



2008 Classical Societies and Cultures Examination GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Students generally showed sound preparation for the 2008 Classical Societies and Cultures examination. They usually understood the criteria by which the scripts were marked and addressed them directly.

Section A responses identified many issues, ideas and values, although some students wrote about the ideas of the prescribed text generally rather than about those in the passage. Most students addressed techniques explicitly but often did not integrate their comments on techniques into the analysis. Sometimes techniques were identified only. There is improved understanding that a technique is something done by the author/artist, and most students mentioned the author. The author's purpose in using the technique should also be considered: how does it influence the meaning of the passage?

Students found it challenging to evaluate the importance of the passage to the work, or to assess whether an artwork was typical of its genre. This criterion was often addressed briefly or vaguely. Students should assume that the passages and artworks have significance either to the prescribed work, or to the development of artistic styles and themes among the prescribed artworks. This significance needs to be explored.

Some Section A responses included irrelevant material such as introductions to their analyses, which gave information about the author and the work as a whole. Lengthy introductions are unnecessary but it helps to briefly place the passage in the work, as this contributes to the significance. It also helps to compare the chosen artwork with the other set artworks to show how typical it is in relation to the cultural form. A few students described the historical context at some length in their Section A responses and gave the impression that they were not confident of their analytical skills.

In Section B most students wrote essays that were of a satisfactory length and that showed a sound knowledge of the chosen texts. Most students knew a lot about the texts they had studied and were using for evidence, but there were big differences between those students who could construct a persuasive and relevant argument from their material on the chosen topic, and those who could not. Students should be reminded that their task is to argue a case and present material that is relevant to the case. As in the past, few students explored the implications of the terms in the question, which led to essays that were not sharply focused. It is understandable that students were eager to show what they knew, but essays often lacked a clear structure. The terms of the question are designed to help students structure their essays; they are not simply a prompt to present everything that comes to mind about the texts. Every essay topic calls for a definition of terms. Many students accepted the assertion in the topic as a given and tried to manipulate the evidence to support it, even though their chosen texts clearly suggested a contrary approach. This occurred commonly with Question 5, where many students used Classical sculptures such as the Doryphoros to argue that 'Suffering is the price of glory', despite the fact that the work does not represent suffering.

Quite a few students appeared to adapt pre-prepared essays to fit a topic – that is, essays they had written during the year on their chosen texts or on a related or similar topic. Often these did not fit well to the question asked, and these students struggled to keep on the topic. Many students committed to writing about particular texts but chose inappropriate topics. For example, *Iliad* (Book 1) was suited to Question 4 'Anger is the most destructive emotion' but not to Question 3 'Classical works present new ideas as a threat'. Students should understand that there is at least one question for each prescribed text and that their task in reading time is to identify the most appropriate question for their chosen texts.

A problem arising this year was the inappropriate pairing of prescribed and non-prescribed works. Some students wrote essays comparing the prescribed Classical sculpture and Euripides' *Women of Troy*. Although this is possible, most students who used this pairing to support the argument that 'Suffering is the price of glory', found little suffering in the sculptures, little glory in the play, and very few points of comparison.

Most students addressed criterion 4, socio-historical context, in their Section B essays this year, but it continues to be a low-scoring criterion. The difficulty has been to integrate observations on the socio-historical context into an essay on a topic that often does not explicitly ask for the context to be considered. Question 4, for instance, 'Anger is the most destructive emotion', required students to divert from the argument to address criterion 4. Assessors accepted this reality. Students were generally more successful in explaining the socio-historical context of Greek texts of the fifth century BCE, than of Roman texts of the first century AD. Students assumed that references to the Augustan era or the rule of Nero would suffice; they needed to be more explicit.



It was pleasing that most students writing on the *Iliad* were able to describe an archaic context but also pointed out the text's importance to Greece in the fifth century BC.

Very few students made the mistake of comparing two prescribed texts in Section B this year. There were many discursive 'English style' responses that focused on the literary techniques of plot and character rather than on culturally relevant ideas. These essays were often well written and quite sophisticated in identifying the motivation and psychology of the characters but they omitted reflection on the cultural environment of the author and the prevalent ideas of the day.

The best students used a wide vocabulary to describe the works and their meanings precisely. They conveyed sophisticated ideas and made fine distinctions. Quotations and specific references were fitted seamlessly into the arguments.

The better Section A analyses were very focused on the passage/artwork, identified and explained the features clearly and were able to place the passage/artwork in the context of the work/genre. The weaker ones were less likely to look closely at the material on the examination paper and made general observations instead.

The better Section B essays were thoughtful responses to the statement in the question. They presented a clear position and supported it with appropriate material from the most appropriate texts. Agreement or disagreement with the statement was often qualified as the student sought precision or took account of conflicting evidence. Weaker essays were not closely linked to the topic and were often undermined by the use of inappropriate texts.

Few students used Greek terms in their essays this year. There is nothing to be gained if an English word can do the job as well. When a student used a Greek word they needed to demonstrate that they understood the term correctly, which consumed time and space for little advantage. Students of Roman culture tended to limit their Latin words to well-defined ones such as *furor* and *pietas*, and used them expertly.

Students are urged to make clarity and accuracy their objectives, and to leave time to re-read their work at the end of the examination.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Section A

First question

Question chosen	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	0	61	17	3	1	4	7	0	0	4	4

Second question

Question chosen	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	1	5	31	20	8	18	3	0	0	6	7

When responding to Section A, students should focus on the passage provided. The socio-historical context is not relevant, just the words of the passage, the ideas they convey and the significance of these ideas and developments in the passage to the work. The task is similar for the artworks; the focus is on the artwork pictured, the techniques used in that work, the ideas expressed and the significance of those ideas within the cultural form of the work (which is represented by the group of prescribed artworks).

Telling the story (an implicit narrative response) is not the task. Some weaker responses provided a summary, some paraphrased and some treated it as a comprehension exercise. None of these is analysis. Analysis identifies specific features in a passage, explains the ideas that they express and shows how the ideas are expressed and their importance in the work.

A description of the artwork will implicitly convey information about techniques and ideas but better responses were explicit about techniques used and the purposes of those techniques.

Students should prepare by annotating passages and highlighting techniques, ideas and implications.

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The most popular Section A texts were *Iliad* (Book 1) and *The Persians* (options 1 and 2 in the tables above). Other texts were well supported, except for Seneca and Suetonius (options 7 and 8 above).

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	0	2	16	35	32	15	3.4

Weaker responses stated the obvious or restated the contents of the passage line by line. In the better responses to the *Iliad* extract there was sometimes too much focus on the characters of Achilles and Agamemnon at the expense of the ideas of hero, king, honour, glory and shame.

Students and teachers may gain an idea of the ways in which students addressed this criterion from the following responses to the extract from *Iliad* (Book 1):

- Very low *The Iliad is a novel about Achilles and the king. The king takes his trophy which is a girl (how sexist is that!)*
- Low *Achilles argues with Agamemnon and the king takes his trophy (Briseis) away. Achilles is overcome by rage and in the passage he attacks the king, saying 'Shameless – armoured in shamelessness – always shrewd with greed' because he was shamed. He is a proud warrior and takes it very hard, and decides to go home. Agamemnon says he can desert if he wants to.*
- Medium *The main idea in this passage is how upset Achilles is to have Briseis taken from him and the fact that Agamemnon doesn't respect the heroic code. According to the code a warrior fights for glory and he must be shown respect. His trophies must not be taken from him. Achilles argues that Agamemnon always has more honours and can afford to be generous. Achilles is the pre-eminent warrior and the heroic code states that honour is the most important thing. However, the king has humiliated him in public and he is very upset. He says 'back I go to my ships'. But Achilles also breaks the rules by abusing the king – 'dogface', and Agamemnon is also humiliated.*
- High *This passage deals with dishonour and the breakdown of the relationship between Achilles and Agamemnon. Achilles has been dishonoured when Agamemnon 'most grasping of men' has seized his trophy, Briseis, to compensate for his own loss of Chryseis. This is a breach of the heroic code – courage must be honoured – and Achilles is devastated – 'And now you threaten to strip me of my prize in person'. His speech veers between noble language which he uses to describe everything else, and the coarsest invective that he directs at Agamemnon – 'you dogface'. Excessive pride is present here, causing Achilles to lose his temper completely, while it makes Agamemnon coldly dismissive. We learn that kings are favoured in the sharing of loot and that the warrior's excellence is just a 'gift of god', according to Agamemnon.*
- Very high *It is the hero's desperation that stands out here. Achilles launches a vicious attack on the king because the one thing he values, his honour, is being taken from him in front of the assembled Achaeans. The heroic code has promised him honour in exchange for an early death. But in taking Briseis from Achilles, Agamemnon ensures the hero's utter humiliation. Despite his despair Achilles can still construct a noble speech, though interspersed with abuse, arguing that he came to Troy to help the Atreides (not quite true – he came to win glory for himself) and that the king has always received the lion's share of the plunder even though he, Achilles, bore the brunt of the fighting. With his back to the wall, Achilles sees no alternative but to leave Troy. Agamemnon shows his personal hatred of Achilles in his cold, brutal reply. He is a poor leader of men. He dismisses the warrior's battlefield skills as 'just a gift of god' - ignoring the fact that a king's throne is a gift of god too. Homer shows that, for a warrior, there is no greater betrayal than this, and that the power of kings is often abused.*

Students showed good knowledge of the set texts; most knew where the passage occurred in the text and were able to place it competently. However, some students strayed outside the passage and wrote about ideas not directly represented. The artworks were generally well treated.

The most effective approach was to describe what the writer/artist is doing in the passage/artwork; for example, *Tacitus emphasises the shocking nature of Messalina's conduct by noting the response of the Imperial household and anticipating the reader's response.*

It helps sometimes to build the analysis around a central idea; for example, *What is striking in this passage is the despair in the great warrior's speech as he veers between impassioned invective and downright abuse, or What impresses here is the lofty tone Virgil adopts to characterise the father of the gods*

Consider three ways of finding ideas in Achilles' distress:

- paraphrase: *Achilles abuses the king*



- explanation: *Achilles' angry abuse shows the depth of his despair because honour is denied him*
- exploration: *Achilles is humiliated to the point where he loses his customary politeness in the assembly and resorts to low abuse. To have lost his honour is to have lost everything. There can be no turning back from this.*

Some students appeared to choose an artwork in the hope that a careful description would supply the ideas and techniques required. The artworks on this year's paper were open to this approach but only those students who knew them well were able to analyse them successfully. A good analysis of an artwork requires the same careful preparation as does that of a text; a simple description is not sufficient.

Many students claimed to see evidence in the gods of the east frieze that females were marginalised in Athenian society because Apollo appears to be turning away from Artemis. They seemed to forget that they were presented with a small section of the frieze, which continued on both sides of the three gods, and that Artemis is involved with other deities in the next section. Some students also argued that the covering of Artemis's torso indicated that the Athenians thought the female figure was unattractive, which was not a persuasive point unless other more likely explanations were disproved.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	5	19	33	27	14	3.2

Students were awarded marks in this criterion for identifying and explaining techniques used by the author/artist in the passage/artwork. Correct identification is important, as is an explanation of the writer's purpose in using the technique and its effect. Many students were unclear about what constitutes a technique and many papers implied, rather than explicitly stated, techniques; for example using phrases like 'Tacitus describes...' or 'Tacitus then states...'. The technique is in the way Tacitus describes something, his choice of words and juxtaposition of observations. The better answers made fine distinctions in analysing the effect of a technique.

Consider the following two responses. The first identifies a technique used by the author and explains its effect. The second only describes the character's actions and words.

After presenting Nicias's speech, Thucydides delves into his mind and thinking to show how easily men fall into error when they assume that they know how others will react.

After Nicias's speech Thucydides tells us what he was thinking.

Different writers use different techniques and some techniques are the hallmark of a particular writer; for instance, Tacitus juxtaposes events very carefully. Students should prepare for the analysis by looking for those hallmark techniques.

Some of the analysis of techniques in the artworks was particularly detailed and impressive, but students still needed to explain how the use of these techniques contributed to the ideas in the artwork.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	11	28	33	20	4	2.7

This criterion was not addressed as well as the first two, usually because students wrote less about the importance of the passage/work. Sometimes a single sentence was simply tacked on at the end of the analysis.

Some students made the error of writing about importance to the society or 'ongoing significance'; for example, *This passage is significant because the issues are still relevant today*. Some evaluated the importance by simply listing the ideas and techniques: *The passage is significant because it contains...*

The better responses made intratextual links. They linked the passage to the work and showed how it contributed to the development of themes and established the groundwork for what was to come: *This passage is essential to the development of the play as it prepares the audience for the entrance of a humiliated Xerxes and The representation of the gods on the east frieze is important because it treats the gods as heroes are treated; Apollo displays a body comparable to that of the Doryphoros with an emphasis on youth and athleticism.*



This year there were more references to other prescribed artworks in responses to the statue of *Claudius as Jupiter* and to the gods of the east frieze.

Section B

Question chosen	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	1	10	7	4	15	12	6	26	3	12	4

Most students chose appropriate questions for their preferred text pairings but there were many students who did not. It was a struggle for some to find relevant material on which to build an argument. Students should give themselves the best chance of achieving a high mark by selecting a question carefully.

Several students ignored the questions specifically set for sculpture and tried to use the evidence from sculpture to construct arguments about the purpose of the gods or leadership. This is possible, but a hard task.

Several students concluded that because anger was absent from their chosen work it must not be the most destructive emotion; this was not persuasive.

Better prepared students had the confidence to answer the right question, grapple with its terms, and use relevant material. Less confident students tended to write everything they knew about their texts, regardless of the question.

Question 7 was the most popular ('Leaders are more interested in themselves than those they lead') and it fitted several of the set texts well – *Iliad* (Book 1), Thucydides and *The Persians* particularly. There were few essays in response to Question 8 ('Empire building is condemned, rather than admired, in classical works'), which had more relevance to Roman texts than to Greek. Question 3, clearly aimed at *The Clouds*, had few responses. Question 10 was not popular, possibly because of the word 'illuminate'.

Several students made it clear that they were going to argue certain things about their chosen text pairing regardless of the question. A few made no attempt to relate to the question, while others related to it loosely and unconvincingly. These pre-prepared essays are never as successful as considered responses to the actual question asked. The best students examined the question and answered it directly, choosing the best supporting evidence from appropriate texts.

Few students disagreed with the statement presented; however, wholehearted agreement with the statement did not produce the best essays in most cases. Few students took the trouble to challenge the premise of the question and/or define its terms. Most questions contained a single assertion this year, which should have made the task of defining terms easier. The topics were all simple statements with little qualification and it was up to the student to provide the necessary shades of qualification.

Most students noted the advice to limit their comparisons to two texts rather than skim over a larger number of texts. Brief cross-references to other works are encouraged, however, and can sometimes clinch an argument nicely. In the case of artworks however, comparison of just two pieces may not produce sufficient material.

Although students are encouraged to support a point of view in their essay, they should discuss the topic on its merits. They should not simply ignore material that may weaken the case they are arguing.

Criterion 1 – Development of a relevant argument and/or responses

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	2	15	32	34	16	3.4

Responses needed to relate to the topic to score well in this criterion. Pre-prepared essays tend not to do this. Students should take time at the beginning of their essay to define the terms in the statement they are responding to. Sometimes this is as simple as rephrasing the statement, but there is usually a word or phrase that should be discussed or defined. Qualifying words need to be noted. In Question 1 'always' needed to be questioned, as did the superlative in Question 4, 'the most destructive', and in Question 10 'only'. In Question 10 it was important to define 'illuminate' and not just assume that its meaning was understood.

Beginnings are important. Most students write better essays if they set out their plan in the opening paragraph. They should state the topic they are addressing, define terms that need to be defined, state the position they are taking (agreement, partial agreement or disagreement), state the texts they will draw on for evidence, and explain in general terms how their chosen texts illuminate the topic.



The students who had the most difficulty writing relevant essays were those who were adapting pre-prepared pieces.

The following is an example of a good beginning for an essay in response to Question 7.

Roman literature is frequently concerned with leaders and their motivations. The leader is someone on whom the community depends. He (he is usually male) is physically strong and imposing, a man who can do things and persuade others to follow his lead because they trust him to act in their interest and to maintain the values by which they live. The Aeneid Book 1 provides an example of a good leader, one whose main focus is to provide for those he leads. Tacitus, on the other hand, in his portrait of Nero, deploras a leader who is only interested in himself and cares nothing for the Roman people. It would be fair to say, based on the works of Virgil and Tacitus that good leaders are definitely interested in the people they lead, but that leadership can fall into the hands of unworthy people who don't give a damn. I will draw on material from section 2 of The Annals, including the burning of Rome to illustrate the nature of Nero's leadership and to contrast it with Aeneas's.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	2	12	30	31	24	3,6

This was the highest scoring criterion. Most students showed sound knowledge of the texts and the major ideas they deal with. There were a number of different approaches evident in the kind of material students drew on. Some essays were more focused on how the texts related to historical developments and events (for example, those on Thucydides and Tacitus), while others were focused on how the texts expressed cultural preoccupations and values.

There were some inaccuracies and false claims. Weaker students sometimes failed to sufficiently elaborate on or clarify what they knew.

Students should not sacrifice truth and complexity in the interests of consistency. For example, there may be temptation to argue that Creon, in *Antigone*, is a leader more interested in himself than the people of Thebes, but the better essay will argue that his judgement is astray because he conflates the interests of individuals and the interests of the state.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	6	24	34	23	11	3.0

To state a fact is to show knowledge; to explore the meaning and implications of a fact is to analyse. Essays that were limited to facts – those that retold the narrative or presented knowledge about the texts – scored low for analysis. This criterion rewards students whose arguments are focused and supported and who show that they are prepared to reassess their argument in the light of the comparisons they make.

In the best responses material was carefully selected and the analysis included an assessment of the writer's methods and purposes in dealing with the ideas and issues. Students needed to make sure that their observations about character, ideas and techniques were relevant to the topic and not just included to show knowledge of the texts.

Some students showed expertise in stringing quotes and references together, describing characters and plot development, but this falls short of real analysis where the meaning must be explored in terms of the classical culture.

Consider the following two responses. The second response does not analyse the statue, though it does show accurate knowledge.

Claudius is depicted as a middle-aged plain-faced man with the body of an athletic youth and accessories indicating piety and authority

The statue of Claudius as Jupiter has a lot of symbolism, from the eagle at his feet to the staff in his hand

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	9	6	18	26	27	14	3

This criterion was well understood and most students made an effort to address it; however, it is still a low-scoring criterion. Ten per cent of papers did not address it at all. Some topics and texts facilitated the inclusion of this criterion more than others; for example, students who used *The Persians* or Thucydides were able to link the texts to events of Greek history quite closely. Some Roman essays referring to the reigns of Augustus or Nero brushed over the socio-

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historical context as if it was common knowledge. Some essays gave a list of features belonging to the time when the work was produced without relating them to the question, but it is better to refer to socio-historic features that are relevant to the work and the topic under discussion. The better responses noted how the work related to its time – whether it reflected the society in which it was produced or challenged it.

Students needed to be accurate and clear about the work's socio-historical context. Homer was less problematic for most students this year.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	9	22	33	24	7	2.8

There were several reasons for lower marks given for comparison of the works this year. One reason was that students tended to deal with each text in turn, as if they were writing two separate essays. If the essay is constructed as an argument then it is easier to make comparisons when they arise. Secondly, there were more than the usual number of difficult pairings where comparison was limited. Teachers should take care when selecting non-prescribed texts to ensure that there is the basis for comparison. Students needed to use appropriate pairings of texts that allowed for profitable comparison in order to score well on this criterion. The language of comparison was used by most students ('however', 'whereas', 'on the other hand', etc.) but specific comparisons were often lacking.

Criterion 6 – Use of relevant evidence to support an argument

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	5	20	35	24	15	3.2

The best students quoted or paraphrased appropriately to support their arguments and evidence was spread throughout the essays wherever an assertion was made. Some students referred to critics, but some carefully remembered quotes were not relevant and did little to support the argument. It is not the name of the author that gives a citation authority but the effectiveness of the words in supporting the essay's argument.