

2016 VCE Texts and Traditions examination report

General comments

Sound understanding of theological and exegetical concepts and terms was evident in responses to all four sections of the 2016 Texts and Traditions examination, while controlled and accurate use of such complex ideas produced some very sophisticated responses. However, it should also be noted that some students made many simple errors of fact and knowledge.

The 2016 examination is the final examination for the current study design.

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

Despite advice in previous examination reports, some responses were still underdeveloped and too short. High-scoring responses were supported by relevant detail; for example, in definitions, explanations of examples or their application to aspects of the set text, or through consideration of the significance of material used in the response.

A simple, correct answer or example does not warrant full marks. Students should elaborate on a nominated example and perhaps indicate its significance.

Consider the start of the following response to Question 1, which was identical for both the Gospel according to John and the Gospel according to Luke, and very similar to Question 1 for both the Hebrew Scriptures and The Qur'an sections: 'What is an allusion? Give **two** examples of allusion used in the Gospel according to Luke. Suggest why the writer of the Gospel according to Luke might have used these two allusions.' Notice how the simple correct definition in the first sentence is developed in the second sentence, which also includes a reference to a scripture scholar. Now consider the (first) example used, noting the student's ability to cite precisely both the Lucan passage and the Hebrew scripture referred to, and the detail that is evident in the next sentence. Here an example is provided (as required by the question), but then it is expanded on in detail. Finally, the student addresses the last part of the question, explaining not only why the evangelist chose to make that allusion, but suggesting a religious context within which the allusion was made.

An allusion is an inferred reference to another text. In Luke's case, his Gospel often contains 'dense scriptural allusions' to the Torah (Johnson) demonstrating his knowledge of scripture. An example of an allusion is the story of Jesus healing the centurion's servant in 7:1-10. There are similarities to the story of Elisha healing Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5:1-14. Those who were

familiar with the scripture story would be able to see Jesus' identity as a miracle working prophet like Elisha, which Luke had mentioned in 4:25-27. Elisha's story provides a model for Jesus' ministry and Luke is suggesting that Jesus is a prophet like him.

In answering Question 2 for Section III: The Gospel according to Luke, while the majority of students provided the more obvious names Adam, Joseph and David as their examples, some students discussed more esoteric individuals named in the genealogy. In this way, they showed greater conceptualisation of the significance of the naming of individuals involved, which allowed them to explore more sophisticated understandings of how those individuals signified aspects of Jesus' identity.

Consider the second and third paragraphs of a response that explored the richness contained within the genealogy. This response shows a student who can think through a question in a manner that allows them to display knowledge that they have attained through their studies in Units 3 and 4. It also shows a thorough understanding of the question, which required students to show the connection between individuals and a set theme, both of which are part of Unit 3, Area of Study 2. The response goes beyond listing information about characters in the genealogy to explaining their significance to the greater themes of the entire gospel.

One individual found in Jesus' genealogy is Boaz, kinsman redeemer of Ruth. This is significant because Boaz foreshadows Jesus in that he is very similar. Boaz helped and showed mercy to Ruth, someone in a dire circumstance. This mirrors Jesus because he is the Messiah and came to save the helpless, showing mercy to all. Like Boaz was a kinsman redeemer, Jesus was a redeemer for the world. This gives insight into Jesus' identity as a saviour and redeemer who gives salvation to all.

Another individual is David (King David), son of Jesse. Jesus is referred to as son of David multiple times in the Gospel of Luke. Furthermore, the messiah was prophesied to be from the lineage of David, highlighting Jesus' identity as the true Messiah and disproving doubts of his divine role. This also carries significance because it is a kingly line, and Jesus was in some ways seen as a kingly figure and a Prince of Peace. However, he was not a warrior king such as David that were part of eschatological expectations. The lineage mainly confirms his role as Messiah.

Consider the following developed response to Question 3 in Section IV – The Qur'an, which considers scholars and offers a discussion at great depth. Although the student has not named Surah 11, a surah set for study in 2016, the second example given is correct. This response shows sound development of ideas, recognition of scholarly opinion and explanation of how the letters work as both a literary and a theological feature.

The disjointed letters (huroof al muqatta'at) denote the unique and miraculous nature of the Quran as well as the all-encompassing knowledge of Allah Ta'ala. Scholars have explained that such disjointed letters, which are often used at the beginning of surahs, have no meaning that is apparent to the creation. Rather, the knowledge lies with God alone and plays a key feature in contributing towards the unique and unparalleled nature of the Quran. For example, in surah al-baqarah, Allah begins with three separate letters that are placed together, "alif" - "laam" - "meem". Together, the letters do not form an apparent meaning or message. However, following the "alif" - "laam" - "meem" is another verse, denoting the miracle of the Quran. "That Book which is unparalleled, a Guidance to mankind." Scholars have interpreted this as a sign of the nature of the Quran, which is a testimony of truth and guidance. In another surah, another set of disjointed (muqatta'at) letters are used, "alif" "laam" "raa". However, scholars have noted a key similarity whenever the disjointed letters are used; they are usually followed with a statement of confidence, denoting the unprecedented, miraculous nature of the Quran, and how it serves to guide mankind. Although the meaning is unknown, it remains with Allah and this emphasises the all-knowing, and vast wisdom of Allah Ta'ala.

For Question 2 in Section IV – The Qur’an, some students made insufficient use of background resources beyond the set text, resulting in limited responses. Many responses to this question ignored the story of Luqmān’s encounter with Jibrael. Many students did not demonstrate awareness of the two audiences involved – Luqmān’s private fatherly advice to his son, and then, by Luqmān’s story being included within the revelation of The Qur’an, his wise advice being also offered to young people generally. Higher-scoring responses to this question, however, sometimes considered Luqmān in relation to Prophethood. The following exemplifies a response in which what is written is correct, but does not go beyond presenting basic knowledge. As such it is underdeveloped. However, its detailed attention to Luqmān’s message is very good and ensured that it scored a higher mid-range mark.

Luqman was an Ethiopian man. He was described as being short, dark skinned and having big lips. Luqman was a carpenter. Although he is an important man and has a surah named after him, Luqman was not a Prophet. God granted Luqman wisdom because he was a good man that many people respected. Therefore, Allah (swt) trusted that he would be able to convey the message of Islam efficiently. Luqman had a few pieces of advice to which he bestowed upon his beloved son. These advices included: Establish your prayer, prayer is the second pillar of Islam and therefore extremely important. Respect and obey your parents, they are significant individuals. However, disobey them if they force you to engage in shirk (worshipping of more than one God), which introduces the third advice, do not commit shirk as it is the greatest sin. Luqman lectured his son to enjoin in good and to disregard evil. Lastly, Luqman advised his son to stray from the path of arrogance, which included removing eye contact when being addressed, speaking loudly and also walking in an immoderate manner. Luqman was an extremely wise man that was gifted with intelligence by Allah (swt).

Part B – Essay

Regardless of religious tradition or essay topic chosen, students should refer to the assessment criteria printed at the top of Part B – Essay. In particular, students need to further consider the second dot-point: management of topic, using the various parts of the question to support an interpretation.

Any interpretation requires supporting examples, and some topics require students to concentrate on the passages for special study rather than the whole set text. Management of topic requires interpretation of the question and decisions on emphasis and structure, including how the essay will flow as a coherent piece of work.

Consider Question 6 from Section III – The Gospel according to Luke: ‘In Chapter 15 of the Gospel according to Luke, the evangelist presents stories that exhibit the joy that comes after recovering what was lost. Discuss how the evangelist uses the stories of Chapter 15 to explore repentance, reconciliation and restoration’. There are three ‘stories’ in Chapter 15 (which most students knew and correctly identified as parables) but there was no use of ‘three’ in the question, and some students, validly, chose to write on only two. Then there are the theological concepts, ‘repentance, reconciliation and restoration’ and perhaps the word ‘joy’ that clearly belongs to the 2016 theme that this essay was based on, Lost and Found. Some students used the three stories, usually in the sequence in which they appear in Chapter 15, to structure their essay. Other students used the three theological concepts as a framework to manage their discussion of the topic. All of these were equally valid and appropriate approaches.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response. The response began by discussing what the student called “*the ‘prodigal son’ also known as ‘the forgiving father’*”, thus recognising differing scholarly interpretations of this parable, and then the story of the Lost Coin. Continuing, the student begins the third page of the essay:

Another parable in Chapter 15 is the parable of the 'Lost Sheep'. In this story, the shepherd can be likened to Jesus. As the shepherd has a flock of 100, one goes missing, and he leaves the 99 to find the 1. Similarly if one is lost, Jesus will make it as his number one priority to find them and restore them to the flock which could be likened to the Kingdom of God, heaven or salvation. Once again, this highlights God's great care for all his children and will do what it takes to save all. Although this parable doesn't mention repentance, the evangelist is sure to give accounts of Jesus' and John the Baptist's ministries that focus on 'metanoia' and the need for repentance if salvation is desired. By pairing these examples, the Lukan community could link them and understand the need for repentance in order to be forgiven and one day restored to glory.

As Chapter 15 focuses on the Lost and Found, the evangelist shows that if we repent and follow God, we will ultimately be forgiven and reconciled with God. These parables place strong emphasis on God and Jesus' great care and love for all mankind and are willing to restore all to glory if they repent. God finds great joy in recovering what was lost and the evangelist captures this joy, this love and care that God has in making the lost found through processes of repentance, reconciliation and restoration.

Not only has this student been able to use the terms of the essay topic effectively and with understanding, but they have introduced extensions of these concepts by using the Greek word used in theological discussion, 'metanoia', suggesting an insightful understanding of how this concept interacts with the three concepts proposed in the essay prompt – repentance, reconciliation and restoration.

The criteria for the essay give students the freedom – and it is an expectation – 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. Students should be attentive to these criteria regardless of responding to a scaffolded or open-ended topic.

Consider the following student response to Question 7 of Section IV – The Qur'an, which asked: 'Explain the ways in which the Qur'an presents the nature of Allah. Support your answer using examples from the surahs set for study this year'. The response began:

The perfection and completion of His knowledge, His supreme attributes and action confirm the absolute Might and Power of Allah. Allah tells us about His pride, majesty and beautiful names, sublime attributes and perfect words, which no one can encompass.

Having begun the essay with this clear contention and then quoting and discussing Surah 31:28, the student continued:

The following verse 29, Allah states "He has subjected the moon and the sun to follow his law and each running in its course until the appointed term" meaning each is running in its appointed time or until the day of Judgement. Both meaning is correct. The first view is supported by Abu Dharr and according to the Hadiths/Sahihs, The Prophet of Allah said "O Abu Dharr, Do you know where this sun goes." He replied Allah and his Messenger know the best. Prophet said "The sun goes beneath the throne of Allah and seeks permission to rise up again and soon it will be said "Go back from whence you came from." The same is in the case of the moon.

A strength of this essay is the student's ability to quote correctly from the appropriate Hadith, a form of reference to scholarship. After this, and having discussed three verses from surah 31, the student switches to examine surah 17, quoting from that and using the quotes as evidence to support the contention of the opening sentence. All of this builds a strong essay.

Part C – Exegesis

The standard of exegeses was very strong. However, some students incorrectly commented verse by verse, or commented on the highlighted words and phrases at the end of the exegesis.

Consider the following exegetical response, showing both strengths and weaknesses, of surah 2:261–266. First, there is a clear overview of the whole extract, which was required, not ayah by ayah. All six ayat consider the theme of ‘charity’. However, the literary techniques – commandments and example – only identify (or name) the technique; they do not explain how the techniques, as literary features, contribute to the passage.

In this passage, Allah (swt) commands the believers to give charity for the sake of Allah. Therefore, the literary forms include commandments and clear verses. Furthermore, in verse 261, Allah gives an example of such believers who spend charity in His cause, that is for His Deen with whatever they spend in His way out of what He has provided for Him will be returned to him multiplied by seven hundred fold in the Hereafter and this world. This ayah also indicates that Allah grows the good deeds of a believer just as He grows plant for whoever sows it in a fertile land. Verily, Allah has boundless knowledge meaning He is Munificent and is aware of everything. He shall give abundance to whom He wills and to those deserving of it as charity may not always be accepted by Allah if it is not performed with good intentions.

In this paragraph and using the word ‘Munificent’, the student is in fact linking three of the themes set for 2016: Charitable Acts, Justice and the Hereafter, and the Nature of God. Following this with ‘He shall give abundance ...’ in the next sentence is a clever development of those themes. Furthermore, as this name for Allah is not found within this surah, the student is connecting this extract to the wider Qur’an.

As an example of using literary features effectively, consider now how another student starts their second paragraph analysing the Gospel according to John 1:19–36, having already set both the literary and theological contexts of this extract in their first paragraph, within what the student calls ‘a faith document’ for the Johannine Community, quoting John 20:31. Beginning by offering both the general and legal definitions of the highlighted word ‘testimony’, the student then considers it ‘here’, within the context of the extract, continuing both awareness of the original audience and reference to John the Baptist.

The evangelist uses a host of literary techniques and theological insights to give deeper meaning to the text. The evangelist commences the passage by affirming that these words spoken are the “testimony” of John. Testimony refers to declarations of truth on behalf of something, usually used in legislative realms. Here, the evangelist emphasises the fact that these are the spoken words of John, not his own. This in turn is meant to highlight to the readership that it is John himself who subordinates himself to Jesus, not the evangelist. And so by doing this reveals to those members of the Johannine Community who had been followers of the Baptist that he willingly shows Jesus is greater than he.

The evangelist advances the text by making an allusion, a reference to Hebrew scripture. The religious authorities ask if John is “Elijah” or a “prophet”. Indeed, Elijah was a revered prophet amongst Jews having risen to prominence by withholding rain from King Ahab for three and a half years. It was believed that he would precede the coming of the Messiah. However, John denies the titles of “prophet”, “Elijah” or “messiah”. These figures relate to Micah 5:2, 2 Kings 2:11 and Deuteronomy 18:15, all of whom were to come one way or another for all Jews’ salvation. However, the Baptist vehemently opposes these [titles], rejecting any divinity. For the evangelist later reveals, it is Jesus who will fulfil all those roles and more.

The use of the literary technique in this succeeding paragraph is not merely definitional, nor is it descriptive, although there is certainly a very knowledgeable and detailed recount of the incident in Elijah’s life and reference to a wide range of supporting texts from the Hebrew Scriptures. What is shown is incisive understanding – to ‘give deeper meaning’ – of how use of this literary technique

and Elijah's prophethood connect to Jesus' own ministry. Another three paragraphs are dedicated to examining literary features as ways to understand how the evangelist presents Jesus before concluding, as below. Note the precision – even to knowledge of the tense of the original Greek – as several set themes are discussed as is the impact of all of this upon the original community.

The evangelist touches on several key themes in this passage such as identity and nature of Jesus and coming to faith. Throughout this passage the evangelist strives to subordinate John the Baptist to the figure of Jesus. He does this by emphasizing he is the “son of God” and he “was before the Baptist”. The imperfect tense here is important as it reveals how indeed Jesus was pre-existent with the father from the beginning of time as his Word which has come onto the earth to show his will. And so it is because of this overt superiority of Jesus that he does indeed “rank ahead” of John. This was to allay concerns amongst the Johannine Community that the Baptist could have been the messiah. Indeed, given the delay of the parousia many had come to suspect Jesus was not the messiah. And so the evangelist allays these concerns by showing Jesus' overt superiority. The passage also touches on coming to faith. In a time of persecution by the Jews, “birkit hominem” and aposynagogus, many of the members of the Johannine Community were experiencing a waning of faith. So the evangelist reaffirms that Jesus “baptises with the holy spirit”. Even when Jesus had gone to the father, the holy spirit remains on Earth with those who believed in him, including the Johannines. The spirit aims to instil confidence and faith that Jesus has not left their side and enabling them to continue to believe he is the “son of God”.

There is a sense here of completion, of linking together the various key knowledge and key skills of the study design and of the student bringing together knowledge from across the whole study. The Hebrew and Greek words used appear in most commentaries and so, in their use, the student is using appropriate and relevant exegetical terminology well.

Compared with responses for Part C – Exegesis, where students structure their analysis by using the dot points of the examination rubric as subheadings, an exegetical response that insightfully synthesises aspects of exegetical analysis can only be more complex and sophisticated.

Consider a response to Question 9 of the Gospel according to Luke, noting how the requirements of the rubric are integrated across the response in a manner that allows the student to address the knowledge and skills developed over Units 3 and 4. This is evident even in the opening paragraph which clearly identifies context, refers in detail to the Hebrew Scriptures, introduces the theme of repentance, and begins consideration of literary features. These aspects are then developed in the following paragraphs where the student also discusses highlighted words, shows appreciation of how this extract affected the original audience, and where there is also reference to various scholarly opinions, all within an integrated method. (The discussion of both the highlighted word ‘prophet’ and the other title used for Jesus by Simon, ‘teacher’, shows that this student has very sound exegetical method whereby one-word prompts – perhaps even demands – reference to another.)

Luke 7:36-50 is found in the Galilean Ministry section of the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus is travelling throughout Galilee to fulfil his mission given in 4:18 – to bring ‘good news’ to the poor. This passage takes place after Jesus has performed two miracles – healing the centurion’s servant and resurrecting the widow’s son at Nain – and has been confronted by John the Baptist’s messengers on whether he is the ‘one to come’. From these miracles, which are a model of the scriptural stories of Elisha healing Naaman the Syrian (1 Kings 5:1-14) and Elijah resurrecting the widow’s son at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:10-24), the witnesses to these actions exclaim that ‘a great prophet has risen among us’. The pericope takes the form of a pronouncement story, where Jesus teaches Simon that ‘if there is repentance, you must forgive’ (17:3).

Just before this unit, the narrator had pointed out to the reader that the Pharisees and Scribes have ‘rejected’ God’s purpose for themselves, painting them in a negative light. Simon’s invitation to eat with him is a result of that discourse, but it is also clear that he does not hold

Jesus in high regard. He doubts that Jesus is actually a 'prophet' (v.39) despite Jesus' previous actions and mockingly calls him 'teacher' (v.40) (Tannehill). Jesus uses the sinful woman as a role model for Simon – by bathing Jesus' feet 'with her tears', she is showing 'great love' (v.47) in comparison to Simon. Hence the sinful woman has shown more hospitality than Simon, making her worthy to be 'forgiven' (v.48) due to her 'faith' (v.50).

Jesus utilizes a parable to emphasize the weight of the woman's actions. The two 'debtors' (v.41) are individuals who lack money to pay the creditor – similar to how the woman is unable to do anything about her sinful status because she is excluded from society. The fact that it is the one who has the greater debt who will be more grateful after it has been cancelled encourages Luke's audiences, and Simon in the story, that those on the margins of society should be embraced into the community and given a second chance.

The understanding that this student has of there being three audiences – those at table with Jesus in Simon's house as well as Simon, together with the original Lucan community – is subtle but brilliant. In what follows, an equally nuanced understanding of Pharisees within the sociocultural and religious contexts of the day, is presented as well as how the evangelist portrays them within this gospel. This demonstrates extraordinary thought under the pressures of the examination and is a very high-scoring work.

This is one of two instances in the Gospel where the Pharisees are not portrayed in a completely negative light (the other being in 13:31 – they warn Jesus of Herod's intention to kill him). Jesus calls the Pharisee by his name – Simon – which differentiates him from the rest of his party and makes Jesus' words to him more on a personal level. The ending is left open ended – Simon's reaction to Jesus' teaching is not revealed. Hence metanoia is possible for him.

The theme of Universal Salvation is prominent in this unit. In Chapter 6, Jesus states that the 'Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins', which he does so here in verse 48. The woman's sins are forgiven because of her 'faith' (v.50) – something that Jesus often praises in the Gospel (7:9, 17:19). The woman acts as a role model for Luke's audience for her actions demonstrating her repentance. More than any other New Testament author, Luke makes forgiveness of sins the 'knowledge of salvation' (Johnson).

Note that while this student has introduced discussion of the context in the first paragraph, its importance to the understanding of this extract as a whole is still being discussed at the end of the exegesis, as the links to Chapters 6 and 17 indicate. Unlike many students who discuss context only in their introduction, this essay shows the complexity context plays in the development of the scriptural text. Similarly, the discussion of all highlighted words and phrases and of all aspects of the rubric and exegetic practice ought to be integrated as much as possible.