purpose or effect. Homer's particular technique is to characterise Hector in a certain way through the words he gives him. The most successful answers noted that Hector's devotion to his family was unique among the heroes of *The Iliad*. Success with the Sophocles question depended on an accurate recall of Oedipus' first appearance, and with the *Apology* question, a solid grasp of Socrates' earlier defence. Some successful answers noted that Socrates was inconsistent, claiming a reward for educating the citizenry while refusing to admit he was a teacher. Many students asserted that the values reflected in the metope were those of Greek superiority over Persians, civilisation over barbarism; however, few chose law over nature. Most considered that the other metopes repeated the message. The special treatment of Augustus Caesar in *The Aeneid* drew many detailed, well-informed answers. The Cicero and Sallust questions called for a sound knowledge of the rest of the works, which enabled better-prepared students to score well. The part c. question on the mosaic was challenging and most students were compelled to speculate, often repeating material from their answer to part a.

The following response is to Question 5c. on the passage from *The Aeneid* Book 6.

*Augustus is given special treatment because he was Virgil's friend and patron, and after his victory at the Battle of Actium (31BCE) which put an end to the civil wars he set out to consolidate his power and re-establish Roman authority based on the old virtue of pietas (dutifulness). Augustus saw himself as Rome's new founder and Virgil takes this opportunity to link Augustus to legendary heroes of Rome's founding, and especially to Romulus.*

*Anchises has praised Romulus immediately before this passage, and now he skips 700 years of Roman history to go straight to Augustus, inviting comparison between the two. Anchises is trying to motivate Aeneas by the prospect of founding an empire in Italy that a descendant of his son Ascanius (Iulus) will turn into the greatest empire on earth. This is not the only passage in which Virgil has his characters look forward to the time of Augustus; Jupiter does it in a speech to Venus in Book 1 and Vulcan engraves the story of the Romans, including the victory at Actium, on Aeneas' new shield in Book 8.*

*Virgil's special treatment of Augustus is conveyed in a breathless tone, with elevated language, sweeping imagery and heroic comparisons. Anchises repeats the phrase, 'Here is..' creating urgency and amazement, and he places the figures he is describing in a noble setting, 'under the great vault of the sky'. The images he uses are of boundless expanses, 'beyond the stars', to make the Augustan empire seem endless. There are flattering comparisons with Hercules and Bacchus (Dionysus), legendary heroes that Augustus has outdone. Two rhetorical questions complete the demonstration: with such a magnificent descendant, surely Aeneas has no need to fear defeat.*

**Section B**

Question	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	1	10	45	10	2	5	10	17	

In 2010, students wrote longer essays than in previous years; however, many essays lost relevance in the students' apparent determination to write everything they knew about the texts. Some students gave the impression that they were committed to leaving nothing unsaid, but instead they needed to take time at the outset to plan an argument and stick to it. The lack of planning was noticeable in many essays which progressed around the texts without a clear direction and little adherence to the terms of the statement to which they were responding. Some students interweaved comments on the texts and compared them continuously, while most treated each text in order and reserved their comparisons for later in the essay. The less successful essays retold the stories of the texts without analysis. Superficial comparisons were common, but the best answers were able to get to the heart of the differences between works. Most essays responded to the prompt; some stated a clear point of view at the outset. Very few students examined the terms of the statement or placed an interpretation on it in order to shape their essays. As mentioned above, this reflects the desire to start writing the essay quickly and not squander any time. However, the premises behind some of the topics might have been challenged.

**Criterion 1**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	1	3	7	9	21	23	20	10	5	6.7

This criterion asked students to display their knowledge of the works and the relation of the works to their socio-historical contexts. Criterion 1 was generally well addressed; however, many students supplied a great deal of



information about contemporary events but much of it did not relate to the works. Students were not able to convincingly relate Aeschylus' participation in the Persian Wars to the unsympathetic character of Clytaemnestra, yet most students mentioned it. It was more appropriate to mention Athenian attitudes to women and the different perspectives of Aeschylus and Euripides. The relevance of military and political events was much easier to establish in the Herodotus/Thucydides essay, but only the best essays noted the significance of Sophist ideas in determining the different approaches of the two historians. The Roman essays were reasonably straightforward in relation to socio-historical context, although the socio-historical relevance of Ara Pacis has more to do with the second and third settlements rather than a celebration of the end of civil wars. Students were well prepared to provide a socio-historical basis for the differences in the Homeric and Roman heroes in Question 7, but some still referred to 'Mycenaean values' when they meant Homeric values. Many essays began with a summary of the socio-historical background and only addressed the topic in the second paragraph.

### Criterion 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	2	4	8	15	24	21	14	7	3	6.2

High marks for this criterion required sophisticated analysis. In addressing this criterion, students needed to analyse the ideas expressed and techniques used to express the ideas in the works. Many were able to list and describe lots of ideas and techniques but lacked the analytic skills to explain their significance. The question is: why? Why is Clytaemnestra less sympathetic than Medea at the start? Too many essays slipped into a narrative that told the story of Clytaemnestra in *Agamemnon*, then Medea in *Medea*. Students need to practise answering the question, starting with a plan and gathering evidence to support their point of view. Mastery of this technique would have enabled many students to improve their work significantly. Although most responses showed a detailed knowledge of the Ara Pacis and Trajan's Column, there needed to be more actual analysis of the techniques used to convey the particular messages of the works.

### Criterion 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	2	5	6	17	22	20	14	9	3	6.2

This criterion required students to compare the works, identifying similarities and differences. As mentioned above, most essays treated the two works separately before adding comparative statements at the end. It is more challenging to interweave the comparisons throughout the essay, but it can produce more sophisticated observations. Most comparisons tended to be comparisons of characters. The more successful essays compared the ideas and beliefs of the authors as exemplified by their works. Sometimes the comparisons were unbalanced and favoured one writer over the other; several students referred to Herodotus as the 'father of lies' and did not credit his achievement. Only a few essays included comparisons of techniques, yet it is often techniques which most clearly distinguish the ideas of the authors. Students found it difficult to make more than superficial comparisons between *The Odyssey* Book 11 and *Frogs*. Perhaps the best pairing for clear and well-observed differences was *The Iliad* Book 22 and *The Aeneid* Book 12. Students needed to be clear about the differences between polemic (political writing) and biography when they compared Cicero and Plutarch.

### Criterion 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	2	3	8	12	21	21	17	8	5	6.4

The last criterion assessed the student's argument and evidence for the point of view they were advocating. Students are reminded that, however clear the statement in the question appears to be, it is always worthwhile examining the terms in which it is expressed. This was especially true of Question 2 where students should have considered the implications of the word 'unsympathetic'. Strictly speaking, we are speculating when we make assertions about the sympathy of the audience, yet we can build arguments about the sympathies of the respective poets. The premise behind 'unsympathetic' could be questioned too, since both characters claim to be the agents of justice (or a curse). In Question 3, a literal understanding of 'journey' and 'destination' produced a thin essay. The works do not contain much journeying or any sense of reaching a destination. But if the statement is read metaphorically it is rich in implications. It suggests that Odysseus and Dionysus learn something along the way and this knowledge is more valuable to them than arrival at the endpoint. In Question 4 'heroes' and 'leaders' should have been defined. In Question 5, 'evidence' needed to be defined, as did 'the hero' in Question 7.

Some essays wandered around the subject but most attempted to give an answer; the more successful ones were sharply focused. Students gave evidence but not all of it was relevant. It was apparent that many students lost sight of the fact that they were arguing for a particular point of view in relation to an assertion, and that their evidence needed to support that point of view. Despite this, students performed reasonably well on this criterion.

# 2010 Assessment Report



Evidence from outside the prescribed passages of works was acceptable if it was relevant to the argument, but most evidence should have been drawn from the prescribed passages.