



2003

Classical Societies and Cultures GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

There was a pleasing level of competence demonstrated by students this year. Questions were numbered and attempts made to comply explicitly with all criteria though there was some confusion about the distinction between ideas, issues, values and techniques. While there were few very short responses there were many that covered two books. Students should be reminded that a well-planned response is likely to score better than one which relies on length; quality is better than quantity. Students should also be reminded to divide their time according to the distribution of marks. There were a number of papers where the analyses and the essay were the same length. As always, there were some brilliant responses that were rewarding and exciting to read. While such statements do not contribute to marks, it was particularly interesting that a number of students implicitly or explicitly commented on the relevance of their study to contemporary issues. ‘Euripides was part of the campaigning group against the war’ and ‘Athenians wanted the Melians to be one of many allies – like the coalition of the willing’ were examples.

The major reasons for students scoring less were: narrative responses; neglect of Criterion 2 (techniques) and misunderstanding of Criterion 3 (importance to the whole work) of Part A, or poor choice of essay topics at Part B. There were still many students who included historical context in Part A but fewer who left it out of Part B. Very few students compared two prescribed or two non prescribed texts this year.

There were more responses based on pre-prepared answers for both Part A and Part B. For Part A, this took the form of focusing the analysis on ideas outside the passage or the authors’ usual techniques. In Part B it was trying to marry the prepared essay with the examination topic that the student had selected. For example, Question 1, where women’s power equated with women’s roles; Question 2 which translated into ‘greatness must be earned’ and Question 10 where holding onto one’s beliefs became adherence to traditional values. The similarities between some responses would suggest that samples had been learnt; a risky strategy as relevance is a key criterion.

Expression was less of a problem this year and there were few ‘SMS influenced’ responses. However, spelling was still an issue, as was inaccuracy. Statements like ‘Euripides’ comedy *Lysistrata*’, ‘Sophocles’ *Medea*’, ‘Vergil writing in 100bce’ and ‘Roman writers such as Euripides’ do not inspire confidence that students are in command of their material. Students should be warned against the gratuitous insertion of esoteric Greek or Latin terms into their responses, for example ‘the warrior was known as *Kaloskagathos*’, ‘*kaloskagathosness*’, and ‘the only mention of *agnoresis* (in the text) is seen in *Talithybius*’.

The most popular Greek text was *Iliad* 22, followed by *Oedipus*, Hellenistic sculpture and *Thesmophoriazusae/Crito*. The most popular Roman text was *Aeneid*, followed by Tacitus, and Roman architecture. There were few on Seneca or Juvenal. There was more concentration on the epics this year but still a number of Greek/Roman combinations.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Part A

Students need to be reminded that Part A requires a literary or art analysis that looks at the works **aside from their historical context**. It is an opportunity to appreciate the works for their own sake rather than as the cultural products from a particular society. A discussion **relevant** to and with a **focus** on the passage/work was required.

Students, writing on selected passages, tended to begin their analysis with an introduction as a way to start. However, many used up valuable time with redundant information for example **historical context** or plot summaries for which there is **no criterion in Part A**. A better use of time would be to identify the context of the passage within the work, explaining why the passage is important to the ‘plot’ of the work as a whole, thus gaining credit toward Criterion 3. Another way to ‘introduce’ their analysis would be for students to list the ideas, issues and values found in the passage and explain their relationship to the ideas, issues, values and techniques of the work as a whole, gaining credit for the two Criteria 1 and 3.

There was still a tendency to retell the story, summarise the passage or describe the art works leaving the reader to identify ideas, techniques and the importance of the passage/artwork to the whole work/style. Students need to understand the difference between a summary, a comprehension exercise and an analysis. Many were able to tie their general discussion to the passage/work through quotes and specific details. However, quotes should be used to support the analysis rather than as a springboard for discussion.

For example:

Thought of shameful treatment for glorious Hektor. This shows Achilles' mind.

While the statement indicates that the student had comprehended the line it leaves analysis up to the reader. Where Classical texts are studied in English and Literature as well, students need to be warned that the nature of the required responses differs from subject to subject.

Encouraging students to underline and annotate passages/artworks, throughout the year and on the examination paper helps keep them focused on the passage/artwork and to identify relevant ideas, issues, values and techniques. Practising passages from unseen works is a valuable form of preparation, both to encourage students to work from the passage/work and to give them the confidence to rely on their skills rather than their memories.

More appropriate responses tended to:

- focus on the passage then link to the whole work
- analyse rather than describe
- be explicit rather than implicit
- explain ideas, issues values, aesthetic qualities and techniques
- use quotes to support discussion
- discuss the importance of the passage to the whole work or the relationship of the artwork to its style.
- use all information to ‘work’ for the criteria, e.g. by combining ideas, techniques and importance.

Less appropriate responses tended to:

- summarise the whole work/style with reference to the passage/artwork
- narrate/describe rather than analyse
- be implicit rather than explicit
- identify ideas, issues values, aesthetic qualities and especially techniques, rather than explain them
- use quotes as the discussion or as identification of a technique rather than to support the discussion
- discuss ongoing significance, or significance to classical society, rather than the importance of the passage to the whole work
- contain redundant information that does not ‘work’ for the criteria, e.g. socio-historical context.

Criterion 1 Knowledge of ideas, issues, values, and/or aesthetic qualities in the passage/work

- **identification and explanation** of ideas, issues, values and/or aesthetic qualities **specific to** the passage/work
- **use** of quotes and specific references to **support** analysis
- inclusion of **relevant** historical context **only** if applicable to the ideas in the passage/work, eg. for Crito, Tacitus, or the art.

All of the above counted toward this criterion.

Criterion 2 Analysis of techniques used to emphasise ideas, issues, values and/ or aesthetic qualities in the passage/work

Correct identification, **explicit** explanation of the **impact** of the technique and **consistent** use of supporting quotes counted toward this criterion. More responses focused on what the author/artist had done to achieve the effect produced by the passage/work. In general, students explicitly identified techniques this year although some confused them with ideas.

For example:

I must be suppliant to this man, who is harsh and violent shows the technique of bravery.

‘Language’ without some descriptor such as ‘emotive’ is not of itself a technique and quotes, if they are to support analysis, should be accurate and relevant to the point being made. Quote such as:

Emotive language like “a cloud of dust arose”

Vergil’s use of deification in such words as ‘land of shades’

Surely those who profess to be your friends would take care of them This argument demonstrates Socrates extreme loyalty to the state

are examples of students’ inaccuracy and inappropriate use of material to support their analysis.

Criterion 3 Evaluation of the importance of the passage to the work as a whole, or of the work to its cultural form

More students attempted an explicit response to this criterion than last year, usually in an ‘introduction’ or a ‘conclusion’. A number of students, though, are still confusing ‘importance to the whole work/style’ with importance to the society or, the ‘ongoing significance’ criterion of the catalogue. A number used valuable time to cover all three.

Many still handle it in a fairly cursory or implicit way by summarising the whole work/style or merely referring to other parts of the text. **Explicit** comments about the importance of the passage/work and references to **specific** intratextual (as distinct from intertextual) **links to support the analysis** were characteristic of the more successful response. For example, ‘From book 5 when Patroclus was killed by Hektor, Achilles rage has been building. However it is only (*arguably*) in this passage 17 books later that Achilles rage and emotion turn into excessive behaviour’.

Students could be encouraged to think about:

- the impact on the whole work if the passage was not there
- the importance of the passage to 1) plot 2) characterisation 3) ideas, issues, values, techniques and aesthetics of the whole work.

Similarly art students could think about how typical the work is of:

- the subject matter
- ideas and techniques associated with the style it represents.

Part B

The most popular essays were 1, 4 and 5, followed by 2, 8 and 10.

Students need to think carefully about which topic suits the texts they have prepared. For example, Greek texts could not be used for Question 7 or Roman texts for Question 8. These questions, along with Question 5, attracted generic answers that appeared pre-prepared because they were only loosely linked to the specific terms of the question. This problem is also related to many students' inability to 'unpack' the topic and understand terms. Less successful responses picked a topic, e.g. 'heroes' or 'women' and neglected the other terms in the questions such as *best* and *flawed but not wicked*, and *never as powerful as men*. The better responses defined concepts, analysed the topic and addressed all terms, for example '**Hellenistic** sculpture **extended the sculptural form to new heights** in its **quality and expression**' in order to structure a response. Attention to the precise terms of the topic is essential to score really well. Likewise, students should use words like '*never*', '*rather than*' and '*portrayed*' as key words around which to construct their arguments. Students could be encouraged to 'unpack' and plan essay topics on the examination paper as well as during the year. There was little evidence of planning on the blank pages of examination booklets.

A number of students wrote on three or four texts. While this is not penalised it is not encouraged. Responses tend to be list-like, superficial and less likely to cover all criteria. Brief cross-referencing to other works, rewarded at Criterion 6 as evidence to support an argument, is better. It appears that students now understand that the prescribed art 'texts' comprise a number of works. Fewer students used a comparison of one prescribed work with one from another period to support their arguments.

Criterion 1 Development of a relevant argument and/or response

Responses needed to be relevant to the topic selected; therefore essays that bypassed the topic or were only loosely linked to the topic could not score well. In Question 4, for example, the concept of *best* let alone *heroes* was rarely addressed whereas *flawed* and/or *wicked*, though not defined, were discussed. The most successful responses 'unpacked' the topic and sustained a **relevant argument** throughout the essay with **progressive conclusions** relating the discussion back to the **topic**. This is not to be confused with a 'debating style' response where connections between the discussion and the topic are merely asserted throughout. The extent and nature of developments and differences (5) or relationship of the works to their contexts (4) formed the argument of the most successful responses.

Criterion 2 Knowledge of the ideas, issues, values and/or techniques in the works

This year more students thought beyond 'plot', to include use of characters, themes (ideas, issues, values) and techniques in their responses.

Criterion 3 Analysis of the ideas, issues, values and/or techniques in the works

The most successful responses discussed the features of the works and demonstrated knowledge **relevant to the topic** through **selection and analysis** rather than by adopting a narrative/descriptive approach. While more students included an analysis of techniques such as the use of characters to voice different viewpoints, there were a number of generic essays that either neglected the topic or asserted connections between their material and the topic that had not been evidenced through their discussion. Students should be reminded that the points they raise need to advance their argument not be included just to demonstrate their knowledge of the texts.

Criterion 4 Evaluation of the relationship of the works to their socio-historical contexts

While most students covered this criterion and others left it out; overall, the essays were very good. This was particularly the case with essays based on *Oedipus*, and is further evidence of the need for students to distinguish between an 'English' and a 'Classical' style of response. Some left out all reference to context. Most dated the works and described contemporary events or values. Only the best also suggested whether the works reflected, questioned or supported the society and times in which they were produced or used it to account for developments and differences between the works. Since the prescribed and complementary works ideally came from different time periods, comparison of their historical contexts makes a good starting point. It is the first point of 'difference'. Students should also be careful with the accuracy of their material. 'Trojan Women, 450bce, written in the C4', the Pergamon altar 'created by Phidias around 160–169 bc', 'Vergil's reign' and 'Athens had a new structure of government-democracy, and was ruled by Pericles' are problematic statements at the end of a year of study; likewise, 'This is only typical of Classical sculpture because this was happening during the Golden Age where nothing exciting was occurring and it was all about democracy'.

Criterion 5 Understanding of developments and/or differences between the works

While more students attempted comparison this year, many merely included two works in their discussion. Every topic carries the instruction. ‘Discuss this statement by **comparing** at least two works you have studied this year’.

Comparison is a basic requirement of the essay. At the very least the language of comparison should be employed, for example: *however, on the other hand, in contrast to, a different approach, similarly, likewise, conversely*.

Most responses discussed works that dealt with the idea or issue raised by the topic and some concentrated on the ways the author/artist presented them. The majority generalised about developments between works or the different emphasis given to ideas, issues or values in the ‘plot’. The most successful discussed the ways and the extent to which, the two works differed in terms of **specific** elements of the ‘plot’, characters, ideas/issues/values, techniques or contexts. Analysis worked best when comparisons were made within the one paragraph. When the texts/works were discussed sequentially often the comparison got lost. Likewise, a number of comparisons lacked depth when too many works were discussed.

Criterion 6 Use of relevant evidence to support an argument

The most successful responses used quotes, specific references to the works and where appropriate, the interpretations of critics to support their arguments. Less successful responses just retold the ‘plot’, included lots of information, relevant or not or inserted quotations where they had little bearing on the argument. There is no need for students to use footnotes or other forms of citation in the examination.

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