2020 Ancient Studies Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the 2020 assessment cycle, gives an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, and the quality of student performance.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

* This year many teacher and students took the opportunity offered to engage with cultures outside of Greece and Rome with success. Many courses featured study in ancient Egypt, China, Mesopotamia and Celtic cultures.
* To support students in delving into the complexities of ancient societies and explore critically and from multiple perspectives, students must have access to good quality primary and secondary sources. Teachers are encouraged to seek out primary source materials and academic materials to support their teaching programs.
* This year there was a higher level of engagement with KU3 and A3 as students provided a deeper and more sustained evaluation and discussion in the usefulness of source materials highlighting that these features of the new course are being fully integrated. The more successful student samples clearly addressed these specific features when there was an engagement with and critical commentary on the context and construction of source material built into the assessment task requirements.
* It was encouraging to see again for the second year a more sophisticated application of RA2 in a range of approaches as students took the opportunity to explore ideas and innovations within a specific culture or across different cultures and time. Teachers are encouraged to continue designing design tasks that supports students to define a clear and specific focus for their connections task to enable a deep and authentic exploration of ideas or innovations.
* There was an increase in students presenting work in PowerPoint presentations with voice recorded analysis. Students who took the opportunity to provide visual material and analysis on the slides which supported but was different to the information presented on the slides were able to maximise time limits for presentations and generally gave a more a sophisticated response as opposed to students who just read the same information from their slides.
* When opting for oral communication, students are reminded that their spoken communication should be clear and fluent holding the attention of their audience just as in a written communication the flow and language choices are important in helping to express meaning and ideas.
* Teachers are encouraged to design assessment tasks around KU2 and KU3 as these Specific Features position students towards engaging with multiple perspectives and concepts which foster deeper analysis in their assessment work.
* The more successful timed responses enabled students to critically analyse material, not just simply recount information. Task design that encouraged one or two sentence answers in response to a set source, include multiple choice questions or asks students to respond briefly to extensive text limit their ability to engage in detail with the material and demonstrate in-depth and critical understanding.

School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Skills and Application

The more successful responses commonly:

* provided thoughtful and analytical commentary on research and ideas
* made wide use of a range of primary and secondary source materials to build an argument or develop a critical investigation
* demonstrated great confidence in their research and application of ideas
* were able to take a step back from material and explore concepts and their influence
* made good use of word count, being precise, fluent and well-structured in communicating their ideas
* engaged critically with sources and their context and construction
* discussed ideas, concepts and topics from multiple perspectives and were critical in their interrogation of information
* presented ideas that were supported by research and primary source material while also offering original insights logically developed through the investigation of material
* utilised relevant and specific quotes from ancient texts and/or secondary sources as supporting evidence to critically analyse and interpret works of literature
* timed tasks which required students to provide detailed discussion and meaningful engagement with source material.

The less successful responses commonly:

* relied on recount of information and were more narrative in nature without engaging in meaningful critical analysis of ideas, events or people
* relied on only a couple of websites mainly to paraphrase ideas
* did not engage with any primary source material across the whole student work sample
* superficially inserted references from ancient writers with limited to no engagement with how the source supported an argument, ideas or research
* did not evaluate the nature and context of sources
* were poorly expressed and written with an obvious lack of editing
* were unable to discuss diversity or multiple perspectives
* were unable to synthesise material
* were unable to provide more than one or two sentences in response to set source analysis questions for the timed-task
* relied heavily on summaries and on others’ commentary (blogs/authors/sites) on texts when presenting analysis of literary texts which limited the student’s own authentic engagement with the text and highlighted that the student may not have even read the text they were analysing.

Assessment Type 2: Connections

The more successful responses commonly:

* could make authentic connections and move beyond similarities and differences
* choose one or two specific connections to discuss in detail avoiding broad sweeping generalisations
* could discuss sources rather than just cite them
* demonstrated authentic voice in treatment of the connection where original ideas and analysis were expressed
* developed an argument or discussion on a specific connection and provide detailed and critical analysis
* utilised word count to move straight into specific and detailed analysis without the need for excessive recount
* utilised and synthesised a range of diverse sources, both primary and secondary, to support analysis
* provided a balanced treatment of the connection through the whole response.
* Students who focused on mythology and creative representations drew on themes and concepts across both traditional stories and modern interpretations to present commentary and analysis.

The less successful responses commonly:

* relied heavily on recounting information with a linking sentence to either show a similarity or a difference, this was especially prevalent when students chose to investigate how myths or stories have been treated cross cultures and times
* heavily recounted the plot of modern movies
* did not make the leap to discussing ideas, concepts or innovations from the ancient world and got stuck in a comparison
* provided an unbalanced discussion where one aspect was explored in detail with a loose connection made in the conclusion
* forced a connection in a superficial way and unsupported by evidence
* did not provide a fluid discussion and analysis that compared, contrasted or showed a connection
* limited use of sources and research to develop ideas
* did not fully utilise allocated word count for the assessment type which limited the ability to expand in a meaningful way on ideas
* attempted to identify too may connections from one ancient civilisation to compare with the modern world. For example, in a study of modern connections to ancient Rome, trying to cover; architecture, games, dining, family structure and agricultural practices all in the one response limiting authentic engagement with content.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

This year more students took the opportunity to explore areas of interest outside of what have been very Greco-Roman centred inquiries in the past. An example of this was an increased number of inquiries focused on ancient China. There were also less inquiries this year based on topics drawn from popular topics in the old course, i.e. Odyssey, Drama, Persian Wars.

There was also a more sophisticated treatment of a range of Ancient Egyptian topics, not just the afterlife or a description of Egyptian Gods. Many inquires also focused on architecture, pharaonic culture and an exploration of daily life.

There was an increased focus on exploring concepts which provided a vehicle for higher results in KU3 and RA2. This year, it was clear that teachers were better directing students in how to meet RA2 as there were less simplistic/superficial references to the ‘modern’ influence and more discussion and analysis about ideas and concepts within ancient societies which enabled students to provide evidence against both RA2 and KU3.

As always, the better responses made use of a range of sources and cited these consistently. This year There seemed to be more attention paid to using a range of sources with some inquiries making excellent use of visual material and drawing on archaeological evidence to support arguments. Using visuals and archaeological evidence, including artefacts enabled students to critical analyse primary sources and when integrated and analysed successfully enabled students to achieve well in A2.

Most inquiries provided both primary and secondary sources demonstrating a genuine effort by students to research widely and provide evidence of this via both intext referencing and by supplying a bibliography.

Inquiries addressing A3 more obviously this year in discussion of source material with the more successful responses utilising comments about bias and perspective to drive analysis and commentary. Even some of the weaker inquiries made a genuine effort to engage with comments about the nature of the evidence they were using to highlight their argument.

Most inquiries did provide an argument and were structured appropriately. Most inquiries took advantage of the full 2000-word count. Only a couple of examples of where students had submitted PowerPoints with speech notes as evidence, these seemed to be generally weaker in nature being driven by factual recount and less analysis. If students are producing orals, please provide audio recordings to give every opportunity for learning evidence to be awarded appropriately, especially in the case of evidence against A2.

Studies with a clear intent, tight focus and room for argument development resulted in the most successful Inquiries. Therefore, the quality of the question is paramount, and students and teachers are encouraged to work closely with one another at the question design stage.

At the same time students must strike a balance between interrogating the reliability of sources to the detriment of their overall argument. The inquiries that maintained a genuine discussion of the nuances between source credibility, content and argument were best place to present a synthesised response that fully answered the question.

Students and teachers are reminded that the inquiry need not be a formal academic essay. Most students stuck to traditional territory, but those who played to their strength and chose a mode of communication that best suited them were often able to engage confidently with the more challenging assessment design criteria.

Knowledge and Understanding

KU1

* Most students were able to demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of their chosen area of study. The scope in this assessment criterion allowed students to show what they knew about a text, a person, an event or an artefact. The stronger Inquiries, achieving in the higher grade bands, were those that moved beyond the recount, project style and demonstrated confident discernment of information.

KU2

* The question design is important to enable a discussion of diversity in this assessment design criterion. Students are reminded to not only demonstrate extensive knowledge about a person, an event, an idea or an artefact, but that they must be mindful of the diversity of ideas, values, processes, or perceptions at the time. The more sophisticated studies were able to consider that people of the ancient world did not have blanket views on issues, just as is the case today.

KU3

* The flexibility of this assessment design criterion allowed students to explore the notion of a ‘concept’ in a natural way suiting their inquiry question. Despite this, it was an assessment criterion that many students struggled to fully explore.
* Students are encouraged to really consider the intent behind this assessment criterion by taking a step back from their immediate content and discussing the bigger, deeper questions behind their study. Students who confidently moved their discussion from cause and effect to the concept of political manoeuvring for example were well placed to hit this assessment criterion in the higher grade bands. Likewise, students who shifted literary studies to the concept of catharsis, or epic genre were able to be insightful. Furthermore, Inquiries in the social area quite naturally lent themselves to concepts of gender construction or cultural expectations.
* Archaeological concepts are an area which were largely underdeveloped. Students who undertake an Inquiry in an area such as battles and weaponry, pottery or building and architecture are encouraged to really explore the archaeological concepts behind this area of study. Likewise, archaeological concepts could be explored in terms of unpacking theories or schools of thought developed around evidence.
* Naturally, the Inquiry focus really determines the way in which the student is able to engage with and develop the historic concept.

Research and Analysis

RA1

* The duality in this assessment criterion was by far one of the most challenging for students to achieve in the upper grade bands.
* It is relatively easy for students to find appropriate information in the age of ‘Google’ and therefore research, particularly of secondary sources, is attainable for the majority of students, and most students did indeed demonstrate that they could collect appropriate material for their Inquiry.
* The more successful inquiries were those that demonstrated critical analysis of this research which is an entirely different skill.
* Students are reminded that they need to engage in a critical discussion of the research material in terms of, for example bias, cultural context, historic setting, paradigms, and influences. This is a sophisticated skill to apply in a considered and balanced way throughout the overall Inquiry discussion.

RA2

* The majority of inquiries were able to draw links in ideas and, or innovations from the ancient world due to the broad flexibility possible in this assessment design criteria.
* Question design is important to allow for a discussion of links.
* Comparative studies of one-time period with another, or one social/political group with another was a start, but the more successful studies explored the links in broader ideas demonstrated within the comparison.

Application

A1

* Overall this assessment criterion was done well by the majority of students.
* Most students were able to use a range of sources, acknowledge material using a consistent referencing system and arrange a bibliography.
* It was pleasing to see students avoiding large slabs of quotes and being selective with their evidence by using short snippets of the most appropriate material within a fluent and meaningful sentence.
* The more successful inquiries were those demonstrating a comprehensive synthesis of sources to build a coherent and balanced argument.

A2

* This assessment criterion was handled well by most students.
* Students demonstrated the ability to define their key premise, follow a logical and progressive structure and, on the whole, could use subject specific language appropriately.
* Achievement in the lower bands was marked by narrative style language that missed the ‘argument’ part of this design criteria.
* Students and teachers are reminded that the construction of the Inquiry question is vital to underpin this assessment design criterion successfully at the higher grade bands.
* Finally, students and teachers are reminded that ‘communication’ need not be confined to the traditional essay style, but can include multimodal mediums, oral recordings, or a report style. Students should be encouraged to work in a mode of communication that best suits their learning style so that they can develop their argument with confidence.

A3

* Students are reminded that they need to evaluate their sources to achieve in this area.
* Discussing the validity of a source is important. Students are reminded that not all sources are trustworthy or valid.
* Distinguishing between primary and secondary sources is important. Students are reminded that these sources are not the same, they must be treated differently and what they each bring to the overall argument must be discussed.
* Identifying contentions, between sources is also vital and often leads to the core of a discussion around the Inquiry question. Evaluating the outcome of cross-checking sources is the mark of a sound, synthesised Inquiry.
* The strongest inquiries were those that could have these source evaluations as a genuine and natural part of their overall discussion.