

2020 VCE Texts and Traditions examination report

General comments

In 2020, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority produced an examination based on the *VCE Texts and Traditions Adjusted Study Design for 2020 only*.

Part 1 – Extended responses

The Gospel according to Luke section (Section C) asked students to focus their response on the original faith community. While in their answer to Question 1, a student might have legitimately discussed ‘faithful discipleship’ as a response to Jesus or as a motif developed by the evangelist across the gospel, these responses only partly answered the question by not addressing ‘the community’. However, the instruction to ‘identify at least three’ such disciples allowed assessors to consider how well the choice of examples connected with, and exhibited a response that did address, ‘the community’. (This same focus – of disciples ‘as models for the original community’ – was also used in Question 6 of Section A – The Gospel according to John.)

Reliance on past examination questions to fashion a response is not sufficient to answer new examination questions. Students should consider how the current year’s examination question varies from a question in a previous year.

The study design clearly requires ‘a range of scholarly opinions’ and commentaries to be studied. (For example, see the last bullet point of key knowledge and key skills of Unit 3, Area of Study 2 on literary aspects.) Question 2 of Section C – The Gospel according to Luke required students to engage with ‘the literary technique of pairing’. Students who referred to ‘parallelism’ by scriptural commentators generally scored highly. While the study design cannot list all aspects of the course over the four traditions, teachers are encouraged to provide students with a wide understanding of how different commentaries present aspects that are known by more than one name. In contrast, as an example, while Question 3 of Section A – The Gospel according to John gave two names by which the Jewish festival of *Sukkot* is known (‘festival of Booths [or Tabernacles]’) many students also included the festival’s Hebrew name in their response.

On the simplest level, while the first part of Question 2 of Section D – The Qur’an could have been answered in three words, higher scoring responses recognised that this question was about the Islamic concept of *haram*; the highest scoring responses were also able to name the *surahs* and *ayat* that dealt with this proscription. In order to discriminate between responses, assessors consider the cognitive levels shown in an answer: ranging from ‘low’, where a response simply names something; to ‘medium’, where the response is developed by the description taking place; to ‘high’, where awareness of the significance of the aspect or issue is demonstrated in the response.

Question 3 of Section D – The Qur’an asked students in part ‘What is the primary message contained in Surah 31 ...?’ Many students ignored the word ‘primary’ and discussed two, three or even more of what they termed ‘the most important’ ideas. When a question asks students to designate only one aspect, students must make an educated choice about which aspect to discuss. While answers to questions like Question 3 of Section D are open to interpretation, it is how the student identifies the significance of the aspect they

choose that is scored on the examination, unless they are completely wrong. Similarly, where the examination question designates how many examples to use, students need to use that many.

A number of students failed to complete the requirements of the examination, responding to only two questions in Part A – Extended responses (one from Questions 1 to 3) and the compulsory Question 4.

Question 4

Some of the ideas, beliefs or themes taught in Unit 4 Area of Study 2 (which on the examination is tested in the compulsory Question 4) were problematic in 2020. The idea, belief or theme must be stated both within the passages for special study and the set text(s). The study design expresses this clearly: ‘... arising out of the passages for special study ... investigated over the entire text’ (p. 23). It was clear to assessors that some beliefs taught in 2020 (while the subject of councils or teachings of the later tradition, and perhaps important to or opposed by faith communities today) were not ideas or beliefs expressed within the passages for special study, or not ones that the original audience would even have recognised.

Some students incorrectly named an idea, belief or theme from a later tradition. For example, Arianism was a belief of the third century. It is not evident in the Christology of the passages for special study. So, the idea, belief or theme should be ‘Christology’, not ‘Arianism’. Similarly, the Qur’an nowhere teaches ‘*Shirk*’; its teachings on *Tawhīd* oppose *Shirk*, so the topic should have been called ‘monotheism’. Neither of these examples – Arianism or *Shirk* – were held by the original faith communities as beliefs and are not found as promoted ideas in the passages for special study.

A number of students were unsure of how to address the instruction ‘Briefly explain the religious idea, belief or theme and its importance to the original community’. The term ‘original community’ does not appear in this area of study in the study design. In scripture studies, ‘original community’ is a highly debated concept with various interpretations. Furthermore, it is often understood differently by the faith traditions of VCE Texts and Traditions. Thus, it is a valid term to use in developing students’ exegetical skills, and indeed it is found in the study design in the areas of study ‘Interpreting texts’ in both Unit 3 (p. 20) and Unit 4 (p. 22).

What students needed to do in the first part of this extended response was place the idea, belief or theme that they were discussing within the ‘sociocultural context ... cultural, religious and political ...’ Higher performing responses showed the students’ ability to transfer a skill from one area of study in the study design to another area of study.

When students discuss several time periods while addressing the ‘later tradition’, they need to trace the shift through time carefully, otherwise they might create confusion between the people involved and the processes that took place in different eras. However, some very good responses to Question 4 were written, which did clearly trace the development of the idea over centuries; for example, in discussing ‘charity’, students moved from the Caliphate of Abu Bakr and the Ribba wars to the Caliphate of Umar and the use of the ‘house of *zakaʿt*’, and then to the Ottoman Mehmed II’s instructions on *sadaqah*. Other examples clearly traced the development of ‘mercy’ from Chapter 7 of the Gospel according to Luke to the later tradition in Catherine McAuley’s institution of the Sisters of Mercy and their school in Baggot Street, before then linking these to Pope Francis’ encyclical ‘*Laudate Si*’. The progression from one period of the later tradition to another was obvious.

Part 2 – Essay

The assessment criteria for both the essay and the exegetical response were printed on the examination, and the performance descriptors, which explain what these mean across the levels of achievement on the School-assessed Coursework, were provided in the *VCE Texts and Traditions Advice for teachers* on the VCAA website. However, many students did not address all of the criteria on the examination. Teachers are encouraged to refer to the performance descriptors on page 41 and (to a greater degree) page 42 of the *Advice for teachers* for guidance on teaching the criteria for exegesis on the examination. Additionally, the

performance descriptors for Unit 3 Area of Study 2 in the Advice for teachers (p. 40), which cover themes and literary aspects, are a valuable resource for teachers.

In particular, for Part B – Essay, criteria four and five were often not addressed or were under-developed. Unit 3 Area of Study 1 is still relevant in the examination and can be used to inform the essay. In both the essay and the exegesis students too briefly touched upon scholarly opinions and commentaries.

Essay topics on this examination offered both scaffolded and open questions. A clearly scaffolded essay topic is evident in Question 5 of Section A – The Gospel according to John. It stipulates a structure: (i) ‘at least three examples’, which leads to a response that explains (ii) ‘how’ and then (iii) ‘why’. Further, while the introductory statement begins with (iv) John the Baptist in Chapter 1, the instruction tells the student to look at (v) the evangelist making choices across the (vi) ‘rest of the gospel’. There are six clear aspects to this essay, which will enhance a student scoring well on the first two criteria for the essay. Given the breakdown of this question, students needed to complete each aspect of the scaffolding.

An infrequent error that arises within the essays is a student writing a commentary instead of addressing the criteria.

Part 3 – Exegetical response

Students scored more highly in Part 3 – Exegetical response than in Part 2 – Essay across all four traditions. This comparison is to be expected as exegesis is the central feature of the study and the skills of exegesis are taught in each of Units 1, 3 and 4.

However, there were still students who showed a lack of understanding of how to tackle the words and phrases in bold type. These are not simply comprehension tasks. Students need to relate to the extract as a whole, with responses that show their significance.

In neither the essay nor the exegesis – indeed, nowhere in the examination – did students need to refer to chapters or *surahs* outside the set texts and passages for special study. On the other hand, using subheadings as found in the NRSV version of the set text, for example, without designating the relevant chapter or placing it within the gospel’s narrative structure, does not show intimate knowledge of the text. Some students across the four traditions referred specifically to chapter and verse, *surah* and *ayah*; students need to remember that they are not just being assessed on completing their own section of the examination but across all four sections.