



GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2010 Texts and Traditions Assessment Report highlighted some of the changes in examination setting and marking guidelines consequent to the implementation of the reaccredited study design; it was pleasing to see in 2011 that many student responses to the examination showed evidence that teachers and students had taken note of the various comments made in last year's report.

The thoroughness with which some students prepared for the examination was very clear, especially when students drew widely from the set texts as well as from the passages for special study. Many students also demonstrated a good understanding of what the various parts of each question required.

Set texts do not need to be known in the same detail as passages for special study; they provide a framework to examine the passages for special study. Therefore, the set texts need to be appreciated only to the extent to which they help students understand the place of the passages for special study within the general structure of the text – in its literary, social and theological dimensions. Students who do not study the entire set text, as required by the study design, may have difficulty in answering some of the examination questions.

Although teachers might occasionally go outside the set texts to look at an alternate foundation text, particularly when approaching Outcome 2 of Unit 4, students are not expected to reference scripture outside the set texts in any of the three parts of the examination, and are not rewarded for doing so. Students should only ever refer to a non-set text to help better explain and discuss the text under study.

Many students demonstrated a sound, even extensive, knowledge base from which to draw during the examination. However, students should avoid the tendency to include everything they know into their responses. Students must answer the questions as set, not as they would like them to have been set. Sometimes very knowledgeable students include whole paragraphs, or even a whole page, of material that is only tangential to the set question. The essay, particularly, is not about providing everything the student knows; it is about selecting wisely from the depth of what has been learnt to develop a response that focuses on the set topic. Students must centre their responses in the terms and parameters of the questions, and it is clear in the higher-scoring responses that many students are capable of this.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Part A – Extended responses

When practising extended response answers, students and teachers could benefit from looking at the question structures across all four sections of the paper. Extended response questions are designed to assess some detail within the students' wider knowledge of the set text: its writing, form and style, sociocultural and historical elements and people named, or approaches to interpretation. As previously advised in the examination specifications on the VCAA website, these may be drawn from any of the areas of study and any part of the set text. Generally, they are broken into self-evident parts, with clear question stems such as 'Who were ...?' or 'What was ...?' to guide the student through their answer and allow them to maximise their score. Students should, therefore, look for those question parts when analysing the extended response questions. Perhaps they could consider Question 3 of Section II: The Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which began with 'What is ...?' and, after referring to an example, asked both 'how' and 'why', thus clearly indicating the three components of the question.

Unless specifically asked to do so in the question, students who try to answer extended response questions using only the passages for special study limit their ability to answer the questions properly. For example, students who attempted to answer Question 1 of Section I: The Gospel according to John needed to go beyond the passages for special study; however, students who identified Nicodemus as an example of an individual Pharisee by using chapter 3 of the set text, which was not a passage for special study, often scored well.

Furthermore, it should be noted that extended response questions usually ask a student to do more than identify or describe a feature of the text; they often require a number of examples, and expect some consideration of something significant about that feature. For example, Question 2 of Section III: The Gospel according to Luke, not only asked students to write about parable usage, but also asked them to relate their use to how 'the evangelist presents Jesus'.



In analysing the questions, students might find it advantageous to show their understanding of a term by using synonyms. For example, in Question 3 of Section I: The Gospel according to John, 'infirmity' was called 'ailment', 'malady', 'disability', 'illness' and 'sickness' by various students, while the following student showed a deeper understanding, not just knowledge. This example also shows how a student can go beyond merely identifying or describing an aspect to explain something significant relating to the question (this example also refers to a verse emphasising Jesus' self-identification of his nature).

The widely held view of infirmity as a permanent state ... only made Jesus' miracles all the more important, pointing ever more strongly to his identity (17:11).

It was evident that some students answered Question 4a. more effectively than others, and there were many excellent answers by students who deliberately chose this question. However, as in past years, this remained the 'fall back' question for students who felt that they might not have been able to answer another extended response question adequately. This means that students must practise this style of question thoroughly. It is not a mini-exegesis or an explanation of what is happening in the selected passage, but a commentary or brief explanation of some underlying social, religious or cultural background behind the passage.

The following example demonstrates one student's understanding of the sociocultural aspects of dietary law underlying the selected passage in Question 4a. of Section IV: The Qur'an. The student also uses their own word, 'carrion', as a synonym for what was in the extract.

Verse 3 includes the prohibition to eat carrion, the flesh of swine The reason such flesh is considered unlawful is because it was not slaughtered in the prescribed manner which is to cut the throat of the animal swiftly, using a sharp blade, causing minimal pain to the animal and allowing all the blood to flow out. This is required to physically purify the flesh. However, for the flesh to be lawful it must also be spiritually purified ...

It was good to see more students attempting Question 4b. this year, and that they had clearly practised the form of approach required by the question. Question 4b. explicitly related to Outcome 2 of Unit 4, and students were required to refer to developments in the tradition, based on this text. They were required to refer to how an idea, belief or social theme is developed from that text **after** the period in which the text was written. Some students still incorrectly explained an idea, belief or social theme as it exists in that passage without looking at the later tradition, or explained how that idea, belief or social theme had emerged from a time before the set passages was written. Question 4b. referred to, and used, the term 'the later tradition', and that term is clearly defined in the glossary of the study design as 'a period of history after that of the formation of the text' (page 35). Last year's Assessment Report offered an example of a strong approach from Section III: The Gospel according to Luke. Consider the following response this year for Question 4b. of Section I: The Gospel according to John. This answer went on to discuss how revelation continues through the scriptures and the church, and has a personal component in individuals' everyday lives. The response fulfilled the requirements of the rubric 'discuss the relevance and the significance for the later tradition' superbly well.

From the passage provided, a theme that has developed as a result is Revelation, present most prominently in the Vatican Document 'Dei Verbum' ... with 'When he comes he will proclaim all things to us.'

Part B – Essay

Essay questions allow students to synthesise what has been studied as separate outcomes or areas of study. Students are challenged to bring together the various key knowledge components and skills of the course, drawing from the more significant thematic, historical, sociocultural, literary and exegetical aspects of the study. The more successful responses developed a structure that brought these elements together; weaker responses often did not sufficiently include scriptural examples despite the specific requirement to do so. Students need to understand that a significant discriminator in assessing essay responses is whether a student only identifies features within a topic or whether they can develop a response that describes or explains those features.

Essay questions can take one of several styles; they can:

- ask a student to consider a theme or an idea found across the whole set text, perhaps asking how that theme or idea is developed across the text
- ask a student to respond to a statement or quote, thus requiring an essay in which students develop their own argument and justify their own interpretation
- require a discussion of some aspect that is dealt with within the passages for special study, sometimes limiting discussion to only the passages for special study
- concentrate a student's focus on an aspect of just one passage for special study.



Regardless of the question style, students need to use examples from their studied scripture to support their discussion. Students should make note of how many examples are required, as the marking scheme allocates marks for each example required, as well as the detail and quality of the students' examples.

The marking scheme also allows for different approaches to how an essay is developed; however, the more successful students obviously took the time to structure their essays, link ideas and construct a framework for their essay while also supplying sufficient scriptural support. What has become evident is that many students are writing much longer essays. Again, many of these essays are being much more carefully developed. Consider the following introduction to Question 6 of Section III: The Gospel according to Luke, which begins with a clear reference to the quote in the question and outlines an essay structure as appropriate to an introductory paragraph. This introduction worked as a scaffold or blueprint for the rest of the essay, in which each of these seven aspects were developed and shown to be interconnected.

Throughout Luke's Gospel, there is constant mention of 'the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind.' This specific group is used to reveal Jesus' mission and his message about the Kingdom of God. This is evident in the themes of Humility and Hospitality, the Great Banquet story, and in Jesus' mission statement with reference to Isaiah 61.

Another essay on that same topic included the following excerpt as the third of its seven paragraphs exploring the hospitality of God. This paragraph uses a topic sentence at the start and a linking sentence to conclude the paragraph – thus using the TEEL structure: topic, explanation, example, link. While the interpretation is a little descriptive, there are clear ideas and an argument is being developed.

God, in this parable, is also viewed as a host of the banquet that is generous, who gives without the requirement of a return. After the original guests of the banquet decline, the new guests are the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. These people have nothing and no chance of repaying what they take from the host. In this way God is viewed as an advocate of generalized reciprocity, giving without the requirement of return. The host, who is God, is still not satisfied with only a few people at his banquet; he wants to help more people. The host tells his servant to 'compel' people to attend the banquet. This urging is not because they are without faith, but because they have not seen the host before. God in this parable is shown to be generous and does not want to be repaid.'

Finally, consider the use of theological language in the following paragraph, part of a response to Question 5 of Section III: The Gospel according to Luke. The student is clearly arguing a case, and shows a strong understanding that the evangelist is deliberately crafting the message of the Gospel.

Luke's Gospel acts like a Christian handbook, instructing his community on what it means to be a disciple and the demands of this task. Through Jesus' mission statement at the Nazarean synagogue in 4:16–21 and the Blessings and Woes teachings, Luke allows readers to glean who is and who is not welcomed to be a disciple and thus into the Kingdom of God. This is then demonstrated in the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus through Zacchaeus' metanoia and discipleship.'

Part C – Exegetical response

The instructions on how to approach the exegesis are clear and unchanged since 2002, when highlighted words and phrases were introduced. However, as in the examination specifications, the criteria for marking the exegesis have been slightly modified to recognise the changes in the current study design. The criteria and descriptors for the exegesis are available on the Texts and Traditions examination page of the VCAA website under 'Exam Specifications and sample examination paper'.

Following the instructions to students printed in the examination paper, marks are awarded for each of the four dot-points on the paper, for use of the highlighted words and phrases, and for the level of exegetical skill demonstrated within answers. Teachers and students should be aware of the progression of skills during the year, as required by the study design: in progressing from Unit 3 to Unit 4, coursework assessment for exegesis differs by going from simply 'Identify and describe the relationships that the meaning, function and teaching of texts have within their historical and social settings' in Unit 3, to 'Analyse the relationship that the meaning, function ...' in Unit 4, and similarly from 'explain textual features ...' to 'Analyse textual features ...', etc. Thus, when considering the sociocultural and literary contexts of the passage, weaker responses merely listed how the passage fits into the sequence of the set text while the more successful answers considered its role or importance in the development of a theme, or its influence upon the original faith community.

Following are excerpts from three students' responses to Part C.



This example from Section II: The Books of Jeremiah and Ezekial explores the historic background as an explanation of context. This description of the historical context is linked to the purpose of Jeremiah's message by its final interpretation, which the student then used throughout the exegesis to link the explanations of the highlighted words and phrases.

Jeremiah was a Judean prophet whose prophetic ministry spanned forty years, beginning in 627BCE. Jeremiah started his career in the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign. This was a period marked by religious reform for Josiah tried to reconnect the people with G-d, after the idolatrous reign of his predecessor Manasseh. At this time, Babylonia was rising as a super power. This frightened Egypt who came to the assistance of the dwindling power, Assyria. The Egyptians sought to aid the Assyrians by going through Judah but Josiah saw this as a threat to Judea's independence so he tried to prevent the invasion, but was unsuccessful and died after battle against the Egyptians in Megiddo in 609BCE ... This was a period marred by sociocultural corruption, religious regeneration and political upheaval.

The following contextual explanation from a Section IV: The Qur'an response, despite some problems with expression, explains the significance of the timing and location of the writing down of the surah and links this with both the contents of the surah and its importance to emerging Islam.

The Quran is the universal book for mankind. It was sent down to the last and final prophet, Muhammad through the angel Jabriel. Its revelation had been sent down over a period of 23 years, from the start of the Prophet's prophethood [sic] until his death. Surah Al-Maidah is a Madani surah, meaning that it was revealed when the prophet was in Madina. It came down during 6-7 AH, after Hijrah, meaning when the prophet migrated to Medina from Mecca. Revealed after the treaty of Hadybryah, a treaty between the Muslims and the tribe of Qurask, some of the problems that arose from the treaty are stated, as the conditions in which this surah was revealed was different from that of the previous surah (Al-Imran). The Islamic state was extending and the Islamic faith was rising. The surah contains many verses of Ahkam (legal rulings and prohibitions).

This introduction to an exegesis for Section I: The Gospel according to John contains a complex connection of placement of the passage within the overall structure of the Gospel, both in general and as a close reading; use of literary techniques to explain their significance; identification of themes evident in this passage; some understanding of the significance of this literary section for the original community; a precise and detailed knowledge of the set text, quoting accurately and appropriately verses outside this passage; and an awareness of differing exegetical interpretation. This student's following five paragraphs maintained this approach while integrating discussion of the highlighted words and phrases.

The prescribed passage (Jn 12:27-41) is found within the book of Signs (1:19-12:50) where, according to Brown, Jesus makes his father's 'glory' manifest through his signs (2:11). Furthermore this passage is found within the feasts sub-section (5:1-12:50) in which, as some scholars maintain, Jesus replaces these feasts and where the origins of worship through Jesus being the new covenant (4:23) is presented. Prior to this passage Mary has anointed Jesus acknowledging him as the messiah, meaning 'anointed one' ... Proleptically Jesus' hour has ironically been alluded to by Caiaphas (in 11:51-52) as the hour encompasses Jesus' crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven which is explored in this prescribed passage (12:34). Immediately before this passage Jesus has fulfilled Old Testament prophesy of a 'king' riding into Jerusalem on a 'donkey' (in Jn 12:13-15) which alludes to Zechariah 9:9. Following on from Chapter 12 there is, as Brown maintains, the true coming of Jesus' hour in 13:1 where later Jesus anoints the feet of his disciples and talks of Judas betraying him (13:18 and heard again in 17:12) thus fulfilling the Old Testament prophesy of Psalms 41:9.

Surprisingly, there were still students who did not comment on all of the highlighted words in their responses. Generally, these words are chosen to allow students to discuss aspects such as points of historical or sociocultural context and interest, the literary context, forms and/or techniques employed, and how these words and phrases help readers understand the impact of the given extract on the original community – these are the dot-points provided as criteria for the exegesis in the instructions for Part C. As noted in previous Assessment Reports, commentary on the highlighted words should not be seen as a stand-alone activity, appended to the body of the exegesis. Nor is it sufficient merely to define or describe a highlighted word or phrase. For example, in interpreting the phrase 'he will be filled with the Holy Spirit' (from Question 8 of Section III: The Gospel according to Luke) it was not enough to note that the Holy Spirit was the third person of the Trinity or that John was blessed by God; students were required to give some explanation of how this (Old Testament) image was used to denote the essential mark of a prophet (as in Jeremiah 1:5 or Galatians 1:15) to explain the role of John in the Gospel according to Luke, and perhaps to link it with the contemporary perception that John represented the return of Elijah (named two verses later). Alternatively, the phrase could have been used to link to Luke 1:41 (following this passage) in which Elizabeth announces that, on hearing Mary's greeting, her child leapt in her womb. Or it could have suggested the contrast between the cultural perception of barrenness with the divine blessing received by Elizabeth and Zechariah, a priest on duty in the sanctuary, and so in the presence of the Lord.

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Students who simply listed the highlighted words at the end of the exegesis usually failed to explain the significance of the terms, and the instruction to consider the ‘meaning and significance for the original community’ was not addressed. The best students demonstrated their knowledge of why the highlighted words had been chosen, which then led to an explanation of their significance to the passage in particular, and to the set text as a whole. Rote learning of possible exegetical passages does not necessarily lead to students being able to identify and discuss the significance of highlighted aspects of the passage.

Under the revised examination format, students are required to write only one exegetical response, giving them more time to develop a thorough and well-structured exegesis. There were fewer incidents of students running out of time and not completing their exegesis, and students generally demonstrated sound exegetical skills.