



2009 Texts and Traditions GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The features that separated better responses from others, again this year, was the detail students were able to include within their responses and the amount of accurate and thorough knowledge shown of the text itself. Alarming, some students seemed to know the passages set for special study very well, but had little understanding of how these related to the text as a whole, either thematically or structurally. The *VCE Texts and Traditions Study Design* requires knowledge of **entire** set texts.

Essay questions are designed to allow students to synthesise information that has been studied as separate outcomes or areas of study. Students are challenged to bring together the key knowledge and skills of the study, drawing from the more significant thematic, historical, sociocultural, literary and exegetical aspects of the study. Better responses developed a structure that brought these elements together; weaker essay responses often did not include sufficient scriptural examples despite the requirement for this in the question. Teachers need to help their students understand that a significant discriminator in assessing essay responses is whether a student just identifies features within a topic or whether they can develop a response that describes or, better again, explains those features.

Extended response questions assess some detail within a student's wider knowledge of the set text: its writing, form and style, sociocultural and historical elements and people named, and approaches to interpretation. They do not warrant essay-style or exegetical responses. These questions may be drawn from any of the areas of study and any part of the set text. Students should note that extended response questions usually ask them to do more than just identify or describe a feature of the text, often requiring some consideration of something of significance about that feature.

In answering Question 4, students who use dot points as the whole or as part of their response should be aware that listing a series of 'facts' and verse numbers does not usually provide a commentary, as required in the examination. These students cannot, therefore, score full marks. It is important that students realise this question is not an exegesis.

Compared with previous years, the technique of using dot points was more frequently employed by students to 'finish' an answer for which they had run out of time, or when they had difficulty completing all responses within the two hours of the examination. This may have been an appropriate strategy for some students, but it should be noted that many students were able to provide extensive responses on each section.

Students must demonstrate more than just the ability to name an aspect of a theme or relate the circumstances of an event when presenting extended responses; they are expected to be able to explain what is important about the information they provide. High marks for such questions are awarded to students who then go on to interpret the significance of that which is explained.

Students must avoid the tendency to include everything they know in their responses. Students must answer the question that is set, not one they would have liked to have been set or have practised during the year. Sometimes very knowledgeable students included whole paragraphs or, in the worst cases, a whole page of material that was not relevant to the question asked, although it may have been very relevant to another topic. The essay, particularly, is not about the student writing down everything they know; 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 response in the terms and parameters of the question.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1: The Gospel of John

Part A – Essay

Question 1

In general, this question was well addressed, and more successful answers often presented a clear understanding of the theme before exploring it through the examples they chose.

The theme of this question was central to the Gospel of John. It asked students to discuss the theme within passages for special study; however, although this year's chapters lent themselves to this specificity, some students used one example from within the set passages and another example from outside the set passages. Care must be taken to read the question carefully.



The question also asked students to use at least two examples. Students were expected to find enough detail and depth in two, or perhaps three, set passages, and possibly only refer briefly to other passages. Most answers were structured in this way, but a few students briefly mentioned five or six examples without developing any of them in detail. This was not a good approach to the question and these students did themselves a disservice by not developing a cohesive structure.

Some students had difficulty explaining the Son's relationship to the Father. They wrote about Jesus claiming divine Sonship, or what Jesus taught about God, or Jesus arguing with the Jews, but not about the abiding relationship itself. Responses could be divided into those that merely identified various aspects of the Father-Son relationship, those that described what the relationship entailed, and better answers that explained the significance of the various aspects of the relationship.

Another strong approach was the use of one passage or example to support another. Following is an excerpt from a student response which examined the Prologue in some detail.

At 17:5 Jesus repeats and further expresses what is said of the relationship at 1:1. Jesus states, 'glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world began'. This re-encompasses the eschatological nature of the relationship as defined in 1:1, 'before the world existed'. The author is conveying the relationship as before all time, and mutual; they both share the same 'presence'.

Question 2

This was the least popular of the essay questions, and many responses suggested that while students knew many of the titles by which Jesus is called in the latter part of Chapter 1, they could not link them sufficiently to their Jewish origins or explain why they were messianic in nature. Indeed, how well students understood Jewish messianism was the key to responses that scored highly.

Although they were able to provide a general discussion of the titles used by the evangelist, some students had difficulty focusing on just two when discussing how they were used throughout the rest of the gospel. This suggested a limited understanding of the titles chosen or a failure to see that the question asked for a quick overview of the many titles, followed by a close consideration of two of those titles identified.

A wide range of responses was seen, and students were able to score well regardless of the passages or titles chosen as examples. It was also good to see students using a title to link different passages that showed the same concept.

Question 3

This was the most popular essay question by a small margin, although it was not always well done. Students and teachers must be aware that a statement before a question should be read as informing the question. The statement was about 'light and darkness'; therefore, the question was not about just 'light', or 'symbolism' or 'dualism', although each of these terms had some part within a larger discussion on the use of light and darkness.

Students generally approached this question thematically, although some showed how the evangelist used light and darkness to structure the gospel, such as Mary's arrival at the tomb. Both were equally valid, and both approaches yielded high scores. Students were rewarded on the sophistication of their response; some merely identified where light and darkness was found while better answers discussed the motif, making links between the Prologue and other parts of the gospel, and top answers were able to discuss the use of this literary device for its theological significance. In such responses, detail was often impressive, such as *Phōs (light) is mentioned 23 times in John's gospel as one of the author's central themes and darkness (Greek: skotia) is presented as the opposition to light.*

Mid-range responses were often limited to discussing each example separately, thereby sometimes missing the concept of the thematic development of this idea as the gospel unfolded. Better responses made connections between the examples given, showing how one passage allowed the reader develop an understanding of the aspect.

Three examples from passages other than the Prologue were sufficient, and students who wrote on more passages than required limited their ability to explore the concept of 'light and darkness' in any meaningful depth.

Part B – Extended responses

Overall, Part B was once again the best answered part of the examination by students answering Section 1: The Gospel of John.



Question 4

There were still students who approached this question as though it was an exegetical response, not seeing the difference between 'commentary' and 'close analysis'. Teachers should remind their students that Question 4 (or 4a. in the new examination structure beginning in 2010) is not a mini-exegesis. It is not necessary for students to locate the context of the passage or, for example, give a full explanation of the structure of the Johannine signs or a literary technique. It is important that students respond to the question asked, which this year was to consider 'Jesus' understanding of the Law', not just what the Law was.

Some students latched on to Moses, circumcision and the Sabbath, and discussed those aspects without stating how Jesus understood them. Some students couched their discussion within Jesus' conflict with the Jewish authorities but without adequate consideration of how Jesus saw these terms. It is crucial that students read the question carefully. Better responses did more than describe how Jesus understood the Law generally and in relation to Moses, circumcision and the Sabbath; they showed an understanding of the interconnectedness of these aspects, and focused on Jesus, for example, '*Jesus' understanding of the law is not one of replacement, but of fulfilment and surpassment*'. The best answers even included consideration of how Jesus' own divine nature and mission affected his understanding of the Law.

The weakest answers merely retold the episode in summary, or took parts or the whole of verses and explained what they meant. The more successful students engaged in a nuanced discussion and commentary.

Question 5

This question required students to define a common literary device found within the gospel. Some students, however, presumed a definition and went straight into the second part of the question by providing examples. There were many examples of allusion provided and all examples that were supported by identification of an Old Testament reference were accepted. While a simple definition and provision of two examples may have seemed a simplistic question, the requirement to explain the significance of those allusions to the Johannine Community proved more difficult for students. Many explanations were nebulous and little more than 'so this was important to the Johannine Community'.

Marks were awarded for the definition, for each example and identification of what it referred to, and for an explanation of the significance of each example.

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response.

The beginning of the gospel at 1:1 'In the beginning' thus alludes to the opening of the Biblical account of the creation of the world in the Old Testament, Genesis 1:1. This is significant to the Johannine Community because they are able to see how Jesus and the Father shared a unique relationship before the beginnings of time. The author is able to achieve this because primarily the Johannine Community is made up of Jews...

Question 6

This question clearly had three parts, although there was no predetermined expectation of how much of the answer each part demanded. This allowed students who had detailed knowledge of the origins of the Feast of Tabernacles to go beyond the Exodus experience as an earlier harvest festival, and focus the majority of their response on the first part of the question. This method was just as valid as concentrating on the second or third part, as long as responses also considered the other two parts. For example, a good student response began with, '*The feast of Tabernacles (Booths, Sukkoth) began as a harvest feast before the Babylonian exile. Solomon dedicated the temple on the feast of Tabernacles and gave the festival messianic overtones doing so.*' While some students could only identify two of the three aspects of the festival as celebrated in early, first-century Palestine, most did at least mention the three. The weakest part was how the Evangelist used the Feast as a narrative structure or means to explain who Jesus was. In other words, students could not use their sociocultural knowledge to explain simple exegetical significance.

Question 7

Generally, this question was well done. The first part of this question asked students to outline their knowledge of who John the Baptist was. This allowed students to approach their response from within the Gospel of John, from knowledge also gained from the Gospel of Luke, or from other sources (the title 'the Baptist' is Lucan, not Johannine). However, the second and third parts of the question demanded firm focus on the set text.

Some answers approached the second part of the question with very close reference to Chapters 1 and 3; others gave a more general overview, concentrating on aspects such as witness, proclaimer, and a man of faith in Jesus. Both were equally valid approaches. Some of the discussion of Chapter 3, considering that it was not a passage for special study, was very detailed, and showed that specialist passages are being studied within the context of the whole set text.



Answers to the third part of the question were not always as well done; however, the more successful students showed their appreciation of the tension that arose from probably having previous disciples of John the Baptist within the Johannine Community, and the best of these couched their answer in terms of authorial intention.

The three parts of the question did not need to be answered sequentially. The following extract from a student response is an example of this.

The synoptics portray John as a man who lives in the wilderness and serves to baptize Jesus. In the gospel of John, John is presented alongside a polemic to his followers which clearly identifies him as merely a witness to Jesus and definitely not the Messiah (1:6). John also removes the baptism of Jesus as it creates a different image of Jesus.

Part C – Exegetical responses

Rather than repeat comments on approaches to each of the three passages set for exegesis, the following common observations are provided on Questions 8, 9 and 10.

The instructions on how to approach exegesis included the statement that ‘in the course of your exegesis you must comment on the meaning and significance of the **highlighted** words and phrases **in the context of the passage**’. This requirement will continue in the new examination format. Surprisingly, there were still students who did not include comments on all of the highlighted words in their responses. Generally, these words allow students to discuss aspects such as points of historical or sociocultural interest, the literary forms and/or techniques employed, and the other dot points provided as criteria for exegesis in the instructions for Part C. Commentary on the highlighted words should not be seen as a separate activity.

When addressing the context of the passage, students need to do more than just list the preceding and following events. While such responses do show knowledge of sequence within the gospel, they show a limited understanding of the placement of a passage within the overall text. Consider the effectiveness of the following (abbreviated) introduction to Question 8 (John 7:25–33).

This passage is placed during the ‘Book of Signs’ ... inside the ‘Feasts section’ ... as the ‘Feast of Tabernacles’ (7:11 – 10:21) is at hand. This passage spans across Before the passage is ... Proceeding the passage is the completion of ‘Officers are sent to arrest Jesus’ and 7:37-39 ‘The Rivers of Living Water’. The passage is placed during the Feast of Tabernacles to illustrate the conflict and transcending of the feast that is presented in this passage.

When discussing literary forms or motifs or when incorporating the highlighted words into exegesis, students’ ability to name, describe and discuss the purpose or significance of those terms or phrases is important. In responding to Question 10 (John 17: 1–8), the following response successfully elaborated on the highlighted word ‘hour’. The precision and ability to use Johannine terminology effectively are also evident.

In the very first verse Jesus adopts a traditional praying position as he ‘looks up to heaven’. He says to his father, ‘the hour has come’. The hour of John’s Gospel is the highpoint of the narrative; it refers to not only Jesus’ death but his lifting up. It is the ultimate revelation of God’s and subsequently Jesus’ glory. The hour is alluded to multiple times in the Gospel, including 7:6, 7:30, 8:28. It actually prevents Jesus being arrested and also encapsulates his pre-destined future by the Father.

As discussed in previous Assessment Reports, students are expected to incorporate discussion of the highlighted words into the whole of their work. Unless students have mismanaged their time, merely dot pointing or listing the highlighted words as an appendage to their exegesis is usually inadequate. There are two reasons for this. The first is because, having failed to structure their exegesis around the highlighted words, students often spend too much time looking for other aspects of the passage to discuss, and so limit the time and space they have to discuss the highlighted words. In the worst cases, students picked up the ‘I am’ from Question 8 (7:28, 29) and launched into an irrelevant explanation of *Ego Eimi* statements in general, simultaneously misrepresenting the use of ‘I am’ in these two verses.

The second reason for not merely listing the highlighted words at the end of the exegesis is that, by doing so, students usually failed to explain the significance of the terms, and the instruction to consider the ‘meaning and significance for the author’s community’ was not addressed. Students are expected to demonstrate knowledge of why the highlighted words have been chosen, leading to an explanation of their significance to the passage in particular, to the gospel as a whole, and/or to the original compilers or readers of the gospel. 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.

In the time allowed for exegesis under the current examination structure, students’ ability to be selective and balanced in their exegetical discussion is highly significant in discriminating between satisfactory, better and excellent responses.



Long introductions to the entire gospel, often repeated in both exegeses, must be avoided. Teachers should help their students recognise this in their examination practice and preparation. Nevertheless, with a mean score of 13.4 out of a possible 20 marks for exegetical responses across the whole study, most students demonstrated sound exegetical skills.

Section 2: The Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Part A – Essay

A small number of students completed Section 2 and there were many strong essay responses. Many students were able to quote extensively from the set texts, not simply the passages for special study, to support their view. This demonstrated students' sound knowledge, and the skill with which passages were integrated suggested solid essay-writing practice had taken place in class.

Again, the more successful students used breadth of knowledge to discuss the prompt and made judgments about the material they presented. The following student response to Question 1 is an example of this.

Using metaphors from nature, Jeremiah denounced the people's abrogation of their covenant with G-d. This covenant required Israel to be loyal and faithful to G-d, and treat man with justice and righteousness. However, during the prophets' prophetic ministries, the people reject G-d and His law.

The same student then went on to provide interpretation about those metaphors.

Such images from nature would have been an effective way to communicate his messages as Israel, an agricultural people, would be able to relate.

Part B – Extended responses

In answering Question 5, the following student showed not only a sound understanding of the contrast between 'sacrificial ritual' and 'moral living' which the question demanded, but an understanding of this within attitudes to the Temple in the history of Israel, and, having examined examples of both concepts, wrote the following.

The prophet stressed that these offerings were worthless without obedience to G-d and his moral law. Furthermore, the prophet warns them that if they continue to not adhere to G-d's law of which a major part is moral living then G-d would destroy the Temple as He destroyed Shiloh, the religious capital where the sanctuary was in the time of the judges and would exile the people as the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom were deported by Assyria in 721BCE.

Part C – Exegetical responses

As in other sections of the examination, it was possible in the exegetical passages on the Jewish prophets to provide solid contextual explanations. The following extract from the introduction to an answer to Question 9 (Jeremiah 31:15–34) is an example of this.

This passage is part of Jeremiah's later, exilic consolatory prophecies in which he fulfils his ultimate role to 'build and to plant' and inspire the people with hope for their future after the fall of Jerusalem in 586BCE with visions of the messianic era. In the previous chapter, the prophet was commanded 'to write a book' of consolation for the people. In the preceding verses of this passage, he continues to give hope by predicting the future return and restoration of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The passage is followed by G-d's promise to restore Israel, which is as certain as nature's laws.

Strong responses are often couched in confident expression. In the following passage, the student not only picks up a highlighted phrase, but relates it to another aspect of the passage and links it to an idea within the wider set text. This shows that the student understands the purpose of this exegetical passage within the larger context of the prophet's book.

In powerful and uplifting verses, the prophet predicts that 'once more they shall use these words' in Judah. The prophet was predicting that once again the people will praise G-d 'the Lord bless you, as they once did in their early stages of national existence. In earlier chapters, Jeremiah recalled Israel's 'devotion of her youth' (Ch.2) when Israel was loyal and faithful to G-d.

Section 3: The Gospel of Luke

Part A – Essay

Question 1

This was the least popular of the essay questions; however, it was handled competently by most students who attempted it. Some students failed to state the titles given to Jesus in particular passages but most seemed well prepared with a



knowledge of titles, their relevance and background. The essays were generally well structured and worked closely with the question. Very few students chose passages from outside the passages for special study.

Question 2

While this was a very popular topic for students, a great number of responses suffered as they presented the notion that all women in first century Israel were almost slaves with no value in society. These responses tended to lack concrete examples from either earlier scripture, the Gospel itself, or other historical documentation. Many students were aware of the literary device of comparing a male and a female character in parallel stories and some used it well to show how Luke was incorporating women into his story. Some students struggled to find relevance in their examples, most notably those students who chose to discuss the parable of the lost coin. Some also tended to discuss the meaning of passages beyond the impact it had on the role of women, and so went off-topic. Many students either ignored, or wrote poorly on, notions of why Luke chose to present women in the fashion they described. Some students had very good knowledge of the texts, while others tended to assume things from either a lack of close reading of the text or by extrapolation.

Question 3

This question was a very popular choice among students and was handled fairly well. It allowed students to use the extensive body of parables in the passages for special study and many students referred to Chapter 14 extensively. Some also used the meal at the end of Chapter 15, and nearly all students used the story of the sinful woman at Simon's house in Chapter 7. Unfortunately, a large number of students retold stories without using the stories to illuminate their thoughts on the question. A large number of students failed to tackle the terms of the question, especially the section requiring students to discuss how the banqueting stories tell something of the person of Jesus. The use of parables in responses made this jump a little more difficult, but this was handled very well by some students.

Part B – Extended responses

Question 4

Most students used the passage well to discuss notions of cultural and religious practices surrounding the birth of a child. Some students simply summarised the passage, for which they were awarded some marks, but did not comment on that summary. In being instructed to write 'a commentary', students are expected to inform the reader beyond basic comprehension of the passage. Many students referred to Hebrew Law and there was a variety of opinions on what the Law said regarding purification and circumcision. Most students, however, were able to show some reasonable background knowledge of these customs.

Question 5

This question was answered by very few students and, when it was attempted, was done very poorly. Marks were awarded to students who thoughtfully and intelligently attempted to list some features of Greco-Roman biography (even if they only discussed the broader understandings of what biography is) and then used either the infancy or the passion narratives to illustrate that understanding. Some students did not follow the instructions of the topic and discussed both narratives. Many students wrote on other literary forms or just summarised the passages with little attempt at an analysis.

Question 6

Students' knowledge of the Passover was quite thorough, although some chose only to give the briefest of outlines. The biggest concern with student responses to this question was that not all parts of the question were answered and there seemed to be little understanding of Luke's use of the Passover beyond the mention of the feast to set the time. High-scoring students wrote about the significance and reinterpretation of the event.

Question 7

Students needed to recognise that there are two Herods in the Gospel according to Luke, and most students were able to acknowledge and differentiate between the two fairly well. Those who mentioned only one Herod were not penalised but those who collapsed both Herods into one did not receive high marks. Very few students attempted to answer the final part of the question which required interpretation, but those who did, did so admirably.

Part C – Exegetical responses

Many students demonstrated a strong understanding of the nature of exegesis and the forms of response suitable for these questions. Many answers were well structured and covered all areas of the instructions thoughtfully. Some, however, did not include one of the dot points or some of the highlighted words and phrases. Students are reminded that these must always be covered in every response.

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It was evident that some students still think that commentary on the highlighted words and phrases means incorporating them into their own retelling of the passage. The words and phrases must be explained in terms of their meaning for the passage and their sociocultural context.

A number of students also seemed to be referring to any story in the Gospel as a parable. As such, it is recommended that all students learn a variety of literary forms used in the Gospel and be able to identify and describe them.

Section 4: The Qur'an

It has not been possible to produce a report on Section 4 due to the limited number of students in this section.

While there is no specific report on Section 4: The Qur'an, or provision of exemplary answers, students and teachers of The Qur'an would do well to read the general comments above and use the given student answers as a guide to how answers should and should not be answered.