

GENERAL COMMENTS

Most students responded positively to the 2011 Classical Studies exam. Few students failed to complete the paper and most responses were quite detailed. Students were well prepared to answer questions on their chosen texts, understood the tasks and demonstrated broad knowledge of the works.

There was little evidence of students writing answers to questions for which they were not prepared. Most students attempted to answer all questions in Section A. Students were aware of the criteria in the Section B essay and addressed the socio-historical context of the works explicitly.

There were few pre-written essays, although many students wrote general comparisons between the works in Section B rather than specifically addressing the question asked. Socio-historical material was often pre-prepared and was not linked appropriately to the topic.

Some Section A responses included irrelevant material; students did well to focus on and respond to the question asked. General observations about the work and background material did not earn marks in Section A.

In Section B, many responses tended to be descriptive rather than analytical. Students showed considerable knowledge of the works but often did not select the most relevant material and use it to present an argument in response to the statement in the question.

Few essay plans were made this year. While producing a plan does take time, it is often useful in thinking through ideas and avoiding repetition.

It is understandable that students feel the need to write quickly and continuously for the duration of the examination, but good responses require thought and thinking takes time. It is a special skill to be able to think clearly in an examination. Practice helps. Responses should have a clearly discernible structure. Only relevant evidence should be presented. This year there were many long and detailed essays that were too descriptive and insufficiently analytical. Some students showed a detailed knowledge of the texts and works but a limited ability to isolate the ideas and techniques of the author.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A – Individual study

Question chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
%	1	37	24	9	12	9	2	0	6

Students earned high marks by addressing questions and providing thorough answers. There was a strong focus on empirical/comprehension material in the part a. and part b. questions, which gave students an opportunity to develop ideas over the three questions. Weaker answers tended to string together quotes from the passage without much comment and often did not refer to the question. Though there is no loss of marks for including extraneous material, this tends to weaken answers and wastes time. Socio-historical material was often included when it wasn't relevant. Most students placed the passages accurately in the texts and were familiar with the images of artworks.

Part a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	4	15	33	30	16	3.3

Most of the part a. questions asked for specific information that was found in the passage or artwork. Most questions asked the student to identify the speaker and the character being spoken to, the circumstances of their conversation and perhaps note a peculiar feature of it. Students earned a mark in answer to Who is Diomedes? (Question 1, part a.) by writing 'Diomedes is a Greek warrior'. A plain answer of this sort to each of the three questions on *The Iliad* passage earned three marks. Higher marks were available to students who wrote responses such as 'Diomedes is the Greek warrior most feared by the Trojans after the withdrawal of Achilles. In his aristeia in Book 5 he killed many Trojans and wounded two gods – Ares and Aphrodite. He continued his slaughter in Book 6 and Hector returned to Troy to arrange a gift for Athena in the hope that she would restrain Diomedes'. This is relevant information and it improves the answer. In the *Oedipus the King* question (Question 2), describing the speaker meant more than naming him; for example,

‘Tiresias is a blind seer who serves Apollo, and his prophecies are respected in Thebes because they are always accurate’. The questions on the artworks asked for information not found in the images, such as the names of people associated with the works, dates and sites.

The question on Plato’s *Apology* asked for a summary of Socrates’ account of how the Athenians viewed him. Some students simply quoted slabs of the passage; this is not sufficient for an answer. Most students identified the hostile views of those threatened by Socrates’ questioning, but many did not mention the young men who emulated him. Students need to think carefully about a question even when it may seem simple.

Successful students found information that others overlooked: the significance of the site of the Parthenon certainly related to its levelling by Xerxes in 480 BCE, but the Acropolis was also the religious centre of Athens, the home of their gods and focus of many religious festivals.

Good answers were specific and thorough in identifying speakers, listeners and circumstances. The *Oedipus the King* question required a brief summary of the circumstances leading to the angry speech by Tiresias; for example ‘Thebes was suffering from a plague caused by the failure of the Thebans to solve the murder of the previous king. King Oedipus called for witnesses to come forward without success. Then he sent for Tiresias who came reluctantly and steadfastly refused to reveal what he knew. Oedipus angrily called him a “scheming quack”. Now Tiresias replies’.

In *The Aeneid* question, many students did not note what was odd about living bodies being banned from Charon’s boat, when in the next sentence he names three living bodies that he carried. Answers to the Mosaics question were often vague; many students were satisfied to name the building as a villa without explaining what sort of building this was and where in the villa the mosaic was found.

Part b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	4	16	34	28	15	3.3

Most part b. questions required students look closely at the passage or artwork and explain a feature of it. Weaker answers tended to quote from the passage but give little comment or explanation. Some students were satisfied to note that Diomedes justified thrusting his spear into the ground by saying that he and Glaucus were friends. The more successful answers noted that their grandfathers were friends and that the friendship was transmitted down through the generations. The most successful answers added that this was an important aspect of the heroic code. Successful responses to the question on Plato’s *Apology* showed that students went through the passage carefully and didn’t simply state a superficial response such as ‘Socrates regarded his opponents as jealous people who ignorantly misrepresented him’.

Part c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	3	7	12	16	21	18	13	4	1	5.6

In some cases students did not respond thoroughly to the part c. questions. Most addressed key ideas in *The Iliad* and *Oedipus the King* questions but quite a few overlooked techniques. Some students resorted to long quotes from the passage and delved into socio-historical material, which wasn’t required. As in other years, there were students who felt compelled to refer to Homer’s heroes as Mycenaean and to imply that Homer was familiar with Mycenaean society. The *Oedipus the King* question was handled very well by some students who found many techniques to write about but also a close connection between the techniques and the ideas that they presented.

The questions on Plato’s *Apology* and The Parthenon required careful thought. The techniques attributed to Socrates by Plato are often subtle, but successful responses were able to describe how Socrates moves from amused irony early in his defence to understandable bitterness towards his opponents after the death penalty is announced. Most students focused on the cross-examination of Meletus for contrast and this proved effective. Many students were able to place the Parthenon in a socio-historical context, but those who drew on Pericles’ funeral oration were the most successful at relating the building to Athenian identity. Students with a thorough knowledge of Book 6 of *The Aeneid* were able to discuss the serious features of Aeneas’ journey to the underworld. Those who tackled the Cicero passage generally did well, although some tended to repeat points made in previous answers without developing them. Many students showed a detailed understanding of the techniques employed in the Roman mosaics.

The following is a good response to Question 2c.



Tiresias' opening words raise the question of rights – the rights of kings and the rights of citizens; there are, too, the rights of seers who speak the truth even when it is unwelcome. The independence of a priest should be respected. Sophocles develops the seer's character through the wounded pride conveyed by the repetition of 'I: I am not your slave. I serve Apollo. Then Tiresias goes on the attack with a series of accusing 'you's and unsettling questions: who are your parents? Do you know? Sophocles is building the tension towards the revelation in a series of powerful images: the whip that will punish Oedipus, the curses of the dead. He is sighted now, but blind to the truth; his eyes will be shrouded in darkness and then he will see. He has sailed to a fatal harbor, not a safe one; it is his mother's bed and it brings the horror of incest. Sophocles uses the motif of Mount Cithaeron, the towering dumb witness to the life of Oedipus from birth to blind exile. Though it will reverberate with his anguished cries it will not be moved. This was fated to happen. Tiresias expresses the certainty of fate and the importance of knowledge based on divine foresight not on human cleverness. Both Tiresias and the audience know this; only the character of Oedipus is in the dark, and that produces the dramatic irony that drives this tragedy.

Section B – Comparative study

Question chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	1	11	29	25	1	7	14	13

Many students wrote descriptive essays that demonstrated detailed knowledge of the texts and a determination to show this. Often analysis was absent and the two works were dealt with separately and consecutively, which limited comparison. Material wasn't selected for relevance to the topic, rather students tended to write all they knew and often confused the argument. Socio-historical material, especially, should be selected for relevance to the argument. Many responses lacked a plan and a considered response to the statement, and many essays did not express a clear viewpoint. These are perennial problems. It was evident that many students had sufficient knowledge in order to write excellent essays but lacked the critical skills to complete the task.

As in previous years some students used too many Greek terms and applied them inaccurately.

The Herodotus/Thucydides question (Question 1) produced some thoughtful discussions of what 'broader' might mean, but most responses took the statement to be true and illustrated it by referring to Herodotus' folk tales and supernatural dalliances. Some essays drew on material from outside the set passages. References are acceptable, but the main part of the argument should rest on evidence from prescribed passages.

Students had difficulty in relating socio-historical information to the Aeschylus/Euripides question (Question 2). Relatively few had the confidence to declare that jealousy wasn't an important theme in either work. Most agreed that Medea was motivated by jealousy to a greater extent than Clytemnestra, without examining why human emotions might be more prominent in Euripides' work. Most were bogged down in a discussion of character and the respective motivation of Medea and Clytemnestra.

Few students who contrasted the underworlds of Homer and Aristophanes discussed genre (Question 3). Solid ground was established for the comparison of Livy and Tacitus, but few students were able to characterise the differences in their outlooks convincingly.

Most essays on the Ara Pacis and Trajan's Column (Question 6) showed a detailed knowledge of what is depicted on the sculptures; however, few considered the importance of the Ara Pacis to Augustus' political ambitions and its Hellenistic precedents.

In Question 7, Virgil was often discussed before Homer, which limited the comparison of the two works. Students would be better advised to deal with these texts chronologically.

Criterion 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	2	5	8	12	19	19	21	9	2	6.3

Students scored better on this criterion compared with criteria 2–4. It asked them to display their knowledge of the works and the relation of the works to their socio-historical contexts. There was no shortage of socio-historical material in most essays and it was evident that students had a good knowledge of the works. They quoted confidently and gave detailed accounts of the texts. Relating the socio-historical information to the question was another matter, and many students struggled to make the information relevant to their argument. Mid-range papers frequently became trapped in lengthy accounts that often became summaries of the works. With some text pairings this was more acceptable than with others. It jarred badly in essays comparing *Agamemnon* and *Medea*. Most essays were linked to the question to some degree, but quite a few were clearly essays that were adapted to the task. Many essays on *Agamemnon*/*Medea* contained lengthy speculation about the role of women in Athens, which was clearly a side issue at best. The breadth of

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Herodotus' interests was established in many essays, but few students examined why the two great historians had different approaches to their research and to the material they included in their works. Similarly, there was little curiosity as to why Homer and Aristophanes had such very different views of the underworld. Any comparison between *The Odyssey* and *Frogs* demands the consideration of genre. The Roman essays usually managed to integrate socio-historical material into the argument. Few students mentioned the second and third settlements in relation to the Ara Pacis so the political importance of the work to Augustus wasn't explained fully. Most essays continue to treat socio-historical context separately from the main body of the essay. Criterion 1 was generally well addressed.

Criterion 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	4	6	11	16	18	20	14	6	2	5.8

This criterion called for analysis of the ideas and the techniques used to express the ideas in the works. Students were primarily concerned with establishing their knowledge and analysis came second in most essays. Plenty of ideas and techniques were identified, but only the most successful students had the analytic skills to explain their significance. Why does Herodotus appear to have broader interests than Thucydides? What does it mean? Why is jealousy more relevant to what happens in Euripides' work than in Aeschylus'? Or, why is it irrelevant? What makes Tacitus' approach to history writing different from Livy's? High marks for this criterion required a grasp of classical culture and of the place that the particular texts have in classical culture. Not every student had this overview.

Criterion 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	2	3	7	10	16	19	22	13	5	3	5.8

This was not a high-scoring criterion, but some students showed considerable accomplishment in the comparisons they made. Criterion 3 required students to compare the works, identifying similarities and differences. The highest marks usually went to essays in which the comparisons were interleaved throughout, although some students succeeded in treating the works separately before writing several paragraphs of comparison. As with other criteria, the comparison needed to be in areas relevant to the essay.

Criterion 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	2	3	5	10	14	20	21	14	7	2	6

This criterion assessed the student's argument and evidence for the point of view they were advocating. Students were assiduous in supporting their points with evidence. However, a lack of clarity in the argument and lack of relevance in some of the evidence caused students to miss out on marks. Few essays followed a careful plan. Very few essays began with a consideration of the terms of the statement to which they were responding. Of course, words like 'broader', 'jealousy' and 'Roman values' may not appear to require definition. However, students may benefit from explaining at the outset what they think the statement is asserting and how they intend to respond to it. In what way might Herodotus' concerns be broader than those of Thucydides? What concerns do they have? However clear the statement in the question appears to be, it is always worthwhile examining the terms in which it is expressed.

In Question 3 a superficial reading of the statement produced a thin essay. Obviously, the two underworlds are different. What is interesting is the ways they are different and what this means about the societies in which Homer and Aristophanes lived and the beliefs they held. Some statements were accepted too easily by students, particularly the statement in Question 6. No doubt Augustus and Trajan intended to produce monuments that would be recognised as reflecting their achievements, but is this the whole story? Question 7 put the onus on students to shape their own essay, and the most successful ones were very specific in the ideas they identified as central to these works.

Successful students argued very specifically, kept strictly to the argument and used evidence that supported their points conclusively.