



2008 Texts and Traditions GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Overall, the standard of responses across the four traditions in the 2008 Texts and Traditions examination was commendable. Most students had reviewed all Areas of Study with precision and had a firm working knowledge of both the set texts and the outcomes of the study design. As such, a large number of students were able to respond to the questions in the examination with confidence and knowledge – indicating that those who excelled in the study did so through wider reading, an ability to express themselves confidently in the language of the study and a firm working knowledge of the texts and their context.

Students with a good understanding of the formation of the text within the social and historical context of its creation were able to respond to the examination with greater complexity and assuredness than students who seemed only to have knowledge of the text's internal workings. This study requires a strong understanding of the text as a working historical document rather than as a piece of writing with no definite formative process. Knowledge of the theories of authorship, dating, audience, and literary forms and styles formed the background of a confident student's response to the examination, even if this knowledge was not directly questioned or referred to within the examination.

Students must read the questions carefully, especially the essay questions, and focus their response on the entire question. There were still students who mistakenly seemed to believe that every essay should start with a general historical run down. Students should not be taught to begin their essays with a general introduction to the text.

Some students attempted all questions within a section of the paper or the whole paper. Students must answer only one section of the paper and the number of tasks indicated. Many marks were lost in all three sections due to students' careless reading of the questions and a lack of focus in their responses – sometimes as a result of students attempting to answer questions which were of a more complex nature or which had a focus different to that assumed by students with pre-prepared answers. Students must respond only to the focus of each question, clearly define terms which are specific to the study, refer to the text as a means of justifying their response and always keep to the topic when responding, especially in the essay section of the examination.

Students continue to lose marks for poor examination technique and a lack of willingness to explore topics in a complex and complete manner. Students should be encouraged to demonstrate the depth and breadth of their knowledge in their answers. They also need to ensure that they answer the question as it has been asked. There are still quite a few students who come to the examination with pre-prepared responses which do not tackle the question asked – this was most notable in the essay questions but was also apparent in general comments on authorship and dating in the exegesis section.

Question 4 still posed problems for some students. Students must recognise that this question requires a particular focus in the response, not just a general commentary on either the text or the theme. It is imperative that students are given the opportunity to practise this type of question in class prior to the exam.

Students need to recognise that there are passages in the exegesis questions that can be used to illustrate answers in other questions. Students did not always make use of the resources provided in the examination.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Part A – Essay

Essay questions are based on the entire set text, although most questions tend to be based on themes from the *Passages for Special Study*. A broader understanding of the themes in the prescribed text as a whole usually leads to a more thorough response.

Most students performed well in Part A, although few responses were outstanding. Students who received high grades did so by clearly and directly responding to the set question. They demonstrated a wide working knowledge of the text studied and used examples from a variety of sections. These students not only reported what is in a particular text, but also discussed its relevance to the topic under discussion and related the situation of the creation of the text to the issue or theme. Higher scoring students generally had a sound knowledge of the text as a piece of literature with a historical setting – they were confident in discussing the situation in which the text was originally produced and how that situation shaped the original text. They could also see how the form of the text lends to its meaning.



Good essays used a number of examples to support the points made. More successful essays developed extended explanations with clear paragraphs relating to well-chosen examples. Strict continued reference to the question also assisted students to achieve high scores. Lower-scoring responses often used many examples, but included only one or two sentences for each example and the essay became a list rather than an analysis of the question. Overall, essays which grew from the question and used passages to illustrate the ideas discussed tended to achieve higher marks. Essays that worked around the question without ever really tackling it, and which only listed or retold particular passages, struggled to achieve similar results.

There were still many students who started their essays with bland introductions that can be found in the foreword to most commentaries on the text. Others wrote memorised essays which did not truly respond to the question asked. The questions are designed to elicit a complex response from students and often require an analysis of one or more particular passages, and should not be a general essay that refers only in passing to the passages as examples of the theme being discussed. As such, some exegetical skills are required to show how a passage illustrates the theme or ideas being discussed.

A pleasing aspect of many students' responses was their ability to draw on examples from the special study chapters. Students who could **demonstrate a thorough understanding and knowledge of the text** performed well.

It is important to define relevant terms in the body of the essay as part of the response. This will help students focus their response to the question they have chosen.

Part B – Extended responses

While Questions 4–7 generally cover terms from the *Passages for Special Study* or socio-historical background to the texts, these questions may also refer to specific minor themes from the passages.

When responding to Question 4 students need to understand the difference between this question and the exegesis questions in Part C. High-scoring students were able to isolate the particular theme or issue mentioned in the question and directly relate the passage to that theme or issue. Strong students not only stated **what** the text says but also indicated some reasons **why** the text says what it does in its original historical setting.

For all traditions, students approached Question 4 more confidently in 2008 than in previous years. They needed to understand that the question asked them to explain or comment on what the given passage says about a particular theme or issue. A summary of the passage was not suitable, nor was a general discussion of the particular theme. Responses to Question 4 should have used quotations and made direct reference to relevant parts of the presented passage.

Some students wrote much more than the questions required in Part B. It is important that students read the questions carefully so as to recognise the specific focus of any particular question. As in the essay section, students must read, understand and respond appropriately to the questions asked.

Students' answers in the extended responses tended to not be of the same standard as the essays. Extended response questions demand a much more specific knowledge of a particular area of the study and require a more factual and historical understanding of the study.

Part C – Exegesis

The exegetical questions are always taken from the *Passages for Special Study* and ask students to comment on highlighted words and phrases in the course of their exegesis. More successful responses tackled the relevant highlighted words and phrases as part of a well-structured commentary. Some students used the dot points as subheadings; this is acceptable provided the response demonstrates an overall direction of thought. Overall an exegesis is a search for meaning, so the fourth dot point 'meaning and significance for the author's community' could have been seen as a guide for all other comments.

It is recommended that teachers spend some time allowing students to respond to this question as a means of preparing for the examination rather than relying on the completion of Outcome 3 of Unit 3 and Outcome 1 of Unit 4 as the only preparation.

The exegesis questions were generally answered fairly well, but students who gained high marks had an obvious depth of knowledge which other students tended to lack. Students should continually revise to build their knowledge throughout the year.



Students who performed best in these questions answered all the dot points and recognised, through their analysis of the text, which dot points required more focus for a particular passage and which dot points only required a brief comment. For example, responses to a text which has a set, describable form (parables are the most obvious example) should have more written on literary form than, for example, a list of laws or a basic narrative would have. In such a case, less time may be given to people and places, or one of the other dot points. Then again, in another text the characters and locations might be historically significant, but the literary form is simply a basic retelling of an event. In this situation, greater weight may be given to the background relevance of the people and places and their sociohistorical relevance, while literary form might only be mentioned briefly.

Students seemed comfortable with the format of the questions. Better responses recognised that all exegeses should lead towards explaining the meaning of the passage to the original community. Other students just tacked this on at the end – it is important that students recognise that all analysis should lead to the final synthesis.

Well-developed responses showed thorough knowledge of all areas of the required task. Completion of all sections of the exegesis generally led to higher results. Students who were awarded the highest results also showed in their knowledge of the passages that they had read widely. Students should be given access to the highest level of commentaries as this showed in the most successful answers. The main reason students received lower marks for the exegesis was due to sections being left out, which became costly for the overall result. This was very often the result of students not reading questions carefully or running out of time.

Students need to recognise that the exegesis in the examination is different from the type of exegesis required in the Units 3 and 4 school-assessed tasks. This exam requires a shorter type of exegesis, usually with a fairly short passage (approximately eight to ten verses), which requires the student to demonstrate that the skills they gained through writing larger pieces in their school-assessed coursework can be used effectively in a smaller, unseen exegesis.

The weighting of various exegeses differed according to each passage – some passages had a wealth of content relevant to literary form, while others had a context which allowed for a great deal of commentary. As such, the manner in which particular passages were marked varied according to the passage and the approach individual students took.

Below is an overview of the manner in which the exegesis questions were marked:

- context*: a maximum of four marks (one for naming, one for describing, and two for the meaning or significance)
- historical or sociocultural setting and people, places and historical material of significance (where appropriate)*: a maximum of twelve marks (one for naming, one for describing, two for relevance, and the remainder for an analysis)
- literary form and/or techniques*: a maximum of five marks (one for naming, two for describing, and two for the significance)
- meaning: a maximum of five marks (so that the total marks available for the entire response did not exceed 20).

*the marks available for any response is greater than 20 but this allows for students to respond to particular passages according to the needs of that passage.

Students were required to comment on a number of highlighted words in the passage under analysis during the course of their exegesis. When doing this, students should note that:

- the highlighted words and phrases could be commented on in any section of the analysis, but should have been linked to the discussion as a whole
- if the highlighted words in the passage were not commented on ‘in the course of [the] exegesis’, the student could not get more than 17 marks out of 20. This often happened when students had finished their exegesis and then added the words/phrases at the end
- students could comment on the words and phrases first and then discuss their meaning. This was allowable without penalty, as long as these words and phrases were also integrated into the subsequent discussion
- most highlighted words fit into the historical/sociocultural or people/places sections, and all should lend argument to the meaning section. Sometimes the highlighted words and phrases were left until the general discussion
- if students did not comment on the highlighted words and phrases they could not be awarded more than 10 marks out of 20.

2008 Assessment Report



Many students did not adequately describe the meaning of the passage for the original audience. Although an outline of the entire theory of the original audience was not required, references to specific aspects relevant to the meaning of the passage were often useful. Students needed to do more than describe the teaching in one summative sentence.

Most students tended to adopt the method used in a lot of commentaries, that is, to first discuss particular aspects and then move on to a more general discussion of meaning. Other students wrote an essay which covered meaning during the discussion of the other dot points. Some of the best exegeses were written as mini essays and incorporated responses to all the dot points within a detailed and well-structured piece of writing. However, many students gained full marks in particular responses by using subheadings based on the dot points to express their ideas clearly. There is no recommended or 'best' way to format a good exegesis, and either method was effective.

Students are advised to practise on as many past examination papers as possible. Practice under examination conditions with constructive feedback from their teachers should allow students to familiarise themselves with the type of responses required and the best methods to satisfactorily complete the examination.

There was a general improvement in students' completion of the exegetical responses. Students demonstrated improved skills in applying basic exegetical methods to the interpretation of texts and were able to discuss the meaning and significance of the text in greater detail.

Successful responses showed clear knowledge of where the passage was placed in the text. Many students still have difficulty commenting on the **context of a passage**. Students simply need to comment on the position of the passage in the text and its significance. This requires students to be able to state what takes place immediately before the passage and what immediately follows the passage, and the importance of the positioning of the passage.