VCE Classical Studies (2019–2024)

School-based Assessment Report

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

This report provides advice for the first year of implementation of the [*VCE Classical Studies Study Design 2019–2024*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/classicalstudies/2019ClassicalStudiesSD.pdf). The [VCE Classical Studies *Advice for teachers*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/classical-studies/advice-for-teachers/Pages/Index.aspx) provides teaching and learning advice for Units 1 to 4 and assessment advice for school-based assessment in Units 3 and 4. Other support materials for the study can be found on the [VCE Classical Studies study webpage](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/classical-studies/Pages/Index.aspx) on the VCAA website.

This report is based on the findings from the 2019 School-based Assessment Audit for Units 3 and 4 Classical Studies. Schools providing the VCE must deliver the course to the standards established by the VCAA, ensure the integrity of student assessments and ensure compliance with the requirements of the VCAA for the relevant assessment program. For school-based assessment, the standards and requirements are stated in the assessment specifications set out in the relevant VCE study design and the [VCE assessment principles](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/VCE_assessment_principles.docx). The School-based Assessment Audit checks that the standards and requirements set out in study designs are being followed and that assessment is being carried out in line with the VCE assessment principles.

The majority of responses to the questionnaire were completed thoroughly and a full understanding of VCE requirements was evident.

For Area of Study 1, almost all schools audited in 2019 set structured questions for the SAC task. Most schools included a series of questions that were designed to target specific areas of the study design’s key knowledge and key skills. These considered each of the key knowledge and key skills appropriately and gave students a means to address them.

Some schools set questions in a style similar to that of the examination. Some of these were somewhat limiting as they targeted a narrower range of key knowledge and key skills. It is recommended that structured questions engage a range of command terms so that students of a range of abilities can access the task.

For Area of Study 2, all audited schools set an essay question rather than a research report. The essay questions were well considered and provided students with the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities.

Schools created original tasks rather than using commercially produced tasks or modifying tasks from previous years, minimising the risk of authentication issues.

The audit found that a number of schools were using the terminology of the previous study design in their instructions and performance descriptors for SAC tasks. Schools are encouraged to make further use of the support materials available on the VCAA website and should use the updated performance descriptors for the revised study design, which can be found in the VCE Classical Studies [*Advice for teachers*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/classical-studies/advice-for-teachers/Pages/Index.aspx). Schools must ensure that the language used aligns with the outcomes, key knowledge and key skills of the *Classical Studies Study Design 2019–2024*. This will

ensure students are not disadvantaged. A small number of schools were using assessment criteria that were outside the scope of the key knowledge and key skills for the outcomes.

The detailed responses provided to the audit questionnaire showed that schools had carefully considered each question. However, in future audits, it is recommended that schools provide further detail in terms of how tasks allow students to demonstrate their highest level of performance. Responses were detailed in their consideration of teaching strategies and resources but not about flexibility in task design itself. Where respondents chose not to upload a SAC task as part of their audit submission, it would be useful to provide further detail about the instructions provided to students.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Units 3 and 4: Classical works

Outcome 1

Analyse the ideas and the techniques of a classical work and evaluate the relationship of the work to its sociohistorical context.

Task type options

*This task is based on a selected work from List 1.*

Assessment tasks can be either:

* a written analysis of a section of a classical work

*or*

* structured questions.

***Please note:*** *Tasks are based on a selected work from List 1 for Units 3 and 4 Outcome 1. The Unit 4 selected work must be a different work from that selected for Unit 3.*

In both Units 3 and 4, all schools set structured questions based on an excerpt from a written work or a small number of artworks. The average time allowed for the task in both Units 3 and 4 was one hour. Some schools allowed students to refer to notes, which had been authenticated by the teacher, during the task. A range of questions were set that allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the works and to analyse ideas presented in those works. There were questions with a range of difficulty to ensure that students had the opportunity to demonstrate their highest level of performance. Most tasks also asked students about the techniques used by the classical writer or artist. Some tasks also explicitly asked students to evaluate the importance of the prescribed section of the classical work to the work as a whole, although this was not always explicitly stated and required some inference on the student’s part.

Few tasks gave students the opportunity to show knowledge of the sociohistorical context or to analyse the relationship between the work and its sociohistorical context. Many schools included knowledge and analysis of sociohistorical context in their performance descriptors for the task but the questions did not directly relate to it. In order to ensure students are given ample opportunity to evaluate the relationship between the work and its sociohistorical context, schools are encouraged to set tasks that explicitly address this.

The audit found that a number of schools were using terminology from the previous study design or were using mainly generic lower-order question terms such as ‘who’, ‘what’, and ‘why’. The words ‘explain’ and ‘discuss’ appeared frequently for higher-order questions, whereas the current study design asks students to analyse ideas, analyse techniques and analyse the relationship between a classical work and its sociohistorical context. Students were rarely asked to construct an argument using evidence from a classical work, to evaluate the importance of the section of the work to the work as a whole or the importance of the subject of the artwork in relation to its form. Schools must ensure the language used in SAC tasks aligns with the language of the current study design to ensure students are not disadvantaged.

The majority of audited schools in both Units 3 and 4 set three questions for Outcome 1. Those who set more than three tended to have questions that covered a wider range of key knowledge and key

skills. The Audit Panel found that in the majority of cases where only three questions were set, it would be difficult for students to demonstrate a range of the required key knowledge and key skills.

Including a variety of question types in the SAC task ensures it allows for a breadth of student achievement. The questions should provide an opportunity for students to analyse the ideas and techniques of the work studied and evaluate the relationship of the work to its sociohistorical context. Students also need to evaluate the importance of sections of the classical work to the whole work, or the importance of the artwork to its form.

Schools are encouraged to have clear prompts within the questions to enable students to answer questions as intended. It is also useful for students to see mark allocations and/or suggested word lengths to allow them to understand which questions require more detail and depth.

A positive finding from the audit was that schools devised their own unique SAC tasks that were tailored to their specific cohort of students.

Assessment

The majority of tasks were assessed using the performance descriptors in the *Advice for teachers*, though some schools were using those from the previous study design. Schools should update their performance descriptors to reflect the requirements of the revised study design. Some schools modified the performance descriptors so that they were matched to the task. In some cases, unmodified performance descriptors were used, and the questions did not allow for demonstration of all the key knowledge and key skills as indicated by the performance descriptors. The marking scheme used to assess a student’s level of performance should reflect the relevant aspects of the study design being assessed and be explained to students before they commence the task.

The *Advice for teachers* indicates that the passage/s or image/s chosen and the structured questions require students to:

* analyse the ideas presented in a classical work
* analyse the techniques used to express the ideas in a classical work
* analyse the relationship between a classical work and its sociohistorical context
* evaluate the importance of sections of the classical work to the whole work, or the importance of the subject of an artwork in relation to its form
* construct an argument using evidence from a classical work.

As many schools created tasks in the style of the examination, with three set questions, they faced difficulty in covering all of these requirements.

Many schools gave a specific mark allocation to each question. This helped students to differentiate the expectations of the questions and the level of response needed. Where weightings were applied to specific questions, they tended to be applied in a way that reflected the depth, complexity and detail required.

The *Advice for teachers* recommends that when developing questions for a SAC:

* 25% should be lower order questions, such as: list, identify and/or describe
* 50% should be mid-range questions, including: explore, compare and explain
* 25% should be higher order, including: analyse, evaluate, and to what extent.

Many schools had carefully constructed their tasks to achieve this balance. In Unit 3, some schools had a significantly higher percentage of lower order questions, which may have been reflective of the particular cohort’s abilities.

Outcome 2

Compare the ideas and the techniques in two classical works and evaluate the relationships of these works to their sociohistorical contexts.

Task type

*This task requires comparison of works selected from List 2.*

Assessment tasks can be either:

* an essay comparing two classical works

*or*

* a research report.

***Please note:*** *Tasks are based on selected paired works from List 2 for Units 3 and 4 Outcome 2. The Unit 4 selected works must be a different pairing from that selected for Unit 3.*

In both Units 3 and 4, all audited schools set an analytical/evaluative essay that required development of an argument for Area of Study 2. Schools asked a range of questions that prompted analysis, evaluation and comparison of the two selected works. Questions were well considered to allow for a range of student performance and to give students opportunities to demonstrate key knowledge and apply key skills. All questions consisted of a statement and a prompt to which students were asked to respond. All schools used the VCAA performance descriptors; however, some still used the wording from the previous study design. A small number of schools used modified performance descriptors. The performance descriptors were available to students before they completed the task so that they knew what was required of them.

Essay questions should require students to:

* analyse the ideas presented in classical works
* analyse the techniques used to express the ideas in classical works
* analyse the relationship between classical works and their sociohistorical contexts
* compare and evaluate the ideas, techniques and sociohistorical contexts of classical works
* construct an argument using evidence from classical works.

The audit found that schools were asking thoughtful questions that allowed students to engage deeply with the texts and had plenty of scope for discussion. The wording of most questions was based around analysis of specified key ideas and therefore did not draw on the scope of key knowledge and key skills. Some prompts specifically mentioned that students should also analyse the techniques used to express the stated ideas in the classical works. A few questions were framed in a way that considered the sociohistorical context of the works. All tasks required the comparison of classical works and the construction of an argument using evidence from those works.

As question prompts will generally not specify all key skills and key knowledge areas that should be covered in the response, it imperative that students are provided with performance descriptors that outline these requirements. All audited schools were undertaking this practice.

All schools allowed ample time for the completion of the task, ranging from 60 minutes to slightly over two hours. The *Advice for teachers* recommends that approximately one hour is appropriate. Some schools allowed students to bring notes into the task, but few did so for Unit 4. It is recommended that where students are able to use notes, these are collected and authenticated by the teacher prior to the task and returned to the student at the beginning of the task.

Assessment

All tasks were assessed using the VCAA performance descriptors, and all audit responses comprehensively explained how the chosen questions aligned with these descriptors. All schools communicated the performance descriptors to the students. One school included a breakdown of how the performance descriptors linked to each of the key knowledge and key skills. Some schools were using the terminology of the key knowledge and key skills from the previous study design and the performance descriptors that accompanied it. Schools must update their instructions and performance descriptors so that students are familiar with the terminology they will encounter in the end-of-year examination. The performance descriptors that accompany the revised study design are available in the *Advice for teachers*.