



GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2013 VCE Texts and Traditions examination was the first examination developed following the publication of a set of themes for each of the four traditions of the *VCE Texts and Traditions Study Design*. The themes appeared in the *VCAA Bulletin VCE, VCAL and VET* in September 2012 (pp. 9 and 10). The themes for 2014 – now compiled without a supplementary list – can be found on the Texts and Traditions study page of the VCAA website. The lists, to be revised annually and based on the passages for special study, were introduced to provide greater guidance on Section B of the examination. Examination questions are developed using the four published sets of themes. This is not to suggest that all essay topics will be based on themes. The examination specifications state: ‘Essay questions are based on either the entire “Set Text(s)” or the “Passages for Special Study”, and are often based on themes.’ As an alternative approach, an essay question could equally as well, for example, concern literary characteristics of the text. In reviewing the 2013 examination, assessors commented that these lists of themes appear to have worked well, allowing students to create a focus for their essay and, in some cases, their exegesis.

In all examinations, students need to make wise judgments about time management and how much to write for each answer. There is a concern that some students are not giving sufficient attention to Part A – Extended responses. Too often, students who achieved high scores for both the essay and exegesis scored only mid-range marks for their three extended responses. Students need to remember that each of Parts A, B and C is worth 30 marks.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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.

Part A – Extended responses

Consider Question 1 for Section III: The Gospel according to Luke and Section IV: The Qur’an. A comparison of extended-response questions across the four sections should be informative of the range of question types asked and the similarity in response expected of students, regardless of the tradition. Section III, Question 1 asked: ‘Who do the crowds say that I am?’ They answered, ‘John the Baptist; but others, Elijah ...’ (9:18–19a). Who were John the Baptist and Elijah? What did the use of John the Baptist and Elijah in this passage signify about Jesus’ identity?

Given the quotation, there was a clear expectation that students would provide information on the two individuals (using lower-order thinking skills of memorisation and recall) and then explain (a higher-order skill) the significance of these two characters. However, better students saw that this significance needed to be linked to the quotation. There were clearly three parts to the question. All students of the Gospel according to Luke, even with just general knowledge, should have been able to list what they knew of John the Baptist: that he was a messenger who proclaimed repentance and Jesus as Messiah; that he was the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah, baptised in the River Jordan, and had his own disciples; and perhaps even that his infancy narrative parallels that of Jesus. There was no limitation here to draw material only from the Gospel according to Luke (Unit 3, Area of Study 1 indicates that a range of sources should be studied).

Who Elijah was proved to be more problematic for some students, despite his being named in Luke in 1:17 (which links John and Elijah), 4:25f (which picks up the universality of Jesus’ mission, a 2013 theme), 9:8 (after the death of John) and 9:30f (the transfiguration, where Elijah represents prophecy, another theme from 2013). Only better students knew of Elijah in 1 and 2 Kings or of his ascent to heaven and prophesied return.

The third part of the question involved understanding of how these two figures were significant, especially when taken together. While the obvious answer involved eschatology and the expectation of the Messiah, students were equally able to discuss how John and Elijah prefigured Jesus, prepared for Jesus’ mission, represented the tradition of the prophets, or alluded to Jesus’ ministry being also to the gentiles. Some students integrated their explanation of the significance of John the Baptist and Elijah with their description of each man; others gave two biographies, as it were, followed by an explanation of their significance, individually or together.

Finally, students should have been able to link that explanation to the given passage and where it fits in the Lucan narrative. Obviously, no one answer was expected to include all of this to achieve full marks, but it should be apparent



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that a student who listed two things about John the Baptist and made one point about Elijah, with minimal understanding of why both characters were important, or the link between them, would not have scored well.

Now consider Question 1 of Section IV: Who was Zakariya? Why was he concerned about his relatives? How is the story of Zakariya, as told in the Qur'an, similar to the story of Ibrahim?

Like the question analysed above, this was a three-part question. The first part asked students to provide information (using lower-order thinking skills of memorisation and recall) on Zakariya, but the third part required knowledge of the Ibrahim story; so, again there were two characters involved in this question as there were in Section III, Question 1. All students of the Qur'an, even using their general knowledge, but especially because Surah 19 (Maryam) was a set text in 2013, should have been able to list what they knew about Zakariya: that he was a prophet and the father of Prophet Yahya; that his wife, al-Yashbi, was descended from Harum; that he was a priest/trustee of Hekal and wanted a son to continue his own religious activities; that he was a patron of Maryam, the mother of Isa; that he did not speak for three days after the promise of a son; and perhaps even that he was a martyr. A minimal response merely said that Zakariya was a prophet and father of Yahya.

The second part of this question asked students to show knowledge of what concerned Zakariya about his relatives and, thus, drove his yearning for a son. Zakariya's concern, 'who should inherit me and inherit the posterity of Ya'qoob' (19:6), involved three aspects: his belief that his kinsmen lacked true faith and did evil; his suspicions concerning the spiritual leadership of Israel; and his fear of who would continue his religious prayer and preaching.

The third aspect of this question required both knowledge of the Ibrahim story and the parallels between the narratives of Zakariya and Ibrahim: both being old men with barren wives before the birth of their sons; divine intervention in the births of Yahya and Ishaq; the faithfulness of both prophets and their zeal for Tawhid; Zakariya's priestly duties and Ibrahim's rebuilding of the Ka'bah in Makkah; and, though the faith of both prophets was tested, they remained silent in persecution. It is this linking of the parallel stories and how students showed the importance of this that allowed more sophisticated answers to be rewarded accordingly.

Question 1 for both Section I: The Gospel according to John and Section II: The Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel were also three-part questions. The first part of each question allowed students to use factual knowledge, the second required a summary of their understanding and the third involved linking together two aspects. In Section I, those two aspects were general knowledge of the pool of Bethzatha and an episode in Chapter 5 (a passage for special study). In Section II, the two aspects of Question 1 connected Ezekiel's prophecy with Zedekiah's treachery against Nebuchadnezzar. Students should ensure they answer all parts of a question.

Not all extended-response questions have three parts. Section IV posed two five-part questions (Questions 2 and 3). In Question 3, for instance, students were asked to provide four knowledge-based terms (low-level cognitive items that all students of the Qur'an were able to answer, thus making it accessible to all students of Section IV) and then to explain each of those terms (a mid-level cognitive skill). This gave two aspects to each of the four 'attributes of God' asked for in the question. This was followed by the fifth part: an explanation of the 'significance [of these attributes] for Muhammad's original community'. Merely naming four attributes of God warranted only two of the ten marks available.

As examples of two-part questions, consider Question 2 of both Section I and Section III. Both questions have virtually the same wording, although one applies to a Johannine figure of speech and the other to a Lucan parable. Both require knowledge and identification of literary structure and literary forms or techniques used by the author (see dot point 5 of key skills in Area of Study 2, Unit 3, in the study design, page 24). The second half of both questions – again virtually the same – required students to complete the second half of the key skill described in that dot point ('explaining how specific literary forms or techniques are used by the author').

Part B – Essay

Use of the published descriptors for marking the essay ensures that each student response – regardless of tradition – is assessed in an identical manner. The criteria used for marking the essay assess the degree to which a response has demonstrated

- discussion, understanding and/or interpretation of the idea, themes, literary structures and/or individuals of topic
- management of topics, using the various parts of the question to support an interpretation
- selection and use of textual detail and evidence significant to the discussion and/or interpretation



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- understanding of sociocultural, religious and historical influences on foundational text and/or significance to original community
- use of scriptural and theological terminology appropriate to the topic and textual passages used.

This means that assessors do not have set answers in mind (or marking schedules) before they read a student's response. It also means that all students do not have to answer a question in the same way, addressing set or pre-determined content. While there might be a range of aspects potentially involved in an essay topic, students are free to determine which of these they use. Obviously, however, the extent of knowledge demonstrated by a student will affect each of the five criteria for essays listed above.

Although there are different patterns to the prompts for the essays, Part B of the examination requires higher-order cognitive skills, with students synthesising knowledge, providing supported interpretation and explaining the significance of the material they choose to present.

Students need to understand key terms in essay questions such as 'explain' or 'discuss' a given aspect. Alternatively, a prompt may offer a scriptural reference or scholarly comment and students may be asked to respond to that quotation by illustrating their understanding of the concept in light of the reference and particular passages from the set scriptural text. In some cases, students will be asked to use the passages for special study; in other prompts, students might be directed to use the whole set text(s). Often, students will be told how many examples they should provide in support of their interpretation, analysis or argument. Again, reading question types from across the four sections of the examination is a useful preparation technique.

Consider how one student responded to Question 7 of Section I, which began with the observation, 'Understanding the Gospel according to John relies on a strong knowledge of the religious festivals, traditions and culture of the Jewish people in early 1st-century Palestine'. Look at the way in which the student presents a point of view, has structured their essay, uses textual examples and detail, shows understanding of sociocultural, religious and historical influences, and uses terminology appropriately.

The following extract accounts for about one-third of this student's response. The response engages in a discussion and interpretation of whether it is necessary to have 'a strong knowledge of the religious festivals, traditions and culture of the Jewish people in early 1st-century Palestine' both in the opening topic sentences and in the concluding paragraph sentences, linking the ideas presented to the overall topic. The student has tried to manage their discussion of the topic through the earlier paragraph being on a 'religious festival' and the latter being on customs or 'culture'. While some might argue that 'Chapter 4' and 'Chapter 9' are a little general, they are sufficiently accurate in locating these episodes in the gospel and avoid requiring a summary or retelling of the episodes, while '5:17' identifies where the quotation comes from with precision. Similarly, these two paragraphs provide evidence of the student's understanding of sociocultural, religious and historical influences on the foundational text and/or their significance to the original community, while the inclusion of 'universality' and 'Abrahamic' (together with other terms elsewhere in the essay) shows that terminology appropriate to the topic and textual passages has been used. All criteria have been addressed.

Understanding of the Jewish festival of the Sabbath is important in Chapter 5 as Jesus breaks this tradition. The Sabbath commemorated the 7th Day in Genesis on which God rested after creating the world. Jews commemorated this by not working on this day. Jesus, however, both breaks this custom and instructs others to break it. He tells the invalid, 'Pick up your mat and walk', even though carrying one's mat is restricted by Jewish law on this day. Furthermore, Jesus breaks the law himself by healing the man on that day – a form of work. Upon being questioned by the Pharisees, Jesus tells them that, 'My Father is still working and I also am working' (5:17). Here, Jesus justifies his right to work on this day by reasoning that as people still die and are born on the Sabbath, God still works and thus so can he; in his unity with the Father. Jesus shows himself to be above the law as he is the object of it. However, this understanding would require knowledge of the festival.

An understanding of other Jewish laws and customs is also necessary if one is to fully understand Jesus' interactions with others. The woman at the well in Chapter 4's encounter with Jesus requires an historic and cultural knowledge of the period. Jesus' decision to talk to the woman and to share her water is significant for numerous cultural reasons. The first was that Jews were traditionally enemies with Samaritans and did not share things in common with them. Additionally, it was uncommon for Jewish men to talk to women who were strangers to them in public (especially women who have had numerous 'husbands' as this one has). This aspect of Jesus represents the universality of his message. Unlike the Abrahamic view of God, Jesus brings the idea that all people can be connected to Yahweh who is no longer exclusively a Jewish God. Jesus also breaks another Jewish tradition in his encounters with disabled people. Jesus – in Chapter 9 – says to his disciples that the man born blind did not sin (nor did his parents) for him to receive this illness, but was made blind so that God's work might be revealed through him. Knowledge of the traditional belief must first be understood thoroughly before the reader can understand that Jesus has broken it.



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Read the following (mid-essay) paragraph on Question 7 of Section IV. While the expression of this paragraph could be improved, VCE Texts and Traditions essays are not marked on their expression or prosaic features. They are marked on what the student has done, which, in this case – as a higher mid-range response – is to engage in the required ‘discussion’ by working methodically, paragraph by paragraph, constructing a structure that manages the topic; selecting another surah to complement the ideas of *Al-Nūr* as an awareness of the need to select supportive text; and, offering an explanation of the sociocultural experience of early Arabia. (The requirement to take into account the ‘circumstances of the revelation of Surah 24’ was dealt with in a separate paragraph.) Being aware of the criteria for marking the essay certainly enables students to focus their responses.

The act of fornication was a typical norm that was widespread within early Arabia. Engaging in sexual activity both married and unmarried distorted the holy flow of the Islamic Community. Although the act of fornication/adultery was outlined as a Social Crime in Surah Al-Ahzab, Surah Al-Nur was the finishing of the abolishing of that crime. In the times during Madinah, the act of prostitution was also on the high, thus needing a remedy before its widespread effect onto the Community. The ordainment of whipping the fornicator/ess 100 times is a measure taken to keep the Islamic Community at bay from the criticised crime. ‘10 whips for the fornicator’, likewise the fornicatress, aimed at eliminating any tendencies any believer had in mind. The fear of the punishment dispelled any prospective fornicator, thus the moral upbringing of the Islamic Community. The converts from pre-Islamic days to Islam found it a tad challenging in minimising the act of adultery, thus the punishment was severe in order to sway the believer into performing activities in a permissible manner.

Part C – Exegetical response

It is concerning that some exegetical responses appear to begin with rote-learnt introductions, often of 10–12 lines. (Although this example uses a response from Section I, the same concern is relevant in other traditions as well.) Consider the too general beginning of such an exegesis.

The Gospel of John was written around the turn of the first century (circa 90–100 CE). It was written by an unknown author although based upon the testimony of the Beloved Disciple (21:24). The Gospel of John was written in an unknown location though most likely outside of Israel for a community comprised of: disciples of John the Baptist, Gentiles, Samaritans, Anti-Temple Jews and Jewish Christians (Brown). The Gospel of John has the literary technique of a Gospel – shows a primordial revelation of Jesus – and has the purpose of spreading the good news of Jesus as the Messiah (20:31). The passage 19:1–12 helps to provide insight into the Johannine community at time of writing.

The passage 19:1–12 is a part of the Book of Glory which focuses on the glorification of God and thus Jesus through Jesus on the cross. Furthermore 19:1–12 is part of the passion narrative (chapters 18–19) which focuses on Jesus on the cross. The passion narrative comes after the farewell discourse where Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure and prior to the resurrection narrative where Jesus returns to his disciples.

Apart from giving the pericope’s reference in the last sentence, which could be considered filling in the blank in a learnt response, the first paragraph contributes almost nothing to a proper placement of the passage in its context. The designated ‘literary technique of a gospel’ shows the lack of pertinence of this introduction to the text to be analysed. What is said of authorship and original community constitutes a series of stock, non-interpretative statements, and the bracketed cited scholar, dates and textual references are suitable for inclusion in an exegesis on any passage chosen from the Gospel according to John, and from any year’s set passages.

It is when the student begins the second paragraph that they commence their exegesis on the set passage. Here, they correctly position the extract in its literary context (using the accepted divisions of book of glory, passion narrative – showing even more knowledge by adding the relevant chapters – and farewell discourse), make use of a pertinent literary technique (narrative), and start to consider the significance of this passage within the whole gospel and for the original community (noting the return of Jesus to his disciples).

Compare that beginning with the following introduction to an exegesis on Luke 2:41–52. While this is not a top-level response and may appear a little unsophisticated in places, it is definitely written in response to the pericope presented for exegetical analysis. It is talking about the literary context from the start and, even if using the sub-headings added in the NRSV, is precise in its citations. Instead of just naming or identifying literary devices, this student has explained how they are used and their significance to an interpretation of the gospel overall. Note the smooth integration of the highlighted phrase, ‘three days’, into the analysis and how the student is aware of its later meaning to the original community, together with some use of technical theological terminology.

‘The Boy Jesus at the Temple’, 2:41–52, is part of the infancy and boyhood section of Luke and is found after ‘Jesus’ presentation at the Temple’, 2:22–40, and is followed by ‘The Proclamation of John the Baptist’, 3:1–20. Like other parts of the infancy narratives, the passage acts as a bridge between the Hebrew Scriptures and Luke’s gospel. As well as reinforcing Jesus’

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divinity even as a child, the incident in Jerusalem pre-empts and foreshadows his later ministry which centres on Jerusalem. The passage itself is a literary bridge between the infancy narratives and Jesus' early ministry ...

Within this passage Luke utilises the literary technique of foreshadowing. The fact that Jesus is lost for 'three days' later recalls the missing three days after the crucifixion. Later he is shown to have risen on the 'third day' fulfilling his prophecy and the messianic plan of God. Here as well, Jesus being found in the Temple – the dwelling place of God – in spite of any fears ultimately shows that he is protected by God in the same way he is following his death. This structure serves to reinforce the notion of a greater plan of God here as well as overall – a salvific plan.

What often distinguishes very-high-scoring responses is the detail that students show through the practised, holistic incorporation of ideas, incisively demonstrating the interconnectedness of various aspects within the passage for exegesis. An example of this approach, also on Luke 2:41–52, follows. Note the way the student not only makes links to other passages in the gospel and to modern scholars' use of theological terms, but uses both the phrases for special study and other key words in the passage to explain the significance of this pericope, within its context, for the original community. There is a linking of the four dot points of the rubric centred on a discussion of highlighted words and phrases, exploring the theological meaning of the passage, while also using appropriate terminology.

... This suggested that Jesus was primarily important within his family's lives and that his early life perhaps is echoed in his death. Within the Temple, Jesus is identified as being equal to or greater than the 'teachers' through his 'sitting' with them and them also expressing 'amaze at his understanding'. This Lukan motif of fear and amazement surmises Jesus' extraordinary position within his childhood. Here, Luke characterises Jesus as aware of his identity as the Messiah, through his 'understanding'. This leaves us and the early Christian following with the awe inspiring image of Jesus as a teacher to all and even at the meagre age of 'twelve'. This 'amazed' reaction is juxtaposed with the 'astonished' (v.48) reaction of Jesus' parents, signifying the intrinsic relationship of fear and joy within the Bible, perhaps an echo from Isaiah 6:1–5.

... The question he puts to his parents is in fact whether they understand Jesus' identity and mission as he does. This defining moment of the passage could be the fulfilment of Simeon's ominous prophecy that a 'sword will pierce [Mary's] heart' (2:31–40), with Jesus emancipating himself from his earthly parents and rather identifying as the Son of God. This presents Jesus as a strong Messiah that loves God above all, an important message to the early Christian following. The lack of understanding exhibited by Jesus' parents (v.50) is indicative of the Suffering Christ motif where Jesus is not understood by those closest to him.

The examination specifications and sample examination available on the Texts and Traditions study page of the VCAA website contain further details of how the essay and exegetical responses are developed, together with the descriptors for mark ranges.