



2006 **Classical Societies and Cultures GA 3: Written examination**

GENERAL COMMENTS

Generally, students were adequately prepared for the 2006 examination; most showed they understood the format of the paper by planning responses which addressed the criteria.

Section A responses identified issues, ideas and values confidently, but there was often uncertainty about the difference between a technique (a method of expressing an idea) and an idea. More students failed to explicitly identify techniques than in 2005. A technique is something done by the author/artist, yet many analyses didn't mention the author/artist.

Students continued to find it challenging to evaluate the importance of the passage to the work or to assess whether an artwork was typical of its genre, and some did not explicitly address this criterion or only made passing reference to it. Section A responses sometimes included irrelevant material. Some students included unnecessary introductions to their analyses, giving information about the author and work as a whole. Some students persisted in writing about the historical context in Section A responses. Their papers gave the impression that these students were not comfortable with passage analysis and may not have sufficiently acquired the skills of analysis.

The better Section A analyses 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 responses were less likely to look closely at the material on the exam paper but made general observations instead.

In Section B most students were able to write essays of an appropriate length which showed a good knowledge of the chosen texts. As in previous years, few students took time to explore the implications of the terms in the question and this led to essays which were not sharply focused. Every essay topic calls for some definition of terms.

Some students appeared to adapt pre-prepared essays to fit a topic – that is, essays they had written through the year on their chosen texts or on a related or similar topic. Often these did not fit well. Many students were committed to write about particular texts but chose inappropriate topics. More common this year were essays on topics that fitted one text but not the paired text. For instance, students who used *Iliad* Book 9 and *The Women of Troy* to address Question 2 on the subject of the power of women often struggled to find appropriate material in *Iliad* Book 9.

Most students attempted to address criterion 4, socio-historical context, in their Section B essays this year but it was still the lowest scoring criterion in Section B. They were generally successful with the socio-historical context of Greek texts of the fifth century BC, but Roman responses tended to assume that references to the Augustan era or the rule of Nero would suffice; they needed to be more explicit in describing the socio-historical context. Confusion persisted about whether *Iliad* is a Mycenaean text, an Archaic period text or a Classical text. This still needs to be clarified.

The best papers used a wide vocabulary to describe precisely the works and their meanings. They conveyed sophisticated ideas and made fine distinctions. Quotations and specific references were fitted seamlessly into the arguments.

The better Section B essays were thoughtful responses to the statement in the question. These 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 student 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 made the mistake of comparing two prescribed texts this year. More common than in the previous year were discursive 'English style' responses that focused on the literary techniques of plot and character rather than on culturally relevant ideas. These essays were often well-written and quite sophisticated in identifying the motivation and psychology of the characters but they omitted reflection on the cultural environment of the author and the prevalent ideas of the day. These discursive responses commonly dealt with Greek texts that have been adopted into the English literary canon – especially the tragedies and Homer.

Each year students are advised not to overuse Greek terms when describing the values of Classical Greek culture. There is nothing to be gained if an English word can do the job as well; *prize* is preferable to *geras*. Nevertheless, a number of students presented papers that contained many Greek terms, sometimes defined and sometimes not. The use of *logos* was problematic this year because the sense in which it was being used was often not explained. There is no criterion for knowledge of Greek abstract nouns, and making a display of an impressive Greek vocabulary can weaken the focus of an essay, particularly if words are not well-defined, for example: *this blend of aletheia (mathematical principles) with*



phantasia (the effect of subjective observation)... Students of Roman culture tended to limit their Latin words to well-defined ones, such as *furore* and *pietas*, and used them expertly.

There were the familiar over-used terms such as *the male collective* and *the pre-eminent warrior*. There were garbled passages of Greek and English, such as *while the latter (lordly son of Atreus) is a patronym for his miasma*, and some inaccuracies – *Melos, a province of Sparta* and *Socrates (in Crito) makes a passionate appeal but fails*. These are likely to crop up under the pressure of exam conditions; however, students are urged to strive for clarity and accuracy and to leave time to carefully re-read their work in the exam.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

First question

Question chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	0	53	22	6	3	4	8	1	2	0	2

Second question

Question chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	1	7	39	14	8	11	1	2	10	0	6

Students should focus on the passage given and remember that the socio-historical context is not relevant in this section. Responses should focus on just the words of the passage, the ideas they convey and the significance of these ideas, and developments in the passage, to the work. The task for the artworks is similar: the focus is on the artworks 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 the task set in the examination. Some weaker responses provided a summary, some paraphrased and some treated it as a comprehension exercise. None of these is an analysis. Analysis identifies specific features in a passage, explains the ideas that they express and shows how the ideas are expressed and their importance in the work.

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

Students should prepare their responses by annotating passages, highlighting techniques, ideas and implications.

The most popular Section A texts were *Iliad* Book 9 and *Ajax*, each of which was tackled in over 60 per cent of papers. Over 20 per cent of students did the *Lysistrata* passage. The most commonly analysed Roman text was *Aeneid* Book 12 (8.7 per cent of papers). Disappointingly, no one analysed the Petronius passage.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	2	12	35	34	17	3.5

Most students did well here, especially those who knew their texts. Some students strayed outside the passage and wrote about ideas that were not directly represented.

The most effective approach to addressing this criterion was to say what the writer/artist is doing in the passage/artwork, for example, *Homer develops the complex character that is Achilles...* It helps sometimes to build the analysis around a central idea, such as *What is striking in this passage is the reflective, changing tone of the great warrior's speech.*

An idea can be identified in the passage and analysed at the same time, for example, *When Achilles says 'but a man's life cannot come back again', Homer is separating the gift of life from all other possessions.*

Consider two student responses:

1: *Homer is expressing the idea that a man's life is not something that can be lost and regained – unlike property.*

2: *Achilles realises that if he loses his life he cannot win it back.*

The first example identifies and explains an action of the author. The second is a merely a summary.



Some students appeared to choose the artwork in the hope that a careful description would supply the ideas and techniques required; however, the artworks on this year's paper were particularly unsuited to this approach. Only those students who knew the artworks well were able to analyse them successfully. A good analysis of an artwork requires the same careful preparation as a text does, 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
%	4	8	24	32	22	11	2.9

Students earned marks for this criterion by identifying and explaining techniques used by the author/artist in the passage/artwork. It is important to correctly identify these techniques and to explain the writer's purpose in using the technique and its effect. Many students were unclear about what constitutes a technique and many papers did not explicitly identify techniques, but implied them – *Tacitus describes...Tacitus then states*. The technique is in the way Tacitus describes something, his choice of words and juxtaposition of observations. Better answers made fine distinctions in analysing the effect of a technique.

Consider two student responses:

1: *In the repeated questions of Tecmessa, Sophocles characterises her as an intelligent, clear-sighted woman in a desperate situation; the tone of her speech is not querulous, but tragic.*

2: *Tecmessa presses Ajax, urgently questioning him about what will become of her and their son.*

The first example identifies a technique used by the author and explains its effect. The second only describes the character's actions and words.

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
%	5	11	26	32	20	7	2.7

This criterion was not addressed as well as the first two, usually because students wrote less about the importance of the passage/work. Sometimes a single sentence was tacked on at the end.

Some students mistakenly wrote about the importance to the society or 'ongoing significance', such as *This passage is significant because the issues are still relevant today*. Some students evaluated the importance by simply listing the ideas and techniques: *The passage is significant because it contains...*

The 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. For example, *This passage is essential to the development of Achilles as a reflective human being rather than merely as a killing machine. Here we see a new side to his character, to contrast with the proud and bitter Achilles we already know...* and *The passage is important because it introduces the consideration of consequences; Tecmessa talks sense and it is sense that Ajax rejects...*

Section B

Question chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	1	8	21	31	9	3	7	8	4	5	4

Most students chose appropriate questions for their chosen text pairings, but some attempted to base arguments on texts which did not yield enough useful material, for example, *Iliad* Book 9 is not an appropriate text to use to argue about the power and influence of women in a Classical society. This caused difficulties in a few papers.

A significant number of students gave the impression that they were prepared to argue certain things about their chosen text pairing and they were going to do it regardless of the question. A few made no attempt to relate to the question asked, while others related loosely but unconvincingly. The best students examined the question and answered it directly, choosing the best supporting evidence from appropriate texts.

Few students disagreed with the statement presented, and few took the trouble to challenge the premise of the question and define its terms. Several questions on this paper would have benefited from careful unpacking because they contained more than one assertion.



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

Although students are encouraged to support a point of view in their essay, they should discuss the topic on its merits and not simply ignore material that would weaken the case they are arguing.

Questions 3 (31 per cent of papers) and 2 (21 per cent) were the most popular in this section. Question 2 proved to be a difficult question as it posed structural problems for many students who agreed with the first part, using either Ajax or Lysistrata, and felt obliged to support the second part but couldn't find strong material. In fact they would have found it more straightforward to disagree with the statement. Question 3 proved to be an excellent topic for those who used Thucydides or *Ajax* but it wasn't quite so suited to *Iliad* Book 9. Generally, students preferred topics they could agree with, but sometimes this course made it difficult to argue the point convincingly. The topics this year were often fairly bald statements which needed qualification at least.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	5	16	31	29	18	3.4

Responses needed to relate to the topic to score well here. Pre-prepared essays tended not to do this. The students who had the most difficulty writing relevant essays were those who were adapting pre-prepared pieces.

Students should take time at the beginning of their essay to define the terms in the statement they are responding to. Sometimes this is as simple as rephrasing the statement, but there is usually a word or phrase that should be discussed or defined. Students who tackled Question 7 were able to define 'leader' to include not just Aeneas, but also Socrates (Crito), Agamemnon, Achilles, Lysistrata and Hecabe:

Many of the texts I have studied in Classics concern the actions and motivations of leaders – people who have power over others. In Iliad Book 9 it is the leadership of Agamemnon that comes under the spotlight and in Crito it is the leadership of Socrates. One leader, Agamemnon, doesn't use his power for the good of others. But Socrates definitely does. I believe that the example of Socrates outweighs that of Agamemnon and will argue that a true leader like Socrates definitely acts for the good of others.

This opening provides a concise definition, the texts on which the argument is based, and the main contention in just a few lines. Openings like this set a direction for the entire essay and irrelevance is unlikely to be a problem.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	2	12	28	30	27	3.7

This was the highest scoring criterion on the paper. Most students showed sound knowledge of the texts and the major ideas each text deals with. There were a number of different approaches evident in the kind of material students drew on: some essays were more focused on how the texts related to historical developments and events (Thucydides, Tacitus); others on how they expressed cultural preoccupations and values (Sophocles, Euripides). There were some inaccuracies and false claims but most students' responses showed solid knowledge of the texts.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	7	21	27	26	15	3.1

To state a fact is to show knowledge; to explore the meaning and implications of a fact is to analyse. Essays which were limited to facts – re-telling the narrative or presenting knowledge about the texts – scored low on the analysis criterion. This criterion rewards students whose arguments are focused and supported, who show that they are prepared to re-assess their argument in the light of the comparisons they make. 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 not just included to show knowledge of the texts.

Consider two student responses:

1: *Survival was the first task of a Roman emperor. Nero's murder of Britannicus was to secure his position, but Tacitus dwells on the treachery involved, the details of the plot and the innocence and talent of the victim, to emphasise Nero's unworthiness.*

2: *Nero is a disgraceful leader, poisoning his own brother, Britannicus, and watching him die at the dinner table.*



The second response does not analyse Tacitus' work, though it does show accurate knowledge.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	10	10	14	22	28	15	2.9

This criterion was well understood and most students made an effort to address it. However, there were still a few who omitted it completely with the result that it was again the lowest scoring criterion in Section B. Some topics and texts made it easier to include this criterion than others. For example, students who used Lysistrata or Thucydides were able to link the texts to events of the Peloponnesian War quite closely. Some essays added a list of features belonging to the time when the work was produced, but it is better to refer to socio-historic features that are relevant to the work and the topic under discussion.

Homer was still problematic for some students. What was Homer's socio-historic context? It certainly extends beyond the eighth century BC and a strong case could be made for including the entire period of Greek civilisation from the Archaic to the Hellenistic. It is not, however, a Mycenaean work. Better responses noted how the work related to its time – whether it reflected the society in which it was produced or challenged it. Students needed to be accurate and clear about the work's socio-historical context.

Better responses incorporated context into comparison between the texts and analysis, for example:

There was less than a generation in time between the construction of the Temple of Zeus with its separate static figures and the Parthenon with its dynamic flowing figures but there was a great difference intellectually between the stolid piety of Olympia and the effusive humanism of the Parthenon sculptures.

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

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	9	20	27	27	13	3.1

Students needed to have appropriate pairings of texts in order to engage in a profitable comparison. Most did; however, 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 (for example, 'however', 'whereas' and 'on the other hand') but specific comparisons were often lacking.

Consider two student responses:

1: Thucydides makes it clear that the extreme behaviour of the Corcyreans is a collapse of nomos (law and order) and reduction to a state of physis (nature) where no civilised constraints exist to prevent the worst crimes (fathers killing sons). Ironically Socrates' extreme behaviour is to assert the claims of law (you were our child and slave) and reject the natural response to flee from death.

2: The Corcyreans' extreme behaviour is to commit terrible crimes in a frenzy of fear whereas Socrates refuses to save his own life when he can.

The first example contains much more in the way of comparison.

Students should consider the points of comparison and development between the texts in the pairings they choose. Some pairing will yield more ideas than others.

Criterion 6 – Use of relevant evidence to support an argument

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	6	21	27	24	19	3.2

The best students quoted or paraphrased appropriately to support their arguments and the evidence came in small doses spread throughout the essay wherever an assertion was made. Some students referred to critics successfully, while others used carefully remembered quotes which were not relevant and did little to support the argument.