

2021 VCE Texts and Traditions external assessment report

General comments

The responses to the 2021 Texts and Traditions examination reflected a wide range of abilities. However, while many students wrote detailed and thoughtful responses by which they showed both knowledge and mastery of the key skills of the study design, there was also a number of students who misread questions or responded only to some parts of the question. Students should practise question analysis in preparation for the essay; an essay is also an optional school-based assessment tool in Unit 4.

Significantly, there is an issue with students not including – perhaps not knowing – material from outside their set text. This is a requirement of Unit 3, Area of Study 1, and therefore a valid expectation of the examination.

It is not possible in this report to comment on all questions on the written examination or to deal with the four sections – based on Traditions – independently. Therefore, the comments included are based on significantly common approaches by students and typical question styles across the four sections.

Specific information

Note: 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.

Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Part 1 – Extended responses

While it is not possible to comment on all 12 extended response questions, as an example of a high-scoring response, consider the level of knowledge exhibited in the following response to Question 2 of Section C – The Gospel according to Luke.

Jesus in the Angelophany of the Shepherds in Luke 2 is addressed as ‘saviour’. It is used by the angels in referring to who the infant Jesus will become and foreshadows the mission of Jesus. The term ‘saviour’ was often used in connection to Roman Emperors throughout the first century AD – particularly Caesar Augustus – and shows to Luke’s original audience that a new messianic saviour is born in Jesus and he is more than just an ordinary baby. It also fulfils for the Jews in Luke’s audience the prophecies laid out in Psalms and Isaiah that he will be a saviour. Another title used is ‘Lord’, which is again introduced in the Angelophany of the Shepherds, by the angel who is speaking. Instead of being a title that is related to an earthly figure, this time Jesus is addressed as a title which is often used in reference to God himself. To Luke’s audience, this would have shown that Jesus is one with God and is a holy figure, and hence fulfils the Jewish Messianic Expectations of the time. Jesus refers to himself as the ‘Son of Man’ throughout his Ministries in Galilee and Jerusalem. This is a term used by Old Testament figures such as Daniel and Ezekiel in reference to the Messiah – showing that Jesus is the son of human flesh but is also the son of God. To his audience who are familiar with the term, this would have further backed up their beliefs that Jesus is the Messiah that was prophesied about.

In this 256-word extended response, the student has fully addressed each of the requirements of the question, used theological terminology correctly, and shown knowledge of both the set text and analogical scriptural and religious backgrounds to the three titles discussed. This is no mere 'identification' of three titles but a solid 'explanation' of their use, meaning and significance.

Question 4

Across all sections, Question 4, the common question to which all students respond, appeared to be the most challenging for students.

The first three parts of Question 4 did not require students to supply a scriptural reference to the set text, yet many students incorrectly worked the set text variously into their answer for these three parts. This led to responses that did not score well. Students reversing the content areas of parts b and c also resulted in many students not being able to score marks for part b when they gave the response required for part c. Other students wrote a single paragraph without distinguishing between each part of the question. Students must answer each part separately.

Question 4a. was based on the first point of Key knowledge of Unit 4, Area of Study 2 in the study design, which in part reads 'within its original social, cultural, religious and historical context'. To respond to this part of the question, students needed to know aspects of the set text's original social, cultural, religious and historical context, as is demonstrated in the following example of a high-scoring response, which gives an overview of context with two specific examples.

Social Justice was important for Luke's original community because there was large segregation and disparity amongst the rich and poor, males and females, healthy and sick which caused many people to be outcasts and prevented from having the same opportunities as everyone else. Those with physical blemishes were prohibited from entering the temple and those who were gentiles were overlooked by Jews who did not associate with them.

Question 4d. was based on the fourth point of Key knowledge of Unit 4, Area of Study 2 in the study design. If students recognise the point of key knowledge to which a question part relates, their responses will cover the requirements of that part. In considering the following example of a high-scoring response, note how the later tradition's interpretation of the original set text, which is clearly cited, is presented as still found in the religious tradition.

The Fourth Gospel contains much proclamation about the identity of Jesus that remain relevant in both the Councils of Chalcedon and (by proxy) more modern texts such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church (second edition, 1991). In John 1:14 it is stated how 'the Word became flesh', emphasising Jesus' divine nature taking human form. The ultimate line of the original 21 chapters also proclaims Jesus as 'Messiah [and] Son of God' (20:31), a key statement regarding his identity.'

Teachers should ensure that the idea, belief or theme is a significant one; otherwise, students may be unable to develop sophisticated responses. Students should not be writing about a practice – such as infant baptism – that does not appear in the set text.

Part 2 – Essay

The mean score for Part 2 – Essay was lower than that for Part 3 – Exegesis. In part, this is because the student does not have the benefit of the extract printed for exegesis before them. In developing a discussion demonstrating understanding and interpretation of the ideas of an essay topic, a student must rely solely on the depth of their knowledge, elaborating on material they have made their own during their study of Texts and Traditions Units 3 and 4. How well a student knows, and understands, the set text, its literary, sociocultural and religious contexts, and the original community's response to the purpose and ideas of the author evident within the set text, especially in regard to its themes and ideas, in part determines how highly

a response scores. Furthermore, the level of complexity demonstrated addressing these criteria, printed on the examination paper, determines how a student scores, as well as their ability to incorporate relevant scholarly sources – scriptural and theological – and use these to support their own ideas, together with the precision of scriptural reference demonstrated, significantly discriminate between different achievement levels on the written examination.

Consider the following example of a high-scoring response to Section A – The Gospel according to John, Question 7. This example begins at the second paragraph.

The nature of the paraclete will be manifested as an identifier of Christ. According to Pfister, it is important to note that first century culture was a culture in which one's identity was revealed not in oneself but in the testimony of another. For example, at 16:14, Jesus claims that 'the Spirit will glorify me', illustrating it will be the Spirit who will identify Jesus as the messiah. Moreover the gifting of the Spirit is a role commonly associated with God, with God willing to 'name' his Spirit upon his 'Descendants' (Isa 44:3) and how 'the Spirit' will give me 'life' (Job 33:4). Thus, through the gifting of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will receive 'Spiritual Witness' towards his identity as 'The Messiah, Son of God' (20:31).

The advocate will manifest itself as medium of new birth, and an avenue of greater intimacy with the Heavenly Father. The test demands one to be born of 'water and Spirit' (3:14). According to Ray Brown, the water Jesus speaks of links to a Baptismal motif, as Jesus, unlike John, will Baptise his believers with the Holy Spirit, granting them access into the 'divine communion of love' (Byrne) between Jesus and the Father.

The Paraclete will prove itself as a perpetual teacher to the Disciples and declare against the World. Like the Johannine Community, the Disciples are being 'put out of the synagogues' (16:2). Thus, the gifting of the Spirit will help remind them of all of Jesus' teachings as he ascends to the Father. Lee claims the Spirit has been in a 'textual cocoon' up until Chapter 14, and will thus manifest itself as 'butterfly of love' for the Disciples with the widest 'Spiritual wingspan'. Thus, assisting the Disciples to remember what Jesus has told them, they will come to learn that their belief is indeed the current hardship they continually face. Moreover, the Spirit will condemn the Prince of the World ...

Students who attempted Section C – The Gospel according to Luke, Question 7 were challenged by how well they addressed Criterion 2 – the management of the topic – as this subsequently affected how appropriately they addressed Criteria 1, 3 and 4. Students were required to choose whether they used examples with a sociocultural and historical basis or examples that demonstrated the evangelist's theology. Many students who chose to base their essay within the sociocultural context of the day had difficulty demonstrating from the set text how this changed within the themes of the kingdom of God, discipleship and universal salvation – three of the prescribed themes for 2021 – or even within the theme of the Great Reversal, to which the quote from LT Johnson referred. Those students who framed their discussion within the religious context of the day and showed how Luke described the change to women's status, regard and position within the Lukan community, developed much stronger essays. Meanwhile, those students who tried to marry the two approaches were generally unable to find evidence to support their, often, confused suggestions. Moreover, this third group of students only minimally, if at all, addressed Criterion 5 as printed on the examination paper.

The importance of the second assessment criterion for the essay cannot be overestimated. It is the framework upon which the ideas, understandings and/or interpretations presented by the student rest. To what degree these ideas, understandings and/or interpretations can be developed significantly depends upon the framework developed by a student. This essay topic was the most popular among students and there were many responses that did not score well. If a student is uncertain as to how to manage and develop their response to an essay topic, they would be wise to see how it can be connected to the themes prescribed for that year.

Consider the following introductory extract of a high-scoring response to this question.

Luke's teachings on women throughout his gospel text were a concept revolutionary for its time period. During the first-century, women were regarded as second-class citizens with little social status, and were separated from men at the temple and synagogue. Consequently, Luke's upholding of women not only challenges the social climate of first-century Israel, but also ties into his theme of universal salvation, revealing that all people can receive healing and salvation through Jesus. The evangelist also upholds various women as exemplary disciples throughout his record, encouraging the Lukan community to take on the characteristics of women who were faithful and humble followers of Jesus. As Kopas says, Luke's record underlines the 'dynamic and valuable role of women'. However, perhaps the most important part of Luke's inclusion of women is the way in which he pairs stories of men and women together, upholding women as part of the Kingdom of God and equal to men through faith. Thus, the writer of the Gospel according to Luke upholds women throughout his text in order to assure women in the Lukan community of the salvation they can receive through Jesus, while also encouraging his broader audience to take on the characteristics of the faithful women.

Luke depicts various women as examples of disciples in order to demonstrate the importance of listening and following Jesus' instructions, which are key characteristics of a follower of Jesus. Luke's upholding of women as disciples in Luke 8:1-3 was extremely countercultural at the time, as 'rabbis refused to teach women and generally assigned them a far inferior place' (Morris). Using the folkloric threesome to refer to 'Mary Magdalene, Joanna [and] Susanna' in this chapter, where three is used as a symbol of completeness, the evangelist suggests that Jesus' disciples were now complete through the addition of women. This also ties into the theme of universal salvation, as Mary was a low-status women healed of a mental illness, and Joanna was the wife of Herod Antipas's assistant, showcasing that even the rich and high status can be disciples of Jesus. 'It is amazing to find Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, lady of the court, in one company' (Barclay). Through this, Luke encourages even those with a high status or riches in the first-century community of their place in God's kingdom. The record goes on to detail that the women were exemplary disciples who healed practically, not referring to domestic help but rather financial hope, thereby encouraging the Lukan community to be generous with one another and share their resources. Later on, in Luke 10, Mary the sister of Martha is exemplified as a true disciple as she 'sat at the Lord's feet and listened'. 'Here sits a woman who fully fits the pattern of a disciple. Jewish society would not expect a woman to be so privileged' (McGee). According to Evans, this was the 'posture of Jewish scholars', and thus presents Mary, a woman, as a true disciple of Jesus. And although Martha appears frustrated that Mary is simply sitting at Jesus' feet and not serving her, 'you must not think Martha alone was busy. Mary too was busy but focusing on a different form of worship' (Carroll). Not only does this demonstrate to the Lukan community the importance of listening and spending time with Jesus, but reinforces the notion of women's place in Jesus' company. This, coupled with Luke's celebration of women disciples in Luke 24, as they appear to be the first witnesses of the resurrection, clearly displays to the Lukan audience both the importance of listening and following as a disciple, as well as the idea that all people can be a part of God's kingdom.

This student went on to use as further examples the sinful woman of Chapter 7, the haemorrhaging woman of Chapter 8, both within a religious/theological framework, before attending to the pairing of Mary, Jesus's mother, and Zechariah in Chapter 1, in which they quoted Kopas: 'Luke's depiction of Mary is emblematic of how God reverses the powerlessness of human control'. A second pair is identified in Anna and Simeon in Chapter 2, arguing that 'her pairing with Simeon gives her value and equality because of her faith'. Overall, this student showed precise and exemplary depth of scriptural knowledge and theological understanding supported by a confident, effective and engaging management of the topic, which led to sound interpretation.

Part 3 – Exegesis

Among exegetical responses, an aberration this year was the large number of students – approximately a quarter – who did not engage with the literary forms and/or techniques. This requirement is one of the five assessment criteria in the [Texts and Traditions examination specifications](#). There were also many students

who merely identified form or technique without explaining 'their purpose, effect and significance within the given extract' (Criterion 2).

There were many, however, who did show that they knew why they were discussing literary form and technique. The following example of a high-scoring response to Section C – The Gospel according to Luke, Question 9 (Luke 8:26–28a, 29–39) demonstrates an understanding of the effect of the literary form on the original community, of how the form validated the extract as a whole and, using one of the words in bold type, which they elaborated upon later in their exegesis, contributed to the development of the theme central to this extract. Their discussion of literary techniques not only developed the purpose and impact of the two techniques discussed but how they are significant in the development of the theme raised earlier in their discussion of the literary form.

The literary form is the recount of an historical event of an exorcism performed by Jesus. It can also be called a narrative but tells of a true event. This is evident as it provides the location as to which this event happened which was 'Gerasenes'. This not only shows that it is most likely not a story; it allows the audience to pinpoint the location of this event which creates more credibility for the existence of God, allowing others to believe more likely that Jesus was real. It also introduces the character of a man who had demons in him ...

The literary techniques include dialogue and sequence of verb. Dialogue is the conversation between one or more people which is evident through this passage through Jesus' conversation with the man possessed by many demons and the other people of the town. For example, Jesus asks the man, 'What is your name' Dialogue is significant as it shows authority and power which Jesus had. Sequence of verbs are also used which is where a number of verbs are used to highlight movement. This is used to make the passage seem more realistic so that the original Lukan audience can visualise the event.

Another shortcoming in some exegetical responses arose from students not covering all the words and phrases in bold type. This requirement has been a part of expectations in writing an exegesis on the written examination for almost two decades. It is also a separate assessment criterion as set out in the [Texts and Traditions examination specifications](#). The task is not one of comprehension – a mere statement of meaning – but requires students to both inform exegetical discussion and demonstrate that they know how the words and phrases in bold work specifically 'within the context of the extract' (Criterion 4). If the bolded word is 'Sabbath', for example, it is not enough to write about its origin or how it was practised at the time of the set text. The student needs to demonstrate understanding of the implications of how the Sabbath works within the extract, what the author was intending by using the word and how its significance would be understood by the original community. Consider the following example of a high-scoring response to Section C – The Gospel according to Luke, Question 8 (Luke 4:16–24) dealing with the two phrases in bold type: 'synagogue on the sabbath day' and 'prophet Isaiah'.

The use of descriptors in otherwise straightforward text when Jesus goes into the synagogue on the sabbath day establishes the importance of the story's setting on a holy day in a holy place for learning. The detail establishes to the reader God is present at the declaration during the passage and indicates what is to happen will be a scriptural education as synagogues would be open on the sabbath to study text. This sense of familiarity would specifically appeal to Jews in the Lukan audience to view what Jesus says in the synagogue is true. Furthermore the indication that the 'prophet Isaiah' indicates Jesus is the Messiah from the beginning of his declaration. The Gentiles in the audience might not have known that 'Isaiah was a prophet associated with the return of the Messiah' (France) but once again, Jews would have likely understood these implications. Also as Jesus calls himself 'anointed' as the Messiah is the 'anointed one' there is a subtle pairing pointing towards Jesus' identity as the Messiah himself. This opening to the passage is extremely specific in context to Jewish readers, however the early Christian Church often employed Jews in their mostly diverse Gentile group. So Jewish members in the church would likely have illuminated this to other Gentiles in the community, and help reinforce Luke's message that Jesus is the Messiah.

Having engaged with the themes of the extract and its literary aspects in discussion of these two bolded phrases, the student continues their exegesis, commenting on a third phrase, 'the year of the Lord's favour'. While doing this, the student also demonstrates their skill at addressing Criteria 2, 4 and 5, all within the same paragraph, while soundly engaging in Criterion 3. This is very clever integrated exegesis, reflecting a very high skill in relation to Criterion 5 – 'overall use of exegetical methods'. (Students who persistently work through an exegetical extract verse by verse or ayah by ayah are unlikely to achieve this level of sophistication.)

In his reading of the scripture Jesus announces he is sent to 'proclaim the year of the lord's favour'. As Jesus declares his messianic identity, the pericope becomes a pronouncement story by which Jesus is the one who pronounces his mission. Sometimes this form is called a declaration story. Some scholars believe that here Jesus is calling for an enforcement and prosperity of the year of Jubilee. Yet other scholars such as Evans associate this statement as a 'call of challenge' by which salvation will extend the favoured people of Israel and come to all. Further, some scholars relate this statement to the end of times and the coming of Jesus in the day of judgement. However, this is phrased in a similar tone to how Jesus declares the 'Good news of the kingdom of God (Luke 8:1) and likely signals to the Lukan audience that Jesus' actions will be of salvation and favour from the kingdom of God. Bock writes '[this would] greatly assure the gentiles of their place in the new community'.

In selecting which words and phrases to bold, those who set the examination consider words and phrases that connect with themes found within the extract, and set text as a whole, and that can be linked to the other four assessment criteria for exegesis in meaningful ways within an integrated and sophisticated exegesis. By not discussing words and phrases in bold type, students limit their ability to score highly across all assessment criteria.

Descriptors for achievement in both the essay and exegesis appear in the [Texts and Traditions Advice for teachers](#). These descriptors include the assessment criteria for the written examination as well as School-assessed Coursework. Teachers and students would do well to visit these from time to time to prepare for the written examination.