

# 2022 VCE Texts and Traditions external assessment report

## General comments

Despite the instruction on the examination cover that ‘responses must be in English’, this year’s examination saw many students using foreign words unnecessarily. Only where a word in Greek, Hebrew or Arabic has a specific meaning not conveyed by the English word, or where a particular foreign word or phrase has a particular meaning within the religious tradition, or where the foreign term has entered the English language and is widely understood should the word from the original language of the text be used.

As an example of the first instance, while both *zakah* and *sadaqah* mean ‘charity’ or ‘almsgiving’ in Arabic, the nature of obligation in regard to *zakah* is different from that of *sadaqah*, and so the Arabic can legitimately be used. As an example of the second instance, consider the word *jahiliyyah*, which designates a particular period in relation to Islam, or *apostynagogus*, which is a single Greek word that involves extensive historical, social and religious contexts, and is used in the Gospel according to John with a particular meaning. As an example of a foreign word now accepted and being used in English, consider *halal*.

In approaching both Part 1 – Extended responses and Part 2 – Essay, students need to ensure that they provide the number of examples specified in the question. If only one example is included in a response when two are required, a student cannot receive full marks. Where the number of examples required is not specified, as in Section A, Question 2, students need to select enough examples to sufficiently respond to the question. If a student is excessive in the number of examples they include, they will not have the time to develop a discussion of what is significant about those examples and, without depth, they cannot be awarded full marks. Section A – The Gospel according to John, Question 2, for example, specifically asked students to ‘explain the significance’, which required a higher-order thinking skill than merely listing examples.

In both Part 1 – Extended responses and Part 2 – Essay, students who developed topic sentences linking their response to the question and those who used deliberate paragraphing benefitted by developing structured, fluent and clear responses. There were some students, however, who left their last response incomplete, presumably because of poor management of time.

While it is essential that students are very familiar with the passages for special study, it is also important to know all the set text to the degree in which responses can show how passages for special study relate to other aspects of the set text, and to draw examples from the set texts in response to examination questions.

## Specific information

### Part 1 – Extended responses

Students must read the questions in Part 1 of the examination carefully. These questions usually have several sub-questions, which start with an entry question or a directive accessible to most students and then move on to a sub-question requiring higher-order thinking. Consider just two examples. In Section B, the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, a number of students ignored the last part of Question 3 – to support their response ‘with specific examples of prophecies’. Similarly, in Section C, the Gospel according to Luke, in

relation to Question 3, many students did not address the aspect of using the evangelist's use of the Temple 'to establish the identity of Jesus'. Others confused synagogue and Temple.

The major problem within Part 1 was with Question 4. Too many students did not address the question. Consequently, Question 4, common to all sections of the examination, was poorly done by many students. This seemed to be because many students went into the examination with a set expectation of what this question would be about and how they would respond to it, even to the extent that it was evident that some students had prepared answers, which unfortunately for them did not specifically address the three parts of Question 4.

Question 4a. required students to nominate a text – 'one chapter or verse' – and to consider how this one text was related to a series of contexts within which it emerged. Many students wrote about the details of the idea, belief or theme they had identified as their topic. What was needed, for example in presenting the theological belief in Christology, was correctly addressed by a student writing about the Gospel according to John 1:1 and the use of the term 'Word' in that verse, by explaining how the Hellenistic and Semitic cultural understandings of the term differed. This involved examination of two contexts. For students addressing an Islamic idea, belief or theme, there needed to be awareness that all of the social, cultural, religious and historical contexts varied depending on whether the surah chosen to discuss was Meccan or Medinan. The question required them to choose at least two contexts.

Furthermore, including only a sweeping generalisation to the set text (e.g. 'Jeremiah often spoke of Messianism' or 'The Qur'an highlights the importance of Tawhīd (Monotheism)') was not an adequate identification of a particular text to which an idea, belief or theme related, as required by the question. Consequently, because of a lack of both discussion of contexts and specific nomination of a text, some students did not achieve full marks for Question 4a.

Question 4b. then required students to use the text identified in part a., a task many students seemed unable to do. Instead, they used other chapters and verses from the set texts to explain the idea, belief or theme. For example, some students who identified the theme of social justice as being predicated on the text 4:16–21 from the Gospel according to Luke then used only Luke 10:29–37 in the second part of Question 4. Higher-scoring responses, using these same two textual references, showed how they were linked by explaining how the Parable of the Good Samaritan was based on Jesus' Nazarene Proclamation, thereby linking part b. with part a. as the question required.

This part of Question 4 required students to explain the way(s) the later tradition understood the idea, belief or theme. This required students to discuss who was involved in the later understanding, when and where this was, and how the later tradition expressed this understanding. All these requirements demanded specific information. So the students who, for example, spoke of Pope Leo XIII's (the who) 1891 (the when) encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (the how) released by the Vatican (the where) as an expression of a later tradition's expression of ideas and beliefs relating to social justice (the nominated idea) as found in the parable of the Good Samaritan (use of the original text) scored full marks. However, many students could not be specific.

Question 4c. required students to assess the relevance of the sacred text they had identified in part a. for the later tradition. This task allowed students to talk about 'how' and 'why' the later interpretation not only understood the idea, belief or theme but about the relevance and authority of that later understanding. Again, many students were too general in their identification of the 'original sacred text', while others did not 'evaluate the relevance' of that later understanding, as required by the question. Of the three parts of this question, part c. was the least well done by students, presumably because they could not relate the later tradition's understanding back to the text identified in part a.

The focus of Question 4 on a text was quite specific in the 2022 examination and many students found it difficult to address this focus. The area of study addressed by Question 4, Unit 4, Area of Study 3, has undergone substantial changes in the revised study design, so students and teachers need to pay careful attention to the revised key knowledge and key skills listed.

Some students did not specify the parts of the question to which they were responding. Each part of Question 4 is scored individually, as indicated on the examination paper. In 2022 there were three parts; students needed to indicate when they moved on from answering one part of Question 4 to the next part.

## Part 2 – Essay

Students and teachers need to understand that while extended responses are generally able to ‘only skim’ the topic and do not require great depth of understanding and breadth of knowledge, the essay topics are designed to draw out both extensive and substantial knowledge and a depth of interpretation from students. If an essay topic used the command term ‘discuss’, student responses should have been a clear, considered and balanced argument that identified issues and showed the strengths and weaknesses of, or points for and against, one or more arguments, concepts, factors, hypotheses, narratives and/or opinions.

A student who used the knowledge they have learnt over the year satisfactorily and discussed ideas with an awareness of different themes scored in the mid-range for the first criterion for the essay. Students who demonstrated a highly developed, complex and insightful understanding and interpretation scored very high on this criterion.

The second criterion for the essay on the written examination is crucial. While it is weighted equally with the other four criteria in assessment of the essay, how it is addressed by a student is critical as it frequently underpins the strength and clarity of the ideas and arguments developed by the student. In Section C, Question 7, for example, this became a key discriminator. There were five ‘terms, concepts and parts’ to the topic, which, when addressed alongside individuals in the text as examples of what the student was discussing, led either to students getting ‘lost’ in what they were trying to say or developing a structure that used detailed knowledge from the text to support a focused and inter-related examination of the parts of the topic.

Higher-scoring responses usually addressed the question in the introduction or first paragraph, and so set up a deliberate structure to the essay.

Three of the four sections of the examination included an essay prompt with a quotation from a scholar. Students handled these quotations with varied approaches. It was not necessary for students to focus their essay on the quotation itself. Some students who did try to create such a focus had trouble including other aspects of the prompt and in many cases their control of the second criterion suffered. Other students developed a response in which the themes and concepts they wanted to engage with ‘bounced’ off the ideas in the quotation. They responded to the concepts within the entire prompt and not just to the quotation. In this way, they developed a more sophisticated essay in regards to both the ideas expressed and the way they organised their interpretation – the first two criteria. Then instead of the prompt being the focus, detailed scriptural references and the text was the focus of the response. Students who supported their argument by use of a wider scholarly reference, rather than just the one scholar quoted, also showed greater depth of thought.

More generally, in using scholars to address Criterion 5, there was no expectation as to how many scholars need to be referenced. Some students referred to four or five scholars, incorporating the scholars’ ideas into their own responses. However, some students only named scholars without incorporating their ideas. Merely listing scholars cannot gain marks. On the other hand, some higher-scoring responses showed insightful familiarity with only one or two scholarly sources, using their ideas in detail and even citing them. In some cases, higher-scoring responses even included comparison between scholars.

## Part 3 – Exegetical response

Some students chose to analyse the extract verse by verse, or *ayah* by *ayah*, instead of as a whole. These students were unable to achieve top marks. They especially limited their chance to score high or very high on the second, third and fifth criteria for Part 3. This is because they did not demonstrate how the features

they discussed in the verse or *ayah* were connected with similar features in other verses or *ayahs*, or to the extract as a whole. Again, it needs to be stressed that the exegetical response must be focused on the extract as a whole in line with both the examination specifications and the criteria as printed at the end of the question booklet.

There were many students who spent their introductory paragraph providing a biography of the writer or transcriber of the set text. This is not a criterion and could not earn marks. The when, where and why of a text or revelation is only appropriate when used as part of the discussion on sociocultural and/or historical contexts and the literary context (Criterion 1).

Overall, students performed slightly more strongly in responding exegetically to an extract from their passages for special study than they did to Part 2. This appears to be because students are addressing the criteria for exegesis rigorously and with understanding. Exegetical responses demonstrated that the more a student appreciated how the five criteria could be linked to both the other examination criteria and to the extract as a whole, the stronger the response. This is especially reflected in the way students approached the five words or phrases in bold print and integrated discussion of literary features and techniques within the exegesis as a whole.

Unfortunately, there were many students who did not engage sufficiently with literary context and literary aspects and techniques. While some students could identify them, they could not explain the purpose of their use or their significance within the context of the extract.

Where some students approached each of the criteria separately, they could not demonstrate, for example, how a literary aspect (Criterion 2) was significantly used in the given extract in relation to either the theme of the extract or to the understanding of the original community, or to both (Criterion 3). By dealing with the words and phrases in bold print separately, some students found themselves repeating material already included in their response, thereby limiting the time left to develop other ideas. Moreover, those students who tried to approach the last criterion separately often could not do so and so missed addressing the criterion entirely.

Among the higher-scoring exegetical responses were those that linked their use of scholarly opinion and interpretation (Criterion 5) to sophisticated analysis and explanation about the nature and effects of literary aspects (Criterion 2). This led to insightful discussion of the significance of literary aspects to the extract's message. Additionally, those students who used discussion of scholarship to explore the ideas and themes of the extract (Criterion 3) often developed sophisticated and incisive discussion of those major ideas and themes found within the extract. These approaches show understanding of the purpose of reference to scholars and scholarship, which is to help inform the student's understanding of the passages for special study.

Finally, students should note that it is not necessary in the exegetical response to cite the verse or *ayah* number every time they address or discuss one. Such repetition is unnecessary considering that verse and *ayah* numbers are printed on the examination paper.