



2005 Classical Societies and Cultures GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Most students were well-prepared for the examination and showed they understood the criteria by addressing them explicitly. The best papers used a wide range of vocabulary to precisely describe the works and their meanings. The students were able to convey sophisticated ideas and make fine distinctions. They fitted quotations and specific references seamlessly into their arguments.

Section A responses identified issues, ideas and values confidently, and there was a good understanding of the difference between an idea and a technique (a method of expressing an idea). Many students were not as adept at writing about the significance of the passage to the work or at assessing whether an artwork was typical of its genre, but most made a reasonable attempt at this criterion. Section A responses sometimes included irrelevant material, and some students persisted in writing about the historical context in their Section A responses. These papers gave the impression that the students were not comfortable with passage analysis and may not have acquired sufficient analytical skills.

The better Section A analyses were very focused on the passage/artwork, identified and explained the features clearly and were able to place the passage/artwork in the context of the work/genre. Weaker analyses were less likely to look closely at the material in the exam paper, and made general observations instead.

In Section B most students wrote essays that showed a good knowledge of the chosen texts and were of a satisfactory length. However, few students explored the implications of the terms in the question and this led to essays that were not sharply focused. Some students appeared to adapt pre-prepared essays to a given question, but often these did not fit well. Many students were committed to write about particular texts but chose inappropriate topics; for example, choosing *The Frogs* to discuss the real suffering in war. This year, more students clearly addressed criterion 4, socio-historical context, in their essays and they were generally successful with Greek texts of the fifth century BCE. Roman writers tended to assume that references to the Augustan era or the rule of Nero would suffice; however, they need to be more explicit in describing the socio-historical context. There was confusion in some essays about whether *Iliad* is a Mycenaean text, an Archaic period text or a Classical text. This needs to be clarified.

The better Section B essays were thoughtful responses to the statement in the question. The students presented a clear position and supported it with appropriate material from the most appropriate texts. Agreement or disagreement with the statement was often qualified as the writer sought precision or took account of conflicting evidence. Weaker essays were not closely linked to the topic and were often undermined by the use of inappropriate texts. Very few students compared two prescribed texts this year. Discursive, ‘English style’ responses were seen, but they were outnumbered by responses that analysed ideas and focused on the classical culture as opposed to the literary techniques of plot and character.

Each year students are advised not to overuse Greek terms when describing the values of the Classical Greek culture; there is nothing to be gained if an English word can do the job as well. Nevertheless, a number of students presented papers that contained dozens of Greek terms, usually followed by an English translation in parentheses: ‘*Man must die in battle...to convey sparagmos (bloodlust) through his anesteia (adrenalin rush)*’. There is no criterion for knowledge of Greek abstract nouns, and displaying an impressive Greek vocabulary can weaken the focus of an essay. It is pointless if the definition is inaccurate: ‘*another issue is that of friendship (sophia)*’. Some terms were used excessively, such as ‘the male collective’ and ‘the pre-eminent warrior’.

Expression was a problem for some students, whose observations became garbled in the heat of battle: ‘*As a result of the extreme of death, people always reacted in excess to this extreme.*’

Occasionally inaccuracies were glaring—Athena, patron saint of Athens—or startling—*Iliad* 9 has excess and extremes while *Women of Troy* does not.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

First question

Question chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	1	58	18	3	3	4	10	1	1	0	1



Second question

Question chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	2	7	32	14	21	10	1	4	5	1	3

Students should focus on the passage given. The socio-historical context is not relevant to this section; students should just look at the words of the passage, the ideas they convey and the significance of these ideas, and developments in the passage. The task is similar for the artworks; the focus is on the works pictured, the techniques used in those works, the ideas they express and the significance of those ideas within the cultural form of the work.

Telling the story (an implicit narrative response) is not required. Some weaker responses provided a summary, some paraphrased and some treated it as a comprehension exercise. None of these styles of response constitutes an analysis. An analysis should identify specific features in a passage and explain the ideas that these features express, how the ideas are expressed and their importance in the work.

A description of the artwork should implicitly convey information about techniques and ideas, but better responses were explicit about the techniques used and the purposes of those techniques.

Students should prepare for this section by annotating passages and highlighting techniques, ideas and implications.

Criterion 1 – Knowledge of ideas, issues, values and/or aesthetic qualities in the passage/work

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	2	11	26	35	24	3.6

Students earned marks for this criterion by:

- identifying and explaining ideas, values and/or aesthetic qualities specific to the passage/work
- supporting their analysis with quotes and specific references
- supplying contextual material relevant to the passage.

Most students did well on this criterion, especially those who knew their texts; however, some students strayed outside the passage and wrote about ideas that were not directly represented. The most effective approach was to say what the writer/artist was doing in the passage/artwork: ‘*Sophocles effectively depicts in this passage the family honor that Ajax embodies.*’ Other good approaches included:

- building the analysis around a central idea: ‘*Immediately striking in this extract is the all-consuming self-interest of the Athenians.*’
- identifying an idea and placing it in the passage at the same time: ‘*When Achilles says “a man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much,” he is lamenting the futility of life.*’

Some students appeared to choose an artwork in the hope that a careful description would supply the ideas and techniques required. Several students expressed concern about the three-legged horse in the Roman mosaic, and one was puzzled by the symbolism of ladies without heads in the Parthenon sculpture. A good analysis of an artwork requires the same careful preparation as that of a text, and a simple description is not sufficient.

Criterion 2 – Analysis of techniques used to emphasise ideas, issues, values and/or aesthetic qualities in the passage/work

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	5	7	19	32	25	13	3.1

Students earned marks for this criterion by identifying and explaining techniques. Correct identification was important, as was an explanation of the writer’s purpose in using the technique and its effect. Most students were specific, while some had the right idea but were unclear about what constitutes a technique: ‘*another literary technique that is used is the use of words by Achilles.*’ Words are the medium, not the technique.

Some students got carried away with the idea of textual analysis: ‘*with the repetitive use of pronouns “we”, “you”, and “us”, particularly evident in the lines “What we shall do now is show you”.*’ Other students implied a technique—‘*Tacitus describes... Tacitus then states*’—but failed to identify it. The technique is in the way Tacitus describes something, his choice of words and the juxtaposition of the observations. Better answers made fine distinctions in analysing the effect of a technique: ‘*His critical depiction of her “criminal methods” insinuates his dislike for her, therefore warning the reader of what is to come. By presenting Agrippina in this negative way, Tacitus...*’ and ‘*Tacitus describes how he was “an emperor whose likes and*



dislikes were all suggested and dictated to him". Tacitus' sarcastic tone suggests his disapproval of the Emperor, not only as a leader, but also as a man.'

Criterion 3 – Evaluation of the importance of the passage to the work as a whole, or of the work to its cultural form

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	10	21	29	22	12	2.9

This criterion was not addressed as well as the first two. Some students referred to 'importance' specifically in their introductory remarks and some devoted a paragraph to it at the end, but it usually received less attention than ideas and techniques.

A few students made the error of writing about importance to the society or 'ongoing significance': *'This passage is significant because the issues are still relevant today.'* Some evaluated the importance by simply listing the ideas and techniques, which isn't adequate: *'the passage is significant because it contains...'*

Better responses made intratextual links. They linked the passage to the work and showed how it contributed to the development of themes and established the groundwork for what was to come:

This passage is central to the tension of Iliad Book 9. Achilles is forced to decide between returning to battle and the short glorious life of the warrior...or leaving Ilium to live peacefully, forsaking his comrades... His position must be overcome by the next two speakers, Phoenix and Aias or the Achaeans will face dire odds in surviving the Trojan onslaught.

and

The passage is important because it entices the audience to see complexity in Ajax's character; it raises the possibility of a world where he need not die and so prepares them for the shock of his suicide.

Section B

Question chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	1	5	16	18	2	12	10	2	9	13	12

Students were less adept this year at choosing the right question for their chosen text pairing, with many using quite inappropriate material; for example, *The Frogs* can't be used to argue that the real suffering in war does not take place in battle. This error caused serious difficulties in a few papers.

A significant number of students gave the impression that they had prepared certain arguments about their chosen text pairing and they were going to present them regardless of the question. A few made no attempt to relate to the question, while others related to it loosely but unconvincingly. Exam responses must relate to the question given, therefore students are advised not to prepare essays in advance.

The best students examined the question and answered it directly, choosing the best supporting evidence from appropriate texts. Students who chose to write about *Ajax* and *The Bacchae* found Question 10 very easy to respond to.

On the other hand, although Question 9, 'Classical literature presents lessons through entertainment', appeared ideal for Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, some students did not choose an appropriate comparative text. It is important to build an argument on both texts.

Most students took the advice to limit their comparisons to two texts rather than skim over a larger number of texts. However, brief cross-references to other works are encouraged and can sometimes clinch an argument nicely.

Not very many students disagreed with the statement presented, and few students took the trouble to challenge the premise of the question and define terms.

Although students are encouraged to support a point of view in their essay, they should also discuss the topic in a way that allows for different directions to be considered; they should not simply exclude material that does not directly support the case they are arguing. Students need more practise at unpacking questions and planning essays in response to them.

Criterion 1 – Development of a relevant argument and/or responses

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	4	11	24	34	24	3.6



Essays needed to relate to the topic to score well on this criterion, and pre-prepared essays tended not to do this. Students should take time at the beginning of their essay to define the terms in the question they are responding to. This may involve simply rephrasing the statement, but there is usually a word or phrase that should be discussed or defined. Students tended to avoid Question 1 this year, but a careful definition of the kinds of 'change' under consideration would have shaped the question to suit several text pairings.

The following is an example of a solid first paragraph from an essay tackling Question 6.

I agree, in part, with this statement. The classical world was often characterised by extremes and excess, though moderation was highly valued in Classical Greece. By excess, we are discussing an unhealthy indulgence, and by extremes, we are discussing immoderate and unconsidered actions. I will base my discussion upon Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War for its description of a classical society at its most extreme and excessive, and Plato's Crito, which portrays Socrates as a man who has learned from the events of the war, and who advocates considered and rational action.

Criterion 2 – Knowledge of the ideas, issues, values and/or techniques in the works

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	2	10	23	34	29	3.7

Most students showed sound knowledge of the texts and the major ideas they deal with. There were a number of different approaches evident in the kind of material students drew on. Some essays focused on how the texts related to historical developments and events, others on how they expressed cultural preoccupations and values.

Criterion 3 – Analysis of the ideas, issues, values and/or techniques in the works

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	6	19	30	27	14	3.1

Essays that retold the narrative or presented knowledge about the texts that didn't relate to the discussion scored poorly on analysis. This criterion rewarded students whose arguments were focused and supported, and who showed that they were prepared to reassess their argument in the light of the comparisons they had made. In the best responses material was carefully selected and the analysis included an assessment of the writer's methods and purposes in dealing with the ideas and issues. Students needed to make sure that their observations about character, ideas and techniques were relevant to the topic and had not just been included to show knowledge of the texts.

Criterion 4 – Evaluation of the relationship of the works to their socio-historical/artistic contexts

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	15	8	16	21	22	18	2.8

This criterion is well-understood and most students made an effort to address it. However, there were still a few who omitted it completely, resulting in this being the lowest scoring criterion in Section B. Some topics and texts provided more material that could be used for this evaluation than others; for example, students who used *The Trojan Women* as one of their texts for Question 2 were able to discuss the Melian genocide.

Most students gave dates for the works they were discussing. Some added a list of features pertaining to the time when the work was produced; however, it is better to refer to socio-historic features that are relevant to the work and the topic under discussion. Some essays wrongly asserted that Linear B was a writing system in use in Homer's time. This error was highlighted in the 2004 Assessment Report but it hasn't yet been put to rest. Homer can be problematic for some students. What was Homer's socio-historical context? It certainly extends beyond the eighth century BCE, and a strong case could be made for the entire period of Greek civilisation from the Archaic to the Hellenic. It is not, however, a Mycenaean work. The better responses noted how the work related to its time – whether it reflected or challenged the society in which it was produced. Students needed to be accurate and clear about the work's socio-historical context; however, there were many examples of inaccuracy: 'Homer, who wrote at the time of the Trojan War' and 'Women of Troy which was written after the fall of Troy'.

Better responses incorporated context into the analysis and the comparison between the texts: 'the twenty-nine year difference between the plays explains why Sophocles presents the gods' treatment of mortals in his plays as fair, and why Euripides presents the treatment of his characters by the gods as wrong and unjust'. This essay proceeded to support the contention that early in the classical period the Athenians had been more reliant on the gods, consulting the Delphic oracle when Xerxes' army approached in 480 BCE, whereas, according to Thucydides, they lost faith during the plague of 429 BCE.

Criterion 5 – Understanding of developments and/or differences between the works

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	9	19	25	24	17	3.0



Students needed to select an appropriate pairings of texts—one which made for profitable comparison. An essay drawing on *The Frogs* and *Crito* struggled to find points of comparison. Some students referred to two texts in order, but did not make comparisons or cross-references. The language of comparison was used by most students ('however', 'whereas', 'on the other hand') but specific comparisons were often lacking.

Students should consider the points of comparison and development between the texts in the pairings they choose, as some yield more ideas than others. Most students who wrote on Question 8, 'Good leadership never misuses power', were able to make good comparisons between both different types of leadership and leadership in different times. Aeneas (*Aeneid* 2) was contrasted with Nero (*Mother of Nero* in *The Annals of Imperial Rome*), and Agamemnon (*Iliad* 9) with Socrates (*Crito*), to good effect. Well chosen text pairings yielded some sharp comparisons: 'Here, again, is the contrast between the Athenians seeking an extreme vengeance (against Mytilene) and Socrates, who would not entertain the notion of revenge under any circumstances'.

Criterion 6 – Use of relevant evidence to support an argument

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	6	17	27	25	22	3.3

The best students quoted or paraphrased appropriately to support their arguments. Some students referred to critics but with varying success. It isn't necessary to quote a critic in support of the obvious: 'as [x] says, the Athenians are self-interested in the *Melian dialogue*'. On the other hand, a well-chosen quote or reference could hit the spot perfectly. These should be inserted where they have most effect, and they need to be accurate. There was one specific reference that appeared to be influenced by Hollywood: 'Cassandra takes the role of the family leader, seeking revenge by killing her new husband, Agamemnon.' Several responses stated that Achilles was to die later in the *Iliad*, with an arrow in the heel.