

2017 VCE Texts and Traditions examination report

General comments

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 2017 Texts and Traditions examination was the first under the revised study design (covering 2017–2021). It was also the first to include a compulsory question in Part 1, common to all four sections.

The ways in which students handled using interpretative commentaries and their knowledge of scholarly commentaries to inform their responses varied greatly and worked as a key discriminator within levels of achievement.

Consider student references to scripture scholars whose commentaries are commonly used in some schools. The first was by a student referring to the road between Jerusalem and Jericho; the second refers to The Gospel according to Luke 16:16.

(1) *Tannehill says this was a common road to travel*

(2) *Morris says that purple dye was gained by crushing hundreds of sea snails*

Both points are correct. The students have referenced their sources. However, the information presented is available in multiple commentaries. More importantly, both statements describe factual knowledge. This is not interpretation, and certainly not use of 'interpretive commentaries to inform an exegesis' (Unit 4, Area of Study 1, last dot point of key skills). There is no requirement to reference every point of fact, or indeed what really belongs to Unit 1, Area of Study 1: The background of the tradition in either the essay or exegetical response. Furthermore, there is no expectation that students would so reference scholars in the extended responses, which are, in part, based on Unit 1, Area of Study 1, as the study of scholars and use of scholarly commentary, except as a secondary source, is neither key knowledge nor a key skill.

Alternatively, consider the following two references to scholars by two different students. These statements provided scholarly support for the interpretation that the students develop.

The main theme of the passage is that of eschatological reversal (Bock)

... the name 'Lazarus' which means 'God helps' so that he gives more importance to the poor man rather than the rich man just as Jesus does in his ministry (Byrne)

The first of these statements used Dr Daniel L. Bock as support for one of several possible interpretations; the second uses Prof Brendan Byrne SJ to move from stating a fact – for which reference was not needed – to using the scholar to support the significance of that fact as a statement of interpretation. Both of these students' statements made reference to

scholars/scholarly opinion correctly. Some students were able to compare scholars, as evident in the following.

Bock (1996) contradicts other scholars views that the lawyer is negatively testing Jesus but asking a question based on sheer curiosity and shows embarrassment ...

This statement captured the essence of the study design, which talks of ‘a range of scholarly opinion’ in multiple areas of study.

Specific information

Part 1 – Extended responses

Each question in this part assessed both lower-order and higher-order skills, and thus required students to complete several tasks. Many students answered only part of an extended-response question. Consider Question 1 of Section A – The Gospel according to John. It read: ‘Who was Nicodemus? Give at least two examples where Nicodemus appears in the Gospel according to John. Using these examples, explain how the character Nicodemus is used by the writer of the gospel to present the evangelist’s message.’ The question required students to recall two (of the three) times Nicodemus appears in the gospel. The detail with which students managed this task became a discriminator in marking the response. A student who wrote, ‘Nicodemus came to Jesus at night but showed no faith’ could not expect to score as well as a student who wrote, ‘Nicodemus first appears Chapter 3:1–21, where he and Jesus discuss faith, rebirth and the Spirit’. Students were rewarded for precise detail. The question required students to link their examples to interpretation about the writer’s message, and this assessed higher-order thinking.

An issue that appeared in responses across traditions was students omitting one part of the question or misreading the question. For example, Question 3 of Section B – The books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel asked students to ‘Name the different groups of leaders ...’, to ‘explain their role’ and to give examples of two things – the leaders’ responses to the message and their attitude to Jeremiah. The last aspect, attitudes to Jeremiah, was ignored by some students.

Question 2 of Section C – The Gospel according to Luke asked students to explain, after naming the literary forms of each of the four miracles in the given examples, how these miracles were used ‘to develop understanding of the “Identity of Jesus”’. Instead of writing about the 2017 prescribed theme ‘Identity of Jesus’, some students wrote instead on Jesus’ mission, which was inappropriate.

Question 4

In 2017, the compulsory Part 1 question assessed Unit 4, Area of Study 2 but was not always well answered. This question was worth 10 marks and was question with multiple parts, not an essay. It did not need to be answered in an essay-length response, which some students provided. While it appeared that all students had learnt something about the later tradition, high-scoring responses gave precise details rather than vague references.

Students need to practise reading the question parts as not all students showed understanding of the terminology. There were also many responses that did not engage with the question parts, with some exploring other, sometimes irrelevant, aspects of the idea, belief or theme.

Question 4 required students to provide answers to parts a., b. and c. Where a student finished answering one question part and began answering the next was not always clear. In other responses, knowledge that should have been included in, for example part b., was found in part a. or c. The examination clearly indicated how the total of 10 marks was allocated across the question parts. Students should use the relative weighting of marks for parts a., b. and/or c. as a guide to how much writing is required for each question part. Moreover, they need to label the parts of their response as part a., b. or c.

Consider carefully Question 4, which was common across all four traditions. First, it required students to name the idea, belief or theme that they had studied and intended using to answer this question. Students who named the idea, belief or theme before commencing their part a. response gave a clear guide for their responses to the three parts of Question 4.

Part a. asked students to relate that idea, belief or theme to the text's original community, while part b. directed students to identify the passages from where the idea, belief or theme originated and explain that idea, belief or theme in relation to the context(s) of the text. While responses to part a. resulted in the highest mean for any question on the examination, indicating how well students understood and completed that task, the means for parts b. and c. were much lower. This was sometimes the result of a lack of detailed knowledge of contexts, as required for part b. High-scoring responses drew on knowledge of the background of the tradition to provide the required detail.

The major problems with responses to part c. were that: responses were vague, with little to no precise details about the later time period being discussed; who the authorities examining the original texts and idea, belief or theme were, and by what authority they defined the statements of the later tradition; and, how the interpretations of the later tradition were communicated within the tradition. Some responses failed to move from the set text to the tradition.

Consider the following examples of responses to part c., which are precise and detailed. The first example provides the context of the era and the sociocultural context that led to examination of the idea, belief or theme, in this case: 'The place and role of women as interpreted by the Christian religion'. This was a different social context from that discussed in part b., in which the student provided an extensive discussion of the contexts of the original text. The details provided were thorough and involved: the dates being discussed; who promoted these ideas and by what authority – in this case as pope; the documents by which reinterpretation took place; brief quoting from one of the documents (the second paragraph to this answer provided more and from both documents); and linking back to passages of the set text in which this idea was originally evident. The sophisticated comparison of how the ideas of the two papal documents – and of the two popes – differed within the later tradition distinguished example 1 as excellent.

Example 1

(c) Largely in response to the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and '80s, as well as through several demands for equality, the Christian religion in August 1988 reinterpreted its ideas on the place and role of women within Christianity through Pope John Paul II's 'Mulieris Dignitatem' – an apostolic letter which gave new focus to the place and role of women within the Christian tradition. Looking to change Christian understandings of women previously published in the 'Casti Conubi' encyclical of 1930, Pope John Paul II in Mulieris Dignitatem gave new meaning to the place and role of women. Prior to Mulieris Dignitatem, Christianity had previously presented women in largely domestic roles, suggesting that as in Luke 4:38-39, women should "serve" the needs of the family. Indeed in Casti Conubi, Pope Pius suggested that women shouldn't work. Yet John Paul II redefined Christian theology, utilizing the passage of Luke 10:30-32, to suggest that rather than be domestic servants, women should be "models of faith" (Mulieris Dignitatem).

By comparison, example 2, while clearly and accurately identifying the passages of the set text, only vaguely referred to 'modernists and contextualists' without naming any. Although it did provide the era of the later tradition being considered – the 'formative period' usually refers to the ninth century CE – it did not say why it, 'inheritance', became an issue; and, while explaining the idea of 'inheritance', the response did not include anything about the 'who, when, where, why or how' of the 'modernists and contextualists' who reviewed the idea.

Example 2

(c) During the formative period, Muslim scholars found that 2:180 contradicted 4:10-12 and 4:176 and decided to abrogate 2:180 and declare 4:10-12 and 4:176 as indicative verses to how distribution of estate should be.

Modernists or contextualists looked into this and saw that this abrogation causes gender imparity and decided to examine the idea of inheritance.

They came to the conclusion that 2:180 cannot be abrogated for when it is applied with fairness, this gender imparity disappears. They supported their claims by declaring the verses of 4:10-12 and 4:176 must be taken into context. At that time men had the burden of providing for their family hence he deserves a higher share, but today men and women are equally contributing to the welfare of the family.

Some students responded to Question 4 with unnecessarily long responses. However, the following example shows that it was possible to include in a shorter response all requirements – era, cause of review, who those involved were and their authority, how the interpretation was conveyed by the later tradition, and how it links to the set text. The belief considered was ‘Nestorianism’, an approach within the theme of ‘Christology’.

Example 3

(c) Nestorianism was officially declared a heresy in 431 CE at the First Council of Ephesus, following a protracted debate between Nestorius (386 – 450 CE) and Cyril of Alexandria. Nestorius, the major proponent of the heresy, was exiled from the Church.

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 further saw the Church think through the problem and clarify its terminology; the final orthodox response, as formulated at Chalcedon, held that Christ is known in “two natures (not persons) without confusion, without conversion, without severance and without division ... both occurring in one person and hypostasis”.

This fits with the teaching of the Fourth Gospel; that Jesus was always one with God and true God (10:30; 8:58), but at the Incarnation he took human form (1:14).

In Question 4, some students did not understand the term ‘later tradition’ and after discussing the idea, belief or theme as evident in one chapter then referred to a later chapter in the set text as if that were later tradition. ‘Later tradition’ refers to the religious tradition in a period of history after that of the writing of the text. Thus, it was invalid to refer to a later chapter as part of the later tradition.

Some explorations of an idea, belief or theme were limited to particular time frames, thus making them more manageable for students. Examples of these were: ‘Divorce and remarriage in the Patristic period up to 450 AD’, ‘From the time of the Industrial Revolution to modern day’ and ‘From the French Revolution until today’. In many cases, restricting study of the idea, belief or theme to a particular era promoted more precise discussion of the later tradition in contrast with more general responses that tried to cover too much and so developed no depth.

Part 2 – Essay

Overall, students handled the essay well. High-scoring responses engaged with the five assessment criteria. Students could not score full marks if they ignored one criterion, for example, the fifth, which directed students to use scholarly opinion and appropriate scriptural and theological terminology. Even mid-range responses, however, showed that students were able to address all five criteria for the essay.

Consider the following paragraph from an essay on Question 7 on The Gospel according to John, which asked students to consider a quote from a well-known scripture scholar. Together, the

citation of memorised chapter and verse, and the ability to quote from another scholar, Raymond Brown, indicated the student's awareness of both the criterion on 'textual detail' and the criterion on 'use of scholarship'. Other scholars were used later in the essay.

Example 4

In the Gospel of John, the legal role of the Holy Spirit is stressed in its title as "the Advocate" (14:16). The Advocate, or Paraclete, will assist the disciples after Jesus' death and ascension into Heaven, and will testify on their behalf all that they say and do. As the mission of the disciples is to spread and proclaim the work and word of God, as Jesus had done, the gift of the "Spirit of truth" (14:17) would allow their word to be proven and testified. This would enable believers to see the word of the disciples to be true, allowing them to "be engaged in a process away from darkness and towards light", according to Brown, as believers come to faith.

A fault common to both the essay and the exegesis was a lack of detail when discussing the social, cultural, religious, political and historic contexts that are appropriate to the topic or extract. Unit 3, Area of Study 1 provides a basis to such discussion. However, some students appeared not to use Unit 3, Area of Study 1, or were unable to distinguish between what of that Area of Study was relevant to the essay or exegesis whereby too much extraneous material was included in these responses.

Part 3 – Exegetical response

Many students did not perform well in writing exegetical responses because they did not address the criterion 'understanding of the literary forms and/or techniques (their purpose, effect and significance within the given extract)'.

The exegetical response is meant to be an exegesis. It is not meant to be a general commentary or a 'sermon style' piece of writing. Both of these approaches limited students' ability to score well as they did not enable students to address features described in the criteria that are specific to the exegetical response.

Some students' exegetical responses included material, though correct, that did not inform the exegesis, and failed to treat the extract given for exegesis as an entity and instead undertook a verse-by-verse approach. The first error led to several pages of writing about historical background, the author of the text and tangential explanation of the structure of the whole set text, instead of developing a focus on the extract. The second error led students to fail to recognise the significance of the extract's overall message or theme, its literary features and, taken as a whole, its significance for the original audience.

In the following example – the start of a response on the Gospel according to Luke 16:16–17, 19–30 – the student does not just name the literary form as a parable, but explains what the purpose of using a parable was, its link to the social context and how it was significant in developing themes. These aspects touch on three of the five criteria. The student then continued to explain in the second paragraph what was important about one of the bolded words, 'Lazarus', both within the context of the extract and the social context of the evangelist's original audience. Moreover, in explaining what was noteworthy about that extract as a whole, the student drew upon well-known scripture scholars to support the interpretation being developed – Craig Bloomberg, Daniel Bock, Joseph Fitzmyer and Leon Morris.

Example 5

After a brief note about kingdom values, Jesus returns to the mismanagement of resources in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Luke urges the reader to interpret the two together, for entering the kingdom of God is a major focal point in this parable. The need for interpretation is why Luke uses a parable as well, which according to Bloomberg, is used here as a way of

conveying spiritual truth in a meaningful way that is depicted throughout processes of everyday life...

The story, according to Bock, is set up in a two person contrast: the rich and the poor. The Rich man remains unnamed here for literary purposes, as it highlights how anyone could end up like him. The name of the poor man, 'Lazarus', is derived from 'Eleazar', which translates to "God saves" which, as Fitzmyer highlights, is quite appropriate for the parable. The Rich man is spoken of as if he lived like a king. He not only acts like a king, but also dresses up as one as well, with purple and fine linen. According to Morris ...

Look also at example 6, the beginning of an exegesis on the Gospel according to Luke 2:25, 27–39. This response showed very detailed knowledge, skilfully embedded within an introductory paragraph that gave very precise detail – even the number of verses used to narrate the parallel births of John the Baptist and Jesus. It placed the extract correctly within the literary context, describing what came before and after this extract. It not only names a literary device but explains its purpose, linking it to introducing two major themes prescribed for 2017: the 'Identity of Jesus' and 'Universal Salvation'. The paragraph suggested an awareness of the evangelist's audience and, in using 'pericope', used appropriate exegetical terminology. These aspects show that the student fully understood all five of the criteria for the exegesis.

Example 6

Luke 2:25-39, found in the infancy narratives section of the gospel, tells the story of Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus to the temple of Jerusalem. Prior to this event was the story of Jesus' birth and how it came to be in Bethlehem. Unlike John the Baptist's birth in Chapter 1 over two verses, the birth of Jesus is told over twenty verses, indicating straight away to the audience the importance of developing Jesus' identity. This passage foreshadows the actions of Christ in the later Gospel of Luke and prepares the audience for what is to come. The audience is introduced to two characters who prophesise the coming of the Messiah to bring salvation for all. Following this passage fast forwards to Jesus' teachings in the Temple of Jerusalem and all those of higher authority are amazed by his understandings at such a young age. Overall, this pericope focuses on the preparation for the Lucan Audience and universal salvation that Jesus is yet to bring.