

2015 VCE Texts and Traditions examination report

General comments

The 2015 Texts and Traditions examination allowed students to demonstrate the depth of their knowledge. In all parts of the examination, students can be asked to use examples to illustrate their responses. The expectation is that, knowing their text thoroughly, students will, as directed, draw these examples from either the passages for special study or the whole text. However, not all examples will lend themselves to the point a student wants to make, within a sophisticated and developed discussion or explanation, and not all examples will be equally significant. The selection of examples can affect the depth of discussion, and thus the score for the response.

Students need to know their examples well. To write 'Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath' is not as precise as writing 'Jesus healed a man with dropsy when going to eat at a Pharisee's house'. If the chapter or surah reference is given, this example becomes even better.

Many of the concepts studied within Texts and Traditions are very complex – such as realised eschatology, justification, pneumatology, witness and divine justice. To ensure sound student understanding of these very sophisticated and also often very precise theological notions, they must be frequently revisited in classes. Many students did not have a strong grasp of these terms and concepts, although students with high-scoring responses displayed sound understanding of these concepts and used related terms appropriately.

It should also be noted that many simple errors of fact and knowledge were made in 2015.

In 2015, a large number of examinations were incomplete. Students should be careful not to spend so much time on one part of the examination that they do not have enough time to allocate to other parts.

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

Students need to read the questions carefully. Question 3 in Section I: The Gospel according to John asked about three things: the significance of the well at Sychar, the shared historic and religious backgrounds of Jews and Samaritans, and the conflict between the two peoples. This question required knowledge of the social and historical background, focusing on events, people and places. It did not warrant an exegetical response, which many students provided, nor a thematic explanation of discipleship discerned in the Samaritan woman Jesus encountered. Many students knew that the well was called 'Jacob's well', but did not always know why. Too frequently

students ignored the second part of the question – on the shared backgrounds of Samaritans and Jews – to concentrate on the conflict between the two people, about which they knew. However, there were some very strong responses, as the following extract from a student’s work exemplifies. After noting about wells in general, ‘*The well is of key importance as in the Old Testament several key figures met their wives at wells, both Isaac and Abraham*’, the student then explained in detail in the next paragraph that:

The well was given to Jacob. By using this well the evangelist is going back before the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities showing that the Samaritans are members of the lost tribes and that despite all of the tensions between Jews and Samaritans Jesus in his mission to gather the tribes ‘is gathering’ all people. For centuries the Jews and Samaritans had worshipped together as they were all descendants of Abraham, thus despite the Jewish belief they were members of Israel.

The conflict stemmed from the Assyrian captivity where the Assyrians assimilated the northern tribes thus becoming ‘half breeds’. The Jews also accused them of mixing aspects of both the Assyrian and Jewish faiths thus they were not worthy. This was made clear following the Jews return from Babylonia when the Samaritans offered to help rebuild the temple in Jerusalem but the Jews refused. As a result the Samaritans built their own on Mt Gerezim.

Students need to allocate a comparable time to Part A as to the other two parts of the examination, and the combined word length for their three responses for Part A should be similar to the word length of each of the other parts. Those who skim over the various aspects of the question do not score highly. Consider the detail in the following student response to Question 1 for Section III: The Gospel according to Luke, the format of which mirrored Question 1 for Section I: The Gospel according to John. The student answered the first part and began answering the second part of the question.

The Sabbath day was a day instituted by God at creation in Genesis 2, for “rest”. God “blessed” the Sabbath day, “sanctified it”, and made it “holy”. The Sabbath was an important day to the Jews, as it was part of the 10 Commandments given to Moses, and its adherence meant acknowledging God as the “creator” (Exodus 20:8–11). On the Sabbath, Jews would rest from everyday work and worship God. It was also a day of fellowship, and the Jews of Jesus’ time gathered at synagogues and worshipped together. The Sabbath was also a day of remembering God’s redemption.

In Jesus’ time, the Pharisees sought to keep the Sabbath in their campaign to keep the oral and written Torah. In order to safeguard the Sabbath, they made laws to protect it, referred to as “Pharisaical law”. These laws, found in the Mishnah, included not sowing, reaping and thrashing and all in all, there were 39 laws. Pharisees also only administered to someone in physical need on the Sabbath in a life or death situation.

In Luke 6:1–5, Jesus’ disciples are “plucking grain” on the Sabbath, which was considered “reaping”, and thus unlawful by the religious leaders. Jesus’ justification to the religious leaders, involving the story of David sharing sacred priests’ bread with his companion in 1 Samuel, shows the audience that the Sabbath was about meeting the need of the people around an individual.

Note the ability of the student to cite from and refer precisely to the Hebrew Scriptures. Some responses even noted the fourfold violation in this scene – that the disciples ‘threshed, reaped, rubbed and winnowed’.

Consider the following extract from a response to Question 3 for Section III: The Gospel according to Luke. This student has included the allusion to the Hebrew Scriptures, the literary parallel of ‘bad thief’ and ‘religious authorities’, a depiction of the scenario, an explanation of how this pericope exemplifies the evangelist’s themes of Jesus’ identity, his mission, universal salvation, the

redemptive action of Jesus, and an interpretation of how the original community may have understood the message in their own lives.

As it was prophesised, Jesus would be “counted among the lawless” (Isaiah) whereby two deserving criminals were executed on either side of Jesus at his crucifixion. Contrasting between the two criminals, Luke portrays one of the criminals as a symbol of the religious authorities who are present at the crucifixion in contrast to the other criminal who rightly portrays a change of heart on the cross as the three hang on their crosses. The criminal on the left is seen to mock Jesus in asking, if he is the messiah, why he won’t save himself and the two criminals, not knowing that scripture had to be fulfilled in Jesus. The criminal on the right however is held as a model disciple in turning away from sin and asking Jesus for forgiveness, in realising Jesus’ identity as the messiah. Jesus grants the criminal salvation in saying “today, you will be with me in paradise”. Luke portrays these criminals in contrast to differentiate once again the right and wrong responses [to Jesus].

Part B – Essay

Many students scored well for Part B – Essay. However, some essays were too descriptive of examples without discussion of the significance of those examples.

The last dot-points for key knowledge and key skills under Area of Study 2 and Area of Study 3 of Unit 3, and Area of Study 1 of Unit 4 in the study design refer to the use of ‘scholarly opinion’ and ‘interpretative commentaries’. Consequently, essay questions might provide a quotation from a scholar reasonably well known to students to launch discussion and explanation of aspects of the study.

The first two criteria for the essay involve the following: firstly, discussion, understanding and/or interpretation of a central idea, theme, literary structure and/or individuals of the set topic; secondly, management of the topic, using various parts of the question to support an interpretation. This gives students the freedom to decide how they are going to structure, shape and sustain their discussion or explanation while also covering other aspects of the essay’s criteria. Consider the following very clear introduction and first paragraph of a response to Question 7 of Section IV: The Qur’an.

In his tafir (commentary) on Chapter 3 of the Qur’an, Ibn Kathir brings attention to Allah’s wisdom behind prophet Isa’s miracles. Both Isa’s (Jesus’) miraculous birth and the miracles he performed confirmed his prophethood and confirmed the nature of God to the people of Israel.

It is in Surah Maryam that the conception and birth of Isa is discussed. Without a father, the prophet was created in the womb of Maryam by Allah’s will. No doubt this occurrence is miraculous in itself and is the preliminary miracle of prophet Isa which confirms the power of God, hence validating the prophet’s message. Once born, Isa himself performed the miracle of speaking in the cradle to confirm that he was not born out of wedlock, by the will of God. This matter is later emphasised in (3:47) when Allah states that “He creates what He wills” in reference to Isa’s birth, which differs from prophet Yahya’s birth in which Allah says, He does what He wills” (3:40). Isa’s ability to speak eloquently at such a young age allowed him to propagate the message of Islam and confirm his Prophethood.

This student then went on to give other examples, as required, and to discuss the notion of Prophethood in a well-structured essay, referring also to other surahs to support the response, all the while arguing their contention with a central focus.

Part C – Exegesis

While many students approached the passages for exegesis well, there were several clumsy approaches to this part of the examination and some students who did not use the set rubric. In

some cases, the student's response revealed no sense of overview nor of the student's complete appreciation of the passage as a whole. This shows poor exegetical technique. In some cases this came about because the student used the rubric printed on the examination or the criteria for assessing exegesis published on the VCAA website as subheadings; for example, once the student writes a paragraph on (the first rubric) 'context', they do not refer to context again. Equally concerning is discussion of 'literary form and/or techniques' as if these techniques do not help inform the themes of the passage nor impact on the 'meaning and significance for the original community'. However, of greater concern is students responding to 'the highlighted words and phrases' without regard for the end of that rubric, 'in the context of the passage'. Consequently they miss using the highlighted words and phrases as avenues to explain themes or context and, in particular, as entry points to discuss the passage as a whole. This tendency, in the extreme, sees students commenting on the highlighted words and phrases as an appendix to their exegesis, with no reference back to how the highlighted words and phrases were used within the passage or recognition that some highlighted words are used more than once within the passage. Finally, many students used the subheading 'ideas and themes' and correctly identified and explained these, then had little to write about under their last subheading, 'meaning and significance to the original community'. This reduced their chance to score well on that examination criterion. (Using subheadings can also sometimes result in minimal interpretation of the extract as a whole.)

Some students, having used a book during the year that used subheadings that do not exist in the original scripture, attempted to discuss each subdivided pericope separately. This was especially apparent in responses to Question 9 of Section III: The Gospel according to Luke. The requirement of the examination is to discuss the passage as presented as a whole.

Other students were unable to discern what from the background of a passage is significant to that passage and wrote everything they knew about the historical background to the passage. The ability to select what is relevant is a skill students need to develop. Again, a problem exists where a student, in giving the context of the passage, refers to only the one verse or ayah before the passage and to only one verse or ayah after it.

The following extracts from student responses – both high-scoring responses and mid-to-upper-range responses – are presented to examine some of the issues involving literary aspects, highlighted words and phrases, and use of commentaries. The first, interpreting Luke 6:27–42 (Question 8 of Section III: The Gospel according to Luke), exemplifies one of these concerns, but more importantly shows how discussion of a theme, developed through explaining the use of literary techniques, can then become the message to the original audience. It also shows awareness of the two audiences evident in the passage – the first being Jesus' hearers and the second, the evangelist's community.

The passage 'Love you enemies' (6:27–42) comes at the early stages of Luke's Gospel. During the Galilean ministry (4:50 – 9:10) the story sheds light on how Jesus wishes his disciples and followers to act. With a Lukan source, the passage is directed at the people who must listen, act and decide.

In the passage, Jesus is preaching to the people and teaching them the way in which they must live to be successful in their journey of faith. Although it is a historical narrative it largely includes sayings of Jesus and parable. These literary forms are greatly known for their ability to enlighten the people and teach them as they listen intently and relate the stories to their own lives. There are large quantities of repetition that are clearly evident in the passage. The constant repetition of phrases similar to "do good to those who hate you" (v.27), and "bless those who curse you" (v.28) all have a similar underlying theme of loving those who do bad things to you. This repetition helps both the hearers of Jesus and the original Lukan audience to embed these commandments.

The following example, in response to Surah 49:3–11 (Question 9 of Section IV: The Qur'an), similarly shows integration of commentary on literary techniques and the message for the original community, showing how those techniques work to develop that message. The student's understanding of the purpose of the passage is apparent.

The impact of these ayat are aided by the use of literary techniques ... The aphorisms of "Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" (59:5) and "Allah is Knowledgeable, Wise" (49:8) are used to establish a sense of Taqwa (God-consciousness) within the reader, hence prompting them to avoid sinful actions. This is further solidified by the repetition of "O believers" in which the believers are directly addressed, hence solidifying the importance of these verses. Peppered throughout the surah are commandments such as "make peace between them" in which Allah orders a third, neutral party to resolve the conflicts of two warring parties. Furthermore, the word "defame" in the 11th verse comes from the root word "lamz" meaning to defame through words – not even of actions. These devices add severity and depth to the message of this passage, aiding its purpose to guide.

The third example is of a student integrating discussion of literary techniques within the overall exegesis of John 12:36b–50 (Question 9 of Section I: The Gospel according to John). Not merely copying – as other students did – from the printed text of Isaiah 53:1–6, this response shows outstanding knowledge of how the evangelist had used Isaiah to substantiate the gospel. The references to Psalm 49 and the following chapter of John 13 are accurate, with the latter also showing context.

Throughout the Gospel the evangelist uses literary techniques as a means of giving greater importance and understanding [to the themes]. One such technique is Hebrew references. These are often allusions to the themes found in the Old Testament which enable members of the Johannine community of Jewish background to have greater understanding. One example is in verse 12 in which Jesus recalls the prophecy of scripture, 'so that scripture might be fulfilled'. In Psalm 41:9 it is stated 'He who ate my bread has lifted the heel against me'. In alluding to this scripture fulfilment with Judas Iscariot in John 13 eating the bread which Jesus gave him it denotes to the Johannine community that Jesus is Messiah, and that he is the prophesied one. Thus including members of the community who are struggling in faith to believe as he fulfils prophecy.

This student then went on to discuss use of fulfilment, imagery, the high priestly prayer form, dualism and the use of 'symbolism as a means to furthering his teaching'. By embedding discussion of literary techniques within a holistic discussion of the passage and its place within the gospel overall, this student demonstrated very high 'Use of exegetical method', the final criterion for assessment of the exegesis. Also recognised is the original community.

Consider now how students can embed their discussion of the highlighted words and phrases with their general interpretation of a passage without having to create the subheading 'literary forms and/or techniques', under which to discuss literary aspects in a more restricted manner, or an appended list. This is an exegesis of John 5:19–30 (Question 8 of Section I: The Gospel according to John).

The next two key words interconnect. In this passage the evangelist challenges the age old Jewish thinking that "eternal life" would come through adherence to the law and being able to trace one's blood line back to Abraham. Here the evangelist suggests that in the new age brought about by Jesus "eternal life" comes to anyone that believes and honours the Son, Jesus, and "Anyone who does not honour the Son" will not be given "eternal life". As the Pharisees are seen not to honour the Son in this chapter, this seems to encourage members of the Johannine community that they will receive eternal life if they believe in Jesus, and the Pharisees who persecute them won't.

Another example of integrating the highlighted words and phrases into a general exegesis of a passage – slightly less sophisticated but still effective – is the following response on Luke 9:21–36

(Question 9 of Section III: The Gospel according to Luke). This response used the highlighted words and phrases to identify and explain a set theme, comment on literary techniques and acknowledge the original audience.

Luke emphasises that Jesus went up on “the mountain to pray” as prayer is a significant theme in his gospel. Prayer indicates a close and intimate relationship with God and a level of trust in God. Luke is emphasising to his own audience that prayer is an important way to communicate and connect with God. The location of the mountain suggests something big about to occur, as many important historic events such as Moses receiving the 10 Commandments have occurred on mountains.

Moses and Elijah “suddenly” appear to discuss Jesus’ departure. This is referring to his “exodus” that will occur in Jerusalem. It is termed an “exodus” as Jesus is to undergo severe suffering at the hands of human authorities, but on a deeper level there is to be liberation of Israel’s sins as Jesus brings salvation through his death and resurrection. This is possibly an allusion to the Exodus of the Hebrews by Moses from Egypt, supported by Moses’ presence. Luke emphasises this to his audience as a foreshadowing of what is about to happen to Jesus.

The use of scholarly commentaries contributes not only to the criterion of ‘Overall exegetical method’ but can be used effectively to inform discussion of all of the assessment criteria. This is displayed in the following example of a response to John 5:19-30 (Question 8 of Section I: The Gospel according to John) which uses – not just refers to – scholars as it considers both literary structure and theme.

This student did not merely name scholars (F. F. Bruce, F. Moloney and V. Pfitzner), but used the scholars’ ideas within a discussion, which shows incisive understanding of these commentators. This scored very high on the criterion ‘use of exegetical method’. Note, too, the sophisticated manner in which the literary techniques – metaphor and *inclusio* – are named, even though the two statements of the *inclusio* were not highlighted phrases. The use of the Greek term *monogenes* (meaning ‘eternally generated from the Father’), so critical in the Arian debates of the second and third centuries and key to Trinitarian dogmatic theology, further shows a breadth of reading and depth of knowledge. This student integrates their work in Area of Study 2 of Unit 4, presumably on Christology, in a manner that many students did not attempt. The student’s knowledge gained in Area of Study 2 of Unit 4 has been internalised and exemplifies how effective learning about Area of Study 2 of Unit 4 can enrich a student’s exegetical skills.

In this passage, as part of a metaphoric ‘courtroom drama’ Jesus defends himself to his accusers and justifies his actions as he has the authority of God. Following this passage, Jesus presents witnesses who attest to his identity; God the Father, the signs he performs, John the Baptist and Moses. Some scholars such as Bruce suggest that John [Chapters] 5 and 6 are out of order, due to the geography and time of the feasts mentioned. Moloney though disagrees saying that this is not the purpose of John’s writings, rather to present the Word of God and the actions of Jesus so that people will come to faith in Christ ...

*Jesus reveals the relationship of the Father and the ‘monogenes’ to be symbolic of the Apprentice, as revealed in the *inclusio* of verses 19 and 30. The Son does what the Father commands as all authority is from God. A concept such as this presents that anyone who denies the Son, dishonours the Father (Pfitzner) as “Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him (v.23).” The Father and Son are one (10:30) and they existed together before time (1:1), therefore what is due to the Father is due to the Son.*