

2015 VCE Latin written examination report

General comments

Overall students performed well on the 2015 Latin written examination. The majority of students scored higher for Section 1, the unseen passage, than they did for the Virgil section. Some students did not answer the shorter questions in complete sentences, despite the instruction given on the front of the examination.

Specific 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.

Section 1 – Translation of an unseen passage

Question 1

When king Pyrrhus was in Italy and had successfully fought one or two battles, the Romans had their hands full and most of Italy had deserted to the king. Then a certain man from Ambracia, Timochares, a friend of the king, came secretly to the consul C. Fabricius and sought a reward. If they could agree on a reward, he promised that he would kill the king by poisoning him. He said that it would be very easy to do, since his son served cups of wine to the king at banquets. Fabricius wrote a letter to the senate about this matter. The senate sent ambassadors to the king and instructed them not to betray Timochares, but to warn the king to act with greater caution and to protect his safety from a plot by those closest to him.

There are many students who would benefit from using bracketing, as suggested below. They might then avoid some of the worst errors of syntax. Prepositions and the words that they govern are shown in italics.

[cum Pyrrhus rex (*in terra Italia*) esset et unam atque alteram pugnas prospere pugnasset], [et satis agebant Romani] [et pleraque Italia *ad regem* desciverat]. [tunc Ambraciensis quispiam Timochares, (regis Pyrrhi amicus), (*ad C. Fabricium consulem*) furtim venit ac praemium petivit]. [(si *de praemio* conveniret), (se regem venenis necaturum esse promisit)]. [(idque facillime fieri posse dixit), (cum filius suus pocula (*in convivio*) regi ministraret)]. [eam rem Fabricius (*ad senatum*) scripsit]. [(senatus (*ad regem*) legatos misit) (mandavitque) (ut (*de Timochare*) nihil proderent), (sed monerent) (ut rex circumspectius ageret atque (*a proximorum insidiis*) salutem tutaretur)].

For the purpose of assessment, specific marks were given for these particular sections.

- *cum ... esset* (two marks)

The first part of the temporal clause introduced by *cum* caused few problems. Some students, however, wrote 'in the land Italy' rather than simply 'in Italy' or 'on Italian soil'. Students are directed by the assessment criteria to write 'in fluent English'.

- *et ... pugnasset* (three marks)

The second part of the temporal clause also caused few problems, although some students were careless in the use of tenses in the two parts – imperfect in the first, pluperfect in the second.

- *et satis ... Romani* (two marks)

Students who found this section difficult showed poor dictionary skills. The correct meaning of *satis agere* is given under *satis* in the dictionary. Those who used the dictionary correctly encountered little difficulty in translating the section. Students should have recognised that there were two ideas linked by ‘both ... and’.

- *et ... desciverat* (three marks)

Many students ignored the syntax here. *pleraque Italia* is the subject of the verb. It should not have been difficult to find the correct meaning for *desciverat* in the dictionary. A large number of students could not translate the prepositional phrase *ad regem* correctly.

- *tum ... Timochares* (two marks)

Some students had difficulty recognising that Timochares was the man’s name and that he was from Ambracia, an area of Greece.

- *regis Pyrrhi amicus* (one mark)

Most students translated this correctly.

- *ad ... petivit* (three marks)

This part of the sentence caused few problems for most students. The C. is the abbreviation for the Roman praenomen Gaius. Students were not penalised for leaving it as C. They missed out on marks for leaving Fabricius in the accusative or for failing to spell his name correctly. The abbreviation C. was the praenomen of Julius Caesar.

- *si ... conveniret* (two marks)

Although technically *conveniret* refers to Fabricius, it was also acceptable to translate it as ‘they’.

- *se ... promisit* (four marks)

Although *se* is commonly used as the accusative subject in indirect statements, translating it correctly still causes problems for students; for example, some made it agree with *regem*.

- *idque ... dixit* (three marks)

Students commonly ignored the superlative degree of *facillime*.

- *cum ... ministraret* (three marks)

cum here could have been causal or temporal and either was allowed. Some students ignored the grammar. *regi* is dative after the verb *ministrare*.

- *eam ... scripsit* (three marks)

Most students encountered little difficulty here, but there was some clumsiness in expression.

- *senatus ... misit* (two marks)

This sentence required students to carefully analyse its structure as there was an indirect command within another indirect command. This was an occasion when bracketing would have helped students to avoid mistranslation. The way in which marks are allocated from this point indicates the way in which the sentence should be broken up into parts. This part was reasonably well done by most students. The senate is the subject of *misit* and also of *mandavit* in the next section.

- *mandavitque ... proderent* (four marks)

mandavit introduces an indirect command beginning with *ut*. The envoys are the subject of the two plural verbs *proderent* and *monerent*.

- *sed ... ageret* (four marks)

The verb *monerent* introduces another indirect command expressing the advice that the envoys were to give the king. Many students failed to recognise the comparative degree of *circumspectius*.

- *atque ... tutaretur* (four marks)

The word order of *a proximorum insidiis* shows that *proximorum* is to be taken with the prepositional phrase.

Section 2 – Comprehension, interpretation and analysis of the prescribed seen text

Part A – Comprehension and analysis of the prescribed seen text

Some students did not answer in complete sentences in this section, though instructed to do this on the front of the examination. A few students wrote far too much for the number of marks allocated. Generally these questions can be answered in a sentence or two. Some resorted to translating the necessary lines rather than specifically answering the question.

Question 2

The events take place at Cumae.

Some students gave vague answers in response to this question.

Question 3

virgo refers to the Sibyl.

Almost all students answered this question correctly.

Question 4a.

The god is Apollo.

Almost all students correctly identified Apollo.

Question 4b.

He is the god of prophecy and oracles.

Many students missed the point that Aeneas has come to find out about his future and that Apollo is the god of prophecy, who speaks through the Sibyl at this point in the story.

Question 5

preces – praying to the god to ask for some favour. *vota* – promises to give something to the god in return for the favour.

Students needed to explain the distinction clearly to obtain high scores. The majority of students did this, but others were too vague in their responses.

Question 6a.

Apollo helped Paris, son of Priam, to shoot his arrow straight into Achilles' heel.

Most students answered this question correctly. Some thought that Paris used a spear rather than a bow and arrow. Students should remember that Apollo is the god of archery and frequently used this weapon.

Question 6b.

Aeacidae refers to Achilles.

Almost all students correctly identified Achilles.

Question 6c.

It is an example of a patronymic, since Achilles is the grandson of Aeacus.

Only half the students gave a clear explanation.

Question 7

A cold shudder passed through the bones of the Trojans and Aeneas poured out prayers from the depth of his heart.

Many students took 'listeners' to refer either to a Roman audience in the first century BC or to themselves, the readers of Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, rather than to the Trojans listening to the Sibyl at Cumae. The answer to this question was found in lines 10 and 11 (*gelidus ... ab imo*). Students who made this mistake tended to discuss the effect of the vocabulary and techniques. Students are reminded that questions on techniques and the use of words belong in Section 2, Part B. Many students did not score a mark for this question.

Question 8

After so many years of wandering to find a new home, Aeneas and his followers have finally reached the promised land of Italy, which had proved to be elusive.

Only half the students gained full marks for this question. Many seemed to be unaware that the Trojans had finally reached Italy at Cumae, even if their ultimate destination was further north in Latium. Commentators and translators take *fugientes* with *oras* so that it means 'the elusive shores of Italy'. Grammatically it could agree with the subject of *prendimus* and be taken to mean that the Trojans were still fugitives from Troy. Students were expected to identify the importance of *tandem*, as it points to the long time that the Trojans have been wandering since the fall of Troy.

Question 9

Aeneas asks Apollo to grant that the Trojans and their gods be allowed to settle in Latium.

This question could have been correctly answered from the last line of the passage (that the misfortune of Troy should follow them no further). Students could also have answered correctly by using 6.63–65, which immediately follow. Students were also awarded marks if they referred to the request to the Sibyl in 6.65–69, even though Aeneas is addressing Apollo at this point.

Part B – Interpretation of the prescribed seen text

Students need to be aware of the wording of a question so that they know what is required in an answer. When a question asks about the use of words, it requires the student to discuss the words that Virgil has chosen to use. It is not an invitation to discuss techniques. If, however, the question asks about word order, it may well invite discussion of techniques. A question could also ask about the sounds created by words. This, too, would involve discussion of techniques.

A question that asks for the identification of a technique only requires students to name the technique, as in Question 15. If, however, a question asks for an explanation, students must say why the line(s) contains an example of that technique.

To scan a line correctly students need to mark the length of each syllable above that syllable, to show where each foot ends, to show where the main caesura is and to show any elisions. The questions assessed the students' knowledge of the rules about length of syllables and other basic rules that apply to the scansion of a Virgilian hexameter.

Question 10

Students were expected to discuss the use of some of the following words and phrases: *horrendus* (frightful), *terribili squalore* (with terrible squalor), *plurima mento canities inculta* (with a long, straggly, grey beard on his chin), *stant lumina flamma* (his blazing eyes stared out), *sordidus amictus* (with filthy clothes), *senior sed cruda deo viridisque senectus* (quite old, but as a divine being his old age was raw and fresh). *lumina* is metaphorical; *aquas et flumina* is an example of hendiadys; the juxtaposition of the contrasting *viridis* and *senectus* emphasises each; there is intricate assonance and alliteration.

Some students strayed from the description of Charon to the wider description of the scene, such as the vessel in which he transported the souls. In a question such as this students should say in English how Charon is described by Virgil and support their points by including the Latin in brackets.

Question 11

māgnānī|m(um) hērō|ūm // pŭĕ|r(i) īnnŭpt|āēquĕ pŭ|ĕllāē (each *ae* is a diphthong – one long syllable)

This line required students to show their awareness of the rules of elision. The first elision was more difficult, because it was caused by a word ending in 'um' followed by a word beginning with 'h' followed by a vowel. 'h' does not count as a consonant, which means that 'um' is followed by a vowel.

Many students scored full marks for this question. Some students were able to identify the 'pue' of *puellae* as two syllables, but at the same time mistakenly made the 'pue' of *pueri* one syllable.

Question 12

There were several points that could have been made about the appropriateness of the two similes. Most important was the emphasis on the numbers of leaves and birds. Other points were that both are insubstantial, both flutter, both emphasise the course of nature and both suggest that life (summer) is over and death with its coldness (winter) is at hand. In the simile of the birds the longing for warmer climes perhaps reflects the longing of the souls for Elysium.

Students were not expected to make all these points, but were awarded one mark for each correct point that they made.

Question 13a.

The slow movement of line 16 quickens in line 17.

If students stated that the pace changed in lines 16 and 17 from the pace of the previous lines they were awarded some marks. In fact, this is a difficult case to support, since line 12 has only one dactyl and line 15 has only two. Each of these lines is, therefore, spondaic and slow. It is true, however, that lines 10 and 13 contain three dactyls and lines 11 and 14 contain four. Line 16 contains four spondees, which makes it slow, like the previous line 15. Line 17 is quicker because it contains three dactyls.

Question 13b.

This reflects the movement of *tendebant* as opposed to the static nature of *stabant*. It reflects the sense of urgency of the souls waiting to cross.

Question 14

It arouses the feeling of pathos.

The majority of students answered this question correctly.

Question 15

There is assonance of the 'os' ending and of 'a' in line 19 and alliteration of 'm' in line 20. There are several short 'i's in the two lines, which produce assonance.

Question 16

dīc āīt| ō vīr|gō // quīd| vūlt cōn|cūrsūs ād| āmnēm

Many students failed to see that *ait* contains two syllables, not one long syllable.

Part C – Analysis of themes and ideas from the prescribed seen text

Question 17

To answer a question on themes and ideas students need to apply their knowledge to their analysis of the passage and show evaluation in response to the question. They should show that they understand what the Latin words mean by quoting them in brackets to support their argument.

Many students did not score well on Question 17a. and it seemed that some students presented prepared responses without tailoring them to the question asked. Some of these students wrote at length about the meetings with Palinurus, Dido and Deiphobus, but hardly mentioned the meeting with Anchises at all. Students should concentrate on preparing for this section of the examination by putting together sets of key points on themes and ideas and should not present prepared essays that do not relate to the question asked.

In Question 17b., low-scoring responses did not address the passage. Some students tried unsuccessfully to link all these crimes to Mark Antony rather than simply identifying him as the person referred to in line 15.

The instructions for the question clearly stated that the answer should be in English and that any Latin quoted should be in parenthesis. However, there were some students who included Latin in their English.

Question 17a.

Students could have begun with the appearance of Anchises' ghost to Aeneas at the end of Book 5 (lines 721–740). In these lines Anchises tells Aeneas that he has come in response to Jupiter's instructions to tell him to follow the advice of Nautes and to warn him what lies ahead in Latium. He tells him that, before he goes to Latium, he must visit the underworld so that his father can explain to him the descendants who will succeed him and the city walls that will be built (lines 731–737).

This, put simply, is the reason for his visit to the underworld. When father and son finally come face to face at line 679ff, Anchises makes it clear that, in spite of all the dangers and distractions that Aeneas has faced, he knew that his *pius* son would respond to the request to come to the underworld. Aeneas, in his reply, reveals that it is his *pietas* that has driven him to make the journey. Before they meet, however, Aeneas has come face to face with the shades of Palinurus,

Dido and Deiphobus, important figures from his past. These meetings are important, as he has to forget the past and move forward to complete his mission.

When they have identified the reason/purpose of Aeneas' visit, students should have discussed what Aeneas learns from his father. In lines 703–751 Virgil presents his view of the underworld: a soul separate from the body; the rewards and punishments in the underworld were aimed at rehabilitation; rebirth was possible and could lead to the perfection of eternity.

After this philosophical introduction, Anchises identifies Alban and Roman heroes from line 752 to line 886. The catalogue ends with Marcellus, Augustus' nephew, whom Augustus had hoped might be his heir, but who died young in 23 BC. In the catalogue of heroes is embedded the famous mission statement for Rome (lines 847–853).

The visit inspires in Aeneas a love for the glory that was to come (line 889), opens his eyes to the mission that lies ahead and confirms him as the *pious* leader of the remaining Trojans.

Question 17b.

The crimes mentioned are those that conflict with the Roman value of *pietas*. Many of them are crimes committed within the family or the homeland. Students were expected to refer to the specific crimes identified in the passage.

In line 1 Virgil identifies those who hate their brothers (*invisi fratres*), and in line 2 those who beat their fathers (*pulsatusve parens*) and those who defraud their clients (*fraus innexa clienti*), as examples of Romans who do not obey the concept of *pietas*. The concept of *pietas* imposes a duty to care for and respect one's family. The *paterfamilias* is the head of each family and should be treated with the respect and love that Aeneas shows to his father, Anchises. Hating brothers or beating fathers flies in the face of such moral principles. The relationship of patrons and clients (line 2) was an important part of the fabric of Roman society.

Virgil identifies as the largest group of sinners those who acquire wealth but keep it all to themselves rather than sharing with their kin (*aut qui divitiis soli incubuere repertis, / nec partem posuere suis*), in lines 3 and 4. Here again the crime is against the family duty that is owed under the concept of *pietas*. He finishes this list of crimes against *pietas* in lines 5 and 6, with those put to death for adultery (*quique ob adulterium caesi*), those who take up arms against their own people (*quique arma secuti impia*) and those who do not fear to abuse their master's trust (*nec veriti dominorum fallere dextras*). Commentators believe that *arma impia* refer to Sextus Pompey's war against Augustus (Octavian) in 38–36 BC.

In lines 14–17 Virgil ends his list of unnamed sinners with those who receive money to betray their country and its best interests (lines 14–15) and those who commit incest with a daughter (lines 16–17). Some commentators also think that *fixit ... atque refixit* is a reference to Mark Antony.