

2018 VCE Classical Studies examination report

General comments

Most students answered two questions from Section A and one question from Section B, as instructed, and most completed the examination. They identified the questions they were answering and generally wrote legibly. Most students managed their time well, although some students wrote longer and more detailed answers for five-mark questions than they did for the 10-mark question that followed.

Most answers were relevant to the questions that were posed. Students showed knowledge of the works and their sociohistorical contexts.

Students are reminded that they should compose a careful answer to the question. One coherent point is better than several incoherent ones.

Students should be careful not to judge classical works from a 21st-century viewpoint. They should try to base any judgments they make on classical sources and on an understanding of classical culture. Analysis is strengthened by fewer general statements and more references to specific evidence.

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.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A – Individual study

Question chosen	none	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
%	0	40	6	26	10	5	0	4	8

Part a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	5	19	38	29	8	2.9

Part b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	3	23	46	22	4	2.9

Part c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	2	4	9	17	24	22	13	4	1	1	5

Most students answered the *Iliad* question and the second-most popular work in Section A was *Bacchae*. The artworks were also quite popular choices.

There were few errors of identification of passages and images. Students displayed a detailed knowledge of narratives and characters and they identified ideas and techniques. Students who scored highly analysed ideas and techniques by exploring the implications of an idea and the effects of a technique. For the most part, responses did not discuss classical ideas and values, and techniques in as much detail as they should have.

Consider the following sentences from two different answers to the instruction in Question 1, part a. 'Explain what has happened in Book 6 prior to this extract.'

Example 1

The gods have left the battle and the fighters are on their own. There is a lot of killing. Diomedes and Glaucus meet and Glaucus tells him about Bellerophon.

Example 2

The Greeks slaughter Trojans at will, with Ajax in the lead. Diomedes cuts down Axylus who Homer describes as a generous host, a 'friend to all mankind', juxtaposing life in times of war with life in times of peace. Most shocking is when Agamemnon dispatches defenceless Adrestus and declares that even Trojan babies must die.

Both answers deal with events prior to those described in the passage. The first answer deals generally and briefly with events early in Book 6 and then skips to the meeting of Diomedes and Glaucus. The second answer highlights the antithetical juxtaposition of the themes of war and peace, the most significant feature of this part of Book 6, which is a better approach.

Students must choose the events that are most significant in relation to the passage. Many students mentioned Helenus instructing Hector to return to Troy, which had no real bearing on the passage.

Consider the following two responses to the instruction 'Explain how Euripides presents Dionysus in this extract' in Question 3, part a.

Example 3

Dionysus has returned to Thebes to restore his mother's reputation by revealing his godhead and driving all the Theban women mad.

Example 4

Euripides presents Dionysus as a god disguised as a man, cold and calculating, 'I have changed my appearance', and he calmly states his purpose: 'to make my godhead plain for men to see'.

This question asked students to describe the techniques used by Euripides in presenting Dionysus. The history of Dionysus's origin and the events leading to his return to Thebes are relevant but a

higher-scoring answer, such as Example 4, deals with the way Euripides presents the character in the opening monologue – his tone, his choice of words, his demeanour.

Consider the following two responses to the instruction ‘Discuss the significance of the gods in *The Aeneid*, Book 4’ in Question 5, part c.

Example 5

The gods make Dido fall in love with Aeneas (Juno) and then order Aeneas to leave Carthage for Italy (Zeus).

Example 6

The gods manipulate mortals, subjecting them to harsh tests which the worthy must rise above.

Example 5 lists some of the actions of gods in Book 4 but the question asked for more than that. How do the gods and mortals relate to one another? How do these divine interventions affect the mortals and shape their destinies? Provided that Example 6 proceeded to discuss instances of tests, it would score more highly.

Question 1
Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 6

Question 1a.

Most students knew generally what had happened in the first 250 lines of Book 6; some knew it in great detail. The problem students faced lay in choosing the events that best related to the passage. What should be mentioned? What were the things that mattered? What matters is that this same Diomedes has just killed Axylus, that ‘friend to all mankind,/at his roadside house he’d warm all comers in’, and that Agamemnon has impaled Adrestus and declared total war. There is a sharp dissonance here of battlefield savagery juxtaposed with bucolic scenes of peace and plenty. And now Diomedes calls a temporary halt to his *aristeia* because of the demands of *xenia*. Homer presents the irony of warfare – that men who kill one another can just as readily be friends. Higher-scoring answers noted that.

Question 1b.

This question was about heroic values. Most students identified *xenia* as a heroic value and this was accepted. However, there is evidence of other heroic values in the passage that many students overlooked. Why are Diomedes and Glaucus on this battlefield? They are fighting for honour and glory. Glaucus has just told Diomedes the parting words his father spoke before he left for Troy: ‘Always be the best, my boy, the bravest’. Diomedes recognises Glaucus’s heroic spirit and the connection between their families, drives his spear into the earth and utters ‘winning words’ – eloquence is valued by heroes. The glory Glaucus and Diomedes seek is measured in valuable possessions – solid gold cups and gleaming sword-belts – and in respect expressed by extravagant hospitality and by 20 days of feasting. Higher-scoring answers mentioned this.

Question 1c.

Students tended to reproduce the observations they had made about *xenia* in Question 1b. Techniques students mentioned included the use of the epithets ‘lord of the war cry’ and ‘the young captain’ and the use of direct speech, but these techniques were often listed without discussion. Other techniques that could have been included were: the description of feelings (‘spirits lifted’), the symbolic gesture (the planted spear), fine speech, noble language (‘Noble Oeneus’ and ‘brave Bellerophon’), psychological insight (‘I really don’t remember’) and irony. Few students noted the irony in this scene: that a warrior proposes to his enemy that they should kill one another’s brothers-in-arms but not one another, and that they should trade armour. The coexistence of brutal warrior and genial host in one and the same person is carried to absurdity. *Xenia* trumps slaughter

– for the moment. The hero's supreme objective may not be the highest body count after all. Agamemnon's total war is repudiated – for the moment. When the task is to discuss ideas and techniques, a good method is to go through the passage line by line. There is plenty there, apart from *xenia*.

Question 2 **Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War***

Question 2a.

The instruction 'Explain how Thucydides presents his investigation of the past' invited students to focus on techniques: principally on the techniques Thucydides uses, but also on the ones he rejects. However, explaining means more than listing. Higher-scoring answers also suggest **why** the techniques are used. Thucydides rejects exaggeration because it is not truthful. He rejects attention-seeking sensationalism because it is not truthful. His material is things that can be known, not 'the unreliable streams of mythology'. He uses only the 'plainest evidence' – evidence that he knows to be true, without conjecture. This is a work written to teach people 'who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past'. Fiction will not serve; inaccuracy will not serve; and rigour is required. Oddly, he has composed many of the 'set speeches' himself. How is it possible to claim truth and historical accuracy when using words that are not those of the speakers, but those composed by Thucydides? This is a conundrum. Most student answers offered some explanation for Thucydides's techniques. The best approach was to systematically identify his techniques by going through the passage line by line and explaining the implications of each technique along the way.

Question 2b.

The use of speeches is an important technique for Thucydides. He recognises that his history may lack a 'romantic element' and that speeches may make his writing more readable. Thucydides is committed to the facts of events and their causes, but an understanding cannot be conveyed without some sense of the people involved. Students who scored highly were aware that dialogue was the basis of Athenian drama and was used persistently by Homer, Herodotus, Aesop, the lyric poets and by practically every Greek writer. Speeches create a human presence and character; they are dramatic and they re-enact events. They are used to represent discussions and debates, to convey feelings, apprehensions and motivations. Students focused on the debate between Nicias and Alcibiades and on the speeches of Nicias and Gylippus to their troops, and explained how these conveyed the circumstances and the experiences of the people present.

Question 2c.

Students approached this question in different ways. Did Thucydides follow his plan to inform people accurately and truthfully? Was it successful? Most students agreed that this passage was very significant and that Thucydides did follow his plan. They were able to illustrate it, referring to the battle in the Syracuse harbour and the Athenian defeat at the Assinarus river. Thoughtful responses found evidence of Thucydides being less restrained than he aims to be. They also considered what he includes and what he omits, and how he represents people and events. His reconstructed speeches characterise people, establish their values, beliefs and motives. Students referred to the debate between Nicias and Alcibiades at the time when the decision to launch the expedition was taken, the scene of the launching, the speeches of Gylippus and Nicias in Sicily, and the extreme pathos of the final destruction of the Athenian army. Those who found good evidence in the text scored highly in this question.

Question 3 **Euripides, 'Bacchae'**

Question 3a.

This question asked how Euripides presents Dionysus. Higher-scoring answers began with the fact that Euripides starts his tragedy with the god Dionysus delivering the prologue on stage. This puts the god in charge of the narrative, making him the director of the play. Dionysus gives a long opening speech informing the audience dispassionately and confidently of the situation – in a manner that is consistent with divine power. The audience is being prepared for a feast of divine retribution. A common error in students' answers was to attribute humanity and human motives to Dionysus. Dionysus is not really calling for justice for his mother; he is not wronged. He is a trickster god, who deceives mortals and punishes them remorselessly. He is calm, matter-of-fact, detached. Higher-scoring answers conveyed this. He leaves a clue to his identity by putting a green vine on Semele's tomb. He makes the ultimate threat: he will reveal himself as a true god.

Question 3b.

Most students correctly responded that Dionysus sets out his program in the prologue and declares his job done in the exodus, at the end of the play. Higher-scoring answers noted that Dionysus is in disguise here, as an outsider, an Eastern magician, a person the Thebans would despise on sight. In the final scene, he appears from above, as a god. He is quite unmoved by the suffering he has planned and executed. Most answers described the death of Pentheus, the punishments of Agave and Cadmus, and Dionysus' responses to his aunt and grandfather. Dionysus is dismissive; they must accept their fates. He is off to other places where people need to be straightened out. He has demonstrated his divinity.

Question 3c.

This question was generally not well answered. Many students recycled information from their answers to parts a. and b. without really addressing 'the significance of this extract'. Some students resorted to sociohistorical speculation to put together an answer but this was not within the scope of the question. Dionysus' speech sets the course of the play; all that happens is foreshadowed here. The significance of the extract is that it launches Euripides's tragedy as a meditation on divinity, on the power of the gods and on their relations with mortals. Higher-scoring answers responded that the prologue establishes the dramatic irony that underscores the entire tragedy. The audience is invited to a conspiracy with Dionysus against the city of Thebes. It knows what Pentheus does not know, what Tiresius and Cadmus fear, and what Agave has no chance to realise. The audience is familiar with the story and knows how it will end. It does not know exactly how Euripides will bring it to a satisfactory conclusion, but the story is framed and the tension is rising. If Athenians liked to see blood, they were assured of seeing it in this entertainment. Only a few answers focused on dramatic irony.

Question 4 **Greek vases**

Question 4a.

This question was confidently and accurately answered by most. Some students did not say exactly who each of the figures in the two vases represented and how they came to be in the situation they were in. Nearly every answer correctly identified Achilles and Penthesilea in Image A, although some confused Odysseus with the steersman of his ship in Image B. There was interesting speculation about the plummeting siren – was she swooping or, with her eyes closed, was she tumbling to her death? Several students suggested that she was defeated by Odysseus.

Question 4b.

Some students focused on vase-painting techniques and others focused on composition and representation techniques. Students who scored highly did both. The amphora by Exekias is a black-figure vase with intricate decoration framing an image dominated by the black figure of the hero Achilles. He has a huge torso and thighs, bull-like, and tiny hands and feet. One staring, shining eye meets the upturned gaze of the Amazon queen. In the red-figure vase, the heroically nude Odysseus strains against his ropes while one of the sirens swoops or falls to her death. The sirens have the higher, more powerful positions, but Odysseus is at the centre and his defiance is impressive. Higher-scoring responses noted how the painters used the curved surface of the vase and how they framed their images.

Question 4c.

Many students were well informed about the separate treatment of the sexes in vase painting and cited good examples from the vases studied. But note that Penthesilea is female and human, whereas the Sirens, though female are not human. The 'otherness' of females in vase paintings was identified, along with the tendency of these females to be dangerous and monstrous. The heroes vary. The dark and menacing Achilles is quite unlike the heroically naked Odysseus, the apprehensive Oedipus who is dealing with the Sphinx, or the loyal Ajax carrying Achilles from the field. Students found plenty to say here and their analyses carried weight.

Question 5

Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Book 4

Question 5a.

The conflict between Juno and Venus has a long history, going back to the awarding of the golden apple. Students made good use of this in their answers, describing the differences of character, status and viewpoint of Juno and Venus. Students also showed a solid knowledge of events in Book 4, focusing on Juno's determination to protect Carthage from the future threat of the Romans, and Venus's desire to protect her son, Aeneas.

Question 5b.

Analysis of tone was crucial to producing a good response to this question. Some students appreciated the mockery in Juno's opening words, the patronising tone that followed, her mock-pleading questions and her greasy attempt at an alliance with Venus. They also described Venus's evasion, her feigned innocence and her tactical deferral to Zeus. Venus agrees to Juno's proposal to bring Aeneas and Dido together because it is all the same to her, and she is not deceived about Juno's motive.

Question 5c.

Higher-scoring responses considered all of the gods that are active in Book 4 and especially their relations with mortals. The key word in this question was 'significance'. What do the gods do to people? How do people respond to their manipulations? Sometimes gods are puppeteers, sometimes enablers and sometimes examiners. Most answers focused on the controlling aspects of divine intervention; higher-scoring answers noted that Zeus's order brought to the fore Aeneas's piety and enabled his departure for Italy to fulfil his destiny. Mostly, the gods are quite callous – they give little thought to the suffering they cause and they are always ready to abandon mortals. Some students entertained the idea that the gods might be metaphors for the irrational and destructive passions that take hold of mortals. This was a welcome insight.

Question 6

Cicero, *On Duties* Book 3

No students attempted this question this year.

Question 6a.

Cicero uses Hercules to demonstrate the honourable way to live. In completing his labours Heracles sacrificed his own safety and a life of comfort in favour of the greater good. He extols the virtues of a stoic life of service and self-sacrifice as opposed to a selfish life devoted to pleasure. Hercules is also rewarded with a place among the gods by grateful humanity. Cicero asserts that public service brings great rewards and that those who follow the example of Hercules will live in conformity with nature and never do harm.

Question 6b.

On Duties was written in 44 BC, in the last year of Cicero's life. At this time the Roman Republic was in a state of crisis. Julius Caesar had taken on special titles and powers and the senate was losing control. The focus of the morals and beliefs of the time was shifting away from the state to the individual. This excerpt urges the Romans to support one another and be public-spirited in the manner of Hercules. Cicero advises the Romans that each person should consider what is right and do what he or she can to achieve it. Rather than luxuriating in comfort and wealth, and turning their backs on one another, they should live by natural law, which means harming no-one. Cicero believes that victory at the expense of another is the greatest crime – and that is what is happening in the power struggles in the city.

Question 6c.

On Duties Book III is divided into 11 sections. Each section discusses a different aspect of morality and justice. The focus is how to preserve political stability. This extract is part of the third section of Book III, The Unnaturalness of Doing Wrong. It sets out the premise that the greatest injustice is one that is committed against another person for the benefit of the self. This premise permeates the text as a whole and is discussed in various test cases. In the extract Cicero argues that we all wish to live safely with others. People have developed laws in different communities to ensure that people do not harm one another. Because this practise is universal it is a natural law. Book III becomes a moral code for a society that has forgotten the way to live a good life.

Question 7
Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Question 7a.

This question was generally well answered. Although the conception of Adonis was not in the passage, most students knew the background and explained it well. Lust and shame were what shaped the events. Students who warmed to Ovid's irony wrote well.

Question 7b.

Venus has the tables turned against her and receives some of her own medicine. It is a daring irony on Ovid's part that even an immortal goddess can experience transformation due to a moment of inattention. She leaves her normal haunts and becomes a pseudo-Diana in her effort to ingratiate herself with Adonis. However, she is comically ineffectual in the role, telling Adonis 'Do not be rash, dear boy' in her advice not to take risks with wild animals. Students clearly enjoyed writing about Venus's transformation.

Question 7c.

The significance of this story lies in the recurring themes. Reversals and irony abound in *Metamorphoses*. The female pursues the male. There is the transformative power of love (or lust), the setting of bountiful Nature, the attribution of human personalities and weaknesses to gods. Students found many examples from the prescribed sections to discuss the power of passion, and beauty and human folly.

Question 8 Roman portraits

Question 8a. and 8b.

Students identified the figures correctly and described the sculptures confidently. The symbols of modesty, virtue and respectability in Image A were noted – the deeply folded drapery, the downward gaze and blank face of Messalina with her healthy, lively baby. Many students noted the similarity to Eirene and Ploutos, and the use of a Hellenic model to represent Messalina. Students were similarly adept in reading the relief sculpture of Nero and Agrippina in Image B. They noted the contradiction in the combination of heavy *palla* and the diaphanous Greek drapery worn by Agrippina, the cornucopia she holds, and the political act of placing the victory wreath on her son's head. Higher-scoring answers used the connection between mother and son in each work.

Question 8c.

Students generally knew the stories of Messalina and Agrippina and appeared to relish the opportunity to expose the sordid aspects of their careers. These were women who stepped outside their role of wife and mother. In their role of empress they were expected to set the tone for Roman women; they were not expected to exercise political power by underhand means. Some students suggested, plausibly, that the works were created to counter the rumours about these infamous ladies. Few students noted that the sculpture of Messalina and Britannicus was a public work, commissioned by the imperial family, whereas the sculpture of Agrippina and Nero was a privately commissioned work. Higher-scoring responses explained the importance of the sculpture of Messalina and Britannicus as propaganda, necessary for the stability and survival of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The fact that the relief of Agrippina and Nero was a private commission may explain why it sends mixed messages.

Section B – Comparative study

Question chosen	none	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	1	17	10	35	1	9	0	27

Most students addressed all four criteria and finished their essays. Essays were of sufficient length and filled with generally accurate information and accurate quotes.

Students had plenty of knowledge of the works and quite a bit of knowledge of their sociohistorical contexts. Many essays displayed knowledge of the fine detail of the Parthenon and Ara Pacis but few could provide thoughtful explanations about the messages conveyed by these great works. The best approach was to see them as works of propaganda. It was evident that some students had pre-prepared essays that only included general comparisons of the paired works and that they had adapted to the question. This limited their flexibility and effectiveness in responding to the question.

There is room for improvement in developing coherent arguments with discussion of ideas and techniques. Many responses did not stick to the topic. Higher-scoring essays argued in response to the assertion in the question by agreeing, by agreeing in part or by disagreeing. The assertion makes a claim and it is the student's job to assess whether or not the claim is true, based on evidence from the texts. Some students simply accepted the assertion as true and found evidence to illustrate this, which often resulted in formless pieces lacking argument.

There were different understandings of Question 3. Many students took it to refer to differences in the characters of Odysseus and Ajax as they are portrayed in *The Odyssey* and 'Ajax' respectively. It was not easy to argue these differences convincingly. A better interpretation was

that the representation of the hero changed between Homer's depiction of Odysseus in the early 7th century BCE and Sophocles's depictions of Ajax and Odysseus mid 5th century BCE.

Criterion 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	1	5	14	16	28	17	10	5	1	6

Students earned higher marks on the first criterion than on the other three. This criterion is used to assess knowledge of the works and their sociohistorical contexts. Most students were able to discuss details from the works that were relevant to their arguments. They were not as confident in dealing with sociohistorical material, which was often submitted in an unconnected paragraph. The sociohistorical context is central to any discussion of classical works and can be a starting point for a comparative essay.

Criterion 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	3	7	15	25	22	15	7	3	1	5.5

Students discussed ideas confidently but more attention needed to be given to the techniques of writers and artists. Genre is important and often neglected, yet many of the pairings are of works from different genres. This is particularly relevant to the pairing of Old Comedy and Socratic dialogue. You do not expect philosophers to be wise in Aristophanes, and they are not wise. Some students accepted 'The Clouds' as Aristophanes's considered opinion of Socrates (which it never was). Another important generic difference arises between 'The Persians' and *The Histories*. Aeschylus is bound to focus on human suffering in his tragedy, whereas narrative is Herodotus's focus. This leads to different judgments about the Persians and the Greeks.

Criterion 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	0	3	10	17	24	21	12	7	2	1	5.2

There is a point to comparison. The classical world was a changing world. Most of the prescribed pairings are of works from different periods (Horace and Ovid are the exception) and many are of different genres. This affects the ideas and techniques that we meet in these works. Most essays compared the works by juxtaposing observations about their similarities and differences. The best essays explained the reasons for these similarities and differences, and their implications.

Criterion 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	2	9	17	25	23	10	6	2	1	5.2

Higher-scoring essays often began with definitions of key terms. In Question 1, the terms 'praise' and 'condemn' did not really need to be defined, nor did 'fear of death' in Question 4. But in Question 2, 'wise' needed to be defined or at least interrogated, as did 'hero' in Question 3, 'ruthlessness' and 'successful' in Question 5, and 'fiction' and (possibly) 'reality' in Question 7. For example, it is difficult to write about 'fiction' in relation to the Parthenon and the Ara Pacis without redefining the word, since these works are not novels.

Higher-scoring essays established the argument in the opening paragraph and presented supporting evidence in subsequent paragraphs. The essays in Section B needed to argue, not make discursive observations and comparisons.