

2019 VCE Texts and Traditions examination report

General comments

The responses to the 2019 VCE Texts and Traditions examination reflected a wide range of abilities within the student cohort. Many students wrote detailed and thoughtful responses demonstrating both knowledge and mastery of the key skills of the study design. However, a number of students misread questions or wrote on only one part of the question asked. Teachers and students would benefit from practising question analysis, especially in preparation for the essay, as an essay remains an optional assessment tool in Unit 4.

Some answers to the extended responses suggested a number of weaknesses. There is the issue of students not including material from outside their set text. This is a requirement of Unit 3, Area of Study 1, and therefore a valid expectation of the examination. Some students did not show basic knowledge of various literary forms or techniques asked about across the paper. Section A, Question 3 on 'metaphor', for example, was poorly handled: students confused 'metaphor' with 'titles'. Students answering Section B, Question 2 were able to describe what a parable was but could not explain how parables were used to develop a theme. Similarly, students answering Section D, Question 2 were often not able to explain the second part of the question requiring comparison of the use of the given literary technique – 'say' (*quid*) – and other techniques that students needed to supply. While understanding literary forms and techniques is a criterion for Part 3: Exegesis, because this is a stand-alone area of study in Unit 3 it can also be tested in extended response questions.

In Question 4 a number of students confused the names of people, documents and eras; for example, confusing the Council of Trent with Vatican II. Similarly, some students confused ideas involved in Christological heresies. In Section A, the complexity of the theological concept of Realised Eschatology was beyond some students who attempted to use it.

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 the answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

Part 1 – Extended responses

Question 4

Despite some of the wording coming directly from the Study Design, some students seemed unfamiliar with the task format. Question 4 was broken into four parts. The first simply required students to name the idea, belief or theme studied. This required no more than a phrase or very

short sentence; even a single word – for example, ‘shirk’, ‘messianism’ or ‘Christology’ – might be sufficient. Only then should students have responded to Question 4a. Students needed to use the designations a., b. and c. in completing Question 4 as marks were allocated accordingly. In 2019, the only time students were required to name the set text was in part b.; giving the set text instead in part a. did not warrant a mark.

The idea, belief or theme must be able to be located within the set text and be an issue for the original community. Stating the theme as being ‘Arianism’, for example, was not acceptable as this heresy was a 4th century issue. It did not affect the gospel writer or the original community. It would be better to call this theme ‘the Nature of Jesus’ or ‘Christology’.

Besides noting that material on the later tradition was only required in parts b. and c., it should be pointed out that the ‘later tradition’ begins after the set text has been written and handed down. Students should have identified that five questions were being asked in part b. and that five marks had been allocated for this section of Question 4. Consider how the following two high-scoring student responses to Question 4b. addressed the five aspects being examined:

- What triggered the re-examination of this idea, belief or theme? Perhaps even when and where this happened and why.
- Importantly, who was involved in the later tradition’s discussions and what were their views?
- How did this discussion take place? Perhaps including what official and/or informal formats the debate took.
- What documents or teachings resulted from this examination of the idea, belief or theme addressed by these discussions and how did they reconcile with the original scriptural text and understanding?
- What was that original text?

The first sample response for Question 4b., which quotes precisely and correctly from two documents of the later tradition, promulgated by identified individuals, as well as scripture, is on ‘The Social Teachings of the Catholic Church’.

The later tradition of the Roman Catholic Church interpreted this theme due to social and global issues occurring throughout history. They described and enacted social justice through the rights, care and support of all people such as in 1891 during the Industrial Revolution where Pope Leo XIII enacted the encyclical Rerum Novarum in response to the inadequate working conditions and quality of life for the poor working class.

The encyclical emphasised the need to acknowledge the rights and dignity of the human person, particularly the suffering (RN #34) as Jesus had shown through the invitation to the ‘poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame’ (14:13, 21) to God’s eschatological banquet where ‘the interests of all whether high or low are equal’ (RN #23), which the meal setting reflected. In 2015, the encyclical of Laudato Si was issued by Pope Francis in response to how the ‘deterioration of the environment and of society affect the most vulnerable people on the planet’ (LS #48), The encyclical emphasised the responsibility to hear and respond to the ‘cry of the earth and the cry of the poor’ (LS #49) which reflects the social justice of Jesus’ identity ‘to seek out and to save the lost’ (19:10). In doing so, the Roman Catholic Church universalises support and care for all people, particularly the marginalised just as Jesus had done in Luke, in healing the impure and outcasted (6:6-11; 14:1-6; 7:36-50).

The second sample response is on ‘Messianism’. It refers to the book of Jeremiah and even cites scholars.

The Jews of Russia in the late 18th century began to look for “sovereignty over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy our first requirement” (Theodore Herzl) as they felt unsafe among non-Jews believing “as long as we comprise of a distinctive element, we cannot be readily assimilated” (Leon Pinsker). Yet, due to the urgency of the situation as the 1882 May Laws forbade Jews to trade and live anywhere, restricting them to the Pale of Settlement, the Zionists

began to look even to Uganda or South Australia, dismissing the idea of “I will bring you to Zion” (J3). As Israel was not safe, surrounded by Arabs, the Zionists felt they needed a different solution, not focusing on a “traditional return to Zion” (Johnny Green). Yet they still believed in social justice, “No more will people say to one another ‘Heed the Lord’” (J31) and “political resurrection” (Pinsker) only rejecting Zion because of urgency.

The depth of knowledge evident in both these examples is exceptional and testament to thorough preparation.

Finally, when responding to the Question 4c. instruction, students needed to remain on topic. This question was about the idea, belief or theme in the later tradition, not the faith tradition that informs the four sections of the examination. Students who presented the line of argument, ‘therefore this proves that our religion is valid and will continue forever’ were not awarded marks for Question 4c., as the comment was about the religion rather than the idea, belief or theme, as was required.

Part 2 – Essay

Some students did not read some of the essay topics carefully enough.

In Section A, Question 7 required students to explore the theme of ‘glory’ as a preface to, or as underlining, the ‘nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son’. Section C, Question 7 required students to engage with the concept of ‘faith’ as well as discussing original communities. In Section D, Question 5 had two parts, one relating to Surah 49, and the other relating to surahs as chosen by students. Both parts were required, to score highly on the first two criteria for the essay. Section D, Question 7 was about ‘justice and the Hereafter’, a prescribed theme in 2019, not the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter. Careful reading of the question is essential.

How a student begins an essay is crucial to addressing the topic well. In the opening paragraph a well-written essay not only begins the discussion and exploration of the topic (addressing Criterion 1), but also indicates how the topic will be managed (addressing Criterion 2). Consider, for example, the following introduction to a high-scoring student response for Section D, Question 7.

Fourteen hundred years ago, during the time of the Prophet (SAW), the people of Makkah had desperately believed in idols and eventually reached an uncivil state causing chaos within their beliefs. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was sent to guide such people in order to bring them to the ‘straight path’ but would often find himself clashing with them and their views. For such reasons, surahs such as ‘Al-Qiyamah’ and ‘Al-Haqqa’ had been revealed to warn the believers and non-believers of the ‘day of resurrection’ and ‘the Truth’ about Islam and the hereafter.

Putting the teachings of the Qur’an into a socio-religious context, this response captures the fact that the two surahs the student identifies contain admonitions to a disbelieving community. It prepares the way to discuss the ‘day of resurrection’ and ‘truth’ as they underlie the notions of ‘justice’ and the ‘Hereafter’ that will drive the structure of the essay. These aspects combined in one paragraph set up a very strong response.

Within the body of the essay it is also important to highlight structure. Consider, for example, this paragraph, which is drawn from the body of a high-scoring response for Section C, Question 7. It illuminates methodology while providing information.

Secondly, although Luke himself was a gentile, it is evident that he also writes his gospel for an original audience that consisted of Jews. This is shown in various allusions to Hebrew Scripture in the Infancy Narratives. For example, the Angel Gabriel who visits both Mary and Zechariah is found within the Hebrew Scriptures. In the ninth chapter of Daniel, the angel Gabriel appears to the Jewish prophet and warns him of impending war. Similarly, the use of the council member Joseph of Arimathea in the 23rd chapter of Luke is a positive portrayal of a Jewish Council member [...] Both examples highlight how Jewish members of Luke’s original audience were included.

The detail and precision of reference to an influential co-text, as well as evidence internal to and across the gospel, as required by the question, suggests a thorough understanding of the topic. The response not only shows awareness of an authorial process by the evangelist, but also addresses the term 'original audience' that began and ended the question.

As with the extended responses, questions set as essay topics sometimes included the directive to use examples drawn from the 'passages for special study' as in, for example, Section C, Question 5. Unfortunately, not all students who wrote on this topic restricted their examples to the passages for special study. This often led to confusion of ideas and adversely affected the overall mark. Again, students need to read the questions carefully.

Part 3 – Exegetical response

Exegesis is a learning outcome in both Unit 3 and Unit 4. Consequently, there are some very able students who show their total control of the key knowledge and skills listed in the study design, and the criteria of the examination. The highest-scoring of these responses integrate the handling of the criteria from the very start. Consider the following introduction to a high-scoring student response to Section B, Question 10, on Ezekiel 37:1–14.

This pericope falls amongst the later oracles in the book of Ezekiel, which is a compilation of the prophet's oracles and predictions. It consists of 28 verses, discussing Israel's restoration and visions of hope, which some interpret to be in the form of a vision. Furthermore, Ezekiel adopts a symbolic action, which is an action to act as words, hence creating the message more vividly for the audience and causing them to want to take action as a result. The prophet is instructed to take two sticks and "bring them close to each other, so that they become one stick". This is emblematic of the re-unification of kingdoms to occur during the Messianic Age. The previous extract, 35, details the downfall of Edom on account of their immense ruthlessness towards the Israelite nation. Hence G-d's protection and love for the nation is apparent, and therefore the thematic flow is apparent.

Dr S Fisch, biblical and Midrashic commentator and editor, suggests that this extract was relayed some time near 586BCE. Hence King Zedekiah was ruling at this time. He was a vacillating king whose alliances fluctuated depending on convenience for him. He mimicked his brother's rebellious and vacillating ways by way of rebelling against the Suzerain and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Rather, he allied with Egypt who later retreated, leaving Judah to fend for herself.

This essay opens by linking literary context with literary aspects – Criteria 1 and 2 – and themes within the one sentence. The third sentence clearly states what is significant about the given extract and shows awareness of the original community, an aspect of Criterion 3. The integrated manner in which the student addresses criteria is of a very high standard. The student then sets up and quotes from memory the second and complementary metaphor of Chapter 37 in a way that demonstrates their ability to place the extract within the literary and socio-cultural contexts, as does the explanation of why the preceding Chapter 35 was important to understand this extract and its themes, as given here.

The second paragraph begins with a reference to an eminent exegete whom the student uses to provide scholarly opinion, which then leads into a detailed description of the political context of the extract using sources outside the set text. There is a lot included in this introduction and it is integrated seamlessly.

Other students integrated the assessment criteria in other ways. Consider the following two essay examples from exegeses both on Section A, Question 8, on John 4:27–38, 43–45. The first handles discussion of literary techniques with reference to scholarly opinion. The second explains

the significance of the identified literary techniques with the themes found in the extract. Both use different but equally valid approaches.

A literary form found in this pericope is misunderstanding. Thus when Jesus explains something and it is not understood right away. This leaves the people confused, allowing Jesus' followers to question him, which according to Brown "allows Jesus to explain his thought more thoroughly and thereby his doctrine". This is seen where Jesus says "I have food to eat that you do not know about" (v.32). Here, the disciples misunderstand Jesus, which shows their obtuseness, and ask "surely no one has brought him something to eat?" (v.33). This question allows Jesus to explain his meaning more clearly without the use of metaphors to say that "my food is to do the will of him who sent me" (v.34) showing that completing his mission is all he needs to be sustained. This is supported by Brown who says "Jesus' work is of a higher order, the work of his father, namely salvation". This misunderstanding therefore makes clear to the audience that Jesus' mission is from the Father and is to convert others. Another literary form is ...

and

John 4:27 depicts the disciples running on Jesus "speaking with a woman" (v.27) at the well and their astonishment at this ... as it was a patriarchal society at the time, and Jews like Jesus typically despise Samaritans, which is what the woman was. The fact that the disciples did not verbally question Jesus for doing so, however, reflects their complete trust and discipleship, which is also contradicted prior to 4:27 when the disciples left to go to the city for food. This woman left the well to return to the village and show her complete faith transformation through converting her entire village to Jesus and her use of "messiah" (v.29). When referring to Jesus as the Messiah though, it is disbelief and in question form. This is both an irony in that the evangelist and audience know that Jesus is in fact the Messiah, and also a parallelism as it reflects the issues of the Johannine Community (delay of Parousia).

This second sample demonstrates an understanding of why the evangelist used the literary forms identified. Unfortunately, some students did not show how literary forms work within the extract as a whole, and how they link to the themes being studied and their significance. Merely identifying a literary technique is a lower-order process. Being able to then describe how the literary technique is being used in the extract under analysis is a mid-range process; discussing the significance of the way the literary technique is used, its value in the development of themes or its role in explaining aspects of socio-cultural context is higher-order thinking. Note too, that in the second excerpt on John 4:27 above, the student has integrated one of the bold words, 'Messiah', which needed to be discussed under Criterion 4.

While the language of the following example may not be as elegant nor the syntax as polished, it nevertheless captures the essence of what an exegesis needs to consider. Expression itself is not a criterion of the examination, and students need to be aware that assessors will overlook grammatical errors and misspellings when the meaning is still clear. This high-scoring example is in response to Section D, Question 9, on Surah 4:1–2, 5–8.

Surah An-Nisa is the fourth surah in the Holy Qur'an and comprises 176 verses. This surah was revealed after the battle of Uhud in Madinah. As such it revolves heavily around themes specific to Madinan surahs such as legal rulings. This surah derives its name from the various rulings it has regarding women and their rights as it translates 'the women'. This surah has been dubbed as one of the most fundamental surahs in regards to Islamic Jurisprudence

Verse 1 is opened by a literary technique where Allah directly addresses the people to grab their attention. He goes on to mention how the human race started from a single person. Qurtubi mentions that 'He who created you from a single soul' refers to Adam and that 'from that soul he created its mate' refers to Hawa being created from Adam's ribs. In Tafseer Al-Aoosi it is mentioned that Allah began this surah by mentioning the origin of humans before mentioning the rulings that came later on which are mainly about family to make people understand that no matter what all humans are like one big family.

This passage opens the exegesis with information on both the literary and historical contexts of the extract within the surah. It introduces the themes and comments on the significance of the surah as a whole for both the original audience and the later tradition. In the second paragraph, it goes on to clearly consider literary techniques, picks up on one of the bold phrases, and uses scholarly opinion. This therefore covers all five of the examination criteria, to which the rest of the exegesis returns repeatedly.

Generally, those students who approach one criterion at a time, or use the five bold words and phrases to structure their analysis – perhaps with one paragraph for each – usually score in the mid-range. Seeing the extract as a whole is crucial to sound exegesis. Responses that integrate some aspects of exegesis usually score more highly.